

**Women's Testimonies of the Concentration Camps of the South African War:  
1899-1902 and After**

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## Abstract

This thesis concerns women's testimonies of the South African War, specifically their accounts of the 'scorched earth' policy of forced removals and concentration camps instituted by the British military. It historicises the mythologised version of this part of South Africa's past by delineating and analysing the processes by which these testimonies became central to an emergent 'post/memory' orchestrated by nationalist political and cultural entrepreneurs as part of the development of proto-nationalism. Chapter One overviews competing perspectives on the war and the camps, sketching out some aspects of the war and its aftermaths and exploring the context in which these perspectives were located. Chapter Two examines Hendrina Rabie-Van der Merwe's 1940 testimony Onthou! [Remember!] as an exemplar of post/memory processes, and provides a re-reading which considers the highly politicised context of this book's production and original reading. Chapter Three explores women's narratives written at different times but describing a single incident that occurred in Brandfort camp and involved a protest about rations, enabling the processes of post/memory to be traced over time by showing how a mythologised version of the event was produced. Chapter Four concerns Boer women's letters and diaries written at the time, and examines the relationship between temporal immediacy and claims of referentiality in these. Chapter Five broadens what constitutes 'a testimony' by investigating the variety of ways women attested to their experiences, something which enables examples of black and other marginalised women who left deliberate 'signs' of their lives to be 'seen' and recognised. Chapter Six deals with translation matters in Boer women's testimonies, exploring translation as a process of cultural and political mediation and considering my own role in this and analysing the layers of re/working and re/writing that constitute translation as central to post/memory processes. The Conclusion considers the idea of 'post/memory' in detail.

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## **Chapter One**

### **The War, the Camps and ‘the History’**

“[I]n scholarly debate in South African and African historiography, there can be little question that in modern South African historical consciousness it is the South African War that today still counts in national memory, however historically narrow the context of that construction has been” (Nasson 2002: 3)

#### **Historicising: The Writing Context for the Thesis**

This thesis is concerned with a range of women’s testimonies of their experiences of the South African War, and specifically the ‘scorched earth’ policy, farm burnings, forced removals and concentration camps instituted by the British military. In particular, it delineates the processes by which such testimonies were central to an emergent ‘post/memory’ produced and orchestrated as a key part of the formation and development of a highly racialised nationalism and ‘the history’ of relevant facts about the Afrikaner past which supported this. In subsequent chapters, I explore the development of post/memory of the camps by historicising “what has been stripped of its temporal and historical specificity by a heavily mythologised account of part of the South African past produced by the activities of nationalist political and cultural organisations and entrepreneurs” (Stanley and Dampier 2005: 89).

As part of this, Chapter Two examines Hendrina Rabie-Van der Merwe’s 1940 testimony Onthou! In Die Skaduwee van die Galg as an exemplar of post/memory, and offers a re-reading of this book that takes account of its highly politicised context of production and original reading within the Afrikaner (proto-) nationalist project.<sup>1</sup> Chapter 3 then explores different women’s narratives, written at various times but describing a single specific incident that occurred in Brandfort camp, involving a protest about meat rations. This enables some aspects of the processes of post/memory to be traced, and shows how a

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<sup>1</sup> I discuss my use of the terms nationalism and proto-nationalism later in this chapter.

single nationalist version of the past has emerged over time. The testimonies (in both the usual, and an ‘expanded’ sense I discuss later) examined in this thesis were mainly written after the war and in some cases, many years after the war. However, Chapter Four is concerned with ‘at the time’ and ‘in the place’ writings by Boer women, including letters and diaries, and explores questions about the relationship between temporal immediacy and referentiality. In considering the key role which Boer women’s camp testimonies have played in the development of Afrikaner (proto-) nationalism, part of my critical interrogation of ‘the history’ involves an attempt to broaden what constitutes a testimony of the camps. Chapter Five consequently explores the variety of ways women attested to their camp experiences, and seeks out examples of black or other marginalised women who ‘left behind a sign’ of their lives (and deaths) in the camps. Finally, Chapter Six deals with translation matters, in the widest sense. Many if not all Boer women’s camp testimonies have undergone at least one translation, and I have translated many testimonies into English for inclusion in this thesis. My final chapter explores the implication of this, recognising that ‘equivalency’ is not always possible or desirable and that translation is always a politically loaded process.

However, in this first chapter I am concerned with overviewing some of the competing perspectives on what are considered ‘the facts’ about the South African War and the camps in particular, as the necessary background to the chapters which follow. This requires sketching out some aspects of the war itself, and considering its aftermaths, in which these competing perspectives to be discussed later were produced.

The South African War<sup>2</sup>, which took place between 11 October 1899 and 31 May 1902, was provoked by Britain and specifically by Alfred Milner as High Commissioner for Southern Africa, against the two Boer republics of the Zuid-Afrikaanse Republiek

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<sup>2</sup> The war is also known variously as the Boer War, the Anglo-Boer War and the *Tweede vryheidsoorlog* [Second War of Independence]. However, in keeping with current historiographical practice, I refer to it here as the South African War.

(Z.A.R.) or Transvaal, and the Orange Free State, as part of his view of the imperialist project in Southern Africa. It ended in victory for Britain, and ultimately paved the way for the Union of South Africa in 1910 and the subsequent consolidation of white political and economic hegemony. British victory in the war came at great cost, in both financial and human terms. The war resulted in 100,000 British casualties, including 22,000 dead; 7,000 Boer combatants were killed; approximately 27,000 Boer children and women died in the concentration camps; and the war also cost the lives of between 17,000 and 20,000 Africans.<sup>3</sup> The conflict cost the British government over £200 million, and has often been noted as the largest and most expensive war waged by Britain between the Napoleonic Wars and the First World War in 1914.

The war was historically significant in other ways too and has been described as “the last of the colonial and the first of the modern wars” (Cuthbertson and Jeeves 1999: 3). Firstly, it saw the introduction of new killing technologies that anticipated later twentieth-century warfare, such as the “combination of trenches, heavy artillery and smokeless high-velocity magazine rifle fire” (Lowry 2000: 2). Secondly, the war dislocated large numbers of civilians from their homes and disrupted their livelihoods, and in this way impacted on their lives in a manner and magnitude that prefigured the nature of twentieth-century warfare. Thirdly, many aspects of the war, particularly the British policy of farm-burnings and the establishment of the concentration camps, aroused considerable public controversy and led to heated propaganda exchanges (on both sides) fought out in the media, again anticipating later public and media involvement in debating many twentieth-century wars and also in propaganda as a tool of systematic manipulation and suppression of information. Fourthly, on the one hand, the war gave rise to the expression

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<sup>3</sup> Of the 27,000 white concentration camp deaths, approximately 22,000 of these were of children under sixteen. The statistics on camp deaths generally omit the numbers of Boer men who died in camps and gloss the deaths as ‘women and children’, obscuring the fact that the large majority of camp deaths occurred amongst young children.

of popular jingoism,<sup>4</sup> while on the other, it helped generate and expand anti-war and especially anti-imperialist sentiments.<sup>5</sup> “Anti-war demonstrations”, notes Koss, “were broken up by mobs, incited by newspaper rhetoric” (Koss 1981: 422). The extensive media coverage of the war itself, as well as the heated public debates it generated, had a wider significance beyond the particulars of the South African situation in setting the scene for the media and public involvement in debating subsequent twentieth-century warfare.<sup>6</sup>

Opponents of the war, often rather misleadingly referred to at the time as ‘pro-Boers’, contested the war on various grounds, including pacifism, a resistance to Britain’s aggressive imperial project, and opposition to what later became termed ‘methods of barbarism’.<sup>7</sup> Opposition to the war came from diverse groups, including the Quakers, the Society of Friends, the Fabians, Secularists and Freethinkers. There was a ‘Stop the War’ committee headed by W.T. Stead, and the League of Liberals Against Aggression and Militarism, supported by some of the press, including the Manchester Guardian. Liberal MP Leonard Courtney headed the South African Conciliation Committee (SACC), which was supported by the Hobhouses and their associates as well as many other prominent figures in the Liberal Party (Hewison 1989: 109). Many Liberal politicians were strongly vocal in their opposition to the war, and both the SACC and its later off-shoot the South African Women’s and Children’s Distress Fund had close links to the Liberal Party itself. Partly as a result of this, the controversy over the war had important political repercussions

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<sup>4</sup> Perhaps most publicly and famously voiced in the celebrations of Mafeking Night, which took place on the streets of Britain after the relief of the siege at Mafeking on 17 May 1900.

<sup>5</sup> One of the best-known South African critics of imperialism at this time was Olive Schreiner (1855-1920), whose opposition to the war and then intellectual critique of the post-war settlement in which she saw black South Africans as increasingly disenfranchised, runs across many of her essays, theoretical tracts, novels and allegories. See Schreiner 1883, 1893, 1896, 1899, 1909 and on this see Stanley 2002a. Also important was J.A. Hobson’s 1902 Imperialism: A Study. Hobson had worked as a war correspondent in South Africa for the Manchester Guardian. He argued that the war was motivated by capitalist gain, and that it revealed the dark, disturbing nature of the imperial endeavour. He also strongly criticised the way in which the British press had helped incite mass public displays of jingoism during the war.

<sup>6</sup> Krebs states that the war accelerated the development of ‘New Journalism’, in which newspapers targeted increasingly wider audiences (working-class people and women, for example) in their efforts to reflect and shape public opinion (Krebs 1999).

<sup>7</sup> On the so-called ‘pro-Boers’ see Davey 1978, Koss 1973 and Porter 1968.

in Britain. Liberal party leader Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman tried to maintain party unity in the face of deepening rifts, but came under attack from Liberal 'pro-Boers' who wanted the party to work actively to oppose the war. The war ultimately "brought Liberal divisions to a climax" and the elections of 1900 produced a massive majority for the Unionist government (Searle 2001: 42).

The importance of this war is also reflected in the large amount of historical enquiry it has generated. The recent centenary has given further impetus to this, and has seen great numbers of books and articles published about the war, although to a much lesser extent, the camps, some of which I shall overview later in this chapter. While this thesis is neither about the South African War, nor even specifically the concentration camps, but rather concerned with tracing post/memory in women's testimonies of the war and camps, this nonetheless requires me to outline the originating events that women's testimonies later aimed to represent, and to re-examine and re-work existing interpretations of the war and the camps, especially in the wake of the centenary re-evaluation. Several key themes emerged from the 'new' 1999-2002 historiography of the war, the most prominent of which focused on the suffering of black as well as white civilians, and on civilian experience of the war in general.<sup>8</sup> One of the best-known and well-marketed centenary books in South Africa was the glossy, lavishly produced Scorched Earth, edited by well-known historian Fransjohan Pretorius, which was published in conjunction with a much repeated, dual language televised documentary of the same name (Pretorius 2001), and both book and documentary focus on the repercussions, especially for civilians, of the British policy of farm-burning. Other popular accounts were also produced, although none were as well-funded or given the same order of publicity as Scorched Earth. A widely

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<sup>8</sup> By 1999 however, the notion that black people had played important roles in the war, and had suffered as a result of the conflict was hardly new (Nasson 2000a: 162). The publication of Sol T. Plaatje's siege diary (Comaroff 1973), Spies' 1977 Methods of Barbarism, and Peter Warwick's 1983 Black People and the South African War had all helped to undermine the myth of a 'white man's war'. Thus at the time of the centenary, the fact that black people had participated in the war was not novel, in academic circles at least.

available popular account is Owen Coetzer's sensationalist Fire in the Sky, concerned with 'the destruction of the Orange Free State', and which depicts the camps as tantamount to death camps and the British as irresponsible, uncaring, greedy murderers: "[I]n a bizarre prelude to a murderous time in the future, fine-honed by Nazi Germany, people were loaded into open cattle trucks and sent ... to concentration camps, often days and nights away" (Coetzer 2000: Preface). A collection of photographs of war and camp scenes entitled Suffering of War: A Photographic Portrayal of the Suffering in the Anglo-Boer War also focuses mainly on the hardships experienced by civilians caught up in the conflict (Changuion, Jacobs and Alberts 2003). On one level more sober and dominated by apparently unreservedly 'factual' photographs, it actually provides an interpretation surprisingly similar to Coetzer's in its ahistoricism; thus its key editor emphasises that: "Today, some of the photographs of emaciated children, only skin and bones and barely alive, are reminiscent of the photographs that emerged from Hitler's death camps" (Alberts 2003: 11).

These and other centenary texts have left largely unchallenged many of the apparent 'truisms' about the camps as places of deliberate mistreatment of the Boers by the British.<sup>9</sup> Some, like Raath's two volume Die Boerevrou [The Boer Woman] (2002a, 2002b), indeed take a strongly reactionary nationalist line, and heavily emphasise the claimed gross victimisation of, almost genocide against, Boer women and children, for him enacted in particular by black people.<sup>10</sup> Raath's interpretation also actively resists aspects of the centenary 're-working' of the war, for instance by continuing to refer to the conflict as *Die Tweede Vryheidsoorlog* [The Second War of Independence], a simple but emphatic statement of his political position. Coetzer, Raath and Changuion, Jacobs and Alberts all

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<sup>9</sup> Treating claims about the camps made in terms of victimhood, 'trauma' and oppression as entirely unproblematic is strongly evident in De Reuck 1999, Raath 2002a, 2000b and Snyman 2002.

<sup>10</sup> Thus, in the first volume of Die Boerevrou, there are multiply repeated images of black people herding Boer women and children into camps, or of armed black people in the employment of the British army (for example, Raath 2002a: 59, 92, 93, 259).

take as entirely unproblematic the politically-motivated version of the past which they draw upon and further entrench; and it is salutary to note that their work is entirely consonant with earlier far-right nationalist books on the camps such as those by Steenkamp, Van Bruggen and Van Zyl, discussed later in this chapter. It is notable that in many respects the centenary reworking of academic scholarship have generated remarkably little new original research, fresh perspectives or reinterpretations of nationalist ‘truisms’, but instead recycled the discourse of civilian victimisation. The main change is that black experience and suffering is now firmly hitched to the historiographical canon, but without any serious reinterrogation of existing representations or historiographical accounts of the war and the camps and the political context in which these were developed.<sup>11</sup>

In the rewriting of the role of black people during the South African War, two strands in particular have been developed in the centenary literature. Firstly, the active role played by black people who worked for the British military or for Boer commandos has begun to be more widely recognised, and also evidence of the autonomous agency of black people who participated in the war to further their own agendas has been delineated and emphasised.<sup>12</sup> Secondly and perhaps most significantly, the suffering of black people in the black concentration camps has been highlighted.<sup>13</sup> For some, including President Mbeki, this aspect of the war has been seen as constituting a shared legacy of suffering between Boers and black people which in some sense united the new South African nation (Africa News Service 1999). The theme of black involvement crystallised around a civil service

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<sup>11</sup> See Stanley 2003 on this aspect of the centenary rewriting of the war.

<sup>12</sup> On this latter, see for example Genge 2002, Labuschagne 1999, Maphalala 2000, Mbenga 2002.

<sup>13</sup> The work of Kessler, Du Pisani and Mangalo, and Mohlamme on black concentration camps is aimed at correcting past historical inaccuracy that ignored the impact of the war and camps on black people (Du Pisani and Mangalo 1999, Kessler 2001, 1999, Mohlamme 2001).

and political re-naming of the war as ‘The Anglo-Boer South African War’, and was widely debated in both academic circles and the popular press.<sup>14</sup>

Much of the centenary literature, especially that part of it aimed at a popular audience, is linked in various ways to the ‘new nationalist’ interpretation of the war which seeks to represent Boers and black people as suffering equally at the hands of the British, with current nation-building ideas resting on the legacy of shared (and presumptively equal) suffering. This new paradigm unequivocally casts the British as inhumane imperial oppressors, much as Afrikaner nationalist interpretations did in the past. Related to this effort to undermine, or rather to ‘vanish’, the history of conflict between black people and Boers (and later, Afrikaners) is the suggestion from some commentators that it was specifically British persecution of the Boers during the war, and especially their employment of black people to assist in the farm-burnings and transportation of women and children to the camps, that later ‘caused’ Afrikaners to invent apartheid.<sup>15</sup> Effectively exonerating Afrikaners of decades of racial discrimination and oppression, this dubious interpretation of the war pushes the responsibility for apartheid solely onto the British intervention and suggests, inaccurately and ahistorically, that the British deployment of black people during the war disrupted what had previously been a stable society of racial beneficence and harmony.

Another strand of the centenary literature has attempted to more fully investigate the roles and experiences of women during the war. Pets Marais’ (1999) Die Vrou in Die Anglo-Boereoorlog 1899-1902 [The Woman in the Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902] was written for a popular school and college audience and uses women’s testimonies completely uncritically, ignoring both their racial dimensions and their strong (proto-) nationalist politics, treating them as entirely referential of ‘what really happened’. In her

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<sup>14</sup> See for example Dominy and Callinicos 1999, Matshikiza 1999 and Nicodemus 1999.

<sup>15</sup> See for instance emphatic statements of this by Grobler 2002 and Krog 2000.

writings about Boer women's testimonies, or what she terms as 'autobiographical texts', Ena Jansen acknowledges that these are "from a feminist and postcolonial context quite complex", but nonetheless classes Boer women's testimonies as "resistance literature" and fails to interrogate either their truth-claims or their treatment of 'race' matters (Jansen 1999a, 1999b). In a very different vein, Elizabeth Van Heyningen has written about women's war and camp experiences, women's experiences of the siege of Mafeking and the 'clash of medical cultures' in the camps between Boer women and camp medical staff (Van Heyningen 1991, 1999, 2001, 2002). Also Leandré Hanekom and Elria Wessels' (2000) Valour, Thy Name Is Woman provides useful overview information about women's various wartime experiences.

In addition, several prominent nationalist women's personal narratives have been re-published, amongst them Sarah Raal's Met Die Boere in die Veld [literally, 'With The Boers in the Field'], originally published in 1938 but re-published in a somewhat modified Afrikaans form in 2000 along with an English translation The Lady Who Fought (Raal 1938/2000, 2000). Anne Emslie's forward to the new English edition uncritically celebrates Raal as a proto-feminist heroine for the new South Africa and completely ignores the 'race' politics strongly presented in the text. Die Kampdagboek van Tant Miem Fischer [The Camp Diary of Miem Fischer], first published in 1964, was also re-published in 2000, like Raal's book presumably to reach the wider new post-apartheid audience generated by a centenary movement that aimed at inclusivity and extending the appeal of war and camp histories through 'women's voices'. Fischer's diary was evidently 'written up' some time after the war from rougher notes kept at the time and chronicles her camp experiences. She takes a fiercely anti-British tone, refers to the camps as 'murder camps' and professes to prefer death over 'English' rule (Fischer 2000: 7). A semi-fictionalised biography celebrating the life of "colourful" arch-nationalist Johanna Brandt (who

produced two well-known camp and wartime accounts of her own, which will be discussed later), Die Verhaal van Johanna Brandt [The Story of Johanna Brandt] appeared in 1999, inviting the reader to “become part of the unique experience”<sup>16</sup> of Brandt’s life (Du Toit 1999).

In spite of the dearth of a critical literature providing new interpretations on the war and the camps, the recent centenary has produced some interesting reflections on aspects of the commemoration process itself. Nasson (2000a, 2000b), for instance, has examined the commemoration of the war over time and has questioned the “new consensual vision of its history” during the post-apartheid period (Nasson 2000a: 164). Similarly, Cuthbertson and Jeeves have written critically of the current public history of the war and its role in the construction of a new “founding democratic myth” in South Africa (Cuthbertson and Jeeves 1999: 7). However, it is Albert Grundlingh’s analysis of the war’s impact on Afrikaner consciousness which has provided the most extensive examination of the ways in which the war and camps were turned into political capital by the Afrikaner (proto-) nationalist movement and some of the lasting effects of this (Grundlingh 1999, 2002a, 2000b). The only thorough, far-reaching historicization and re-analysis of the political afterlife and commemoration of the concentration camps to date is Stanley’s forthcoming Mourning Becomes... Post/Memory and the Concentration Camps of the South African War. (Stanley 2005a, in press). In the chapters that follow, I draw on Stanley’s re-working of the theoretical idea of post/memory in my examination of women’s testimonies of the concentration camps, and the ways in which the post/memory process has successively interfaced with political developments in South Africa at various points over time.

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<sup>16</sup> The original Afrikaans is: “*om deel te word van die unieke ondervinding*”. Throughout the thesis, where my English translations are provided in the main text, the Taal, Dutch or Afrikaans original wording is provided in footnotes.

### **The Events and ‘The History’<sup>17</sup>**

Much writing on the South African War prior to the centenary has focused on its causes, and resulted in the development of various schools of thought and much debate that will not be rehearsed here.<sup>18</sup> Many historians have represented the war as the final stage in Britain’s imperial conquest of Southern Africa and a final assertion of her supremacy in the area. Some have stressed the role of particular individuals such as Milner, governor of the Cape Colony 1897-1905 (and High Commissioner), who has frequently been depicted as an aggressive arch-imperialist who actively orchestrated war with the Boer Republics; or President Kruger of the Z.A.R. or Transvaal, who has been portrayed as a persistently inflexible, conservative and corrupt opponent of progress and modernisation. The role of the abortive later 1895 Jameson Raid in deepening hostilities between opposing sides has also been repeatedly highlighted. The war has sometimes been reduced to a conflict over gold, a struggle to gain control over the land in which immensely rich mining reserves were located, and a bid to acquire and regulate a cheap source of labour to mine this wealth. Explanations focusing on the political grievances of the *Uitlanders*, the mostly English-speaking ‘outsiders’ who dominated the mining industry in the Transvaal but did not have access to any franchise rights, have also been propounded. Andrew Porter (1980, 1990, 2000) provides a useful overview of the various debates on the causes of the war, and Iain Smith’s 1996 The Origins of the South African War offers a more detailed study of this.<sup>19</sup>

From the contemporary Boer point of view, the war was caused by an acquisitive, aggressive Britain in order to rob the Republics of their hard-won independence, which had been secured in the Transvaal after the first Anglo-Boer war in 1881 when the British were

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<sup>17</sup> This term draws on Halbwachs 1992.

<sup>18</sup> Bill Nasson, however, has provided a valuable and succinct bibliography of South African War literature, conveniently divided into topics (Nasson 1999: 290-295), which can be referred to for this.

<sup>19</sup> Earlier literature on the causes of the war includes Caldwell 1965, Hobson 1900 and Spies 1972.

defeated at Majuba Hill. It should be noted here that both the Boers, who had settled in the interior of the country after their famous 'Great Trek' away from the Cape in 1838, and the English colonists who flooded into the area later when gold was discovered in the Transvaal in 1886, had dispossessed the indigenous African people who had previously inhabited and controlled these territories.<sup>20</sup> In view of this, to say nothing of later political events, the present trend of seeing the war as a heroic anti-colonial struggle by the Boers against the unjust British Empire, and depicting Boers and black people as equally persecuted and victimised by barbaric Britain, is all the more problematic.

Another aspect of the war that has attracted much historical attention concerns the actual military campaigns and strategies undertaken during the conflict. The early stages of the war saw the Boers gain the upper hand, laying siege to Ladysmith, Kimberley and Mafeking, and inflicting a bloody defeat on the British at Spion Kop in January 1900. However, once large numbers of British troops arrived in South Africa and Lord Roberts took over from Sir Redvers Buller as Commander-in-Chief of the British forces, so Boer commandos began to experience drastic setbacks. In February 1900, the sieges of Ladysmith and Kimberley were relieved, and General Piet Cronje was forced to surrender at Paardeberg. By June of that year, Mafeking had also been relieved, and British troops had seized Bloemfontein, Johannesburg and Pretoria. Much has been written about the three sieges in particular, and many of the published personal accounts of the war coalesce around these events.<sup>21</sup> Secondary material on the sieges has also flourished, as have

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<sup>20</sup> Displaced people in the Transvaal area included the Ndebele, Pedi, Rolong, Sotho, Thlaping, Tswana, and Venda. The myth that the Boer trekkers of 1838 entered and took possession of an empty land was long supported by the Mfecane theory, which claimed that Shaka, Zulu leader from 1817 to 1828, had emptied the interior part of the country of African people with a ruthless campaign of destruction and assimilation. The Mfecane theory has been critiqued by Julian Cobbing and others, who have focused on the activities of illegal slave raiders as the more likely cause for the disruptions and displacements in the southern African interior at that time. They have dismissed the Mfecane theory as originating in racist stereotyping of black people, and the Zulu people in particular, as inherently warlike, bloodthirsty and savage. See Cobbing 1988 and Hamilton 1995, 1998.

<sup>21</sup> Examples of published personal accounts of the three sieges include Ashe 1900, Baillie 1900, Bradley 1900, Comaroff 1973, Davey 1983, Stafleu 1985, Watkins-Pitchford 1964 and Willan 1980. A general

specialist studies on various set-piece battles and military campaigns of the war.<sup>22</sup>

Publishers have also favoured the diaries and letters of soldiers, and personal accounts by Boer prisoners of war.<sup>23</sup>

By mid-1900 the battle phase of the war was effectively over, and a protracted guerrilla phase had set in. In November 1900, Kitchener replaced Lord Roberts as Commander-in-Chief of the British forces in South Africa; wanting swiftly to end the guerrilla war, he suggested the further removal of Boer women and children from their farms to camps near the railways. Haphazard refugee camps had been in place since September 1900 to accommodate those men, women and children who were British supporting refugees, and also those had been left homeless by the early farm burnings. However, by January 1901 the 'scorched earth' programme involving the destruction of homesteads, crops and livestock was greatly intensified in order to curtail Boer resources, and specifically to prevent the supply of food, clothing, ammunition and also information from Boer women reaching the commandos. As a result, the camp system for Boer women and children became both formalised and more extensive.

Camp inhabitants were mostly accommodated in canvas bell tents (some camps had tin or earthen 'sod' houses), were provided with basic rations of food<sup>24</sup> and cooking fuel, and sometimes clothing and bedding, although the quantity and quality of this varied from

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collection of personal accounts of the war in the South African Library collections has been made by Schoeman 1998.

<sup>22</sup> A few of the many writings about the military aspects of the war and its chief battles include Birch 1900, Duxbury 1974, Meintjies 1969, Pemberton 1964, Symons 1963, Ransford 1969, as well as the more general popularist accounts such as those by Doyle 1903 and Kruger 1959.

<sup>23</sup> For examples of Boer commando accounts see de Wet 1902, Lane 2001, Mostert 1938, Natrass and Spies 1994, Oberholster 1978, Reitz 1929, Rothmann 1976, Van Warmelo 1901, 1902 and the discussion of commando life by Pretorius 1991, 1999. Examples of British soldier's personal accounts include Carver 1999, Dennison 1904, Fuller 1937, Morris 2000, Rankin 1901, Swaisland 2000 and Todd and Fordham 1980. Boer prisoner of war accounts include Burger 1977, Kotze 1942 and Preller's collection of 1938.

<sup>24</sup> At first camp inhabitants with male relatives still on commando were classed as 'undesirables' and received smaller quantities of rations than those deemed genuine 'refugees'. The differentiated rationing system was abandoned in March 1901.

camp to camp.<sup>25</sup> Most camps permitted Boer inhabitants to keep servants, although servants were not always rationed and the number of private servants in the camps overall was small.<sup>26</sup> Hospitals and schools, as well as shops where inhabitants could purchase additional food and other items, were set up in each camp. Most camps had a resident clergyman, usually NGK (*Nederduits Gereformeerde Kerk* or Dutch Reformed Church), who conducted church services. Some camp inhabitants worked either for the camp administration or for other wealthier camp inhabitants, and occupations included carpentry, gardening, brickmaking, butchery, shoemaking, water-drawing, clothes laundering, nursing and sewing. In many camps, inhabitants could apply for passes to work in nearby towns; and, depending on the local military situation, camp inhabitants could also obtain passes to shop in town, visit the seaside or even attend the theatre and parties.<sup>27</sup> The concentration system thus controlled, regulated and institutionalised everyday life as it sought to organise the several thousand women and children who populated each camp.<sup>28</sup>

In December 1900, Emily Hobhouse arrived in South Africa from Britain as the representative of the South African Women and Children's Distress Relief Fund, and by early January 1901, when her visits commenced, eleven camps were in existence.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> In some camps local committees carried out 'relief' work which included distributing clothing and medical comforts. Some of these items were supplied by the camp administrations, while various relief committees privately donated others.

<sup>26</sup> Apart from black people who lived in the so-called 'white' camps as servants of Boer inmates, there were black people who lived in these camps as employees of the camp administrations. There were also separate black camps (which were later disaggregated to many farms), and estimates of the deaths in the black camps range between 14, 000 and 20, 000. On black people in the 'white' camps see Stanley 2004a and 2005a, in press.

<sup>27</sup> For example, the Ladies Commission commented, "The [Pietermaritzburg] camp was out of bounds for the military camp, but the people were free to go into town as much as they pleased up to 6 p.m. After that hour they required a pass, which Mr. Struben not infrequently granted if there was anyone wanting to go to the theatre or to a party" (Concentration Camps Commission 1902: 32).

<sup>28</sup> The numbers in each camp were constantly changing with new arrivals and deaths, and people were also moved from camp to camp. Bloemfontein had the largest camp population, with the combined population of its 'old' and 'new' camps standing at 6660 in September 1901 (Concentration Camp Commission 1902: 39). There were also large numbers of Boer men in the camps, although this is seldom mentioned in nationalist literature about the camps, where it is implied that all adult men were fighting on commando. Apart from the very young and the very old, men in camp included those who had surrendered, those who were neutral and those who worked directly for the British.

<sup>29</sup> Emily Hobhouse was a humanitarian and a social reformer, who became well known after her work for the South African Women and Children's Distress Relief Fund during the war. After the war she visited South

Hobhouse visited the camps at Bloemfontein, Norval's Pont, Aliwal North, Springfontein and Mafeking, where she distributed relief; and as a constituent part of this, she collected detailed information about people and conditions in these camps to use in petitioning the military authorities to make improvements. Significantly, this involved her collecting short testimonies from Boer women in the camps, which she published in part in her June 1901 Report to the Distress Fund and then more fully in the late 1902 The Brunt of the War and Where It Fell. Hobhouse's emphasis on obtaining first-hand 'stories by word of mouth' from women as essential to her relief work strongly influenced not only the subsequent development of relief work more widely, but also the writing, collection and political use of women's war and camp testimonies.<sup>30</sup> When Hobhouse's June 1901 Report on the camps was published, it sparked a public outcry in Britain about conditions in the camps. This was further fuelled by a speech given the same month by the leader of the British Liberal party, Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, when he denounced Britain's conduct of the war in South Africa as 'methods of barbarism', and was later then reinforced when the disastrous death-rate figures for October and November 1901 were published.

Probably as a result of these successive public exposures, in July 1901 the British government appointed a committee of women, popularly known as the Ladies Commission, under the leadership of Millicent Garret Fawcett to investigate the claims made about camp conditions and recommend any necessary changes. Starting on 20 August 1901, the Commission spent three and a half months travelling from camp to camp and conducted a detailed and careful inspection of each camp they visited, telegraphing weekly suggestions for improvement and reform back to Britain as they did so. They visited the five camps of Irene, Kimberley, Mafeking, Orange River Station and Vryburg a

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Africa again to carry out her Home Industries and other reconstructive work. She also carried out relief work during World War I, and later became involved in the Save the Children Fund. On Hobhouse see Fischer 1971, Balme 1994, Stanley 2005b, in press and Van Reenen 1984.

<sup>30</sup> Hobhouse 1902, 1927 and on this see Stanley 2005b, in press.

second time, either to check that initial suggestions had been implemented, or, in the case of Mafeking, because subsequent to their first visit news of Mafeking's shocking rise in mortality had reached the Commission. The Ladies Commission Report was published in January 1902, by which time death rates in most camps had declined, partly because the camps were better established and more efficiently run by officials with greater understanding of what was required to organise such camps, and partly because the epidemics of measles and pneumonia that had peaked in the second half of 1901 had by then run their destructive course. Early improvements in a few camps were made as a result of suggestions from Emily Hobhouse, but it was particularly the later much wider action taken as a consequence of the Ladies Commission recommendations that was instrumental in improving conditions.

By the end of the war, about 27, 000 Boer children and women had died in the camps, and around 22, 000 of these deaths were those of children. These deaths were largely caused by disease (in particular, virulent strains of measles and pneumonia together with typhoid raged through the camps between July and December of 1901, peaking at different times in different camps), and exacerbated by poor sanitation, and sometimes inadequate food and lack of access to clean water. It must be emphasised that these camps cannot in any way be equated with the Nazi concentration camps of the Second World War like Treblinka or Auschwitz-Birkenau which deliberately sought to exterminate inmates. Camp sites were frequently selected on the basis of their proximity to the railway system to facilitate provisioning and for military reasons; while factors such as the climate, or availability of fuel or fresh water, were infrequently taken into consideration, especially at first. Added to this was the total lack of experience by the military in accommodating and provisioning large numbers of settled women and children. The skills required for housing, feeding, clothing, schooling and nursing the camp populations were not those possessed by

many of the military authorities who had the initial responsibility for administering the camps. However, the Transvaal, Orange River Colony and Cape camps were granted civil administration in March 1901, but with effective civilian administration coming into effect on 12 February 1901.

Generalisations cannot be made easily about the various concentration camps, as they differed widely from each other and also changed internally over the course of the war; and, as Hobhouse's Report observed, conditions depended in particular on the effectiveness of individual camp superintendents. At Mafeking, for example, the Ladies Commission blamed much of the decline of the camp and the sharp rise in the death rate in September and October 1901 on the negligence of the superintendent, Mr. R.L. McCowat, strongly condemning his incompetence and recommending his dismissal (Concentration Camps Commission 1902: 178). The death rate at Mafeking was subsequently brought under control as the result of dedicated work on the part of a new camp doctor, Dr. Morrow, and then the appointment of a new superintendent, Henry Kemball-Cook. In their Report, the Ladies Commission recommended the dismissal of three camp superintendents in all – those at Mafeking, Aliwal-North and Standerton. Equally, there were camp officials who worked hard in difficult circumstances to help the people under their care. When the superintendent at Springfontein, Captain William Gostling, died of pneumonia on 16 October 1901, hundreds of the camp inhabitants attended his funeral; and when the superintendents of Norval's Pont (Cole-Bowen) and Irene (Scholtz) were promoted, hundreds of people signed petitions praising their work.<sup>31</sup> Some camps that were initially favourable later deteriorated and submitted high death returns. On the other hand, some camps that were at first heavily criticised improved markedly over time and did not ultimately experience a high death toll. Such discrepancies can be attributed partly to the

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<sup>31</sup> On Gostling's death see SRC 87. For the petitions see SRC 11/3972 (Norval's Pont) and a letter in Dutch dated 21 July 1901 signed by inhabitants of Irene, regretting the transfer of N.J. Scholtz to a new appointment (Cullen Library, A276f Burger Kamp Irene).

camp officials, but also to the conditions under which they had to work. Difficulties included the inevitable hardships and privations of wartime, including securing sufficient numbers of weather-proof tents, finding suitably qualified medical and nursing staff, securing adequate supplies of fuel and clean water, obtaining rations of sufficient quality and quantity (fresh meat and vegetables were particularly scarce and, in some regions, entirely unavailable, and so tinned substitutes had to be used), policing standards of hygiene and cleanliness within camps, acquiring necessary hospital equipment and supplies, as well as more general problems relating to the natural terrain and climate, which were often extremely inhospitable.

In their Report, the Ladies Commission grouped the causes of the high death rates in the camps in the following way: “1. The insanitary condition of the country caused by the war. 2. Causes within the control of the inmates of the camps. 3. Causes within the control of the administrations” (Concentration Camps Commission 1902: 14). Causes within control of the inmates focused on the culpability of Boer women themselves for causing or aggravating disease with their claimed dirty habits, such as their refusal to air their tents and their toileting practices. The Commission also focused on Boer women’s reluctance to admit their sick children to hospital, and their use of ‘Dutch medicines’ and home remedies, which included the administering of dog’s blood as medicine and painting measles patients’ skin with oil paint. However, they accepted that these practices were not uniquely ‘Boer’: “no doubt parallel horrors could be found in old-fashioned English family receipt books of 150 or 200 years ago” (Concentration Camps Commission 1902: 17). Certainly many Boer families were unaccustomed to living in close and cramped quarters with others and habits that would have been relatively harmless on large isolated farms, such as emptying human excreta onto the open veld, could prove fatal in camps crowded with others inclined to the same practices in circumstances where typhoid and enteritis

were endemic. It is also likely that the Boer children who were worst affected by the measles and pneumonia epidemics of 1901 were particularly vulnerable because their previous isolation on remote farms had not enabled them to develop any natural resistance to these diseases. Moreover, many of children from the poorest Boer families entered the camp in bad health anyway, suffering from worms, rickets, bad teeth, tuberculosis and other complaints related to inadequate or inappropriate diet.

Whatever the complex epidemiological causes of the concentration camp deaths, there is no doubt that this episode in South African history had a dramatic impact on Boer society post-war, not least because an estimated ten percent of the Boer population of the Republics was said to have died in the camps.<sup>32</sup> While I have thus far overviewed some aspects of the historiography of the war itself, and have referred to themes addressed in the recent centenary literature, what of the research and secondary material specifically concerned with the concentration camps? Existing histories of the camps range from the virulently anti-British that equate the camps with Nazi death camps and propose the British military deliberately set about trying to murder Boer women and children in a co-ordinated programme aimed at the eventual genocidal extermination of all Boer people, through to a defensive British-apologist standpoint that maintains the camps were established entirely on humanitarian grounds, to protect and succour Boer women and children whose own unsanitary habits were the cause of most deaths. Variations of the former position have dominated much of the South African historiography of the camps, and this point of view has been strongly linked to particular political purposes, as I shall demonstrate, after discussing the British-apologist position.

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<sup>32</sup> Given the much-noted impact of the war, there is a marked absence of literature broadly investigating the effects of this on women's lives in South Africa. This contrasts considerably with literature on the effects of the World Wars on women's work and lives in Europe. See for example Braybon and Summerfield 1997 and Summerfield 1998, with the bibliographies of both providing comprehensive overviews of relevant literature in this field.

This latter standpoint has been most clearly articulated in Devitt's The Concentration Camps in South Africa, which was published as a deliberate and direct counter to the many Afrikaner nationalist accounts appearing at that time (Devitt 1941). Indeed Devitt's final chapter deals specifically with "Some Books On The Subject", in which he lists and critically comments on the existing camp literature, most of which he dismisses as anti-British propaganda, commenting "Lavish allegations of murder and wild suggestions of the employment of poison by the British authorities carry one nowhere" (Devitt 1941: 56).<sup>33</sup> He argues that "the Primary Cause of the disaster was the military strategy of the Boer leaders", which he claims left Boer women and children "vulnerable to all manner of risk and dangers" (Devitt 1941: 60). Similarly, Martin's later The Concentration Camps 1900-1902: Facts, Figures, and Fables aimed to debunk 'fables' about the camps, and replace these with 'facts' (Martin 1957). Martin argues that the concentration camp system was established entirely on humane grounds, to protect Boer women and children from 'the natives' who would naturally have taken the opportunity of the war to molest vulnerable white women and children left alone on farms. He stresses that the British authorities did their best to care for these women and children, and thus fulfilled their duty as a civilised and responsible nation. Overall, Martin views the deaths that occurred in the camps as unfortunate, but largely the result of the dirty, unhygienic habits of the Boer people. Both Martin and Devitt were writing at a time – the 1940s and 1950s – when the Afrikaner nationalist 'the history' was strongly dominant, and it was against the 'they murdered our women and children' line espoused by 'the history' that they wrote their 'corrective' accounts.

Many of the key texts that contributed to this dominance of the Afrikaner nationalist 'the history' against which Martin and Devitt wrote placed the blame for the

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<sup>33</sup> The poisoning allegations referred to here concern the much-repeated claim made across many Boer women's testimonies that vitriol and other poisons were added to camp rations.

camp deaths directly on British intent, and depicted the Boer people as the persecuted victims of a deliberately cruel and barbaric genocidal imperialist regime. This is at the core of the hegemonic Afrikaner nationalist line on the camps which was already well established by the 1950s and which was crucially related to the political context in which it evolved, aspects of which are sketched out below. The extreme anti-British point of view was expounded most vehemently in some ultra right-wing texts published during the dramatic growth of Afrikaner nationalism in the 1930s and 1940s, such as Van Bruggen's 1935 Bittereinders [Die-Hards] and Steenkamp's 1941 Helkampe [Hell Camps]. Steenkamp's fictionalised account of a family's experiences of camp life made very strong factual claims to reveal 'the truth' about the camps: "They are dead. Precisely 26, 251 innocent women and children. Dead by a means that even in the gentlest words can only be branded as gruesome, inhuman murder"<sup>34</sup> (Steenkamp 1941: 32), and the book was in fact banned under Smuts' government for being too 'propagandist'. Van Bruggen used thirty-one testimonial accounts of Mafeking camp to write a novel that focuses on starvation, sickness, misery and death, and his novel is dedicated to "the women and children who ushered in a new nation" (Van Bruggen 1935).<sup>35</sup> Both Steenkamp and Van Bruggen made use of many fictive devices in their depictions of camp lives and deaths, but they both nonetheless claimed that their stories represented with factual accuracy the lives of real people whose authentic experiences of misery, starvation and death revealed 'the truth' about the concentration camp deaths as 'inhuman murder'.

In a similar vein to the books by Steenkamp and Van Bruggen is D.H. Van Zyl's In Die Konsentrasiekamp: Jeugherinneringe [In The Concentration Camp: Youth Reminiscences], which describes the author's experiences of Aliwal-North concentration

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"Hulle is dood. Presies 26, 251 vrouens en kinders. Dood op 'n wyse wat selfs in die sagste woorde slegs as growwe onmenslike moord bestempel kan word."

<sup>35</sup> "die vroue en kinders wat 'n nuwe nasie ingelui het." The 31 testimonies of Mafeking camp which Van Bruggen used to construct his novel are now archived at the State Archives in Pretoria as the Huyser Collection (A951).

camp as a child. The narrative, although not fictionalised in Steenkamp or Van Bruggen's explicit way, is structured like a novel, with dramatic build-ups and dénouements, extensive use of direct speech, characterisation and so forth. The book's content and tone are congruent with the nationalist 'the history', with Van Zyl for instance claiming that in the camps "the word 'hospital' would become synonymous with 'murder'" (Van Zyl 1944: 21).<sup>36</sup> While less sensationalist than Steenkamp or Van Bruggen, Otto's 1954 Die Konsentrasiekampe [The Concentration Camps] nevertheless stresses that the poor conditions and high mortality rates in the camps were a contributing factor in the Boer decision to surrender and that this had been intentionally orchestrated by Britain (Otto 1954).<sup>37</sup> The notion that the camps were 'death camps' in which civilians were wantonly neglected or even deliberately mistreated continues to appear up to the present, with some writers like Coetzer and Snyman explicitly linking the South African camps with the later, very different Nazi ones.<sup>38</sup> Indeed, Jenny De Reuck even more strongly asserts that:

"The concentration camps of the South African War arguably laid down a template for civilian suffering that subsequently the Herero of German South West Africa, the Jews of Europe, the Russians under Stalin, the Cambodians under Pol Pot and most recently the civilians in Rwanda and in all parts of the former Yugoslavia have endured" (De Reuck 1999: 73)

By the 1930s, 'the history' of the camps had been developed into a unified nationalist 'take' on these events, one which depicted the camps as murder camps and Boer women and children as the persecuted victims of British barbarism and deliberate genocidal cruelty, and as respondents to the '*vryheid en volk*' [freedom and nation] sentiments of sacrifice for the Boer nation. This seemingly unassailable version of 'the history' was, apart from isolated marginal attacks of the kind provided by Devitt and

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<sup>36</sup> "*die woord 'hospitaal' sinoniem met 'moord' sou word*".

<sup>37</sup> J.C. Otto had been an inhabitant of the Mafeking camp, entering the camp as an eight-year-old on 26 August 1901 with his mother and three siblings. His mother gave birth to a son in the camp. Interestingly, this baby and the rest of the Otto family in fact all survived camp life (DBC 158).

<sup>38</sup> Coetzer 2000, De Reuck 1999, Raath 2002a, 2000b and Snyman 2002 have all adopted variations of this position, for instance.

Martin, largely unchallenged. Over time, this homogenous history, produced for distinctly political purposes in a very particular social and political context, has been reproduced and expanded upon by academics without any critical interrogation of the (proto-) nationalist political framework in which this history was produced. As a result, this perspective has been carried forward to the present time, with writers from De Reuck to Coetzer to Raath all taking as entirely unproblematic ‘fact’ this actually highly politicised version of the past, with the result of making its assumptions and conclusions concerning ‘the history’ the bedrock of their own work, thereby replicating this nationalist account of the camps as unchallengeable fact. It was most prominently by means of women’s camp testimonies that the development of the nationalist ‘the history’ of the camps was organised and framed. The interaction of ‘the history’ with concurrent political developments in South Africa at various points in time can be interestingly, readily and revealingly traced by means of these personal accounts, for these were largely produced within and to serve the purposes of the (proto-) nationalist political agenda, rather than being spontaneously arising personal testimony.

### **Historicizing: Boer Women’s Testimonies in their Context of Writing**

A wave of publication of women’s accounts of their war and camp experiences took place in the period immediately after the war. Hobhouse’s The Brunt of the War and Where It Fell, which contained women’s testimonies she had collected during her relief work, appeared in late 1902, as did Wilhelmina Riem Vis’s Tien Maanden in Een “Vrouwenkamp” [Ten months in a ‘Women’s Camp’]. 1903 saw the publication of Mrs. De La Rey’s A Woman’s Wanderings and Trials During the Anglo-Boer War,<sup>39</sup> Mrs.

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<sup>39</sup> A Dutch version of Mrs. De La Rey’s book was also published in 1903.

Neethling's<sup>40</sup> Should We Forget?, and Johanna Van Helsdingen's Vrouewenleed: Persoonlikje Ondervindingen in den Boereoorlog [Women's Suffering: Personal Experiences in the Boer War]. Then in 1905, Johanna Brandt-Van Warmelo's Het Concentratie-kamp van Irene [The Irene Concentration Camp] first appeared in print.<sup>41</sup> After these camp accounts and testimonies published immediately post-war, a number of sporadic surges of publication followed, usually coinciding with moments of political significance and public interest. In addition to these published narratives, women's unpublished testimonies exist in the form of sworn statements, letters to newspapers, private letters, as well as journals and diaries, some of which are now stored in archives while others are still privately held.<sup>42</sup>

Certainly Boer men's personal accounts of the war, such as those by commando members and prisoners of war, have been widely published and read. However, it is the accounts and testimonies of women concentration camp survivors and their tales of suffering, persecution, stoicism, resolute bravery and dedication to the *volk* that have most informed the growth of a national Afrikaner identity and have undergone the most interesting political evolution. The first cluster of camp accounts that emerged at the end of the war reflected the fragmentation and bemoaned the lack of united political purpose that characterised Boer people at that time – or, rather, they evidence the early public efforts by proto-nationalist women like Mrs. Neethling and Johanna Brandt-Van Warmelo to make political capital of the war and particularly the camps so as to help orchestrate a unified Boer proto-nationalism. Such women had also begun to organise themselves politically, as

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<sup>40</sup> Mrs. Elizabeth Neethling was a daughter of Andrew Murray, the famous NG church minister who lived at Graaff-Reinet. She married Hendrik Ludolph Neethling, a prominent NG church minister who served time as chairman of the Synod of the NG church, and who died in 1893.

<sup>41</sup> Interestingly, Johanna Brandt-Van Warmelo's brother, Dietlof Van Warmelo, published an account, also in Dutch, in 1901 of his experiences on commando, and an English version appeared in 1902 (Van Warmelo 1901, 1902).

<sup>42</sup> For example, A.W.G. Raath evidently has an extensive private collection of such material, some of which he discusses and references in his writings (Raath 2002a, 2002b).

evinced by the 1904 founding in Cape Town of the *Afrikaanse Christelike Vroue Vereeniging* (A.C.V.V., Afrikaans Christian Women's Society), dedicated "to build 'Taal en Volk' (Language and People)" (Du Toit 2003: 160).<sup>43</sup> In the same year, the *Suid-Afrikaanse Vrouefederasie* or South African Women's Federation (S.A.V.F.) was founded. While the S.A.V.F. grew out of the wartime relief committees and was initially concerned with "relief work among war victims", it later became a strongly politicised organisation in which women could work for "the preservation of the Afrikaner language and culture" (Van Rensburg 1980: 18).

However, not all women who wrote early war and camp accounts were involved in proto-nationalist activities. In particular, Hobhouse and her writings were not nationalist in intent, but were rather concerned with humanitarian and anti-war matters. In The Brunt of the War and Where It Fell, Hobhouse's own commentary on "the sufferings of the weak and the young" is interspersed with personal accounts by Boer women, newspaper extracts and various official wartime proclamations and letters (Hobhouse 1902: xvi), and its tone is that of humanitarian pacifism concerned with exposing the brutality of war and its particularly devastating effects on those Hobhouse saw as the most vulnerable in society, that is, women and children. However, it is worth noting here that, in spite of Hobhouse's concern with giving 'voice' to ordinary farming women, the most marginalized during the war, the majority of those whose testimonies appear in The Brunt of the War and her later War Without Glamour were well-off, well-connected members of the Boer elite, often the wives of NGK ministers, *landdrosts* [magistrates] or *veldkornets* [field-cornets] who were immersed in the republican and then proto-nationalist project. Hobhouse thereby, wittingly or unwittingly, privileged middle- and upper-class and nationalist views of the war and the camps over the stories of the 'ordinary' Boer women she otherwise sought to help.

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<sup>43</sup> The A.C.V.V. was initially called the *Zuid-Afrikaansche Vrouwe Vereeniging* (Z.A.V.V., South African Women's Society) but in 1907 substituted the narrower 'Afrikaans' for 'South African' and added the word 'Christian'. On the A.C.V.V. see Du Toit 2003.

Mrs. De La Rey, wife of the Boer General Koos De La Rey, wrote the story of her wartime experiences in A Woman's Wanderings and Trials During the Anglo-Boer War.<sup>44</sup> This account chronicles her many flights, sometimes alone with her children or as part of a laager, to avoid capture by the British military.<sup>45</sup> It is written in a flat, descriptive way with little reflection or personal commentary and with many expressions of religious faith. Instead of framing her experiences directly in terms of (proto-) nationalism, as many later Boer women writers did, Mrs. De La Rey viewed her success in evading capture by the British as proof of God's care for the Boer people, emphasising that, "however great may be our sufferings, I shall always put my trust in the salvation of the Lord" (De La Rey 1903: 144). However, as Mrs. Neethling's 1903 Should We Forget? points up, claiming a special relationship with God on the part of 'us' and 'our sufferings' was often a coded and indirect means of invoking a version of (proto-) nationalism because founded on a belief of being God's Chosen People, marked out by him for a special purpose.

Wilhelmina Riem Vis' Tien Maanden in Een "Vrouwenkamp" tells in Dutch the story of Emily Darling, whose father was English and whose mother was "a real Boer daughter" (Vis 1902: 1)<sup>46</sup>, and who along with members of her family was captured and spent time in the camps at Johannesburg and Irene. The nature and extent of Wilhelmina Riem Vis' relationship with the text or Emily Darling is unclear, although it appears from the foreword that Vis was a Dutch woman who visited South Africa, met Emily Darling, took an interest in her story and arranged for its publication: "The Transvaal woman, whose story I am telling here, wrote down her memories in Cape Town, where she, with the help of an English female friend, went to join her family, after a residence of ten

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<sup>44</sup> A Dutch version of the book was published the following year (De La Rey 1903).

<sup>45</sup> A laager refers to the inward-facing circle of Boer wagons used as a defensive formation. During the war in some areas groups of Boer women and children gathered together for safety and formed 'women's laagers', for instance at Mafeking.

<sup>46</sup> "een echte Boerendochter."

months in two different women's camps" (Vis 1902: Foreword).<sup>47</sup> Whether the account is articulated through the voice of Vis or of Darling, or indeed whether it is a fictionalised story, its conclusion takes a decidedly proto-nationalist tone: "Will the enemy triumph to the last? "No, No!" shout all true Afrikanders..." (Vis 1902: 175).<sup>48</sup>

Mrs. Neethling's Should We Forget? documents the author's own camp experiences, primarily through her relief work in various camps for the Dutch Ladies Committee, and its tone strongly foreshadows the virulently anti-British 'they murdered our women and children' position that was later to develop into the unified nationalist interpretation of the camps. Mrs. Neethling's book is an impassioned defence of the Boer people whom she believes have been misrepresented and misunderstood as racist, ignorant and dirty. She sets about righting this misrepresentation by depicting the Boers as benevolent masters in a naturally harmonious racial idyll, and as a simple, homely, beneficent, religious people. Like Hobhouse, she represents the elite of Boer society although, interestingly, Mrs. Neethling insistently portrays all Boer people as affluent farm-owners and people of property and sensibility and she sees the 'mistreatment' of Boers in the camps as particularly reprehensible because these were wealthy, civilised people.

Johanna Brandt-Van Warmelo's Dutch Het Concentratie-kamp Van Irene is presented as based on her secret wartime diary, and deals mainly with the two-month period in 1901 when Van Warmelo with a number of other Pretoria 'young ladies' worked as a volunteer in Irene camp. Johanna Van Warmelo also acted as a Boer spy during the war, and afterwards was extremely active in (proto-) nationalist circles as evinced in her call for other women to record their stories: "O, women of South Africa, write about

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<sup>47</sup> "De Transvaalsche vrouw, die ik daarin laat spreken, heeft haar mededeelingen opgeteekend in Kaapstad, waar zij zich, door bemiddeling van Engelsche vrienden, bij hare familie had gevoegd, na een verblijf van tien maanden in twee verschillende vrouwenkampen." I am grateful to Maretha Potgieter for help with translating this and other Dutch extracts in this chapter.

<sup>48</sup> "Zal de vijand triumfeeren tot het laast? "Neen, neen!" reopen alle echte Afrikaanders..."

everything you have suffered at the hands of our mighty oppressors. Nothing may be lost, nothing may be forgotten” (Brandt-Van Warmelo 1905: 123).<sup>49</sup> Het Concentratie-kamp was one of the first women’s accounts to directly interpret the deaths in the camps as sacrifices consciously made for the eventual future of “*ons volk*” [our people] (Brandt-Van Warmelo 1905: 130), with Johanna Van Helsdingen’s earlier Dutch Vrouwenleed also framing Boer war and camp deaths in this way, as “offerings” on the “altar” for “Justice and Freedom” (Van Helsdingen 1903: Introduction).<sup>50</sup> Crucially, however, Brandt-Van Warmelo’s proto-nationalist account was a high-profile one worked out across a number of publications and for increasingly popular audiences, and in many ways seems to have set the tone for the subsequent production of other Boer women’s testimonies.<sup>51</sup> It is interesting to consider here the possible links between her 1905 call on women to remember and record their wartime experiences, and the large number of Boer women’s war and camp accounts that appeared in newspapers and magazines in the years immediately after the book’s publication, although of course it was in immediate calls made by journalists and the efforts of key proto-nationalists such as Mrs. Neethling that women’s accounts were solicited.

In the post-war period, the powerful impact of the camps and their hardships was reinforced by difficult socio-economic conditions, as many hard-pressed Boer families returned to abandoned or burnt-out farms and attempted to restart their lives, while people of the ‘poor white’ *bywoner* or tenant-farmer class often became completely destitute. The system of landlordism and tenancy that had prevailed in the Republics before the war rapidly gave way to the growth of capitalist agriculture, resulting in the unemployment and

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<sup>49</sup> “*O, vrouwen van Zuid-Afrika, schrijft op alles wat gij geleden hebt onder de handen van onze verdrukters. Niets mag verloren gaan, niets mag vergeten worden.*”

<sup>50</sup> The original words are: “*geofferd*”, “*Altaar*” and “*Recht en Vrijheid*”.

<sup>51</sup> Brandt-Van Warmelo herself was highly active in (proto-) nationalist circles after the war. She was instrumental in founding a branch of the S.A.V.F. in Pietersburg in 1904, and founded the Women’s National Party in Johannesburg in 1915, as discussed later in this chapter.

impoverishment of many more Boer *bywoners*. Many Boers who did not have the necessary resources to establish themselves as commercial farmers migrated to cities, where they joined the ranks of the white unemployed, the 'poor whites' who so troubled later nationalist political agendas (O'Meara 1983: 26). In spite of the nearly £16 million spent directly on relief and repatriation after the war, a severe drought between 1903 and 1908 hindered rural recovery and placed further pressures on post-war Boer farmers. Political developments at this time in what was in 1910 to become the Union of South Africa included a Progressive victory in the 1904 Cape election, and the formation in the same year of *Het Volk* party in the Transvaal, and the 1905 formation of *Orangia Unie* in the Orange River Colony, both of which represented Boers dissatisfied with the post-war settlement. In 1907 the Liberal British Government granted local self-government to the Orange River and Transvaal Colonies.

Also at this time, Milner as High Commissioner was pursuing his Anglicisation scheme, hoping to assure British domination in South Africa by encouraging the large-scale immigration of English-speakers and by promoting the English language, especially in schools. Ultimately his policies met with little success (in all, Milner's immigration policy only established 1, 300 English-speaking families on farms), although his scheme certainly fuelled fears amongst some Boers that their language and way of life was under threat. However, when Union came in 1910 it was an ex-Boer General, Louis Botha, who became the head of the new South Africa, and upon whom the responsibility for conciliation between Boer and Briton rested. Highly opposed to the integration and unification of English and Afrikaans-speaking white South Africans favoured by Botha and Smuts, it was another famous ex-General, J.B.M. Hertzog, who broke away from the government in 1914 to form the National Party.

It was against the backdrop of these events that a second surge in the publication of women's camp accounts occurred between 1913 and 1927. This started with Johanna Brandt's The Petticoat Commando published in 1913 (a Dutch version was published later in the same year as Die Kappie Kommando).<sup>52</sup> The book in part concerns Brandt's involvement in espionage for the Boers during the war, and is written in the style of a heroic adventure-story, foreshadowing similar accounts later published by Raal and Rabie-Van der Merwe. Brandt and her mother, according to her 1913 account, harboured members of the Boer secret service in their home in Pretoria, and sent letters written in invisible ink made of lemon juice (so as to pass through the censors) to Boer leaders in the field and also to Boer sympathisers in Europe, updating them on the latest war news.

This was followed in 1917 by Mrs. Neethling's Vergeten? [Forgotten?], a collection in Dutch of twenty-nine Boer women's testimonies obtained by Mrs. Neethling through a journalist called Horak, who advertised for women's camp accounts while serving as editor of Die Transvaler newspaper. Horak later sold his collection of accounts to Mrs. Neethling, who published a selection of these.<sup>53</sup> A similar collection by M.M. Postma<sup>54</sup> appeared in 1925 as Stemme Uit Die Vrouekampe [Voices from the Women's Camps]. Much like Vergeten?, this collection is presented as including the testimonies of 'ordinary' woman whose suffering in the war had contributed to the *volk's* fight "for Freedom and for Justice" (L.M. Fick 'Foreword', Postma 1925).<sup>55</sup> Stemme Uit Die Vrouekampe contains thirty-eight women's testimonies, some of which take the form of

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<sup>52</sup> The book was initially serialised in Die Brandwag magazine between October 1912 and August 1913 (Brandt-Van Warmelo 1913b). The origins and significance of Die Brandwag magazine are discussed later in this chapter.

<sup>53</sup> A large number of the women's testimonies obtained by Horak and later bought by Mrs. Neethling are now in the State Archives in Pretoria in the Van Zyl collection (W19). As indicated in Chapter Three, not all the testimonies which appeared in Neethling 1917, 1938 were initially solicited by Horak.

<sup>54</sup> M.M. Postma (formerly Uys, nee Bronkhorst) was married to Dirk Postma, a grandson of the founder of the Gereformeerde Kerk, Dirk Postma (see footnote 66). The Dictionary of South African Biography describes her as "a well-known resident of Middelburg (Transvaal)" (Dictionary of South African Biography Vol. I: 631).

<sup>55</sup> "*vir Vryheid en vir Reg.*"

statements sworn before a magistrate, mostly between 1916 and 1923, many years after the war. It is possible that apart from the truth-claims inherent to the sworn statement form, this mode was chosen to enable illiterate women to testify orally before a legal official who transcribed what was said, thereby producing a written statement. Hobhouse's collection of thirty-one women's testimonies, gathered in 1903 but only published as War Without Glamour posthumously in 1927, had as its main aim, quite unlike the collections by Neethling and Postma, to "depict war in simple, unvarnished language ... disclosing its squalid and ghastly details..." (Hobhouse 1927: 5).

In 1920, Mrs. Le Clus' Lief en Leed: 'n Verhaal van Huis- en Kampelewe Gedurende die Anglo-Boereoorlog, van 1899 tot 1902 [For Better or for Worse: A Tale of Home and Camp Life during the Anglo-Boer War, from 1899 to 1902] was published.<sup>56</sup> Mrs. Le Clus, evidently an affluent, influential woman, spent part of the war in Brandfort and Bloemfontein camps and Lief en Leed describes her experiences there. Her account is peppered with proto-nationalist talk of "justice and fatherland" and "faithfulness" to "Fatherland, Church and Language", and closes with the rousing call, "Afrikaners, fellow patriots, be true to nation and tongue" (Le Clus 1920: 9, 6, 86).<sup>57</sup> A further account of the experiences of an individual woman appeared in the form of the 1923 Tant' Alie of the Transvaal, Hobhouse's translation into English of Alie Badenhorst's Taal diary of her wartime experiences (Hobhouse 1923b).<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Bulk orders were made of both Mrs. Le Clus' Lief en Leed and Hobhouse's Tant' Alie of the Transvaal by the S.A.V.F. and the Women's National Parties, which arranged for the promotion, sale and distribution of these books amongst their members. See letters from Emily Hobhouse to Rachel Isabella (Tibbie) Steyn 7 January 1923 and 1 July 1923 (A156).

<sup>57</sup> The original words are: "*reg en vaderland*", "*getrouheid*", "*Vaderland, Kerk en Taal*" and "*Afrikaners, landgenote, wees getrou aan volk en taal*."

<sup>58</sup> The word 'taal' literally means 'language', although at this time it also referred to the spoken, informal, hybridised form of Dutch that later developed into Afrikaans, and it is in this sense that I have used the word throughout the thesis. Largely spoken rather than written, Taal was not a standardised or formalised language, and was eventually replaced by Afrikaans. I am aware that my use of the term Taal offends against certain strands of thought which see Afrikaans as fully formed at this point. However, women's writings from during the war and up until the early 1920s indicate that it was not a 'fully formed' language for them. The Taal they used can be distinguished from both Dutch and later Afrikaans.

Significantly, this wave of publication between 1913 and 1927 occurred within the wider context of the growth of the Second Language Movement, which emerged during the period of World War I (the First Language Movement took place in the 1860s and 1870s, under the leadership of S.J. du Toit). The Second Language Movement sought to promote the use and growth of Afrikaans and to formalise the hybrid Taal into a standardised and respectable language for the *volk*. As Hofmeyr points out, the “manufacture of Afrikaans literary culture ... was an important terrain in which nationalist ideologies were elaborated” (Hofmeyr 1987: 95). Le May describes this as “the heroic period of Afrikaans prose and poetry”, when writers as such Eugene Marais, Jan Celliers, C. Louis Leipoldt and ‘Totius’ (son of S.J. du Toit) were making literary names for themselves (Le May 1995: 159). Much of the poetry of this period had as its central theme the hardships and deaths of the concentration camps, and some of these ‘camp poems’ appear on later memorials at *Gedenktuine* or Gardens of Remembrance. One of the best known of these poems, Visser’s “Rest in Peace Tender Blossoms”, for instance, appears at Brandfort, Heidelberg and the smaller of two cemeteries at Mafeking.<sup>59</sup>

The Second Language Movement was given added impetus in 1914 with the founding of the *Nasionale Pers*<sup>60</sup>, again in 1925 when Afrikaans became an official national language for the first time, and then also in 1933 when the Bible was translated into Afrikaans. Afrikaans magazines were also established to advance and popularise the language, with Die Brandwag [The Sentinel, founded in 1910] and Die Huisgenoot [The Home Companion, founded in 1926] part of the emerging (proto-) nationalist framework and among other activities they encouraged women to write in and contribute accounts of

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<sup>59</sup> The verse reads: “*Rus in vrede tere bloeisels, / Offer van die storm. / Want uit weke moedertrane, / Is dié steen gevorm.*” [Rest in peace tender blossoms, / Offerings of the storm. / For out of weak mother’s tears, / This stone is formed.]

<sup>60</sup> The *Nasionale Pers* was a group of publishing houses linked to the National Party. Pieter Neethling, a major founding investor, was a prominent member of the *Broederbond*, an all-male nationalist organisation discussed later in this chapter.

their concentration camp experiences. These accounts focused on the shared suffering endured by the Afrikaner people, and helped to generate the notion that this shared experience unified and strengthened Afrikaners and provided a history of solidarity on which to build an independent national state. Women's stories of suffering in the camps became a crucial vehicle for the development of both a (proto-) nationalist consciousness and the new national language of Afrikaans. The Second Language movement was accompanied by an insistence on 'Afrikaans-ness' and emphasis on difference and distinctiveness within the context of the Afrikaners' 'testing' as God's Chosen People, with all these factors part of the early development of the cultural religious proto-nationalist movement.

Also at this time, and most significantly for the development of 'the history' of the camps in relation to Afrikaner (proto-) nationalism, on 16 December 1913 the *Vrouemonument* or National (and nationalist) Women's Monument was unveiled in Bloemfontein. The monument was erected to commemorate the '26 370' 'women and children' who died in the camps.<sup>61</sup> It has been argued that the monument was a manifestation of emergent Afrikaner proto-nationalism, and while Grundlingh points out that "In 1913, the year in which the Monument was inaugurated, fissures rather than a sense of unity characterised Afrikaner politics" (Grundlingh 2002a: 25), nonetheless the occasion of the unveiling was used as a platform for the expression of proto-nationalist sentiments. Importantly, the speech by ex-General Christiaan De Wet "recalled the historical travails of the Afrikaner and questioned whether the 'progress' that had been

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<sup>61</sup> See Gaitskell and Unterhalter 1989, Grundlingh 2002a and Stanley 2002b and 2005a, in press Chapter 3 for a full discussion on the *Vrouemonument*. As Stanley has highlighted, this gloss of 'women and children' disguised the fact that the majority of those who died were children: "The taciturn face and eidetic veneer of the monument concerns 'our heroines and beloved children' and '26,370'; but there are the vanished facts that over 22, 000 of these deaths were of children, and more than 1, 600 of men were 'forgotten'" (Stanley 2005a, in press).

made since the South African War was ‘progress in the right direction’” (Grundlingh 2002a: 28).

The ‘*bittereinder*’ proto-nationalist sentiments articulated in these speeches took an active form the following year, 1914, when as a result of Botha and Smuts taking South Africa into World War I on the side of Britain, a group of devoted, embittered Republicans under the ex-Boer generals De Wet and Beyers, who could not countenance fighting side-by-side with erstwhile enemy Britain, staged a rebellion.<sup>62</sup> The Rebellion was swiftly put down by the Union government, but the event itself indicated that neither Republican nor *bittereinder* sentiments had been extinguished by Boer defeat in 1902 (Moodie 1974: 10, 11). Indeed, the aftermath of this event saw an upsurge in proto-nationalist activity with the founding of the *Helpmekaarsvereniging* [Mutual Aid Association] in 1915, set up by women to pay the fines and aid those imprisoned as a result of the Rebellion (Swart 1998, 2000). Many of the women who strongly sympathised with and had indeed helped to incite the Rebellion, such as Johanna Brandt-Van Warmelo, were also involved in writing and production of women’s testimonies and in the formal political structures that grew out of the reaction to the Rebellion, such as the establishment in 1915 by Brandt-Van Warmelo of the Women’s National Party in Johannesburg (Dictionary of South African Biography Vol. IV: 55). Thus, women were not merely “playing a supportive role” in the (male-led) National Party at this time, but increasingly during the late 1910s and early 1920s “began to organise themselves more formally” by establishing branches of the Women’s National Party (Walker 1990: 333).<sup>63</sup> Another important part of this early expression of proto-nationalist fervour was the founding of the *Broederbond* [Bond of Brothers] in 1918, initially a cultural organisation with Masonic undertones. The Bond was a male secret society, observed certain rituals and exclusively served the Afrikaans community in which

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<sup>62</sup> On the 1914 Rebellion see Bottomley 1982 and Swart 1998, 2000.

<sup>63</sup> On the growth and significance of the Women’s National Parties see Vincent 1999.

it was based, and later became a “highly disciplined vanguard organisation of northern Afrikaner nationalism” (O’Meara 1983: 61).<sup>64</sup> A significant economic development concerned with ‘*volkskapitalisme*’ [people’s capitalism] (O’Meara 1983) at this time included the 1918 establishment of Santam and then Sanlam, assurance and credit institutions created specifically to service the financial needs of Afrikaners.

These cultural, political and economic organisations were expressions of the nationalist movement in its infancy; and while what constituted ‘the Afrikaners’ was by no means entirely clear at this stage, nationalism was certainly being constructed by appealing to an apparently ‘innate’ nationalism that had ‘always’ existed in all Afrikaners. One of the means by which nationalism garners support and creates legitimacy is to collapse time, by suggesting that the group concerned has ‘always’ been distinct and unified, and that all that is required to achieve lasting solidarity and independence is to awaken the dormant feelings of oneness and patriotism that are inherently and timelessly shared by this people.<sup>65</sup> Hobsbawm refers to this collapsing of time in the creation of nationalism around the idea of “invented tradition”, which he argues is “a set of practices ... which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past. In fact, where possible they normally attempt to establish continuity with a suitable historic past” (Hobsbawm 1983:1). ‘The Afrikaners’, during and then in the first two decades after the war particularly, were actually characterised by class and political differences, urban and rural splits, discrepancies in education, and religious factionalism, and it was these many differences that nationalist bodies sought to elide or remove in favour of Afrikaner *eenheid* [unity].<sup>66</sup> However, while a small degree of

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<sup>64</sup> For detailed analysis on the organisation and significance of the *Broederbond* see Bloomberg 1990, Furlong 1991, O’Meara 1977 and Serfontein 1979.

<sup>65</sup> My thinking about nationalism has been particularly influenced by Anderson 1991, Hobsbawm 1990, Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983 and Smith 1999, 2000.

<sup>66</sup> Religious factionalism centred on struggles between and within the three broadly Calvinist Dutch Reformed churches; the “small, theologically liberal” Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk (NHK), the “rigidly

fragmentation is reflected in the pre-1930s women's accounts discussed above, this concerns their different contexts of publication and distribution, and not their tone or contents. Their contents overall are highly congruent regarding structure, content and tone and provide first a proto-nationalist and then a nationalist discourse about 'sacrifices' willingly made for 'freedom and fatherland', and consequently seriously attending to their contents challenges dominant views that nationalism only arrived on the scene much later.

Much South African historiography dates Afrikaner nationalism 'proper' as a "very recent phenomenon" that evolved primarily in the interwar years (Marks and Trapido 1987: 12), with O'Meara putting particular emphasis on 1934 to 1948 as "the crucial formative period" (O'Meara 1983: 3).<sup>67</sup> Certainly the 1930s saw the emergent Afrikaner nationalist movement cohering and strengthening, primarily as a result of economic changes that began to undermine class distinctions between Afrikaans-speakers, as I shall discuss later in the chapter. However, without endorsing ideologies of the 1930s which sought to depict Afrikaner nationalism as a 'timeless' movement with its roots in the distant past, and fully recognising the marked change in the character of the nationalist movement in the 1930s, I nevertheless maintain that prior to this there is clear evidence of vibrant proto-nationalist sentiment in women's testimonies and in their political activities. Women played a crucial role in transforming the *bittereinder* pro-Republican legacy into a proto-nationalist movement with strong political structures, as with the founding of the A.C.V.V. and the S.A.V.F. as early as 1904 and then the later establishment of the Women's National Parties in the 1910s. Borrowing from Hobsbawm (1990), I term these

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conservative and equally small" Gereformeerde Kerk (GK) and the large Nederduits Gereformeerde Kerk (O'Meara 1983: 67). Moodie explains that the GK broke away from the NHK in 1859 because its founders were so ascetically Calvinist that they "objected to the singing of hymns" (Moodie 1975: 59-6). Dirk Postma was the founding minister of the GK.

<sup>67</sup> This trend in part resulted from 1970s and '80s revisionism in South Africa which sought to challenge liberal analyses of apartheid as originating post-1948 as a result of ideological factors concerning Afrikaner nationalism. Revisionists focused on Afrikaner nationalism as a 1930s phenomenon that primarily concerned the dissolution of class divisions between Afrikaans-speakers, and explained apartheid in relation to the development of capitalism, focusing on the post-war growth of industrial capitalism around mining and the migrant labour system. See in particular Legassick 1974, Lipton 1985, Wolpe 1988.

pre-1930s activities, organisations and their accompanying ideologies as proto-nationalist, and view the 1938 Great Trek centenary, discussed later in this chapter, as a crucial moment marking the onset of an ebullient and increasingly militant Afrikaner nationalism.

The 1930s, then, saw a series of dramatic political shifts and realignments take place in South African politics, particularly within the Nationalist Party framework, changes which were symptomatic of, and also a stimulus to, the rise of Afrikaner nationalism. The ideological components of right-wing Afrikaner nationalism were produced and carried forward in the 1930s by various political groupings, including mainstream parliamentary politics and smaller breakaway groups, some, like Oswald Pirow's New Order and the Ossewabrandwag, both paramilitary and fascistic in nature. An outline of some of these political shifts and reconfigurations will help contextualise women's camp accounts published in the 1930s and 1940s and their significance as part of the further construction of 'the history' as perceived within the ideological framework of Afrikaner nationalism.

In the elections of 1924, the South African Party that had governed the country since Union in 1910 was defeated by an electoral pact between Hertzog's National Party and the Labour Party under Creswell. By the early 1930s, however, the Great Depression and the Gold Standard crisis, precipitated by Britain's abandonment of the Gold Standard in 1931 and South Africa's reluctance to do the same, were putting great economic pressure on the Hertzog government.<sup>68</sup> 'Poor whiteism' had increased dramatically, as the agricultural sector was worst hit by the Depression, causing widespread rural unemployment and swift urbanisation. The government-appointed Carnegie Commission of 1932 estimated that one-sixth of the white population was 'very poor' and a further 30

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<sup>68</sup> O'Meara gives a useful explanation about the details and implications of the Gold Standard Crisis which significantly weakened the South African economy (O'Meara 1983:36).

per cent were categorised as 'poor' (O'Meara 1983: 37).<sup>69</sup> In this context, in 1933 Hertzog's National Party and the South African Party under Smuts formed an electoral coalition and won the 1934 elections with a large majority. Hertzog remained premier, with Smuts as his deputy; then later in 1934, the two parties fused to form the United Party. Afrikaner opponents of this fusion split away to form the *Gesuiwerde Nasionale Party* (G.N.P., Purified National Party), under Dr D.F. Malan. Malan's new party resented South Africa's membership of the Commonwealth, and sought full Afrikaner independence and sovereignty and to prioritise Afrikaner language, culture and interests. The G.N.P. was also committed to solving the so-called 'poor white' problem and to maintaining and indeed further entrenching racial segregation.

While the 1930s saw the steady growth of the ideology and apparatus of Afrikaner nationalism, this took place within a context of differences and disputes amongst Afrikaners themselves, including between Hertzog and Malan. Hertzog, who had fought as a General in the South African War, had a loyal following in the Orange Free State, his birthplace. Hertzog favoured what he termed a two-stream policy, whereby English- and Afrikaans-speaking South Africans should be encouraged to develop along separate but equal lines. In 1925 he had stated that succession from Britain should be South Africa's 'right', but thought succession at that specific point would be a mistake. Alongside his two-stream policy for whites, Hertzog was also fully in favour of racial segregation between black and white South Africans, and used the notion of 'the black peril' (the threat of black urbanisation and worker-mobilisation, as well as a tacit sexual threat to white women) to defend and promote his segregationist ideology. As part of furthering

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<sup>69</sup> Of course black people were severely affected by the Depression, although in white South African terms the unemployment and poverty endemic amongst black people was regarded as 'normal' and acceptable, and did not warrant either investigation or remedial action. My intention here in discussing 'poor whiteism' is to provide the backdrop of poverty, frustration and displacement to the rise of Afrikaner nationalism, rather than to accept this as a 'real' characterisation of the actual distribution of poverty and hardship in South Africa at the time. See Morrell 1992 on 'poor whiteism'.

segregationist objectives, Hertzog aimed to abolish the qualified franchise enjoyed by black male voters in the Cape Province, and ultimately used the enfranchisement of white women in 1930 to dilute and undermine the black vote in the Cape.<sup>70</sup> As Walker points out, “Less than 20 per cent of the Cape electorate in 1929, black voters amounted in 1931, once white women had been enfranchised, to just under 11 per cent of voters in the Cape and less than 5 per cent of the electorate nationally” (Walker 1990: 314).

In contrast to Hertzog’s two-stream policy and concerns about succession from Britain, Malan believed that South Africa should make a complete break from British control, and wished Afrikaans to be privileged over English. Malan’s G.N.P. hitched white worker politics to nationalist race-based politics, to capture votes from poor, urban, working-class whites who feared their jobs were under threat from cheap black labour. Prior to 1938, the G.N.P. had little influence or standing in parliament, but in the elections of that year the party secured seats for twenty-seven National Assembly members, out of a total of 153. All but one of these men came from the Cape, where support for Malan was strongest. The G.N.P. victory was closely linked to the Great Trek celebrations of 1938, which the G.N.P. had effectively controlled and promoted and which occasioned an immense public response all over South Africa. Malan took every opportunity to stir up nationalist sentiment during the celebrations and in a now famous speech at Blood River on 16 December 1938,<sup>71</sup> he chose “as his theme the trek of the Afrikaner to the city, where he faced the black man in a new battle for survival”, and called for Afrikaner *kragdadigheid* [strong purposeful action] (Le May 1995: 183). He implied that Hertzog

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<sup>70</sup> The 1853 Cape Representative Government Constitution granted the vote to “any adult male who earned £50 a year, or occupied property worth £25, and could sign his name and write his address and occupation” (Maylam 2001: 107). The franchise was therefore qualified but non-racial. Whether or not this represented a more liberal attitude to ‘race’ in the Cape Colony has been the subject of considerable academic controversy in South Africa.

<sup>71</sup> 16 December was the date on which a small group of Voortrekkers had defeated several thousand Zulu *impi* at Blood River. Before the battle, the trekkers allegedly made a pact with God that if he granted them victory they would always honour and commemorate that day. Later the date became a highlight in Afrikaner nationalist calendar, and is still a day when right-wing groups gather.

was not sufficiently committed to the Afrikaner cause, was too willing to make compromises with English-speakers who wished to undermine Afrikaans language and culture, and held mistaken humanitarian views on racial politics.

Eventually Hertzog left the United Party in 1939 after parliament voted in favour of South Africa entering the Second World War to fight with Britain, and joined Malan's G.N.P., which was subsequently renamed the *Hereenigde Nasionale Party* (H.N.P., Reunited National Party). However, incorporating Hertzog into a party of extremely hardline Republicans like Strijdom and Verwoerd<sup>72</sup> proved difficult and in 1940 the *Hereniging* broke down, with Hertzog storming out of the Party Congress over the question of equal rights for English and Afrikaans. In 1941, the Hertzogites formed the Afrikaner Party under Havenga, but it failed to achieve any real success, and in the elections of 1948 the Afrikaner Party co-operated with Malan's National Party. The National Party's portentous victory in 1948 represented the triumph and rationalisation of Afrikaner nationalist politics in South Africa, that had taken formal shape in Malan's G.N.P. when this was established in 1934, and which was consolidated and extended in the years immediately after 1948, as evinced by the National Party's significantly improved majority in the 1953 elections.<sup>73</sup>

If nationalism depends upon a perception by 'imagined communities' (Anderson 1991) of timeless unity and the sense of a shared past, then much of the work required to achieve this in the 1930s was done, not by the mainstream nationalist parties, but by smaller groups who worked at local levels to undermine divisions within the Afrikaans community, even though the existence of these groups was in some respects also indicative

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<sup>72</sup> Both Strijdom and Verwoerd were later to become Prime Ministers of apartheid South Africa.

<sup>73</sup> The National Party governed South Africa between 1948 and 1994, and during that time further entrenched existing racial segregation in South African to establish a more extensive, formalised racial system that became known as apartheid. After the apartheid system collapsed as a result of the struggle against it within the country as well as strong international pressure, democratic elections were held in 1994 and the National Party relinquished political control of South Africa. Nevertheless, the pervasive economic and social repercussions of apartheid continue to affect the country.

of such divisions.<sup>74</sup> Developments such as the 1929 founding by the *Broederbond* of the *Federasie van Afrikaanse Kultuurverenigings* (F.A.K., Federation of Afrikaans Cultural Associations) saw the gradual consolidation of nationalist bodies. The F.A.K. was an umbrella organisation under the chairmanship of Dr N.J. Van der Merwe<sup>75</sup> set up to provide centralised co-ordination and a greater public unity for the many and varied Afrikaans cultural organisations, of which almost 300 were associated to the F.A.K. by 1937 (O'Meara 1983: 61, Moodie 1975:109). Then 1930 saw the formation of the A.T.K.V. (the Afrikaans Language and Cultural Union) by the same Henning Klopper who had founded the *Broederbond* in 1918. While ostensibly 'cultural', these organisations were dominated by the activities of cultural entrepreneurs who worked to promote a nationalist political agenda, rather than a strictly 'cultural' one.<sup>76</sup>

On the economic front, in 1934 the *Broederbond* established *Volkskas* ('people's treasury'), a bank for the Afrikaner people run by the *Broederbond* Executive Council (O'Meara 1983: 102). A further economic initiative on the part of the *Broederbond* took place in 1939 with the formation of the *Redingsdaadbond* (R.D.B., Rescue Action Society), which was aimed at alleviating the plight of Afrikaans 'poor whites.' The R.D.B. was financed from subscriptions, and through it "Afrikaners were provided with loans for the study of trades and businesses and were proffered advice on investments, and efforts were made to organise the buying power of Afrikaners into cooperative unions. Afrikaners were urged to save in Afrikaans savings banks, and membership in the R.D.B.

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<sup>74</sup> Some of these groups included the *Ossewa Brandwag* [Ox-wagon Sentinels], founded in the wake of the Great Trek Centenary, and Oswald Pirow's New Order. Both groups favoured fascism, and many of their supporters and leaders hoped for a German victory in the Second World War. These groups promoted Afrikaner language and culture, but also encouraged uniformity, obedience, fervent nationalism and the belief in a strict racial hierarchy that helped to bring a sense of unity and hope to some Afrikaners at that time, especially those who suffering urban dislocation and poverty. Furlong offers an analysis of the origins, workings and impact of these far right-wing groups (Furlong 1991).

<sup>75</sup> A prominent Free State nationalist and *Broederbond* member, Nico Van der Merwe was married to one of the daughters of the last president of the old Orange Free State Republic, Martinus Theunis Steyn. Nico Van der Merwe translated Hobhouse's *The Brunt of the War and Where It Fell* into Afrikaans, and this was published in 1923 as *Die Smarte van die Oorlog en Wie Dit Gely Het*.

<sup>76</sup> See Crawford Young 1976 and Giliomee 1995 on the idea of 'cultural entrepreneurs' in South Africa.

automatically brought a small amount of life insurance and burial assistance for those who joined” (Moodie 1974: 206). What these economic and cultural developments of the 1930s indicates is a growing Afrikaans unity and hegemony, or at least the attempt to construct such unity, and I will now go on to discuss the important role that women’s war and camp accounts played in this construction of oneness and solidarity.

The construction of a shared past during the 1930s centred on ‘remembering’ two events in particular, namely the so-called Great Trek of 1838, and the concentration camps of the South African War. At this time Gustav Preller “was beginning to chronicle the saga of the Voortrekkers, with ebullient imagination” (Le May 1995: 159), with the focus on the Voortrekkers reaching its zenith in 1938, when centenary celebrations were held all across South Africa. These celebrations were pivotal to constructing and giving voice to an emerging Afrikaner nationalist identity committed to Afrikaner unity and autonomy, characteristics apparently embodied by the brave, pioneering Voortrekkers. The celebrations depicted “the Voortrekker past ... as the main event in South African history, and ... this was ... linked to the struggle against the ‘mighty enemy from Europe’ in the South African War” (Witz: 2003: 98). The key part of the festivities took the form of a Great Trek re-enactment, sometimes called *Die Tweede Trek* (the second trek). Nine life-size ox-wagon replicas were constructed, and these took various routes through the country, some ending their journeys in Pretoria where the foundation stone of the Voortrekker Monument was laid, and others ending up at Blood River.

The idea for the trek re-enactment supposedly originated with Henning Klopper, a founding member of the *Broederbond* and the A.T.K.V., although interestingly it was Hendrika Postma, Hendrina Rabie-van der Merwe’s step-niece, who is thought to have had

a key role in formulating the central specifics of the festivities.<sup>77</sup> Thus according to the Dictionary of South African Biography, Hendrika Postma “took a lively interest in the symbolic ox-wagon Trek of 1938. It was she who suggested that the wagons be called after Voortrekker heroines, that tracks of the oxen and marks of the wagon-wheels should be imprinted in cement at the festival grounds, and that cairns bearing small bronze plaques should be erected in the towns on the route of the trek” (Dictionary of South African Biography Vol. I: 633). Le May provides a vivid description of the festivities:

“The wagons visited in all 500 towns and villages in a crescendo of excitement. Welcoming committees dressed in what they believed to be Voortrekker costume; municipalities renamed streets in commemoration; marriage ceremonies were performed in the proximity of the wagons and children were brought there to be baptised. There were the customary excesses that usually accompanied periods of mass hysteria, and some unfortunate babies were afflicted with names such as ‘Ossewania’ (ox-wagon-girl) and ‘Euufesia’ (centenary-festival-girl). [...] The wagon routes were designed to pass through the poorer areas of the cities; the object, which was successfully achieved, was to stimulate Afrikaner unity across any emerging class divisions; it was part of the process by which poor Whites should be reclaimed for the *Volk*” (Le May 1995: 183)

The Great Trek centenary celebrations are a striking example of Hobsbawm and Ranger’s ‘invented tradition’, and were pivotal to the construction and representation of Afrikaner identity. The public success of the centenary celebrations marked the shift from proto-nationalism to nationalism in its ‘full-blown’ sense. In many cases commemoration of the trek was coupled with commemoration of the camps, with ‘remembering’ two events forming the cornerstones of Afrikaner nationalism of this period. The deaths of women and children in the concentration camps were thus appropriated into a display of collective suffering that gave meaning to the Afrikaner people and its eventual triumph, as signified at the time by the centennial celebrations and the laying of the foundation stone of the Voortrekker Monument. At Irene concentration camp cemetery, for instance, a concrete

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<sup>77</sup> In addition, Anna Neethling-Pohl, an Afrikaans academic dramatist and distant relative by marriage to Mrs. Elizabeth Murray Neethling, was in charge of the historical tableaux and pageantry that formed part of the celebrations. Thus the heirs of two key figures in the production of women’s testimonies were centrally involved in the centennial festivities.

slab with wagon wheel imprints made by one of the 1938 celebratory wagons was preserved alongside a plaque commemorating the work of Irene volunteer 'nurse' Henrietta Armstrong. Also during 1938 cairns, plaques and other memorials to the Voortrekkers were placed in or alongside many more of the camp *begraafsplase* or cemeteries: in addition to Irene, these include Bethulie, Kroonstad, Norval's Pont, Pietersburg, Springfontein, Standerton and Volksrust, for instance.

The third surge of publication coincided with this dramatic increase of Afrikaner nationalism in the 1930s and 1940s. Many of the women's war and/or camp accounts that appeared at this time were published by *Nasionale Pers*, the group of publishing companies owned and controlled by the National Party, while some were released by *Voortrekkerpers*, which was established in 1936 by W.A. Hofmeyr and largely funded by the same Pieter Neethling who had helped set up *Nasionale Pers*. *Voortrekkerpers* was created to publish a new pro-G.N.P. newspaper in the Transvaal, Die Transvaler, which it was hoped would provide a counter to the Hertzogite Die Vaderland in the Transvaal. However, the appointment of Dr H.F. Verwoerd as editor of the new newspaper led to a later rift between *Voortrekkerpers* and the Hofmeyr group, and by the early 1940s *Voortrekkerpers* was in financial trouble (O'Meara 1983: 105).<sup>78</sup> Women's accounts published at this time include Sarah Raal's (1938) Met Die Boere in die Veld,<sup>79</sup> Mrs. Neethling's (1938) Mag Ons Vergeet? [Should We Forget?] (an Afrikaans translation by Mrs. Neethling's daughter Ella of the 1917 Vergeten?), M.M. Postma's (1939) Stemme Uit Die Verlede [Voices from the Past] (a modification of her earlier Stemme Uit Die

<sup>78</sup> After 1934 the *Nasionale Pers* daily, Die Volksblad, became the official mouthpiece of the G.N.P in the Orange Free State. The G.N.P line was already being propounded in the Cape by Die Burger newspaper, of which Malan had been the editor in the period immediately after its founding in 1915 by the National Party (Le May, 1995: 161). The newspaper remained loyal to Malan after 1934.

<sup>79</sup> Prior to its 1938 publication, Raal's book had been serialised in Saturday editions of Die Burger newspaper from 5 December 1936 until 6 February 1937.

Vrouekampe),<sup>80</sup> and Hendrina Rabie-Van der Merwe's (1940) Onthou! In Die Skaduwee van die Galg [Remember! In the Shadow of the Gallows].

Mag Ons Vergeet? and Stemme Uit Die Verlede were translations from Dutch and/or Taal into Afrikaans of two earlier collections of women's testimonies and sworn statements, both varying only slightly from their originals. Their republication in updated form during the height of 1930s Afrikaner nationalism represents the 'drawing in' of earlier women's camp testimonies into the then-dominant nationalist 'the history' of the camps. A review of Stemme Uit Die Verlede by J.R.L. Van Bruggen<sup>81</sup> that appeared in Die Brandwag stated that "Soberly and yet effectively the women here give testimony of the dark days which our nation had to go through", and also noted the book would be of interest to "everyone who is concerned with this heroic-tragic part of our history" (Van Bruggen 1940: 21).<sup>82</sup> Raal and Rabie-Van der Merwe's books both draw on the heroic mode epitomised by Johanna Brandt-Van Warmelo's 1913 Kappie Kommando/Petticoat Commando. Raal's and Rabie-Van der Merwe's books depict their war and camp experiences in the form of adventure stories in which they star as intrepid heroines who took great risks to defend the "*vryheid en reg*", freedom and justice, of the Republics (Raal 1938: 62, Rabie-Van der Merwe 1940: 10). Both accounts are fiercely nationalist, with Raal hoping that her book would awaken, "love of the fatherland and awareness of the nation in our young generation"<sup>83</sup> (Raal 1938: *Voorwoord* [Foreword]), and Rabie-Van der

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<sup>80</sup> Stemme Uit Die Verlede appeared in a slightly 'updated' form of Afrikaans, and significantly included one additional testimony by Mrs. S.C. Scheepers, mother of Boer commandant Gideon Scheepers, who had been controversially executed as a war criminal by the British military on 17 January 1902. Scheepers was charged with acts of murder, arson and ill-treatment of prisoners. The Dictionary of South African Biography observes that he "had no compunction in executing any Non-Whites he captured who were armed or who were, in his estimation, guilty of spying" (Dictionary of South African Biography Vol. II: 627). However, Scheepers was later valorised as a hero and martyr of the republican cause. Interestingly, Hendrina Rabie-Van der Merwe named her only son Scheepers, after this man (TAD 6328/64).

<sup>81</sup> Van Bruggen was the author of the strongly nationalist Bittereinders (Van Bruggen 1935) discussed earlier in this chapter.

<sup>82</sup> "*Sober en tog effektief lê vroue hier getuienis af van die donker dae waardeur ons nasie moes gaan*", "*almal wat in hierdie heroïes-tragiese deel van ons geskiedenis belangstel*".

<sup>83</sup> "*vaderlandsliefde en volksbewussyn by ons jong geslag*".

Merwe hoping that her book would help cultivate “patriotism in the bosom of our upcoming generations”<sup>84</sup> (Rabie-Van der Merwe 1940: 5).

These 1930s and 1940s accounts have more in common with one another than with the previous published accounts, and in many ways they represent the achievement of the hegemonic nationalist ‘the history’ of the war and camps. Thus the books by Raal and Rabie-Van der Merwe share an adventure story with a feisty redoubtable heroine format, and both have a strongly triumphalist nationalist and racist tone to them. In considerable contrast, the earlier collections of women’s testimonies by Postma and Neethling repeatedly emphasise, on the one hand, the cruelty and deliberate malice purportedly shown by the British towards Boer women and children during the war and the enormous suffering this caused, and, on the other hand, the great powers of forbearance, fortitude, and resistance shown by Boer women in response to British mistreatment. As noted earlier, there is a good deal of overlap between testimonies across the Neethling and Postma collections, with the women testimony-writers repeating and reproducing incidents and occurrences across the individual accounts and collections, thereby apparently conferring on these testimonies authenticity and historical validity because of their seeming corroboration of each other’s claims.<sup>85</sup> However, as I shall argue in later chapters, these similarities and repetitions in fact resulted from their politicised production within a strongly nationalist context. After the third cluster of publications represented by Raal and Rabie-Van der Merwe, two other accounts were published much later and these apparently emerged independently of a specific grouping of women’s accounts. These were Tant

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<sup>84</sup> “*om nasieliefde in die boesem van ons opkomende geslagte aan te kweek*”.

<sup>85</sup> Certainly Hobhouse took these great similarities as a confirmation of the veracity of the women’s accounts and stated: “The universality and similarity of experience is striking. Had every woman of the two Boer Republics (apart from the few big towns) recorded her experience, the result would have been but a general repetition of these statements with minor variations of detail” (Hobhouse 1927: 5).

Miem Fisher se Kampdagboek<sup>86</sup> (1964, 2000) and Camp Diary of Henrietta T.

Armstrong<sup>87</sup> (Van Rensburg 1980).<sup>88</sup> Although both purport to be camp diaries, in fact both are likely to have been written up some time after the war, possibly from informal, ‘untidy’ fragments written at the time, and in Armstrong’s case following publication of Johanna Brandt-Van Warmelo’s Het Concentratie-kamp van Irene.

It is the processes by, and political context in, which Boer women’s camp accounts came to be seen as providing factual and accurate memory about the past and ‘the facts’ about the camps in the context of ‘the history’ as perceived by nationalism that the following chapters will analyse and theorise. Linked to this, the moral right that is apparently ‘automatically’ conferred on testimony writers/speakers by their claims to persecution and oppression is interestingly called into question in the South African case. This is certainly not to suggest that Boer women and children did not suffer great hardships during the war and in the camps, nor that the deaths that occurred were otherwise than terrible and unnecessary; rather it is the manner and circumstances in which these experiences have subsequently been remembered and represented, and used to what ends, that requires investigation and re-thinking. It is the hindsight knowledge that these testimonies played an important role in the development of nationalism, and thus in segregation and later apartheid, that enables a re-reading that historicises these writings and looks in detail at their contents, as well as the contexts in which they were written, published and originally read, as well as re-read now. In the chapter that now follows, I commence such a re-thinking of ‘the history’, by providing a post-1994 re-reading of a

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<sup>86</sup> Miem Fischer’s brother was Tobias Smuts, a well-known Boer assistant commandant-general in the war until August 1901, when he was stripped of his rank for excess of zeal burning down a village in Swaziland, contrary to orders (Dictionary of South African Biography Vol. IV: 586).

<sup>87</sup> Henrietta Armstrong worked at Irene camp as one of the volunteers. She was later a key organiser in the S.A.V.F.

<sup>88</sup> In keeping with arguments that unfold across this thesis about the influential role of translating and editorial work, I reference edited diaries and collections of testimonies under the name of the editor throughout. Thus Armstrong’s diary appears here under the name of its editor, Van Rensburg.

particular nationalist woman's testimony, Onthou! In Die Skaduwee van die Galg by Hendrina Rabie-Van der Merwe (1940).

## Chapter Two

### Re-reading Hendrina Rabie-Van der Merwe's Onthou! In die Skaduwee van die Galg: *Testimonio* and Post/Memory Processes

“It is expected of us to forget and just to cover everything over. Blood will not be covered up. The stain always reappears. And the soil of South Africa is soaked with the blood of our burghers and the suffering of 26, 000 women and children. They drank the bitterest cup and absorbed also the dregs. How dare we forget? No, my people, even if my voice is like one who calls in the wilderness, I urge you with all that is precious: remember! Do not be vengeful, but remember what they suffered for us and sealed with their blood. And so, the iron stones in our land begin to call” (Rabie-Van der Merwe 1940: 328)<sup>1</sup>

#### Hendrina Rabie-Van der Merwe's Onthou! In die Skaduwee van die Galg

[Remember! In the Shadow of the Gallows] was published in 1940 and provides a useful starting point for an examination of women's testimonies of the South African War and concentration camps, because it epitomises key aspects of the processes of post/memory production that characterise the production and contents of these accounts more generally. As a book published thirty-eight years after the conclusion of the war, a with-hindsight re-reading of this text usefully enables the crucial questions about the workings of memory, referentiality and moral authority that are key concerns of my thesis to be raised. The text of Onthou! exemplifies post/memory in its *de facto* if not *de jure* autonomy from its originating events and constitutes what Stanley refers to as “an almost canonical and constantly reworked version of the past” (Stanley 2005a, in press). The publication of Onthou! in 1940 in fact represents a culmination of the fervent nationalist activity involved

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<sup>1</sup> “Van ons word verwag om te vergeet en maar alles toe te smeer. Bloed wil nie toegesmeer wees nie. Die vlek staan altyd weer uit. En die bodem van Suid-Afrika is deurweek met die bloed van ons burgers en die lyding van 26, 000 vroue en kinders. Hulle het die droesem ook ingeswig. Hoe durf ons vergeet? Nee, my volk, al is my stem soos van een wat roep in die woestyn, ek maan julle by al wat dierbaar is: onthou! Moenie wraaksugtig wees nie, maar onthou wat hulle vir ons gely en met hul bloed verseël het. So nie, sal die ysterklippe in ons land begin roep.” The last sentence reverberates strongly with much early Afrikaans writing and with a line from C.J. Langenhoven's 1918 poem ‘Die Stem’ [The Call] which later became the national anthem of South Africa: “laat die kranse antwoord gee” [let the echoing crags resound]. In the poetry of C. Louis Leipoldt in particular, landscape is depicted as strong voice of resistance to the bloodshed of the war, and Leipoldt implies that there will be an elemental revolt from the landscape if people forget what happened in the past (see for instance ‘Die Koperkapel’). I am grateful to Maretha Potgieter for her insightful comments on this extract.

in remembering and commemorating both the concentration camps and the 'Great Trek' in the late 1930s; it represents the apotheosis of the post/memory process, a process which began as the events of the war unfolded and women's experiences of these began to be told and re/told, first in oral and then in written accounts.

*Onthou!* shares many of the defining characteristics of the *testimonio* genre, in that it purports to present 'the truth', the whole truth and nothing but the truth about what is perceived as a terrible injustice by its author, who positions herself as a moral crusader on behalf of what is axiomatically assumed to be the moral highground. However, the book also disrupts key assumptions of the genre in several interesting and challenging ways. The political context in which the events of this narrative were remembered and inscribed – that is, the rise of Afrikaner nationalism in the 1930s, sketched out in Chapter One – with hindsight considerably complicate the author's truth-telling claims, not least by problematising important aspects of the moral basis of the Boer claim to persecution and victimhood. The spotless innocence of victimhood and the related moral authority of the author are also compromised by the treatment of 'race' matters in *Onthou!*, when these are re-read from a post-1994 perspective on segregation and apartheid in South Africa and their close relationship with nationalism. And they are further problematised by the adventure-story form that the narrative takes, in which the author does not figure as a victim, although all of her compatriots do, but instead as its redoubtable heroine by never compromising in her dealings with the British enemy and always discomforting and defeating them.

*Onthou!*, like other Boer women's war and/or camp accounts, has received very little detailed critical attention in South African or elsewhere.<sup>2</sup> Part of the reason for this absence of critical interrogation lies in the *testimonios* nature of these accounts, which for

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<sup>2</sup> See Stanley 2002c on Mrs. Neethling's 1903 *Should We Forget?* for an exception to this. Jansen's discussion of Boer women's testimonies is neither detailed nor critical (Jansen 1999a, 1999b).

many commentators has imbued them with seemingly unquestionable referentiality and moral authority. As a result, those commentators who have written about Boer women's accounts have by and large assumed the a priori referentiality of these testimonies:

“But what of the personal depositions? They were all given, either contemporaneously or within a few years at the end of the war. No one would fabricate the truth: it was too close. There were too many people who knew” (Coetzer 2000: 256, original emphasis)

There has also been little questioning of moral right as this is inscribed and claimed in Boer women's testimonies, which have been read mainly as examples of “resistance literature” which “should be studied as forerunners of a heart-rending twentieth century genre consisting of texts written by women in the Nazi and Japanese [sic] camps during World War II” (Jansen 1999b: 9). However, in this chapter I shall argue that the text and context of Onthou! require critical interrogation of a kind that does not accept as given the memory, truth and moral claims made by its author. Using ideas drawn from the theoretical debates that have developed around the *testimonio* genre, and also the analytical tool of post/memory, this chapter examines the complex intersecting issues concerning referentiality, moral authority and memory-making present in Onthou!, all of which have bearing on the interpretation of Boer women's testimonies more widely. I begin with a brief synopsis of the book itself before providing the key elements of my analysis of Onthou!, which will include discussing detailed extracts from the book as well as its context of production and first reading, and also its relationship to the *testimonio* genre.

**The fight for “freedom and justice”: a ‘referential text’ written under an ‘extreme condition of oppression’?**

Onthou! begins with the outbreak of war in October 1899, when the author and her husband Sarel were living as tenants on a farm near East London, in the Eastern Cape Colony. Upon hearing about the start of the war, they decided to return to their birthplace,

the Orange Free State, to join the fight for “*vryheid en reg*”, freedom and justice (10).<sup>3</sup>

Sarel Van der Merwe joined a commando, and Hendrina Rabie-Van der Merwe went to her family in Bloemfontein, where she and her sisters spent their days at the railway station, singing folk songs for arriving and departing *burghers* (citizens), men off to join their commandos or officials involved in war activities. Here she comments that President Steyn<sup>4</sup> always waited on the platform to greet the men on their way to join their commandos, and to underline her patriotism she adds that “The President also always sang the folk songs with us. I am sure I speak on behalf of our whole nation when I say that we loved our President heartily” (23).<sup>5</sup> However, Rabie-Van der Merwe longed to be part of the action occurring out in the *veld* (bush, field), commenting that “I did not come here [to the Orange Free State] to bake rusks. I want to nurse the wounded, hold the dying in my arms, wash away their blood and refresh their parched lips with drops of cool water” (19).<sup>6</sup> She eventually joined a Boer commando unit to work as a nurse, but she found nursing trying and comments that it showed her “that war is cruel and barbaric and inhuman” (72).<sup>7</sup> Later Sarel and his brother Faan<sup>8</sup> were captured by the British, jailed at Jagersfontein and sentenced to death. With the help of a commando unit, Rabie-Van der Merwe participated in freeing her husband and brother-in-law from prison. As a result of the jailbreak, she in turn was arrested and imprisoned at Jagersfontein, and following the British re-occupation of the village was sent to the concentration camp at Port Elizabeth along with a large group

<sup>3</sup> In this chapter all references to *Onthou!* will provide the page number only.

<sup>4</sup> Martinus Theunis Steyn was President of the Orange Free State from February 1898 until March 1900 when Bloemfontein fell to the British and the territory was renamed the Orange River Colony.

<sup>5</sup> “*Die President het ook altyd die volksliedere met ons saamgesing. Ek is seker ek praat uit naam van ons ganse volk as ek sê ons het ons President hartlik liefgehad.*”

<sup>6</sup> “*Ek het nie gekom om beskuit te bak nie. Ek wil die gewondes gaan verpleeg, die sterwendes in my arms washou, hul bloed afwas en hul dorre lippe verfris met druppels koel water.*”

<sup>7</sup> “*dat oorlog wreed en barbaars en onmenslik is.*”

<sup>8</sup> Faan (Francios) van der Merwe was known as *Rooi Faan* [Red Faan] on account of his long red hair and beard. According to the *Dictionary of South African Biography*, Faan was a “dauntless, sometimes recklessly, bold fighter” during the South African war, and was also known as the *Rooi Duiwel* [Red Devil]. He was part of the group under Hertzog and Nieuwoudt who invaded the Cape Colony and seized Calvinia in January 1901 (*Dictionary of South African Biography Vol. V: 797*).

of Boer women and children. En route the group were temporarily encamped at Edenburg,<sup>9</sup> where Rabie-Van der Merwe assisted as an unofficial nurse to the women and children there, and was apparently asked by a British doctor if she would like to work nursing wounded British soldiers, which she refused.

Eventually Rabie-Van der Merwe was sent to Port Elizabeth camp, which she deplored for its poor condition,<sup>10</sup> claiming for example that Mrs. Koos Hertzog's son died of hunger in the camp: "When I arrived in camp, Mrs. Koos Hertzog's son was already dead, but the other women told me how the poor mother begged on her knees for a tin of condensed milk at any price from the rationers. She explained that it was for her sick child ... But this was absolutely refused ... the poor mother had to see her child fade away and die of hunger" (168-9).<sup>11</sup> After a short stay, Rabie-Van der Merwe and a fellow inmate, Hannie Marais, escaped from this camp in the hopes of re-joining a commando, for as she explained, "I did not come to the war to eat the Englishman's baker's bread and jam" (184).<sup>12</sup> With Rabie-Van der Merwe posing as an Englishwoman called Helen Taylor and Hannie Marais as her cousin Miss Smith, the two women took the train to Graaff-Reinet, telling the authorities they were on their way to attend a wedding, while in fact they were hoping to meet up with a Boer commando. However, upon reaching Graaff-Reinet both

<sup>9</sup> Edenburg station was a key railway junction at that time, and also the site of one of the black camps.

<sup>10</sup> Port Elizabeth camp was regarded as a 'show camp', and was thus not included in the Ladies Commission tour of inspection in 1901. A total of 15 people died there over the whole period of the camp's existence. Many of the families of Boer commanders and generals were sent there, including members of the Hertzog family.

<sup>11</sup> "Toe ek in die kamp kom, was mev. Koos Hertzog se seuntjie reeds dood, maar die ander vroue het my vertel hoe die arme moeder op haar knieë gesoebat he tom 'n blikkie kondensmelk by die uitdelers te koop, teen enige prys. Sy het verduidelik dat dit vir haar siek kind is ... Maar dit is haar ten enemale geweier ... moes die arme moeder haar kind so sien wegwyn en van honger sterwe." This death in fact refers to that of eight-year-old Charles Neethling Hertzog, son of Mrs. James Hertzog, on 12 November 1900 in Port Elizabeth camp, the details of which are documented in Hobhouse 1902: 83-89. Hobhouse stated that the child was suffering from measles before he was taken to Port Elizabeth camp, and this was most likely the cause of his death, not hunger (Balme 1994: 66). It is unclear why Rabie-Van der Merwe refers to the child's mother as Mrs. Koos Hertzog.

<sup>12</sup> "Ek het mos nie oorlog-toe gekom om Engelsman se bakkersbrood en jem te eet nie." Unlike at all other camps where inhabitants were provided with flour or meal to bake their own bread, ready-made loaves were distributed at Port Elizabeth camp. Meals in this camp were centrally prepared, rather than individually cooked by inhabitants.

women were quickly arrested by a large contingent of British soldiers who raided the boarding house the women were staying in. On this, Rabie-Van der Merwe writes with a mixture of self-deprecation and self-importance, "If I was in the place of the enemy, I would be really ashamed of myself to make such a demonstration over a simple little old Boer woman" (211).<sup>13</sup>

Rabie-Van der Merwe was then imprisoned in jails at Bethulie and later at Bloemfontein, where she met other Boer women prisoners and comments on some of their stories. The bulk of her book focuses on the hardships of prison life, with the *galg* or gallows referred to in the title in the Bloemfontein prison yard affording the only shade in the hot, dusty enclosure. In spite of her depiction of prison life as harsh and trying, Rabie-Van der Merwe also emphasises her own success in challenging British authority in jail, for instance by demanding that her meals in Bloemfontein prison be provided by a local hotel: "'That [prison food] I will not tolerate,' was my answer. 'I am not a criminal, but a political prisoner, and I want my meals three times a day from a hotel and you must see to it.' ... Within half an hour my breakfast was there, to my greatest surprise sent by some or other hotel" (257-8).<sup>14</sup> After some months Rabie-Van der Merwe's health deteriorated. A persistent cough coupled with poor circulation eventually precipitated her release from prison, and she was given permission to travel to Stellenbosch where her mother was staying.<sup>15</sup> However, claiming to have felt concern at being a financial burden to her mother, she wrote to the British military authorities demanding that the British pay for her

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<sup>13</sup> "As ek in die plek van die vyand was, sou ek my waarlik geskaam het om soveel demonstrasies te maak oor 'n eenvoudige ou Boerevrou." *"Dit sal ek nie gedoog nie," is my antwoord. 'Ek is nie 'n misdadiger nie, maar 'n politieke gevangene, en ek wil my ete driemaal per dag van 'n hotel af hê en jy moet daarvoor sorg.' ... Binne 'n halfuur was my onthyl daar, tot my grootste verbasing deur een of ander hotel gestuur.*"

<sup>14</sup> "Dit sal ek nie gedoog nie," is my antwoord. 'Ek is nie 'n misdadiger nie, maar 'n politieke gevangene, en ek wil my ete driemaal per dag van 'n hotel af hê en jy moet daarvoor sorg.' ... Binne 'n halfuur was my onthyl daar, tot my grootste verbasing deur een of ander hotel gestuur."

<sup>15</sup> Mrs. Rabie lived in Bloemfontein concentration camp after her house in the town was commandeered at the end of June 1901 by the British military who paid her £10 a month in rent (A190, 24). Interestingly, the records of the Bloemfontein Ladies Relief Committee indicate that Mrs. Rabie was a recipient of 'relief' in the form of writing paper, envelopes and stamps, an indication both of her relative affluence – she did not request or receive basic items of food – and also her likely level of education (A13, 19). Mrs. Rabie was later allowed to go to live with relatives in Stellenbosch.

upkeep while martial law was still being enforced. As a result she was sent to live at Springfontein camp, where she arrived on 31 May 1902, the day the peace treaty of Vereeniging was signed.<sup>16</sup> The last part of her book describes Sarel's return from Bermuda, the Van der Merwes' decision to live at the devastated Rabie farm 'Groenkloof' in the Free State, and their struggle to begin life again there. The book ends with a piece of verse by C. Louis Leipoldt in which the dead of the battlefield and the camps are assured that they can sleep peacefully after their suffering, because "we remember!" (347).<sup>17</sup>

In what follows, detailed extracts from *Onthou!* will be provided and discussed; and, as part of this, I want firstly to consider specifically the ways in which the text does and does not exemplify key features of the *testimonio* genre, and secondly what features of it a post-1994 re-reading brings into critical sight. As is well-known, the *testimonio* genre has been particularly associated with the Latin American testimonial narratives that emerged in the late 1960s with the publication of texts such as Esteban Montejo's / Miguel Barnet's *Autobiography of a Runaway Slave* in 1966. However, certainly outside Latin America, the best-known example of the genre is *I, Rigoberta Menchu* (Rigoberta Menchu with Elisabeth Burgos-Debray 1983), which has received a great deal of critical attention, a critical attention that shows no sign of drying up. With the growth of *testimonio*, so too there has been an increasing academic interest in the genre, and this has developed into the specialised field of *testimonio* studies, implicitly concerning Latin American testimonies, and especially those by women, although curiously this gendered dimension is seldom explicitly addressed. The key definitions of the genre provided by prominent *testimonio* theorists over a ten-year span all stress similar characteristics:

<sup>16</sup> SRC 87. Interestingly, the register of inhabitants for Springfontein camp indicates that Rabie-Van der Merwe herself took the Oath of Allegiance to the British on 31 May 1902, the date the war ended and the date she entered the camp for the first time. This is curiously out of keeping with the fierce nationalism expressed in her book.

<sup>17</sup> The Afrikaans is "*ons onthou!*". Leipoldt's poem, entitled "*Opdrag 'Aan almal wat voorgegaan het'*", appeared his collection of poetry *Oom Gert Vertel en Ander Gedigte* [Uncle Gert Tells and Other Poems].

*“Testimonio represents an affirmation of the individual subject, even of individual growth and transformation, but in connection with a group or class situation marked by marginalization, oppression, and struggle”* (Beverley 1989: 23, my emphasis)

*“... an authentic narrative, told by a witness who is moved to narrate by the urgency of a situation (e.g., war, oppression, revolution, etc.). Emphasizing popular, oral discourse, the witness portrays his or her own experience as an agent (rather than a representative) of a collective memory and identity. Truth is summoned in the cause of denouncing a present situation of exploitation and oppression or in exorcising and setting aright official history”* (Yudice 1991: 17, my emphases)

*“There are three distinguishing features I particularly want to emphasize in these definitions of testimonio: (1) it is produced through a voluntary collaboration between an intellectual and a subaltern individual or group; (2) it emphasizes a collective experience of an often extreme condition of oppression; and (3) it is a referential text, that is, it refers to real events in the real world and insists on the truth of its account. Testimonio is a collaborative discourse which refers to a concrete reality, often with the explicit intent of changing it”* (Kokotovic 1999: 38, my emphases)

All three definitions here stress that *testimonios* bear witness to situations of “marginalization” and “exploitation and oppression” in what is presented as an essentially truthful, referential way, and that a *testimonio* is thus perceived as a “referential text” which truthfully represents “real events”. By implication, the *testimonio* writer/speaker<sup>18</sup> is presumed to be morally and politically correct in their opposition to the situation of injustice which their *testimonio* gives voice to, individually and collectively, but with this presumption more strongly evident in the first phase of *testimonio* criticism, as I outline below. It is these features of referentiality and moral right that are crucially disrupted by *Onthou!*, as I shall propose later.

In his introduction to the extremely influential collection *The Real Thing: Testimonial Discourse and Latin America*, Guggelberger identifies two phases of *testimonio* criticism – the initial response to the genre by critics in the late 1980s and early 1990s

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<sup>18</sup> Many *testimonios* have been produced by a collaboration between ‘speakers’ who have verbally related their stories to academics or writers based in US or European contexts, who have subsequently ‘written up’ these accounts and arranged for their publication.

characterised by what he calls “unconditional affirmation of the genre”, and then a second wave of criticism that questioned this earlier affirmation of the genre’s referentiality and explored “issues of authenticity and salvationality” (Gugelberger 1996: 5, 4). Some critics have argued that in light of the urgent political calls to action made in *testimonios*, it is a callous and unaffordable luxury to interrogate their referentiality or authenticity, and that “poststructuralist skepticism” leads to a destructive and unwanted “depoliticising” of testimonial narratives (Kokotovic 1999: 35). Others, like Elzbieta Sklodowska, have examined *testimonio* more critically and questioned the assumption of referentiality, arguing instead that the genre hovers on the borders of “factual and fictional” (Skłodowska 1996: 85). There has also been critical scepticism expressed about collaborations between the *testimonio*-speakers and academic writers who have produced many of the best-known *testimonios*.<sup>19</sup> Recent *testimonio* criticism has thus opened up the possibility to engage with the interplay between fact and fiction in the text, and has also emphasised the significance of the context of *testimonio* production. The context and content of Onthou! raise significant questions about referentiality, and as I shall suggest, the book provides a clear example of *testimonios*’ tendency to be simultaneously both ‘factual and fictional’.

An aspect of *testimonio* that has received far less critical attention concerns the presumption of the moral right on the part of the speaker/writer. Even those critics who have questioned the referentiality of *testimonio* still tend to presume that the speaker has been the victim of injustice and is the righteous, principled opponent of an illegitimate and repressive regime. A strong assumption running through *testimonio* literature is that victims of injustice or oppression automatically gain moral authority, and that this

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<sup>19</sup> For instance, a great deal of controversy has surrounded Elisabeth Burgos-Debray’s role in producing I, Rigoberta Menchu, and there has been much debate about Menchu’s own credibility as a testimony-speaker, sparked primarily by the polemical attack in Rigoberta Menchu and the Story of All Poor Guatemalans (Stoll 1998). Aspects of these debates are outlined in Burgos 1999, Lincoln 2000, Gugelberger 1999 and Stromquist 2000. See also Skłodowska’s discussion of Barnet’s mediating presence in The Autobiography of a Runaway Slave (Skłodowska 1996).

immunises their writings against doubt or question as to its veracity, its truthfulness.<sup>20</sup>

Kokotovic describes *testimonios* as “texts [in which] the colonized, silenced ‘others’ of Western discourse intervene in that discourse as selves and claim the authority to speak in order to contest their exclusion from history” (Kokotovic 1999: 29, original emphasis).

Especially during the first wave of *testimonio* criticism, the genre was viewed as a mouthpiece for the marginalized and oppressed, providing a place for the subaltern to speak. The assumption has been that political correctness is on the side of the *testimonio*-speaker, who occupies a superior moral position as a result of the unwarranted evil persecution to which they have been subject. However, when the *testimonio*-speaker/writer is a Boer woman, a member of a group of people who even at the time of the South African War were widely criticised for their views on ‘race’, and who later in the twentieth century went on to rule the South African apartheid state, a present-time re-reading requires suspending such assumptions.

In 1994, South Africa’s first free democratic elections were held, providing a watershed ‘moment’ in the demolition of apartheid, and thus my interest in providing a post-1994 re-reading of women’s testimonies. That is, I take it as crucial that a present-time, post-1994, re-reading not only requires suspending assumptions about referentiality and moral right and authority, but also requires a critical interrogation of the ‘race’ assumptions, parameters and dynamics of all prior writings on and about South Africa. In this context, it is pertinent to note that Rabie-Van der Merwe’s negative comments on ‘race’ are intertwined with her claims to persecution at the hands of both the British and black people, so that re-reading her testimony with hindsight knowledge about apartheid

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<sup>20</sup> In the case of South African women’s testimonies, this is reflected in Coetzer’s insistence commented on earlier, that, “No one would fabricate the truth: it was too close. There were too many people who knew” (Coetzer 2000: 256, original emphasis).

enables problematising assumptions about testimonial narratives and moral right concerning this particular instance of *testimonio*-writing.

There are three features of *Onthou!* in particular that place it within the genre of *testimonio* and around which my following discussion is organised. Firstly, the text is pervaded by truth-telling claims – Rabie-Van der Merwe repeatedly states that the ‘real’ history of the war and its atrocities has been concealed or forgotten and that her account has been written to help rectify these silences and omissions. Secondly, while Rabie-Van der Merwe certainly does not cast herself as a victim, she nevertheless presents the Afrikaner nation’s history as a people’s “struggle for survival”, and depicts the British as unjust oppressors who deliberately caused “the suffering of innocents” (328),<sup>21</sup> with *Onthou!* presented as an objective text that documents the Afrikaner people’s struggle for survival in the face of this. Thirdly, she “portrays [...] her own experiences as an agent (rather than a representative) of a collective memory and identity”, as Yudice (1991: 17) has phrased it. In this depiction of herself as an active agent, Rabie-Van der Merwe’s self-portrayal is suggestive of the hero in an adventure story, as I will demonstrate later. However, as a *testimonio*-writer Rabie-Van der Merwe is a troublesome figure, for *Onthou!* is not morally or politically straightforward in the sense implied by even critical definitions of the genre, because, although the author repeatedly asserts her authority as a reliable witness and truth-teller, the content and context of her book make these claims problematic in a post-1994 re-reading.

I focus now on examining these three aspects of *Onthou!* in turn, and begin by exploring the ways in which Rabie-Van der Merwe asserts her authority as a witness to the war and an ‘agent of collective memory’, before examining aspects of her book’s content and also its writing and publishing context that problematise her claims to referentiality

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<sup>21</sup> “die lyding van onskuldiges”.

and truth-telling. Doing do so in the context of a post-1994 re-reading means that my analysis and understanding of this text is grounded in the particular social and political milieu that has prevailed in South Africa since the end of apartheid rule in that watershed year. In 1994, National Party rule and with it the political system of apartheid ended in South Africa with the first democratic elections, and since that time there have been widespread efforts to make sense of South Africa's racial past by individuals, the academic community, and also more publicly by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.<sup>22</sup> This provides the broad context in which my re-reading of *Onthou!* is located, a re-reading inevitably shaped by the wider impulse to understand and historicise South Africa's racial past. In addition, my re-reading of *Onthou!* is informed by feminist literary theory and practice, which has usefully used strategies of reading and re-reading 'against the grain' to identify "patriarchy as the source of women's textual as well as material oppression", but also to interrogate gender differences and hierarchies and "the language through which [they are] constructed and symbolized" (Mills and Pearce 1996: 2, 4). Through such a reading 'against the grain' or "political reading", feminist literary theorists have shown how "conflict between the reader and author/text can expose the underlying premises of the work" (Moi 1985: 82, 24-25, original emphasis).

### **Claiming truth and referentiality in *Onthou!***

Rabie-Van der Merwe's self-representation as a testimony-writer centres on three main features – her claimed authority as a witness, her related insistence on the truthfulness of her account, and her personal heroism and bravery as demonstration of her moral worth. Rabie-Van der Merwe's wartime experiences give her tale credibility: she

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<sup>22</sup> For the *Report* itself see Truth and Reconciliation Commission 1998, and on the role and significance of the Commission and its wider ramifications in South Africa see Christie 2000, James and Van de Vijver 2000 and Wilson 2001. On rethinking history in post-1994 South Africa more generally see Colvin 2004, Coombes 2003 and Nuttall and Coetzee 1998.

and her husband's loyalty to Boer independence, together with the price they paid for this, help authorise her version of events. Experience and suffering legitimate the tale, and also legitimate Afrikaner claims on South Africa; that is, their having fought and suffered for South Africa is presented as justifying their claim for political as well as moral supremacy thereafter. The author's status as, in Yudice's terms, an 'agent of collective memory', is given more, rather than less, authority by her insistence that "What I have seen and lived through is but a droplet in comparison with the beakers-full which my fellow-Afrikaners have drained" (4).<sup>23</sup> This self-deprecating acknowledgement of the greater suffering of others at the outset of the book gives the author's tale the implicit backing and corroboration of the thousands of other tales of hardship more extreme than her own. It also acts to pre-empt any potential accusations of exaggeration on Rabie-Van der Merwe's part, while simultaneously gesturing towards the suffering of the collectivity in a story that is actually about the author's individual heroic wartime activities. This emphasis on her own suffering on the one hand, but playing it down on the other in relation to the wider collective experience, confers credibility and authority on the text and its ensuing account.

Thus Rabie-Van der Merwe explains in her foreword that one of the difficulties in writing her book was "to track down all the names of people and dates of events" (3),<sup>24</sup> continuing that,

"I want to assure my readers that I have exaggerated nothing, and have written down nothing that is not true; on the contrary, I suppressed a lot and left out names, not because I have forgotten them, but because I feel sorry for their descendents, who would hide their faces in shame if they knew how their parents and grandparents acted in the Anglo-Boer War" (4)<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> "Wat ek gesien en deurgemaak het, is maar 'n druppel in vergelyking met die mara-bekers wat my mede-Afrikaners geledig het."

<sup>24</sup> "om al die name van persone en datums van gebeurtenisse op te spoor."

<sup>25</sup> "Ek wil my lesers verseker dat ek niks oordryf het, en niks neergeskryf het wat nie waar is nie; intendeel, ek het baie verswyg en name uitgelaat, nie omdat ek hulle vergeet het nie, maar omdat ek jammer voel vir hul nageslagte, wat hul aansig met skaamte sal bedek as hulle weet hoe hul ouers en voorouers in die Anglo-Boere-oorlog gehandel het." The last part of this presumably refers to the descendents of *hendsappers* and joiners, who Rabie-Van der Merwe assumes would feel ashamed to know of their ancestors' past traitorousness to the Afrikaner folk.

This assurance guaranteeing truthfulness and authenticity is strengthened by the author's claim that there is more she has remembered but has chosen not to record, because this implies both the comprehensiveness of her memory and also her tact and responsibility in recounting these memories. The author's truth-telling claims pervade the text, but with an interesting tension between truth and untruth. Thus Rabie-Van der Merwe represents herself as the epitome of an honesty that is almost perverted by contact with the British, who forced her to live by lies and deception. In this context, after her escape from Port Elizabeth camp, Rabie-Van der Merwe notes that she was 'forced' by circumstance to tell many lies to the British authorities in her flight to Graaff-Reinet. Just before her re-capture by the British, having got as far as a boarding house in Graaff-Reinet, she reflects on her ability to lie: "To my surprise I found that the more lies I told, the easier it became to deceive. The straying path! If it had carried on any longer, I would have become an expert liar" (210).<sup>26</sup> While this admission could undermine the authority of the tale by countering the author's claims, in fact it functions in the opposite way. That is, by confessing the ease with which she was able to lie but her realisation of this 'straying' before it was 'too late', the author points up and reinforces rather than undermines her truthfulness.

There are indications that Onthou! has been read as an accurate factual account that can be used to glean information about aspects of the war. In a letter of 14 July 1950, ten years after the book's publication, sent to the journalist popularly known as 'Renier', F.P. Cillié recommended Onthou! as a book which records the events that took place in and around Fauresmith during the war and suggested that it "deserves a place in the Renier archive" (A119).<sup>27</sup> Of Rabie-Van der Merwe herself, Cillié commented, "A braver, more

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<sup>26</sup> "Tot my verbasing vind ek dat hoe meer ek leuens vertel, hoe makliker dit my val om meer te versin. Die afdraande pad! As dit langer so aanhou, dan word ek nog 'n ekspert-leuenaar."

<sup>27</sup> This letter is part of the Renier collection which consists of the correspondence of G. Joubert (1904-1968), a journalist popularly known as Renier, who wrote a column entitled 'Stop Van Myne' [Fill your pipe with my tobacco] for Die Volksblad newspaper during the 1940s and 1950s. Much of the correspondence deals with topics related to the South Africa War and the 1914 Rebellion, and amongst the letters to Renier are

determined woman than Henkie Rabie could not easily be found.<sup>28</sup> Here, for a reader more-or-less ‘of the time’, Onthou! has been read as intended by Rabie-Van der Merwe – as the truthful, factual account of an intrepid and heroic woman. In addition, her first-hand (albeit it brief and atypical) experience of concentration camp life is used by Rabie-Van der Merwe to make authoritative judgements about conditions in the camps more widely, and to condemn those she holds responsible.<sup>29</sup> Her status as a self-proclaimed ‘expert’ has been reinforced by later writers, who have used her book as a primary source on the camps at Port Elizabeth and Springfontein.<sup>30</sup>

For instance, in the Springfontein volume (1991) of Raath and Louw’s Konsentrasiekamp-Gedenkreëks [Concentration Camp Commemorative Series], the authors quote extensively from Onthou! to illustrate their arguments about poor conditions in Springfontein camp, in spite of the fact that Rabie-Van der Merwe arrived there on the date the war ended and lived there only post-war, making her experience highly atypical. Nonetheless, Raath and Louw present the aim of their series as, “to make just the assimilated facts available, as objectively as possible” (1991: vi)<sup>31</sup>, and in doing so juxtapose comments from Onthou!, extracts from the official camp records and quotes from secondary sources as if these are all equally factual and bear an equally direct relationship to the events they purport to describe.<sup>32</sup> Similarly, Swart and Roodt (1992) reference Onthou! in footnotes as a source of ‘factual’ information about Port Elizabeth

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several in which writers relate their concentration camp experiences. Cillie’s original Afrikaans is, “*verdien ‘n plek in die Renier argief.*”

<sup>28</sup> “*‘n Dapperder, kraniger vrou as Henkie Rabie sal nie maklik kan gevind word nie.*”

<sup>29</sup> In fact, Rabie-Van der Merwe spent no more than a few weeks in Port Elizabeth camp, and about four months post-war in Springfontein camp. Unlike the large majority of Boer women in the camps, she had no children to care for, and was unfettered by family responsibilities.

<sup>30</sup> Indeed, several present-day commentators on the camps have reproduced extracts from Boer women’s testimonies as primary supporting evidence for the factual claims they make, without providing any critical discussion of these testimonies or their context of production. See for example Marais 1999 and Raath 2000a, 2000b.

<sup>31</sup> “*om slegs die feite ... so objektief moontlik samevattend beskikbaar te stel*”

<sup>32</sup> Raath (2002a) too provides extensive quotes from Onthou! and treats the text as the objective account of an innocent Boer woman who was unfairly victimised by the British.

camp. However, Rabie-Van der Merwe escaped from this 'show camp' after a very short stay, of around two or three weeks. These repetitions in 1991 and 1992 of the claims made more than 50 years earlier in Onthou! as unproblematic facts hinge on the assumption that Rabie-Van der Merwe's memories, of the events of the war and the camps some forty years before, and her representation of these in Onthou!, are taken to all map onto each other in a direct and unproblematically *referential* way. *Such commentators offer no critical interrogation of the book nor its provenance within the political context of its writing, publication and original reading: Rabie-Van der Merwe's representation of herself as authoritative, reliable, educated, sympathetic, and most importantly, 'having been there', has seemingly placed her truth-claims as beyond question for them.*

Rabie-Van der Merwe evidences her authority as a witness as well as a custodian of truth in various ways in the text. Thus, for instance, while in Bloemfontein prison she describes having offered to help a fellow inmate accused of murder, and she secured a defence for the sixteen-year-old Johanna and related the details of the case and the evidence of Johanna's innocence to her lawyer. The author explains her actions in the following way: "Johanna was too simple and underdeveloped to do anything for herself, I therefore regarded it as my duty to represent her. Praise the Lord that I was more privileged, and in a position to do this" (291).<sup>33</sup> Many references are made throughout the text to the author's fluency in English, and her sound reading and writing skills; and by emphasising her superior educational qualifications, she bestows further authority on herself as a witness and testimony-giver. However, while this example of noblesse oblige in relation to the presumptively white Johanna derives from a 'superiority' grounded in education and confidence, Johanna's 'too simple and underdeveloped' characteristics are

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<sup>33</sup> "Johanna was self te eenvoudig en onontwikkeld om iets vir haarself te doen, dus het ek as my plig beskou om vir haar op te tree. Prys die Heer dat ek meer bevoorreg was en in staat om dit te doen!"

also shared with the coloured people that Rabie-Van der Merwe offers patronage and aid to, some examples of which I shall discuss later.<sup>34</sup>

At various points in Onthou!, Rabie-Van der Merwe references God as the ultimate authority for her conduct: "A Good Spirit took charge of my hand and my mind and led me safely through" (4).<sup>35</sup> Indeed, the entire text is written using such biblical devices. There are many references to prayers and praying and direct appeals to God for help or protection; and the Afrikaner people are throughout represented as God-fearing and pious and the British as godless and barbaric. For instance, when Rabie-Van der Merwe was transported by wagon with a large group of women from Jagersfontein to Edenburg station, and then eventually to Port Elizabeth, she describes a scene on the first night of the journey which emphasises the moral authority of the Afrikaner people. Among the women being transported was Mrs. Hertzog, mother of General J.M.B. Hertzog.<sup>36</sup> As the women, children and soldiers were turning in for a night spent under the wagons, Mrs. Hertzog (who was very deaf) began to pray aloud. Rabie-Van der Merwe states that the camp immediately fell silent, with many women falling to their knees to pray with Mrs. Hertzog. In fact, she proposes that so powerfully moving was this act of faith that "Even the English guards nearby bowed their heads, just as seriously" (151, my emphasis).<sup>37</sup> God is clearly on the side of goodness and morality, which is the side of Afrikanerdom, with this sanctioning by God providing the ultimate backing and irresistible authority to Rabie-Van der Merwe's testimony.

Onthou! is of course not actually a directly and unproblematically referential account of the war and the camps in the way that the text asserts, but is rather a

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<sup>34</sup> In South Africa 'coloured' does not equate with 'mixed race' but refers to a group of people with specific historical origins in freed slaves, Malay, KhoiKhoi, San and Griqua people, but also including 'mixed race'.

<sup>35</sup> "*n Goeie Gees het my hand en verstand in beslag geneem en my veilig deurgelei.*"

<sup>36</sup> J.M.B. Hertzog, Boer general and later premier of South Africa, was a dedicated Afrikaner nationalist and promoter of the Afrikaans language. Aspects of his political clashes with Malanite nationalists in the late 1930s are sketched out in Chapter One.

<sup>37</sup> "*Selfs die Engelse wagte in die nabyheid buig ewe ernstig hul hoof.*"

subjectively told and politically-motivated account, in which the author uses her wartime experiences of some forty years before as a vehicle to represent herself as a defiant, daring, patriotic heroine of the nationalist cause and this cause as the axiomatically morally correct one. It is not on positivist grounds (i.e. of there being superior facts to these) that I question the truth-claims in Onthou! but rather, as Lincoln comments in relation to Rigoberta Menchu's testimony, "I have no difficulty with this distinction [between historical truth and narrative truth], except when narrative truth is passed off as historical truth" (Lincoln 2000: 133, my emphasis). It is to the 'passing off' aspects of the narrative style of Onthou! that I now direct my attention.

#### **A people's "struggle for survival"? The political context of Onthou!**

Exploring the circumstances surrounding the publication of Onthou! indicates how enmeshed the book and its author were in the nationalist politics of the late 1930s. There are in fact interesting indications that Rabie-Van der Merwe had the opportunity to publish her story much earlier than 1940 as one the testimonies collected by Hobhouse in 1903 and eventually published in 1927 as War Without Glamour. In a letter of 14 January 1905 to Emily Hobhouse, a Mrs. Bam of Fauresmith stated, "Twice I have asked Mrs. v.d. Merwe for her story, but she does not give us a decided answer. I think her brother who is a journalist in Pretoria will give her a helping hand, so that she can publish her story separately" (A155/176/1). This letter indicates not only the ways in which women's testimonies were orchestrated, with local women like Mrs. Bam acting on behalf of influential cultural entrepreneurs like Hobhouse, but also that Rabie-Van der Merwe had begun to think of publishing her individual account as early as 1905. Her interest was in her own 'separate story' and not in a communal endeavour such as Hobhouse's, in which

her individual heroism would, like some others, have been subsumed by the ethos of collective suffering.

Instead the book was published nearly forty years after the war, with its author describing in the foreword to *Onthou!* having ‘stifled’ her war memories for many years, only for these to be awoken by the Great Trek centenary celebrations and laying of the Voortrekker Monument foundation-stone in 1938, indeed commenting that the book was written as a matter of “conscience” (4). As noted in Chapter One, there was an explicit nationalist construction of a shared and unifying past during the 1930s, which centred in particular on orchestrating remembrance and public commemoration around the so-called ‘Great Trek’ of 1836-38, and the concentration camp deaths during the South African War. The ‘Great Trek’ centenary celebrations were pivotal to producing and giving voice to the emergent Afrikaner nationalism which aimed to “bring the history [of the trek] to its destination in a future, Afrikaner-led ‘white South Africa’” (Witz 2003: 50). Thus by referring to the 1938 Great Trek celebrations as the stimulus for *Onthou!*, Rabie-Van der Merwe explicitly locates her account in this nationalist context, and emphasises claims that this, together with encouraging letters from “my children, my friends and from an unknown friend, D.J. Louw”, was what motivated her to write *Onthou!* (4).<sup>38</sup>

Rabie-Van der Merwe clearly declares the purpose of her text in its foreword: “May my book contribute to cultivating patriotism in the bosom of the upcoming generations, until they reach the zenith, and are also prepared to lay down their lives, as our ancestors did, for FATHERLAND, FREEDOM and JUSTICE” (Rabie Van der Merwe

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<sup>38</sup> “my kinders, my vriende en van ‘n onbekende vriend, D.J. Louw”. It is unclear who this particular Louw is, although Mrs. Neethling’s sister Jemima Murray was married to Andries Louw, an NGK minister based for a time in Fauresmith, where Rabie-Van der Merwe was born and grew up. D.J. Louw may well have been a connection of these Louws (*Dictionary of South African Biography Vol. II: 41*).

1940: 4-5, original emphasis).<sup>39</sup> Her account is therefore a self-conscious and explicit account motivated, written and published for specific nationalist ends. Indeed, all *testimonios* are selective and motivated, and frequently by political and/or nationalist intent, although this is seldom overtly referred to in the *testimonio* literature, with the implications of this for their assertion of truth-claims and moral right even more rarely discussed. Rabie-Van der Merwe's 1940 declared wish to cultivate patriotism in younger generations of Afrikaners strongly echoes Sarah Raal's foreword to her 1938 Met Die Boere in die Veld: "My hope and expectation is that it will be worth the effort and will contribute to awakening love of fatherland and awareness of nation in our young generation and to draw the ties closer that bind us together as an Afrikaner people" (Raal 1938: *Voorwoord* [Foreword]).<sup>40</sup> Given the small number of women who were both authors and who played high profile roles in the expanding pantheon of nationalist publications, it is effectively inconceivable that Rabie-Van der Merwe did not know of Raal's foreword, with her 'echo' a deliberate choice. The result is that both women are unambiguous about their 1930s political objectives in publishing accounts of their wartime experiences from 40 years earlier, and it is precisely these political objectives that a with hindsight post-1994 re-reading brings into analytic focus.

Onthou!, like Met Die Boere in die Veld, was published by Nasionale Pers, the group of publishing companies owned and controlled by the National Party. The text shows an awareness of its political context, demonstrated in particular by Rabie-Van der Merwe's repeated sympathetic references to the Hertzog family, thus publicly situating herself and her heroic story in Hertzogite terms just as the crisis between General J.M.B.

<sup>39</sup> "Mag my boek daartoe bydra om nasieliefde in die boesem van ons opkomende geslagte aan te kweek, totdat hulle die toppunt bereik het en ook bereid is om hul lewe neer te lê, soos ons voorgeslagte gedoen het, vir VADERLAND, VRYHEID en REG."

<sup>40</sup> "My hoop en verwagting is dat die moeite werd sal wees en daartoe sal bydra om die vaderlandsliefde en volkshewussyn by ons jong geslag aan te wakker en die bande nouer te trek wat ons bind as 'n Afrikanervolk."

Hertzog and D.F. Malan referred to in Chapter One was reaching its climax. She describes Mrs. Hertzog, the General's mother, as a "good old friend of my mother's" (134-35),<sup>41</sup> and familiarly refers to her to as *Ouma* Hertzog (Grandmother Hertzog). It is also made clear that she herself knew the Hertzog family well enough to stay with them while she was in Jagersfontein, waiting for the Boer commando (under General Hertzog himself) that would free Sarel and Faan from prison. *Onthou!* was published at the height of the crisis, as Hertzog rejoined the G.N.P., and thus at a particularly crucial moment in the development of Afrikaner political unity. The author not only makes her allegiance to Hertzog's brand of nationalism clear by these admiring references to the Hertzog family, she also bolsters her wider nationalist credentials with name-dropping references to other important and well-known Afrikaner public figures. This occurs most obviously when she mentions meeting General De Wet and him shaking her hand when he visited Springfontein camp at the end of the war (324), and when "beloved old Dr. Neethling" called on her in Stellenbosch (312).<sup>42</sup>

There are other signs of political point making in *Onthou!* Thus for instance, at the end of the book, when Rabie-Van der Merwe describes the hardships she and her husband endured, along with many other Boer families, in restarting their lives and livelihoods after the war, she writes that "Thousands of our fellow countrymen struggled just like this, and maybe more so, to just get on their feet again. Many also never succeeded in this, witness many of the poor whites in our country up to today" (346).<sup>43</sup> As noted in Chapter One, 'poor whiteness' was a central concern of Afrikaner nationalist politics in the 1930s. In this passage, Rabie-Van der Merwe directly attributes its origin to the war and therefore to the

<sup>41</sup> "goeie ou vriendin van my moeder"

<sup>42</sup> "geliefde ou ds. Neethling". This refers to Dr. J.H. Neethling, Mrs. Elizabeth Murray Neethling's brother-in-law, who was a leading minister of the NG church and helped to establish an influential NGK theological seminary at Stellenbosch. The reference to De Wet is key; he was one of the 'bittereinde' generals and was later a leader of the 1914 Rebellion.

<sup>43</sup> "Duizende van ons landgenote het moet net so gesukkel, en miskien nog erger, om weer op die been te kom. Vele het ook nooit daarin geslaag nie, getuie baie van die armblankes in ons land tot vandag toe."

British and black enemies who destroyed traditional Boer livelihoods, and by doing so clearly signals her nationalist political views.

The title page of Onthou! shows that the author retained her surname of birth, Rabie, and linked it to her married surname, Van der Merwe, creating a double-barrelled surname, something highly unconventional for a woman and particularly a nationalist woman in 1940s South Africa.<sup>44</sup> Rabie-Van der Merwe's retention of her birth surname is significant and related to emphasising her authority as a witness, because it indicates her position as a member of a well-connected prominent nationalist family network. The Rabie family name bore significant social and political weight, while Van der Merwe was undistinguished and rather common. Rabie-Van der Merwe's father, Johannes Jacobus Rabie, was a Voortrekker and had fought at the Battle of Blood River. He was also a signatory of the 1854 Bloemfontein Convention, and for many years represented Fauresmith as a member of the Orange Free State Volksraad. Rabie-Van der Merwe's eldest brother, Johannes Stephanus Marais Rabie, was a journalist at Ons Land, the influential proto-nationalist newspaper, from 1892 to 1893, later joining the editorial staff of the bilingual Bloemfontein newspaper, De Express.<sup>45</sup> After the occupation of Bloemfontein in 1900, Johannes Rabie the younger joined a Boer commando and was a participant in the battle of Paardeberg. In 1918, he married Johanna Postma (born Slijkhuis), widow of Prof. Stephanus Postma (Dictionary of South African Biography Vol. II: 569). Stephanus and Johanna Postma had produced a daughter, Hendrika, who now became Johannes Rabie's step-daughter, and thus Rabie-Van der Merwe's step-niece. This

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<sup>44</sup> Nationalism in general tends to espouse very traditional, binary views of gender and of familial relations that would not be in keeping with women retaining their birth surnames. However unconventional Rabie-Van der Merwe's retention of her unmarried surname was for a Boer woman, it was not unique – Johanna Van Warmelo became Johanna Brandt-Van Warmelo when she married. Sarah Raal 'abandoned' her married name on the title page, claiming this only through 'signing' the foreword as Mrs. Snyman.

<sup>45</sup> Johannes Rabie is the journalist brother referred to in Mrs. Bam's letter quoted earlier.

was the Hendrika Postma commented on in Chapter One, who played an influential part in designing and orchestrating the Great Trek centenary celebrations.

Rabie-Van der Merwe's eldest sister Meks was married to Dawie Krige of Stellenbosch, who was a cousin of Isie Krige, later the wife of General Jan Smuts. In addition, another Rabie sister, Hester van Heerden (she married Izaak van Heerden), was the first Afrikaans woman journalist and was well-known by her pen name of '*Tannie van die Brandwag*' (Auntie from the Brandwag).<sup>46</sup> Hester and her husband were both devoted to the Second Language Movement, and from its first issue in 1910 until its close in 1922 Hester wrote regular articles for women and children for *Die Brandwag* magazine. Many in Rabie-Van der Merwe's wider family were thus key members of the small circle of elite, middle-class, literate Afrikaners who pioneered the emergent proto-nationalist movement. Rabie-Van der Merwe and her family were very much part of the 'inner circle' involved in the growth of Afrikaner cultural (proto-) nationalism, and the text and context of *Onthou!* reflect this.

### **An agent of collective memory? Rabie-Van der Merwe as hero**

In cautioning against assuming a direct, one-on-one relationship between text or representation and history or events, particularly by readers of *testimonios*, Sklodowska argues that "The discourse of a witness cannot be a reflection of his or her experience, but rather a refraction determined by the vicissitudes of memory, intention, ideology ... Thus, although the *testimonio* uses a series of devices to gain a sense of veracity and authenticity – among them the point of view of the first-person witness-narrator – the play between fiction and history reappears inexorably as a problem" (Sklodowska 1982: 379, translated quotation in Beverley 1989: 22). *Onthou!* is almost a textbook case of this, for although

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<sup>46</sup> The word 'tannie' refers not only to 'auntie' in the sense of an actual relative, but is also used as an honorific, and as a slightly patronising form of address.

Rabie-Van der Merwe presents herself as a knowing and truthful witness and thus confers “a sense of veracity” on her testimony, the narrative style of Onthou! uses a range of ‘fictive devices’ (Eakin 1985).

Thus, much direct speech is used in the telling of the tale, with the effect of giving the flavour of immediacy to the story. Instead of approximating the essence of conversations held thirty-seven years earlier, Rabie-Van der Merwe writes these conversations as if verbatim recordings of direct speech, which obviously they are not. The following example is taken from Rabie-Van der Merwe’s account of being questioned by a British soldier, en route to Bloemfontein prison:

“Who are you and where are you going to?’ they wanted to know.  
 ‘I am a prisoner under escort’, was my answer.  
 ‘Who is your officer in charge?’  
 ‘Sergeant Wakefield.’  
 ‘Where is he?’  
 ‘I don’t know.’  
 ‘Where are you supposed to go?’  
 ‘I don’t know.’  
 ‘Well, I don’t believe your story and if this sergeant Wakefield cannot be found, you shall be court-martialled and shot as a spy!’” (222)<sup>47</sup>

However, by providing the apparently ‘exact’ words spoken by someone several decades before, the author also achieves something very different from what she perhaps intended. Thus these passages of direct speech do not confer authority or realism, but read instead as elements in a stagy adventure story. The soldier’s extreme comment about having her shot adds to this adventure story effect, with the whole encounter heightening Rabie-Van der Merwe’s self-representation in her book as a daring woman who took part in extremely dangerous wartime exploits.

The narrative of Onthou! shares many other adventure story characteristics; it is fast paced, full of quickly changing scenes and high drama. For example, during the time

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<sup>47</sup> The direct speech appears in English in the book, and the linking parts in Afrikaans. Thus “they wanted to know” is “*wil hulle weet*”, and “was my answer” is “*is my antwoord*.”

she accompanied Sarel's commando unit, Rabie-Van der Merwe witnessed the battle of Bastersnek, which she watched from a rock near to the battlefield before retreating to the laager where she awaited the return of the men. She describes their return thus:

**"At sunset the burghers began to come back from the day's fighting. There I see Faan with my husband's horse at his hand! Has Sarel perhaps stayed behind on the battle field? Or where can he be? Will there never be an end to the war? I feel I can stand the uncertainty and anxiety no longer. After a while I heard the stones creak and the bushes on the other side of the river moved to and fro as if someone was coming. Thank the Lord, it's my husband! A moment later I am in his arms and a mountain of uncertainty and fear rolls off my heart" (87)<sup>48</sup>**

Here Rabie-Van der Merwe leads the reader through her reactions and emotions ostensibly re-creating them as they occurred to her at the time, with Sarel feared dead one moment and then back in her arms the next. The repeated use of rhetorical questions and exclamation marks helps create the sense of suspense and high drama.

Also in keeping with the adventure story style, Rabie-Van der Merwe places much emphasis on her near escapes, cunning, cloak-and-dagger plans, disguises and mischievous ideas, as in the following passage where she describes one of her intended disguises for escaping with Hannie Marais from Port Elizabeth camp: "We decided that I had to dress up as a little girl. My black dress must have a hem of 12 inches, so that it just reached my knees. With that I would wear a coloured blouse and a straw sailor's hat. I must leave my hair loose" (190-191).<sup>49</sup> At Port Elizabeth station, Rabie-Van der Merwe and Marais then passed themselves off as two young English girls, and pretended they had to travel to Graaff-Reinet to attend a family wedding, with Rabie-Van der Merwe seemingly delighting in the trickery this entailed, but with Hannie depicted as less brave and brazen:

<sup>48</sup> "Teen sononder begin die burgers terugkom van die dag se geveg. Daar sien ek Faan met my man se perd in die hand! Sou Sarel miskien op die slagveld agtergebly het? Of waar kan hy wees? Sal daar tog nooit 'n einde aan die oorlog kom nie? Ek voel ek kan al die onrus en onsteltenis nie langer uithou nie. Meteens hoor ek klippe kraak en die bosse aan die oorkant van die rivier beweeg heen en weer asof iemand aankom. Dank die Vader, dis my man! 'n Oomblik later is ek in sy arms en 'n berg van onrus en vrees rol van my hart af."

<sup>49</sup> "Ons besluit date ek my soos 'n dogtertjie moet aantrek. My swart romp moet 'n soom van 12 duim breed kry, sodat dit net tot my knieë reik. Daarby sal ek 'n gekleurde bloese dra en 'n strooi-matrooshoed. My hare moet ek laat los hang."

“‘Hannie, how do you feel?’ I asked ... ‘I feel very scared’, she said, ‘and bad and anxious. And how do you feel?’ ‘With my hands, man.’ ‘Oh, it’s not the time to make jokes’, complained Hannie, just rattled by my lightheartness. ‘Yes, just wait, the sport is just beginning’, was my answer” (205).<sup>50</sup> In 1940, these high drama and adventure story aspects of *Onthou!* would have resonated not only with the accounts by Raal and Brandt-Van Warmelo, but also with some of the stories published in *Die Huisgenoot* magazine, which were often humorous and featured trickster Boer women who managed to evade the capture by the British military.<sup>51</sup> Here too there are connections with Raal’s *Met Die Boere in die Veld* (1938), also having strong adventure story dimensions and directed in particular towards older girls, in a very similar way to Johanna Brant-Van Warmelo’s *The Petticoat Commando / Die Kappie Kommando* (1913a, 1913c).

As an adventure story, *Onthou!* also includes several incidents that are portrayed as humorous. One of these occurred when Rabie-Van der Merwe was briefly living in Port Elizabeth camp. She and some of the other women there played a prank on the official who carried out the daily camp roll call, encouraging one woman in the group to pelt this man with eggs, cheering her on with, “‘Hit him, Pretoors! Tear his shirt from his body! Kiss him! Bite him!’” (171).<sup>52</sup> Rabie-Van der Merwe jokingly describes the official emerging looking like a “*voëlverskrikker*”, a scarecrow, and claims they were never subjected to roll call again.<sup>53</sup> Rabie-Van der Merwe’s depiction of the women’s attack on the roll call

<sup>50</sup> “‘Hannie, hoe voel jy?’ vra ek ... ‘Ek voel baie bang,’ sê sy, ‘en sleg en benoud. En hoe voel jy?’ ‘Met my hande, jong.’ ‘Aag, dis nie nou tyd om grappe te maak nie,’ knor Hannie, net nukkerig oor my ligsinnigheid. ‘Ja, wag maar, die sport begin nou eers,’ is my antwoord”.

<sup>51</sup> A selection of such stories from *Die Huisgenoot* was published in 1999, and contributions bore such titles as “Hideaway in the Spring” [“*Wegkruipertjie in die Spruit*”, *Die Huisgenoot* 3 December 1937] and “Flight from the Concentration Camp” [“*Ontvlug uit die Konsentrasiekamp*”, *Die Huisgenoot* 14 January 1938] (Steyn 1999).

<sup>52</sup> “‘Slaai hom, Pretoors! Skeur sy hemp van sy lyf! Soen hom! Byt hom!’” Although Port Elizabeth was regarded as a ‘show camp’, it is still interesting to consider the claims made elsewhere about starvation in relation to this incident in which women have not only been provided with eggs, but use them as ammunition rather than food.

<sup>53</sup> She writes, “*Daarna het ons nooit weer roukool of gaarkool gehad nie*” (171-172), which literally translated means, “Thereafter we never had raw cabbage or cooked cabbage again”. She and the other women

official has a sexual undertone, and she seems to take great delight in her own audacious, 'amusing' role in humiliating the man. While *Onthou!* purports to be the testimony of a Boer woman wronged by an unjust enemy, the narrative throughout reads much like a 'Girls' Own' adventure story in which the enemy is always worsted and even humiliated by the youthful, resourceful and fearless heroine. The fictionalised adventure story format of *Onthou!* certainly exemplifies Sklodowska's characterisation of *testimonio* as both "factual and fictional" (Sklodowska 1996: 85).

The adventure story character of the narrative sets up scene after scene in which Rabie-Van der Merwe is cast as the heroine, with the author continually drawing the reader into the story and also her point of view, by directly addressing her readers, for instance concerning her experiences at Jacobsdal hospital, with comments such as, "No, just believe me, war is hideous, heart-breakingly cruel" (76).<sup>54</sup> The author positions herself as a hero and a rebel, and the reader by implication is invited to admire her acts of bravery and defiance. In the narrative, she variously plays the parts of: cheery supporter of the brave burgers; stoical and caring nurse; prankster who shows up the incompetence of the British military; loyal wife who risks her life to liberate her husband from jail; courageous and principled Boer woman who refuses the 'protection' of a concentration camp; and politically upright citizen of the Boer Republics who makes her contribution to the cause by suffering the hardships of prison life. In all these roles, Rabie-Van der Merwe is the star of her story, and her readers are positioned along with participants of these events as admiring and interested, as for instance when she describes her first few weeks in Stellenbosch after her release from prison: "I was invited out for meals or tea and found constantly myself amongst the curious and the interested" (312).<sup>55</sup> John Beverley has

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apparently nicknamed the man who conducted roll call *roukool*, which literally means 'raw cabbage', but was also a play on his role as roll call official.

<sup>54</sup> "Nee, glo tog vir my, oorlog is afgrysig, hartverskeurend wreed."

<sup>55</sup> "Ek word uitgenooi vir ete of vir tee en bevind my maar gedurig tussen nuuskieriges en belangstellendes."

written that *testimonio* “suggests an affinity” with the picaresque novel, a style of fiction dealing with the adventures of loveable rogues, and certainly Onthou! shares the characteristics of that sub-genre (Beverley 1989: 15).

Rabie-Van der Merwe records the British military reading out a list of her offences as justification for sending her to Bethulie prison. She presents these as instead marks of honour: “[the following accusations were levelled against me]: (i) You are a runaway from P.E. camp. (ii) You are a most political and influential woman. (iii) You are the fighting woman of Jagersfontein. (iv) Your husband is still fighting. (v) You defy the military authorities. (vi) You are an undesirable character. (vii) You head the black list” (230). That a woman could run up such a list of political offences seems a source of considerable pride for Rabie-Van der Merwe, and she uses this list to demonstrate to her readers just how important and disruptive she was, as not only political but also influential. However, what this list suppresses are the actual offences which led to her conviction and which will have been either criminal offences and/or ones against martial law. These might well have included the murder of a prison warder, with his death and Rabie-Van der Merwe’s responses to this discussed later in this chapter, and indeed, at least twice in the text she describes without comment other people referring to her as a “murderess” (141, 307).<sup>56</sup>

Rabie-Van der Merwe also conveys to the reader that other Boer women at the time were aware of and themselves promoted her status and celebrity. For instance, the day after she arrived at Springfontein camp, the same day that the terms of the Peace treaty were made public, Rabie-Van der Merwe describes how a group of women fetched her from her tent: “Here is our commandant!” they cried. ‘Hooray for commandant Van der Merwe!’ and they grabbed me by the legs, picked me up and carried me around on their shoulders. The Free State flag was held above my head and our anthem was sung, while I was carried

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<sup>56</sup> “moordenares”

through the streets of the camp” (319).<sup>57</sup> Thus Rabie-Van der Merwe’s self-depiction as a highly-politicised heroine is described as being given the clear and overt sanction of other Boer women, leaving the reader with no grounds to question either the ‘truthfulness’ of this account, or the nature of the offences she has been charged with.

With hindsight, though, Rabie-Van der Merwe’s text glorifies the author as heroine rather than testifies to the sufferings of Boer women; these are sufferings certainly touched on in passing, but the focus is very much on the single heroine rather than collective victimisation. Clearly a highly politicised woman, Rabie-Van der Merwe made explicit choices during the course of the war to demonstrate her commitment to the Boer cause. While much of the post-war literature on the South African concentration camps depicts the women in them as helpless, passive, stoical victims, Rabie-Van der Merwe’s position is decidedly proactive and agentic.<sup>58</sup> She deliberately elected to enter the arena of conflict by working as a nurse in the field and accompanying the commandos to battle. Once in Port Elizabeth camp, she made the decision to escape and travel back to Orange Free State. When finally released from prison, she refused to be supported by her mother and instead opted to live at Springfontein concentration camp. Rabie-Van der Merwe is certainly not depicted as a victim of circumstances beyond her control; rather, she is inscribed throughout as a fervent supporter of the Boer cause who took every opportunity to demonstrate her loyalty to and solidarity with this, with *Onthou!* celebrating this political position.

The official Colonial Office records relating to Rabie-Van der Merwe’s case provide further interesting dimensions to her story. In late August 1901, Rabie-Van der

<sup>57</sup> “*Hier is ons kommandant! Skree hulle. ‘Hoera vir kommandant Van der Merwe!’ en hulle gryp my om my bene, tel my op en dra my op hul skouers rond. Die Vrystaatse vlag word bokant my kop gehou en ons volkslied gesing, terwyl ek deur die kampstrate gedra word.*”

<sup>58</sup> Much of the dominant camp literature overviewed in Chapter One tends to represent Boer women as passive, suffering victims, and this has been reinforced by commemorative activities which have primarily inscribed women as the weeping “weak mothers” in Visser’s poem, verses from which appear in many of the *Gedenktuine* [gardens of remembrance].

Merwe applied to the Orange River Colony (O.R.C.) administration for a transfer from Bethulie prison to the Bloemfontein camp, where her husband Sarel was being held as a P.O.W. She wrote, "I humbly ask of you to be shifted to the Blmftn Camp, sincerely giving you my word to abide by the rules of the Camp." This request was denied and "Mrs. Van der Merwe", as she is inscribed in the correspondence and as she signs herself, is referred to as "a dangerous undesirable" and "a regular virago". Later, however, a telegram from the resident magistrate of Bethulie, stating that the "District Surgeon has certified that it is dangerous to Prisoner's Brain & Body to be confined longer under present circumstances", led to her transfer in September from Bethulie to Bloemfontein prison (CO 32A, 3135/01). Later correspondence between the Crown Prosecutor's Office and the O.R.C. administration states that "Mrs. Van der Merwe ... is being detained at the insistence of the Military Authorities on a charge of having instigated the murder of a soldier during the attack on Jagersfontein in October 1900." Although Goold-Adams, deputy administrator of the O.R.C., stated that he "should be obliged if the case of this woman was investigated", the Assistant Provost Marshall, Major Bolton, intervened to announce that "Mrs. Van der Merwe is not detained on any charge. She is in the old gaol for safe custody as when placed in a Refugee camp she will not behave herself. She stirs up strife and generally causes trouble and since she has been in gaol has stated that if she is let out to a camp she will cause as much trouble as possible" (CO 52, 40/02).

Rabie-Van der Merwe's transfer to Stellenbosch and then subsequent return to the O.R.C. caused a further flurry of official correspondence, with Major Bolton wryly commenting that she "seems to have been as troublesome to them [the Cape Colony administration] as she was to us", and Goold-Adams writing to the Cape authorities that "I am not particularly anxious to have her back in this Colony" (CO 68, 1369/02). It is evident from the collection of correspondence relating to her case that the British regarded

Rabie-Van der Merwe as a recalcitrant troublemaker and a dangerous republican, and the references to her as “undesirable” and a “virago” certainly reinforce her self-depiction as both ‘unwomanly’ and a hardened nationalist. It is also apparent that the Rabie family more generally were well known as fierce republicans. This is evinced in a note from the superintendent of Bloemfontein camp to the Chief Superintendent of Refugee Camps in the O.R.C. concerning a family called Parsons, who are referred to as, “if anything rather more bitter than the Rabie people” (SRC 8/ 2260).<sup>59</sup> In official correspondence dealing with Mrs. Rabie’s transfer, with two of her daughters, from Bloemfontein camp to their relatives in the Cape Colony, the Bloemfontein camp superintendent wrote, “Both mother & daughters are very hard cases” and insisted that their transfer be delayed as both Rabie daughters were in the camp ‘bird-cage’ (SRC 8/2745).<sup>60</sup>

Rabie-Van der Merwe gives additional illustration of her explicit (proto-) nationalism in her decision, while an inmate of Bloemfontein prison, to tattoo the letters O.V.S. (*Oranje Vry Staat* – Orange Free State) by scratching them onto her own arm and the arms of her fellow Boer women prison inmates, as a reminder of their political commitment: “I suggested that we all get tattooed, as a lifelong reminder ... We got a piece of charcoal from Mrs. Murphy, ground it finely and made a sort of ink from it. We took six needle of the same length and thickness ... rolled them tightly together with the cotton thread ... Now we are ready for the operation ... My left arm was bound tightly and I had to do the work myself” (285).<sup>61</sup> The tattoo is a radical physical manifestation of her political allegiances, and such an act of political zeal would surely have been regarded as

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<sup>59</sup> In the official correspondence the description of someone as ‘bitter’ was a coded reference to extreme republicanism.

<sup>60</sup> The ‘bird-cage’ referred to a separate section of some camps, in which rule-breakers, troublemakers and ‘recalcitrant’ women were confined apart from the other inhabitants, often for political reasons.

<sup>61</sup> “*As lewenslange gedagtenis het ek voorgestel dat ons almal gebrandmerk word ... Ons kry 'n stukkie steenkool van mev. Murphy, maal dit fyn en maak 'n sort ink daarvan. Ons neem ses naalde van die selfde lengte en dikte rol hulle styf vas teen mekaar met die gare-draad ... Nou is ons gereed vir die operasie ... My linkerarm word doodgebund en ek moet self die werk doen.*”

highly unusual for a young woman at the time. The political context and content, the narrative form, and the unseen but significant official background to Rabie-Van der Merwe's tale, all suggest she was by no means an objective witness and recorder of historical truth, and all of these need to be taken into account in any present-day re-reading of Onthou!. The important implications which follow for Rabie-Van der Merwe's moral credibility are the focus of the following discussion.

### **Moral authority, 'women's voices' and the racialised moral landscape of Onthou!**

Recognising the political context and content of Onthou! not only problematises the testimonial nature of this text and its claim to objectivity, truth-telling and the provision of 'nothing but the facts', but also helps raise questions about the author's moral credibility for readers today. In particular, this concerns the extent to which readers can and should sympathise with testimony-writers when a hindsight re-reading reveals the moral dubiousness of their politics. The assumption of moral and political right accorded to *testimonio* writers/speakers is often compounded by gender, for the majority of *testimonio* writers/speakers are women, even though the gendered aspects of the genre are seldom made explicit. However, concerning 'personal narratives' more generally, it has been proposed that "[t]he recovery and interpretation of women's lives have been central concerns of feminist scholarship from the earliest pioneering works to the present" (Personal Narratives Group 1989: 4). Certainly one of the chief concerns of feminist scholarship for the last three decades has been the discovery and promotion of subjugated women's 'voices', and *testimonios* and 'women's voices' have been strongly linked by some scholars: "It would seem, then, that almost all writing of women under patriarchy would have something essentially in common with what constitutes the genre of testimony,

that is, a kind of speaking from the margins to and about the systems which oppress that speaking” (Marin 1991: 52).

Like *testimonio*-theorists, whose eagerness to listen to ‘voices from the margins’ has led to the assumption that these are a priori morally good, so too feminist scholars have not always grappled with the difficulties of ‘recovering’ women who are politically problematic or even offensive, and whose lives have been characterised less by being oppressed than by their role in oppressing, exploiting or harming others. Here the implicit assumption on the part of some academic feminists has been that gender as a category outweighs others, and that women’s historical experience of subjugation not only overrides other social divisions between women, but also renders women’s voices and experiences as by definition worthy and moral. Thus, for instance, Gluck and Patai introduce their edited collection Women’s Words stating that “By documenting women’s representations of their own reality, we were engaging in advocacy. We felt that our work was, indeed, political and that it was for women” (Gluck and Patai 1991: 3). In the South African context, Jansen describes Boer women’s testimonies as “resistance literature” which women produced to “try to gain an entrance into history and power with their writing”, and explicitly links this to a feminist paradigm by commenting, “With a huge stretch of the imagination the concentration camps were for Afrikaner women comparable to what Virginia Woolf saw as a prerequisite for writing: ‘a room of one’s own’” (Jansen 1999b: 4, 6). Jansen thus ignores both the temporal and political context in which Boer women’s testimonies were produced; by suggesting these writings were an expression of proto-feminism by Boer women, she expunges the real moral ambiguities of these texts for present-day readers owing to their treatment of ‘race’; and her view of life for most Boer women in the camps seems unaware of both literacy levels and material conditions.

The feminist project of recuperating women's lives and self-representations has also been advanced by some scholars in the field of colonial and imperial studies who have focused on "uncovering and understanding the presences and participations of white women in imperial contexts and colonial locations" (Haggis 1998: 45). Haggis suggests that this approach has limited conceptual value, and usefully argues instead in favour of examining more widely how "hierarchies of differences ... have been constituted" (Haggis 1998: 46). However, as Haggis points out, many proponents of the 'recuperative' approach may contest or reject this alternative, because it seems to undermine a "core tenet of feminism – the historic and continuing subjugation of women by a dominant patriarchy", by focusing attention on "other relations of power, such as class and race, which undercut the commonality of women's subordination" (Haggis 1998: 46-47).

Historically in South Africa, 'race' has outweighed gender as an institutionalised political, economic and social marker, and this has interesting repercussions when thinking about and conceptualising the lives of white South African women over time. White women in South Africa have occupied a subordinate position within a highly privileged, dominant racial and racist elite, so that they have been in the position of being simultaneously victims and agents of oppression. Consequently, feminists in South Africa have been considerably more hesitant than in the US, Europe or Australasia to recover the lives and voices of white women, whose 'political incorrectness' is now seen to be at odds with the egalitarian ideals of feminism. In the 1930s South Africa in which Rabie-Van der Merwe was writing, white Afrikaans-speaking women were certainly members of the privileged white elite and of an Afrikaner elite within this. However, they were also playing key roles in actively developing and promoting emergent Afrikaner (proto-) nationalism, for instance through their politically important work in the Women's National

parties, the S.A.V.F., the Second Language Movement and their central organisational and participatory activities in the 1938 Great Trek celebrations.

The political writing context of Onthou! and Rabie-Van der Merwe's views on 'race' consequently provoke interesting questions for "feminism's project to intervene critically within recuperative and re-evaluative research" (Donnell and Polkey 2000: xxii, my emphasis), for, as Donnell and Polkey indicate, these require feminists to interrogate, rather than merely recuperate, the lives or voices of oppressed or repressed women. The text of Onthou! also confounds the *testimonio* genre in interesting ways, as well as exemplifying this in others, particularly because of what with hindsight is its highly problematic treatment of 'race', clearly disturbing notions about moral righteousness from a present-day perspective. Many of its claims about persecution during the war of 1899-1902 are inextricably bound up with the prevailing South African 'race' politics at the time it was written, published and originally read, and this has crucial bearing on a post-1994 re-reading of it. In the re-reading which follows, I understand Onthou! as "a literary event that goes beyond the assumption of historical truth" (Tierney 2000: 111) and question the assumption of moral right crucial to perceiving Onthou! as a testimonial text. I shall focus on Rabie-Van der Merwe's representations of 'race' in questioning and problematising her claimed moral authority as a testimony writer, and also in examining the extent to which Onthou! disturbs theoretical assumptions about both *testimonio* and 'women's voices'. These theoretical ideas, I shall propose, need widening to accommodate speakers/writers who are morally ambiguous, or who, like Rabie-Van der Merwe, can be seen in respects as morally disreputable.

Succinctly, a post-1994 re-reading of Onthou! unsettles assumptions about the *testimonio*-writer or speaker as morally righteous because it shows that the book assumes and depicts a highly racialised moral landscape. Re-reading this moral landscape today has

important implications, not only for understanding Rabie-Van der Merwe's testimony and her moral authority or lack thereof, but also concerning the presumption of moral right accorded to *testimonio*-speakers and writers more generally. The text of *Onthou!*, as I shall show, presents a simplified, dichotomous moral landscape, in which the heroic Boers are depicted as nobly defending their independence against the morally corrupt, bullying British. Black people figure in this landscape as sly traitors conspiring with the enemy for their own gain, with Rabie-Van der Merwe treating 'race' as absolute and racial characteristics as entirely inherent and unchanging. She does not see her 'race' views as needing explanation or justification; her dichotomised view of 'race' is an axiomatic organising social principle, something protean which requires no explanation or justification but just 'is'.

Rabie-Van der Merwe represents the Boers as a righteous people whose "loyal burghers" (322)<sup>62</sup> bravely fought for their freedom and independence in an unjust war forced on them – as with a commando member she reports as declaring that "I regard it as an honour to lay down my strength, my blood and even my life for our beloved Free State and Transvaal, for our people and independence" (45).<sup>63</sup> Rabie-Van der Merwe also relates how a commando unit sang the hymn 'Onward Christian Soldiers' as they set off for battle, making it clear that Christian right was on the side of these "noble crusaders" whose "beautiful voices carried through the air and echoed over the valleys" (29).<sup>64</sup> There are a few references in the text to the *hendsoppers* and 'joiners' – those Boers who had taken the oath of neutrality or had actively joined the British forces – and Rabie-Van der Merwe contemptuously describes these 'traitorous' groups as being the cause of the greatest

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<sup>62</sup> "getroude burgers"

<sup>63</sup> "ek beskou dit as 'n eer om my kragte, my bloed en selfs my lewe neer te lê vir ons geliefde Vrystaat en Transvaal, vir ons volk en onafhanklikheid."

<sup>64</sup> "die mooi stemme so deur die lug sweef en oor die rantjies weergalm"

“unpleasantness” (92).<sup>65</sup> At the same time, she explains the pressures placed by the British on the Boer men in captured villages, so that while these disloyal and unpatriotic groups have the potential to undermine the representation elsewhere in *Onthou!* of Boer men as entirely brave, patriotic and righteous, this is mediated by placing the responsibility for the decision to surrender or ‘join’ on the British themselves, rather than on the Boer men concerned.

Rabie-Van der Merwe presents the British in general as voracious imperialists who would go to any length, including waging war on women and children, to seize the wealth and independence of the Boer Republics. The author includes an (ostensibly verbatim) speech by a commando leader, in which he emphasises that “we must defend our land against a blood-thirsty, money-seeking and ambitious enemy” (44)<sup>66</sup> and likens the war to a David and Goliath struggle. This is how Rabie-Van der Merwe positions the British more generally in the moral landscape, as greedy, bullying antagonists. However, her depiction of individual British soldiers, particularly the ‘Tommies’ or ordinary soldiers, tends to be less rigid, and when faced with complexities in the enemy’s character her moral landscape becomes somewhat less two-dimensional around an implied class distinction between ‘Tommies’ and their officers.

At Edenburg station, for instance, the group of captured Boer women (and a few men) with whom Rabie-Van der Merwe had been travelling were sent on ahead of her to Port Elizabeth camp by rail. One elderly, infirm Boer man had to be carried onto the train by British soldiers, and as he was borne away he made a sad, sentimental speech, bidding farewell to his beloved homeland of the Free State. The author describes the ensuing scene:

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<sup>65</sup> “*onaangenaamheid*”. It has been estimated that between 12, 000 and 14, 000 Boer fighters voluntarily surrendered between March and July 1900, with a further 6, 000 laying down their arms between January 1901 and May 1902 (Pretorius 2002: 68). In addition around 5000 Boers were fighting for the British as ‘joiners’ by the end of the war. This is seldom represented either commemoratively or in women’s testimonies, where it is implied that all Boer men fought loyally on commando to the end. On the *handsappers* and joiners see Grundlingh 1979.

<sup>66</sup> “*ons land moet verdedig teen ‘n bloeddorstige, geldsugtige en eersugtige vyand*”

“My tears flowed, all the Tommies were crying, and threw their arms around the old father’s neck, who had learnt from his Master to meet his enemies hatred and actions with love and tolerance and to pray for them, and they kissed his tear-stained cheeks and said ‘Poor old Dad.’ Thus walked our enemies, with their enemy to the station. ‘And if I am borne away dead, it’s for you, South Africa!’ Where is the animosity? Who is it that is making war? What can it all mean?” (164)<sup>67</sup>

This incident blurs the distinction between enemy and friend at the level of ‘ordinary people’, and contrasts with the dichotomous moral landscape that the author constructs elsewhere in her book. By implication, Rabie-Van der Merwe is presenting ‘the British’ as the imperialist, upper-class officers, politicians and officials, with ordinary ‘Tommies’ as well as Boer people on the receiving end of the “who is it that is making war?” It is also noteworthy that the writer puts the words “*Dis vir jou, Suid-Afrika*”<sup>68</sup> in the elderly man’s mouth at a time when ‘South Africa’ as a nation did not exist and when people’s allegiances would have been to the Transvaal or Orange Free State, or less frequently perhaps a wider republicanism or even a Boer ‘one people’ proto-nationalism, but certainly not the anachronistic South Africa. In 1940, she is reading this political entity back onto the past, thereby constructing not only the inevitability of the united South African – and implicitly Afrikaner – nation but also its ‘essential’ rootedness in history.

A similar approach is taken in relation to Sergeant Wakefield, a soldier who was assigned to guard Rabie-Van der Merwe on her journey to Bethulie prison, and who defended her character to his superiors. A group of officers had informed Rabie-Van der Merwe that she would be jailed for the remainder of the war because she was a troublemaker and an undesirable character, when:

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<sup>67</sup> “My transe stroom, die Tommies huil almal, slaan hul arms om die hals van die ou vader, wat dit by sy Meester geleer het om sy vyande se haat en vervolging met liefde en verdraagsaamheid tegemoet te kom en vir hulle te bid, en hulle soen hom op sy betoende wange en se: ‘Poor old Dad.’ So stap ons vyande met hul vyand aan die stasie. ‘En word ek sterwend weggedra, Dis vir jou, Suid-Afrika!’ Waar nou die vyandskap? Wie is dit wat oorlog maak? Wat moet dit alles beteken?”

<sup>68</sup> This is a line from Langenhoven’s *Die Stem* [The Call], written in 1918, set to music in 1921 and the national anthem promoted by Afrikaner nationalists in opposition to ‘God Save the King.’ It eventually became the official anthem of the country in 1957. Rabie-Van der Merwe puts these words in the old man’s mouth retrospectively, to suggest that Afrikaner unity has ‘always’ existed.

“To my surprise, Sergeant Wakefield showed that he was really a man. He stepped forward and said to the other officers in English: ‘Gentlemen, I have served in the British forces for twenty seven years, and I never imagined that my grey hairs would be expected to take part in such a scandalous treatment of a woman. Mrs Van der Merwe is a lady in every sense of the word, and I ask her forgiveness that I have brought her to this place.’ Then he turned to me and said: ‘Madam, may I have the honour of shaking hands with you?’” (230)<sup>69</sup>

Here too, the sympathetic behaviour of the ‘ordinary’ British soldier contrasts with how those in charge of the British military are depicted. It is notable, however, that Rabie-Van der Merwe uses these incidents and the reactions of ‘Tommies’ primarily as proof of the moral rightness of the Boer cause in general, and her conduct in particular, and also her adeptness at hoodwinking the British military into believing her feigned political innocence and naivety. Moreover, these are exceptions to the rule and outside of them the British feature in the book’s moral landscape as greedy, self-interested, dishonourable aggressors. In addition, there are no exceptions in her one-dimensional portrayal of African people, so that ‘race’ maps onto the moral landscape in a starkly dichotomous way, as I shall go on to show.

Onthou! positions black people as fundamentally inferior, as less civilised or even savage ‘others’ who are easily manipulated because of their greed and supine character, and who are consequently always an actual or potential source of danger for Boer people. This is established on the very first page of the book, when Rabie-Van der Merwe explains her reluctance to answer a knock at her front door, on the day war was declared: “There were many Kaffers around us and some of our neighbours were also not trustworthy or altogether peaceable. What’s more, the impending war between England and our two

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<sup>69</sup> “Tot my verbasing toon sersant Wakefield toe dat hy regtig ‘n man is. Hy stap vorentoe en se vit die ander offisiere in Engels: ‘Here, ek dien nou al sewe-en-twintig jaar lank in die Engelse leer en ek het nooit kon dink dat dit nog my gryse hare sou verwag word om deel te neem aan so ‘n skandelijke behandeling van ‘n vroumens nie. Mev. Van der Merwe is ‘n dame in elke sin van die word en ek vra haar beleefd om verskooning dat ek haar tot hertoe begelei het.’ Toe draai hy na my toe en se: ‘Madam, may I have the honour of shaking hands with you?’” That Wakefield’s words to her are given in English again conveys verisimilitude.

republics had awakened the natives' bloodlust" (9).<sup>70</sup> Rabie-Van der Merwe's comments invoke a racial order in disarray, with 'untrustworthy' white Boer neighbours as well as savage 'Kaffirs' whose fundamental 'bloodlust', always there, has been 'awakened', and the feelings of resentment and contempt this elicited in her. This locates the problem as 'in' black people, rather than in the system of relations Boer people had with them – a moral 'flaw' due to their race, rather than the product of social relations of exploitation and oppression.

Relatedly, black people are characterised as violent scoundrels, and the British as primarily responsible for awakening these qualities, which if left unchecked could crush Boer supremacy or even existence. Thus, upon overhearing some black soldiers recount their experiences of helping the British to burn farms and herd Boer women into camps, Rabie-Van der Merwe notes: "It was not enough that a person had to contend with the khakis in the war, we had to also take account of the black scoundrels, as hundreds, maybe thousands of Boer women can attest to. And who armed them and sent them to carry out the atrocities? We will remember!" (240).<sup>71</sup> It is clearly the British, also characterised through their 'colour' (khaki), who took advantage of impressionable, easily corruptible black 'scoundrels' and turned them against their rightful Boer masters and mistresses. The reference here to unnamed but 'known' atrocities hints at sexual violence by black men towards white women imagined as part of the so-called 'black peril'.

At other points in her book, Rabie-Van der Merwe writes of the "disloyal Kaffers and low joiners" (92)<sup>72</sup> surrounding the Boer commandos, and of Boer farms swarming

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<sup>70</sup> "Daar was baie Kaffers rondom ons en sommige van ons bure was ook maar nie betroubaar of alle vredelekkend nie. Wat meer is, die dreigende oorlog tussen Engeland en ons twee republieke het die inboorling se moordlus wakker gemaak."

<sup>71</sup> "Dit was nie genoeg dat 'n mens dit in die oorlog met die kakies te doen gehad het nie, ons moes nog met die swarte taters ook rekening hou, soos honderde, miskien duisende Boerevroue kan getuig. En wie het hulle gewapen en gestuur om die gruweldade te verrig? Ons sal onthou!"

<sup>72</sup> "ontroue Kaffers en lae 'joiners'."

with invading “spies, Kaffers, Hottentots and khakis” (95).<sup>73</sup> Her sense of angry affront at the (perceived) disruption of racial positioning (with the British engaging the ‘lowest’ members of the racial hierarchy to fight the racially superior Boers) is strongly articulated in an incident that occurred while she was travelling across the *veld* by wagon. The party included her husband Sarel and a group of black servants and drivers:

“One of the people with the wagon was a big, strong, cheeky Kaffer. The third day we were on the road, I woke up very early in the wagon’s tent, and heard the [black] people talking amongst themselves, and that man said: ‘If the Boers drink this coffee, they will die.’ [The text provides his speech in an African language, with an Afrikaans translation]. I immediately leapt up and went and told the conductor of the wagons what I had heard. He immediately walked to the fire and kicked over the black coffee kettle – which we had given the name of ‘drinking together’ – so that the coffee ran out, and out rolled a large bundle of bulbs and roots, bound with a piece of dirty, old striped cloth from the burly Kaffer’s shirt!” (80-81)<sup>74</sup>

To punish the seemingly would-be poisoner, Rabie-Van der Merwe and her party beat him before tying him to one of the wagon wheels: “They then flogged him thoroughly, while the Kaffer swore terribly and bit his own flesh from malevolence. I was nervous about the moment that he would get loose. The conductor loaded his weapon and said that if the Kaffer showed the slightest sign of hostile behaviour, he would shoot him on the spot. But by then he was fairly tame.”<sup>75</sup> (82). They then *inspanned* (yoked the oxen) and trekked on, but later found that the man had broken free and escaped. Rabie-Van der Merwe’s anger that she, a white Boer woman, was almost poisoned by a black person can be discerned more widely in her general condemnation of the racial chaos created by the war. For her,

<sup>73</sup> “spione, Kaffers, hotnots en kakies”

<sup>74</sup> “Een van die volk by die wa was ‘n groot, sterk, parmantige Kaffer. Die derde dag wat ons op pad was, word ek die more baie vroeg in die wa se tent wakker en hoor die volk onder mekaar praat, en daardie meneer sê: ‘Ha magoa oa noa koffieani ba thla shoa.’ (‘As die boere van hierdie koffie drink, sal hulle doodgaan.’) Ek spring dadelik op en gaan vertel vir die kondukteur van die waens wat ek gehoor het. Hy stap reguit na die vuur en skop die groot koffieketel – wat ons doe naam van ‘samesuipting’ gegee het – om dat die koffie so stroom, en daar rol ‘n groot bondel bolle en wortels uit, vasgebind in ‘n stuk ou vuil gestreepte lap van die parmantige Kaffer se hemp!”

<sup>75</sup> “Hulle het hom toe goed afgeransel, terwyl die Kaffer vreeslik vloek en sy eie vlees byt van boosaardigheid. Ek was maar skrikkerig vir die oomblik wat hy daar sou loskom. Die kondukteur het sy geweer gelaa en gesê dat as die Kaffer die minste vyandige houding inneem, hy hom op die plek sou doodskiet. Maar hy was toe taamlik mak.”

this was a world gone awry, in which black people are not only armed and rebellious, but have so lost sight of their rightful place in the racial hierarchy that they would consider poisoning an inviolable white woman. This was utterly repellent for Rabie-Van der Merwe, and it is with some satisfaction that she describes the man's flogging. Moreover, the man is not merely punished by the beating, but dehumanised, as her use of the word 'tame' underlines, while the extreme savagery of the beating is surely indicated by the man biting his own flesh, rather than this deriving from any supposed 'malevolence'.

Black people do not define their own position in the moral landscape of Onthou!; this is instead seen as entirely contingent on their relationship with the British and Boers. Black people on the side of the Boers are generally patronised as loyal minions (and are usually coloured rather than black African); those supporting the British are described as in bloodlust, dangerous and devious, and when they are killed they simply get what they deserve. Black people apparently have little agency of their own, but rather respond to circumstances that are never of their own creation. Moreover, the author displays a callous, cavalier disregard for black people killed in the service of the British – these individuals are presented as inviting death by daring to resist their racial positioning in Boer terms. An incident of this kind occurs when Boer commandos, helped by Rabie-Van der Merwe, free Sarel and his comrades from prison:

"Another shot fell just in front of the gate and a young Kaffir in police uniform (jail warden) was hit in the head by the bullet. He fell, but still gasped and blinked his eyes. A boy of about seven years old, who was drawn by all the commotion, stood by and laughed. 'Who are you, my child?' I asked. 'My name is De Villiers Theunissen, aunt.' 'Then get me that badge from that Kaffir's cap. I want to keep it as a souvenir.' The unconcerned child grabbed the cap, but then let it go again. 'It is full of blood!' he said. 'That's nothing', I said, and he got the badge off and gave it to me" (118-119)<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> "Daar val nog 'n skoot vlak voor die hek en 'n jong Kaffer in polisiedrag (trankoppasser) kry die koeël deur die kop. Hy val, maar gaap en knip nog sy oë. 'n Seuntjie van omtrent sewe jaar oud wat op die lawaai afkom, staan en lag. 'Wie is jy, my kind?' vra ek. 'My naam is De Villiers Theunissen, tante.' 'Nou haal vir my die knopie van daardie Kaffer se pet af. Ek wil dit hou vir 'n aandenking.' Die onverstrokke kind gryp na die pet, maar smyt dit weer neer. 'Dit is dan vol bloed!' sê hy. 'Dit is maar niks nie,' sê ek en hy haal die

Rabie-Van der Merwe's discounting of the warder's suffering in her desire for a 'souvenir' was not simply because he was black, but because he occupied a position of authority (as a prison warder, and specifically as her husband's jailer) perceived as incongruous with his racial inferiority. As the warder lay dying, Rabie-Van der Merwe removed the physical sign of his improper authority in removing his badge, returning this man to his 'rightful' subordinate position by enlisting a child to remove the badge. With her casual comment of 'that's nothing' to the boy, she indicated to herself, the others present and also her 1940s readers that rightful racial order had been re-established and the challenge to white authority erased – the warder and his death are 'nothing' to her now.

Later in Onthou! Rabie-Van der Merwe bitterly describes how "a few Kaffer maids" (142)<sup>77</sup> laughed conspiratorially with her prison warden when they discovered that she, a white woman, had been imprisoned. The humiliation of being jeered at by her 'natural' inferiors is possibly the worst aspect of her imprisonment for Rabie-Van der Merwe, shown when she is later transferred to Bethulie prison and is jailed together with black people, something described as indicating the severity of her punishment: "It must be understood that Bethulie prison was not meant for white people, but certainly for Kaffers, and that space was very limited" (237).<sup>78</sup> Once again the British breach the racial order, this time by imprisoning a white woman in the same jail as black people. Rabie-Van der Merwe adds:

"I was the only white person in there, with eight or more Kaffers in the cell right above mine. They were just as rowdy as Kaffers always are and one day when a few new ones arrived, it was enough to make a person go mad listening to their talking, which I could not help doing. With the greatest enjoyment they told the other convicts of the skirmishes, spying expeditions, fire-settings and other

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*knopie af en gee dit vir my.*" It is possible that this was the man whose murder Rabie-Van der Merwe was accused of instigating by the British authorities.

<sup>77</sup> "'n paar Kaffermeide", that is, black female servants.

<sup>78</sup> "Dit moet verstaan word dat Bethulie se tronk nie bedoel was vir witmense nie, maar wel vir Kaffers, en dat die ruimte baie beperk was."

atrocities that they carried out on Boer farms. It made my blood boil and made me so enraged that I could easily have committed murder if I could just have reached them” (240)<sup>79</sup>

For Rabie-Van der Merwe, ‘race’ is a timeless category, with different ‘races’ exhibiting fixed characteristics: thus black people are ‘always’ rowdy as well as always having a ‘bloodlust’ that can be ‘awakened’. That her fury made her ‘blood boil’ and could have led her to easily have committed ‘murder’ is discomfiting in light of the flogging and shooting incidents earlier in the text. The black prisoners’ tales of destruction of Boer farms are clearly a particularly unsettling affront to Rabie-Van der Merwe, isolated from her own racial group in the racially disordered setting of the jail.

Many of her accounts of persecution (one of the important features of *testimonio*) rest directly on ‘race’ – it was not being in jail that so enraged Rabie-Van der Merwe, but rather being in a racially-mixed jail; it was not being attacked by the British that she found intolerable, but rather the British use of black soldiers; it was not her husband’s imprisonment that incensed her, but rather that his warder was a black man. Many of Rabie-Van der Merwe’s claims to persecution are based less on the actions of her ‘oppressors’ and more on their skin-colour and assumed place in the racial order, and her testimony relies on the reader’s equally a priori acceptance of her ‘race’ views and shared understanding about the severe social disruption of the natural order that black people’s wartime activities represented. For instance, she actively invites the reader to sympathise with her position in the racially-mixed jail with an appeal based on the presumption of shared ‘race’ views: “Just think of it, under one roof with a bunch of rowdy, stinking,

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<sup>79</sup> “Ek was die enigste witmens daarin, met agt of meer Kaffers in die sel regoor myne. Hulle was net so luidrugtig as wat Kaffers maar altyd is en toe daar eendag ’n paar nuwes bykom, was dit genoeg om ’n mens mal te maak om na hul praatjies te luister, wat ek nie kon verhelp nie. Hulle het met die grootste genot vir die ander bandiete vertel van die skermutselinge, spiontogte, brandstigtings en ander gruwelkade wat hulle op boereplase aangerig het. Dit het my bloed laat kook en my so woedend gemaak dat ek maklik moord sou kon begaan het as ek hulle net kon bykom.”

filthy, grunting Kaffers!” (243).<sup>80</sup> Her use of the term ‘grunting’ here again inscribes black people as animals rather than people.

Rabie-Van der Merwe stresses that the war fundamentally disturbed the relationship between racial roles and labour when she describes the difficulties she and her husband faced in beginning again on the family farm after the Peace in 1902: “People [to work] were totally unattainable. What became of all the Kaffers in the Free State from before the war, I do not know” (344).<sup>81</sup> The war was indeed partly instrumental in racially ‘disordering’ South African society for at least the initial post-war period. During this time, whites like the Van der Merwes had to do their own manual farm work, labour previously deemed suitable only for black subordinates. This was because, during the war, many black people who had previously worked as farm labourers were able either to be independent farmers providing agricultural produce for the British, or else to find alternative forms of work, often for the British military and for considerably better wages than they had previously earned. Consequently, many African people accumulated savings from this; and also some African farmers became relatively prosperous by supplying towns with scarce agricultural produce, again cushioning them against wage labour for uncongenial employers for a significant period post-war.<sup>82</sup>

There are a number of incidents in *Onthou!* which, on first reading, appear to cut across the author’s inferior positioning of black people. However, these largely involve coloured people who apparently accepted their inferior position in the racial hierarchy, and in so doing affirmed Rabie-Van der Merwe’s ‘superior’ status by depending on her for help in some way. Thus, rather than being inconsistent with the ‘race’ politics presented

<sup>80</sup> “*Dink net daaraan, onder een dak met ‘n klomp lui drugtige, stinkende, smerige, snorkende Kaffers!*”

<sup>81</sup> “*Volk is totaal onverkrygbaar. Wat van al die Kaffers van voor die oorlog in die Vrystaat geword het, weet ek nie.*”

<sup>82</sup> On black labour during the war, see Stanley 2004a, Warwick 1983. Bundy’s 1988 study examines the effects of the war on black peasant farming as part of his wider analysis of this group, and he examines the war as a key factor that contributed to a temporary improvement in the fortunes of small-scale black farmers.

elsewhere in *Onthou!*, these episodes in fact confirm the presumption of a strict racial order in which everyone knows their ‘proper’ place. The following incident concerning the author’s stay in Graaff-Reinet jail provides a proto-typical example:

“[There was] a bastard maid [in South African terms, therefore ‘coloured’], Rosa, who was suffering in terrible pain. The groaning and moaning were heart breaking to hear. While Hannie stood on guard to alert me if the gate was opened, I knocked on the cell door and asked, ‘Who is inside here and what is the matter?’ ‘I have been without food, just rice water, for twelve days, and must stay like this for a further two days,’ was the answer. ‘I have much hunger and terrible pain in my stomach, colic and cramps. I could almost die. Oh my mistress, please make a plan for me to get something to eat.’ ‘What wrong did you do to receive such a cruel punishment?’ ‘I was drunk, my mistress, and I made a nuisance in the street.’ ‘All right my little maid, stay determined. I will do my best for you.’ During this time, food was arriving for us, but how to get it to Rosa? I ground up some dried out biscuit on a newspaper, with a bottle containing coffee, and now I was going to try to give Rosa food, come what may. I knelt in front of the cell door, blew away the dust and told Rosa to do the same, as the gap was very small. Then I slipped a piece of paper under the door and pushed the crumbs carefully through. Poor, hungry Rosa greedily licked up the smallest crumbs, as the largest would not fit through. These had to then be crushed again. For days we fed Rosa in this way and shared our food with her. She did not get much in, but the worst hunger was stilled and the pains abated” (216-217)<sup>83</sup>

The account of feeding Rosa does not have the effect of illustrating Rabie-Van der Merwe’s kindness and humanity towards a fellow prisoner, but rather, given its positioning in the narrative, works to reinforce British injustices and bolster Rabie-Van der Merwe’s self-depiction as a resourceful risk-taker who cheated or thwarted the British at every opportunity. She later describes Rosa’s thankful response to her ‘saviours’ when released

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<sup>83</sup> “Dit was ‘n bastermeid, Rosa, wat in vreeslike pyn verkeer het. Die gekerm en gesteun was hartverskeurend om aan te hoor. Ek klop aan die selduur, terwyl Hannie op wag staan om kennis te gee as die hek oopgesluit word, en vra, ‘Wie is hierbinne en wat maker?’ ‘Ek is vandag al twaalf dae sonder kos, net op ryswater, en moet nog twee dae so bly,’ is die antwoord. ‘Ek het baie honger en vreeslike pyn in my maag, koliek en krampe. Ek kan amper doodgaan. O my miesies, maak tog ‘n plan dat ek iets te ete kry.’ ‘Watter kwaad het jy dan gedoen om so ‘n wrede straf te ondergaan?’ ‘Ek was dronk, my miesies, en het moles gemaak in die straat.’ ‘Nou ja, hou daar moed, my meidjie. Ek sal my bes vir jou doen.’ Onder dié wyl het kos vir ons opgedaag, maar hoe om dit by Rosa te kry? Ek het van die uitgedroogte beskuit op ‘n koerant fyn gemaal met ‘n bottel waarin koffie was, en nou gaan ek probeer om vir Rosa kos te gee, laat gebeur wat wil. Ek het voor die selduur gekniel, die stoffies weggeblaas en vir Rosa gesê om dieselfde te doen, want die grepie was baie klein. Toe steek ek ‘n stukkie papier onder die deur in en skuif die krummeltjies versigtig deur. Arme, hongerige Rosa lek gretig die kleinste krummeltjies op, terwyl die groteres nie onder wou deurgaen nie. Die moes dan weer gemaal word. Dae lank het ons Rosa so gevoer en ons kossies met maar gedeel. Sy het nie te veel ingekry nie, maar die ergste honger is gestil en die pyn het bedaar.”

from jail: “Rosa walked past us, greeted us ever friendly and said: ‘Thank you my young mistresses, thank you very much. I will never forget you,’ and she burst into tears” (217).<sup>84</sup> While Rosa thanks both of her ‘mistresses’, in her depiction of the incident Rabie-Van der Merwe is at the centre, and she sidelines any contribution made by her cellmate Hannie. Rosa’s emotional gratitude asserts the author’s racial superiority and emphasises rightful ‘race’ relations, where black people are dependent, submissive and child-like and their white superiors benevolently authoritarian. Thus at Bloemfontein prison too, Rabie-Van der Merwe helped “a small maid” (268-269)<sup>85</sup> – it is again implicit that she is coloured – called Emily to escape. Then, when the author receives a box of food and fruit for Christmas from her family, she shares this with all her fellow inmates, including the warden and “*die meide*” [the (coloured) maids]. (287). In addition, in Port Elizabeth camp, a black man who accidentally stumbled through the camp late one night was shot and killed by British guards, and Rabie-Van der Merwe refers to this man as “the poor, drunken, innocent old Kaffer” (177).<sup>86</sup> These incidents are used to demonstrate the indiscriminate intolerance of the British, in contrast to Rabie-Van der Merwe’s magnanimity towards those black people who conduct themselves appropriately in her eyes. The basic moral framework of the text is straightforward – the long-suffering Boers are the victims in a war in which an aggressive enemy seeks to strip them of their wealth and independence, helped by a traitorous black population who use the war to undermine or more strongly reject the authority of their ‘natural’ superiors. As a consequence, her treatment of ‘race’ matters makes it impossible for Rabie-Van der Merwe’s post-1994 readers to affirm the author as simply a victim of mistreatment and injustice, or to read her

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<sup>84</sup> “Rosa stap by ons verby, groet ewe vriendelik en sê: ‘Dankie, my nonnies, baie dankie. Ek sal julle nooit vergeet nie,’ en sy bars in tranen uit.”

<sup>85</sup> “’n kleinmeid”

<sup>86</sup> “*die arme bedwelmdede, onskuldige ou Kaffer*”

testimony as straightforwardly indicative of oppression and affirmative of the moral rightness of its author.

A post-1994 re-reading of Onthou! is inevitably influenced by an analysis and evaluation of the racialised moral landscape presented in the text, with this book explicitly located as part of the late 1930s nationalist movement. Consequently, the relationship between Rabie-Van der Merwe's politics, racism, Afrikaner nationalism and the post-1948 National Party state ought not to be glossed over in any present re-reading of Onthou! The text is in fact strongly marked by a triumphalist discourse, with nationalistic refrains such as, "FATHERLAND, FREEDOM AND RIGHT", "freedom and right" or "our beloved fatherland" recurring throughout the text (5 original emphasis, 10, 309).<sup>87</sup> War suffering and camp deaths are invoked in this framework by being used for political capital, as in the passage quoted at the beginning of this chapter in which Rabie-Van der Merwe exhorts "my people" never to forget what "the blood of our burghers and the suffering of 26, 000 women and children" has "sealed" for South Africa (328).<sup>88</sup>

A post-1994 re-reading, then, amply demonstrates that Onthou! confounds the moral assumptions made about the *testimonio* genre once its stance on 'race' and the treatment of black people come into analytical sight, for Rabie-Van der Merwe provides too many examples of victimising and mistreating other people on racial grounds for this to be ignored, or to be seen as accidental. By the time it was written and published, Afrikaners were in fact a racially dominant and already very powerful group in South Africa. As a text being presented as if written from an "extreme condition of oppression" (Kokotovic 1999, 38), and which invokes many incidents seen to show "marginalization oppression, and struggle" (Beverley 1989, 23) of Boer people, Onthou! was certainly intended as *testimonio* and certainly is a piece of special pleading. However, many of its

<sup>87</sup> "VADERLAND, VRYHEID EN REG", "vryheid en reg", "ons dierbare vaderland"

<sup>88</sup> "my volk" "die bloed van ons burgers en die lyding van 26, 000 vroue en kinders" "verseël het"

truth-claims about Afrikaner people being unreasonably treated during the war rest on implicit and sometimes explicit claims to racial superiority and an outraged angry rejection of the perceived British reversal of this. Its emphasis on ‘race’ and the importance of a protean binary racial order is likely to have had considerably greater resonance at the time of its publication, given its location as part of the political developments of the 1930s, than it would have done at the time of the war itself. While now, sixty years on and in the very different political circumstances prevailing post-1994, it has considerable negative resonance.<sup>89</sup>

My rejection of Rabie-Van der Merwe as a morally unambiguous innocent victim, and of her *testimonio* as a straightforwardly referential account, is partly the result of knowing ‘what came next’ in South Africa. It is also partly due to the ‘picaresque’ character of the text itself, which encourages interrogation and analysis in the context of major political change, and also of several decades of debate among literary theorists about the role of fictive devices in a range of sub/genres. While Rabie-Van der Merwe depicts herself and the Boer people as wronged and persecuted, in 1940 what was by then ‘the Afrikaner people’ were actually well on their collective way to becoming a highly privileged racist elite following the 1948 National Party election victory. Her exposition of a “situation of exploitation and oppression” (Yudice 1991, 17) rests on the fact that her primary ‘oppressors’ were black, and their attitudes towards and treatment of Boer people were deemed to be appalling and objectionable because transgressing an apparently unchanging ‘by nature’ hierarchy. And the British were culpable in this, because they had unleashed the ‘bloodlust’ of these people by promoting them out of their properly subservient place in the natural scheme of things. But in spite of what I conclude is its lack

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<sup>89</sup> Surprisingly though, neither *Onthou!* nor Raal’s *Met Die Boere in die Veld* (1938/2000) have invoked a negative or even critical response from present-day commentators. Jansen (1999b) mentions *Onthou!* as an instance where an author has made claims to veracity, but then goes on to treat these claims entirely uncritically. The eulogising preface to the 2000 republication of Raal’s *Met Die Boere* is discussed in Chapter Six.

of moral credibility, Onthou! in my view remains an interesting example of *testimonio*. That is, the text conforms to the main elements of standard definitions of the genre, and what needs to be reconsidered, indeed fundamentally rethought, are the academic assumptions predominantly evident in the first wave of *testimonio* theory but which still persist, that *testimonio* speakers/writers are by definition morally and factually as well as politically correct. Such texts are in fact “neither open to proof nor self-evident. We come to understand them only through interpretation, paying careful attention to the contexts that shape their creation and the world views that inform them” (Personal Narratives Group 1989, 261). To surrender interrogating and evaluating the truth-claims and moral presumptions of any and all such writings is to treat them as in some sense sacred, and this requires ignoring not only the social and political context of their production but also the gaps, silences and inconsistencies in them as texts.

Putting ‘race’ matters on one side, the inconsistencies, ambiguities and objectionable features revealed in re-reading Onthou! are largely those which *testimonio* critics have attempted to grapple with in recent years. The tensions between fact and fiction, victimhood and agency, moral right and wrong, literature and history, are all present in Onthou! and reflect the blurred and complex nature of life-writing more generally. Onthou! is a clear reminder that *testimonios* must not be exempt from the rigorous, critical deconstruction to which other kinds of texts have been subject, and an awareness of its structure and contents certainly cautions against any “simplistic identification with the protagonist of the autobiographical text” (Brodski and Schenk 1988: 14). Although it may be tempting to admire Rabie-Van der Merwe as a woman of determination and hardiness, in my view she must be viewed as a highly problematic figure for readers today. The history of South African racial politics pre- and post-1940 is rightly read onto Onthou!, for the text is inextricable from its context of writing,

publication and original reading within the development of Afrikaner nationalism and the racially-organised apartheid state that it gave rise to.

Moreover, *Onthou!* serves as a reminder that the feminist project of recuperating women's experiences and voices should be undertaken with a clear-sighted awareness that: "Accounts of women [...] ... lives, their memories, the ways they frame the choices made, the way they are viewed by observers, all need to be examined as constructs produced at specific historical moments, under particular circumstances, with different audiences in mind" (Weiler 1999: 56-57). Thus, like all texts, whether fictional or factual, those involving *testimonios* and women's 'voices' must be read with a close and critical eye. As I have shown, neither *testimonio* literature nor feminist theories about recovering women's 'voices' provide fully adequate analytical tools for understanding *Onthou!*, so that my discussion and analysis here has had to re-work the analytical focus of these around moral landscape and, particularly, by using 'race' to problematise this.

This has resulted in problematising the presumption of moral right accorded to *testimonios*. In maintaining that *Onthou!* is an example of *testimonio* and of a woman's 'voice', however uncomfortably and problematically so for present-day readers, I argue that it is not *Onthou!*'s moral ambiguity that unfits it as an example of these, but rather that these genres need to be widened to accommodate politically and morally problematic figures such as Rabie-Van der Merwe. Relatedly, I have emphasised that claims to past suffering or oppression should not immunise any text from critical interrogations of its truth, memory and moral claims. Finally, I have stressed the crucial importance of the context of writing and re/reading in the production and interpretation of any text, and pointed up my own post-1994 context as fundamental to my re-reading of *Onthou!*

In my view, the idea of post/memory provides a useful framework for thinking through the related problems of time, memory, referentiality and moral right so important

to comprehending this book. As I suggested at the outset of this chapter, Onthou! represents a peak in, an apotheosis of, the post/memory process wherein the events of the war and the camps were re/worked successively at a number of points over time into a politically-motivated nationalist 'line' inscribing 'the history' of key moments in the past. I now want to sketch out the key elements of the analytical term of post/memory, and to highlight some of the ways in which Onthou! epitomises the 'canonical' and retrospectively re/worked aspects of this.

### **Onthou! as post/memory**

Marianne Hirsch has developed the concept of postmemory, which she defines as memory experienced by members of a 'second-generation' who have absorbed a heritage of traumatic events that they themselves have not directly experienced from the generation that did. These memories have been transmitted to them by their grand/parents who had direct experience of the traumatic events in question, with Hirsch's analysis specifically concerned with the Holocaust. Hirsch characterises postmemory in the following way:

"In my reading, postmemory is distinguished from memory by generational distance and from history by deep personal connection. Postmemory is a powerful and very particular form of memory precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation. That is not to say that memory itself is unmediated, but that it is more directly connected to the past" (Hirsch: 1997, 22, my emphasis)

In summary, my response to this is that each participant in a particular event is likely to have somewhat (or markedly) different memories of it, and also individual memories are likely to change over time and according to the circumstances of remembrance. These things remove the grounds for assuming there is a direct link between memory and the past in the way that Hirsch claims, or rather presumes. At the same time, Hirsch's ideas about memory, time and succeeding generations are insightful and fruitful, and so her work is

usefully built upon and developed, the approach that Stanley's (2005a, in press) re-working has adopted.

In making use of Hirsch's ideas about postmemory, Stanley (2005a, in press) has argued for re-working this conceptual device as 'post-slash-memory', a re-working which recognises the unstable, mediated nature of all memory, not just that of second-generations who have had purportedly 'direct' memory communicated to them by family members.

Stanley emphasises that:

"people who directly experience traumatic events too are subject to the retrospective re/workings of memory, for almost as soon as something is experienced, post/memory and 'memory itself' overlap and cannot easily be prised apart. And thus of course the use of the analytical term of 'post-slash-memory' here to recognise the disjunctures and to indicate the successive production of an almost canonical and constantly reworked version of the past ... " (Stanley 2005a, in press)

While Hirsch contends that it is only second-generation memory which "consists not of events but of representations" (Hirsch 2001: 218), for Stanley the analytical framework of post/memory indicates that all memory consists of representations, with varying degrees of connection to 'events'. Stanley's reconceptualisation of post/memory has been developed in relation to the re/workings of private memory, remembrance and public commemoration of the concentration camps of the South African War, and involves an analytical approach I find helpful for thinking about the complex layers of memory-making that characterise Boer women's testimonies of the camps. Consequently I have used her revised and expanded definition of post/memory to underpin my analysis of Onthou! and women's testimonies more generally. In relation to Onthou!, I see this text as in fact exemplifying the concept of post/memory, in being "delayed, indirect, secondary", and by being mediated through "an imaginative investment and creation" (Hirsch 1997: 13, 22). However, beyond this, post/memory recognises that 'memory' is always memory-making, a process which is motivated and selective, not spontaneous, direct or referential;

and consequently as an analytical tool it is able to grapple with the problems of referentiality and moral authority in re-reading *Onthou!* in a way that the literature on *testimonio* and Hirsch's work cannot. It is this that I now want to show in more detail.

Rabie-Van der Merwe's *Onthou!* was, as I have indicated, stimulated and shaped by her political concerns during the late 1930s. One of the defining characteristics of post/memory of the concentration camps in the 1930s and its part in 'the history' of the Afrikaner people concerns the high degree of overlap between women's testimonies, indicating their mediation not only by time but also by the processes of telling and re/telling stories, in a variety of overlaying personal and political contexts, that had been occurring since the time of the war itself. This raises another of the defining features of post/memory: *Onthou!* is severed from its originating events, not only by time and space, but also by the mediating role of other war and camp testimonies, the large majority produced by (proto-) nationalist women whose lives and writings 'silently' resound in this text.

I have already indicated various similarities between the nationalist intentions as well as sentiments expressed by Rabie-Van der Merwe and Sarah Raal in the forewords to their two books, as well as the shared political context in which these books were written, published and originally read. There are other similarities, too, including their adventure story formats and heroic young women protagonists. In addition, like many other women's testimonies, these two texts feature what are presented as unique memories of directly experienced events, but which are actually drawn from powerful 'exemplary' incidents. These most likely had their origins in the oral tradition of stories told and re-told, and which over time many people came to 'remember' as things they themselves had witnessed or participated in, and they have some of the characteristics of 'urban myths'.

A key example of this in Onthou! and Met Die Boere in die Veld concerns a story that both authors relate about a burgher who entered a house in British-occupied Jagersfontein, caught sight of himself in a mirror and shot at his own reflection because mistaking it for an enemy soldier. The two authors both claim to have heard first-hand accounts of the incident from the man in question, although by implication this is a different man for each of them:

“One of our burghers was already busy looking for clothes in one of the houses. He was careful and looked around frequently to see that everything was still peaceful. One time when he looked up again, he saw a man standing near him; he pulled out the revolver and shot. The other group heard the shot and stormed in to him. Then we shall see that one of the mirrors from the wardrobe was shot to smithereens. He saw himself in the mirror!” (Raal 1938: 73-74)<sup>90</sup>

“He walked along the long passage and saw someone coming towards him, also with a weapon in his hand – an ugly man who couldn’t be anyone other than King-Hall [a British officer]. When Faan raised his weapon, the other man also lifted his up and Faan pulled the trigger to be first. The big mirror at the end of the passage shattered into a thousand pieces” (Rabie-Van der Merwe 1940: 121)<sup>91</sup>

Such ‘shared’ and iconic incidents recur throughout Boer women’s war and camp accounts, with other key examples including the brutal killing and maiming of farm animals by British soldiers and an ‘exemplary’ story about the presence of hooks in camp rations, seen as evidence of the widespread British ‘murder’ of Boer women and especially children, including also by starvation or poison in the camp hospitals. These widely-circulated stories of events which seemingly occurred throughout the concentration system in fact had their origins in single events – for instance, the meat hooks were found in one particular huge tin of corned beef imported from the U.S.A. and opened in Pietersburg

<sup>90</sup> “Een van ons burgers was reeds besig om kleren in een van die huise te soek. Hy is ook maar versigtig en kyk kort-kort rond of alles nog vreedzaam lyk. Eenkeer toe hy weer opkyk, sien hy ‘n man by hom staan; hy ruk die rewolwer uit en skiet. Die ander klomp hoor die skoot en storm by hom in. Toe sal ons sien dat een van die spieëls van die hangkas flinters geskiet is. Hy het homself in die spieël gesien!”

<sup>91</sup> “Hy stap die lang gang af en sien iemand na hom aankom, ook met ‘n geweer in die hand – ‘n lelike kèrel wat niemand anders as King-Hall kan wees nie. Toe Faan sy geweer lig, tel die ander man syne ook op en Faan trek los om eerste te wees. Die groot spieël aan die einde van die gang spat in duisend stukkies.” The Faan here refers to her brother-in-law, ‘Rooi Faan’ Van der Merwe.

camp, but with the story subsequently told and retold with hooks in meat rations planted by the British being claimed by women from other camps.<sup>92</sup> The result is that the women testimony-writers whose accounts appear in Mag Ons Vergeet?, Stemme Uit Die Verlede and War Without Glamour frequently repeat the same ‘personal’ stories and emphasise the same ‘directly experienced’ events, and this process:

“took shape around the stories that were told, an oral tradition of powerful stories which were then re-worked and honed in written versions in women’s testimonies produced in a nationalist framework. In so doing, only those testimonies and stories that served nationalist purposes were ‘heard’ in the public political context of encouraging, collecting and publishing camp testimonies” (Stanley and Dampier 2005: 95)

Not only were the camp populations very varied, comprising both men and women, British supporters, those who were neutral and those who were avowed Boer supporters, but also the circumstances and conditions prevailing within individual camps differed and were changeable. However, this heterogeneity of population and circumstance is not reflected in published or unpublished archived camp testimonies, where it is only the stories of women who were Boer supporters and indeed fervent republicans that exist. This disconcertingly total absence of views and experience contrary to the nationalist ‘line’ reflects the testimonies’ political context of eliciting, collection and publication, and also indicates something of the determined ruthlessness of this. Regarding the repetition of ‘exemplary’ or canonical stories and images, “some narratives and images” it would seem are “so powerful, so monumental, as to constitute memories in their own right”, even by those who did not directly experience them (Hirsch 2001: 219), a point that Cornelia Brink (2000) has insightfully made about canonical visual images. In other words, some stories and images

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<sup>92</sup> For example, the back cover of Raath 2002b reproduces a photograph of Mrs. Roos, who had been in Bloemfontein camp, posing with the labels she collected from tins of meat that she claimed contained hooks, the collection of labels presumably ‘proving’ her contention. The meat hook allegation is made repeatedly in Postma 1939: 45, 50, 92, 146. On the Pietersburg meat hook incident, see DBC 6: Papers received, Pietersburg camp, May – December 1901.

spoke so meaningfully and powerfully to the (proto-) nationalist intentions of women testimony-writers that they were told and re-told and became absorbed as ‘memories’ even by those who did not have literal, first-hand experience of the events represented.

There are additional points of close connection between Onthou! and other Boer women’s testimonies. For example, Rabie-Van der Merwe mentions meeting Mrs. Roos of Heilbron, Mrs. De Kock and Mrs. Mocke, in Bloemfontein prison and notes that: “Mrs. Roos told us everything that she had been through, and everything she had heard and seen how it went on in one of the hospitals. It was the cruellest and most scandalous treatment of wounded burghers and sick children that I heard of during the whole war. Her statements were published in Emily Hobhouse’s book: ‘War Without Glamour’” (276).<sup>93</sup> Another example concerns Maria Els, whose testimony appears in War Without Glamour, Mag Ons Vergeet? and Stemme Uit Die Verlede, and who also appears in Onthou!, with Rabie-Van der Merwe describing her as one of the women who had tattooed the letters O.V.S. onto her arm in prison (283).<sup>94</sup> The presence of other women testimony-writers in Onthou!, especially those who became well-known in (proto-) nationalist circles post-war, indicates the ways in which these women’s stories informed each other and highlights those elements of the post/memory process which originated in an oral story-telling context and then became components in the organisation of written testimony as a set of factual

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<sup>93</sup> “Mev. Roos het ons vertel wat sy alles deurgemaak het, en wat sy alles gehoor en gesien het hoe dit in een van die hospitale aangegaan het. Dit was die wreedste en skandelikste behandeling van gewonde burgers en siek kinders waarvan ek in die hele oorlog gehoor het. Haar verklarings is gepubliseer in Emily Hobhouse se boek: ‘War Without Glamour.’” However, in her unpublished extended testimony Mrs. Roos mentions receiving a cup of water from a Boer girl who was a fellow-prisoner but states that she and her fellow two prisoners were under guard all the time and that “while we were waiting there, we were not allowed to speak to anyone, nor to smile on those whom we knew” (WM 4208/20: 66). There are discrepancies between Mrs. Roos’ published testimony in War Without Glamour and the handwritten, unpublished version now archived in the War Museum of the Boer Republics (WM 4208/20). The line quoted here does not appear in the published testimony, and the girl who produced the cup of water is described as being “on parole in the town” (Roos in Hobhouse 1927: 120). What is now unknowable is whether the changes were made by Mrs. Roos or by Emily Hobhouse.

<sup>94</sup> Maria or Miemie Els was well-known for her involvement in a riot in Brandfort camp, which I discuss at length in Chapter Three.

sworn statements informing ‘the history’ of those events crafted in (proto-) nationalist circles.

While Onthou! is strongly rooted in the 1940 writing and publication ‘present’, the justification for its truth-claims lie in its author ‘having been there’ and her ‘at the time’ experience grounding her direct and unmediated memory of wartime events and experiences. Rabie-Van der Merwe shows an explicit preoccupation throughout her text with the idea of remembering, and especially the physical manifestations of memory. The title Onthou! of course immediately instructs the reader to ‘Remember!’ and also resonates with the ‘remembered’ titles of other women’s published testimonies, particularly Mrs. Neethling’s Should We Forget? and Vergeten?. This emphasis on remembering is strongly present across different kinds of commemoration connected to the camps, with the connections between remembrance and notions of vengeance epitomised in Leipoldt’s lines, “Forgive? Forget? Is it easy to forget?” which are inscribed on several camp monuments.<sup>95</sup> Sarah Raal, writing about leaving Uitenhage camp at the end of the war, commented, “Who found it necessary to take something with them, to remember what we could never forget?” (Raal 1938: 153),<sup>96</sup> although of course the 1938 publication of her book itself acts as a powerful indication that matters are not so simple and that public markers of remembrance are required if public memory is to persist over time. In contrast, Rabie-Van der Merwe explicitly evokes a number of physical reminders of her ‘having been there’ memory of the events she writes about.

One instance of this is when Rabie-Van der Merwe describes a letter she received from her husband Sarel shortly after he went on commando, reassuring her that he was safe, and she writes that “(The envelope of that exceptionally welcome letter is today still

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<sup>95</sup> The Afrikaans lines are, “*Vergewe? Vergeet? Is dit maklik om te vergewe?*” and are taken from Leipoldt’s poem ‘*In die Konsentrastie Kamp, Aliwal Noord, 1901*’. Extracts from the poem appear on monuments in a number of camp *begraafplase* and *Gedenktuine*.

<sup>96</sup> “*Wie het dit dan nodig gehad om iets saam te neem, om te onthou wat ons nooit kan vergeet nie?*”

in my possession.)” (17).<sup>97</sup> While there are other examples of Rabie-Van der Merwe’s concern with the physical manifestations of ‘memory’, the most significant instance involves a photograph entitled “Collected by the author during the war, and referred to in the book”,<sup>98</sup> which shows a range of items, putatively her mementoes, displayed on a table. The collection of these items in the first place, and the subsequent arranging of them together to be photographed, strongly indicates Rabie-Van der Merwe’s concern with tying her construction of ‘memory’ in *Onthou!* to referential memory itself and thus to the physical ‘proofs’ of originating wartime events that she had experienced. Stanley has commented on this photograph that:

“In ‘Collected by the author...’, Rabie-van der Merwe has assembled various objects from the past that was the ‘then’ of the South African War, so they could be represented in a different medium, a photograph, in the ‘now’ of the book, and they are described in her mementoes of diverse events and people. The photograph, then, represents a number of material, temporal and spatial orders; and, while the meaning of each object was gained in somewhat different times and places from the others, they are made to cohabit in the photograph and gain a collective meaning from this, being represented to readers as ‘a collection’” (Stanley 2005a, in press)

Rabie-Van der Merwe’s concern to temporally ‘freeze’ physical items from the ‘then’ of the war, and to do so in the ‘now’ of the book, is also evinced by an incident concerning a woman she met in Bloemfontein prison. This woman had been collecting wood with her eight-year-old son on the outskirts of Bethulie camp when a ‘joiner’ and a few ‘khakis’ shot at them, killing the little boy. His mother had futilely attempted to bind his wounds with her apron, soaking it with the boy’s blood. “The grief-stricken mother,” Rabie-Van der Merwe explains, “immediately wanted to wash her son’s blood out of the apron, but I strongly insisted that they preserve the apron just as it is for their descendents” (280).<sup>99</sup> For Rabie-Van der Merwe, this woman’s apron had to be kept both as a physical

<sup>97</sup> “(Die koevert van daardie uiters welkome briefie is vandag nog in my besit.)”

<sup>98</sup> “Versamel deur die skryfster gedurende die oorlog, waarna verwys word in die boek.”

<sup>99</sup> “Die bedroefde moeder wou dadelik die bloed van haar seuntjie uit die voorskoot was, maar ek het daar sterk op aangedring dat hulle die voorskoot net so bewaar vir die nageslagte.”

reminder of her suffering and as a political reminder of British brutality – remembrance, ‘bitterness’ and politics overlay each other throughout her book. As her O.V.S. tattoo and the Onthou! title of her book indicate, Rabie-Van der Merwe was concerned to emphasise ‘having been there’ and thus her ‘at the time’ direct memories. However, it seems to me that her endeavour to preserve the 1899-1902 ‘moment’ in the text exposes, rather than bridges, the temporal gap that characterises the post/memory process and the role of claims about ‘the history’ within it.

In particular, although Onthou! was written nearly forty years after the event, Rabie-Van der Merwe nowhere comments on nor even mentions the years that have passed since the conclusion of the war, and nor does she provide any clues about the events of her own life during that lengthy, and in political terms extraordinarily momentous, time. The narrative of Onthou! ends as she and Sarel returned to the Rabie family farm at the end of the war and concludes with the enormous difficulties that they and fellow-Afrikaners faced in rebuilding their lives after the devastating conflict. This perpetuates and ‘fixes’ the image of the struggling, suffering Afrikaner people: except that, of course, each and every original reader of Onthou! would have been aware of the dramatically improved fortunes of the Afrikaner people in the 1940 ‘now’ of writing and reading, and with the possibility of a more triumphant future at various points intimated: “We will have to wear the foreign yoke, live together with our enemies! We are reduced to ash and dust! Can order ever again emerge from the chaos? [...] And will life again be born from death? We shall see” (338).<sup>100</sup> In addition, for Rabie-Van der Merwe and other (proto-) nationalist women testimony-writers, the wartime sufferings of the Boer people were both terrible and provided political and moral capital. Onthou! invokes the words spoken by field cornet Gert Fourie to the family of a man killed in battle, “No, mothers and sisters and friends,

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<sup>100</sup> “Ons sal die vreemde juk moet dra, met ons vyande moet saamwoon! Ons is verneder tot in stof en as! Kan daar ooit weer orde uit die verwoesing te voorskyn kom? [...] En sal daar weer lewe uit die dood gebore word? Ons sal sien.”

dry your tears away. Your son and beloved fell as a hero and his name will live on in the history of our people" (41),<sup>101</sup> insistently claiming the Boer dead as heroes in the history of the *volk*. For Rabie-Van der Merwe, this included "the suffering of 26, 000 women and children" who had to be remembered for what had been "sealed with their blood" (328). In the context of the 'now' of 1940, Rabie-Van der Merwe mobilised the death and suffering of the war for political reasons, both to justify the rightful pride and patriotism of the Afrikaner people and concomitantly to legitimate a way of life and their claims to *ons land*, to rightful possession and control of 'our land', with South Africa under nationalist Afrikaner control and restitution of the protean racial order an assumed constitutive element in this.

Onthou! is thus a product of the complex post/memory process that in South Africa characterises remembrance of the concentration camp deaths, and also the part this has played in the successive layers of producing 'the history' of the Afrikaner past as seen and promulgated within a (proto-) nationalist framework. The text is presented as a referential, morally authoritative first-hand testimony of the author's direct experiences, but Onthou! and its author's 'memories' are in fact strongly mediated by the 1930s context of its writing and publication and its original 1940 reading. One the most curious features of Onthou! is precisely its 'living in the past' quality and absence of acknowledgement of change over time between the end of the war in 1902, and the writing and publishing context of 1940. 1940 is hinted at, and what might come is suggested by Rabie-Van der Merwe's 'we shall see', but no more. On a first reading of Onthou! this almost complete lack of recognition of the passing of time and the changes related to this seemed odd; only later did it become clear that suspending time is crucial to the products of post/memory and

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<sup>101</sup> "Nee, moeder en susters en vriendinne, droog julle tranes af. Julle seun en liefing het soos 'n held geval en sy naam sal voortleef in die geskiedenis van ons volk."

characterises not just Onthou! but also other women's testimonies, and this is something I return to in later chapters.

In addition, my post-1994 re-reading of this text, too, is a component within the retrospective, re/worked and multi-layered process of post/memory-making. The post/memory articulated in Onthou! of course neither emerged fully-formed in 1940, and nor did its production cease in this year either. Onthou! represents, indeed in my view exemplifies, a 'moment' within a set of interconnected processes through which public political 'memory' is orchestrated and promulgated, is precisely memory-making. Consequently, as part of my analysis of the workings of these processes, in the following chapter I shall continue to trace out and historicise the post/memory process as it developed over time, with particular regard to a specific incident in a specific camp, in order to show some of the ways in which the specific and unique became both exemplary and seemingly general.

### Chapter Three

#### ‘Stories That Find their Place’: Tracing Post/Memory in Retelling the Protest at Brandfort, 1901 – 1949

“The historical roots [of a singular nationhood] are precisely the stories that find their place in a coherent structure that is capable of shaping all narratives that had been or will be told” (Schleifman 2001: 29)

“A political myth can be said to exist when accounts of a more or less common sequence of events, involving more or less the same principal actors, subject to the same overall interpretation and implied meaning, circulate within a group” (Flood 2002: 42)

This chapter concerns eight different testimonies concerning a single event, produced over a period of some fifty years.<sup>1</sup> These testimonies describe a protest about meat rations, which occurred in Brandfort camp in the Orange River Colony on or around 8 November 1901. My focus here is not the ‘event itself’, which cannot now be recovered except in its archival or documentary forms. It rather concerns subsequent representations of this incident in women’s testimonies because these provide an example of a story that has been told and retold and over time has acquired some of the qualities of political myth as outlined by Flood in the quotation above. In Chapter Two, I discussed Rabie-Van der Merwe’s *Onthou!* as a ‘canonical’ version of the past and as an exemplification of post/memory in the particular 1940 ‘moment’; while, in this chapter, I trace the development of post/memory over time in the re/telling of the Brandfort protest story. I have already indicated that women’s camp testimonies played a key role in the construction of ‘the history’ of the Afrikaner past and the development of Afrikaner (proto-) nationalism. In this chapter I show in more detail how, as versions of a particular story were re/told, these testimonies ‘found their place’ in an “coherent structure that is capable of shaping all narratives that had been or will be told” (Schleifman 2001: 29), and gained an increasingly nationalist political meaning over time. The Brandfort protest

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<sup>1</sup> Els in *Hobhouse* 1927, Els in *Neetling* 1917/1938, Els 1944 (WM 4128/29), Le Clus 1920, Le Roux in *Postma* 1925/1939, Lombard 1949 (A119/74), Rabie-Van der Merwe 1940, Venter 1938 (A248).

stories also show how post/memory commences “almost as soon as something is experienced” (Stanley 2005a, in press), and then how story-telling and myth-making in a series of linked cultural-political contexts subsequently overlays ‘the events’, eventually displacing and subsuming them, in much the way that post/memory subsumes and displaces ‘memory itself’.

I begin by sketching out some of the theoretical literature concerning story telling, narrative and political myth, which form the backdrop to my analysis of the Brandfort testimonies. Then I briefly outline the events of the protest itself and the writing and, where appropriate, the publishing context of the Brandfort testimonies, and organise these chronologically according to when they were first written. I trace the ways in which this protest was written about over time and examine the testimonies as ‘rehearsed narratives’ which demonstrate various of the attributes of post/memory of the camps as “an almost canonical and constantly reworked version of the past” (Stanley 2005a, in press). As part of this, I also show how the Brandfort testimonies connect with and echo key themes in women’s camp testimonies more generally. I consider too the politicised, (proto-) nationalist content and tone of the Brandfort protest testimonies and the different ways in which the testimony-writers positioned themselves in relation to this aspect of the events they represent. I stress that proto-nationalism is present from the earliest extant testimony, written in 1903, but indicate how this developed over time, with later testimonies evincing strongly nationalist triumphalist tone and content. In arguing that these testimonies were re/worked and departed from the specific originating events, I discuss aspects of the ‘at the time’ context likely to have influenced both the protest itself, and the later retrospectively inscribed testimonies of it. I emphasise that, over time, the tale of the Brandfort protest became universalised and was re/told well away from specificities of time and place, and suggest that if nationalism depends on the perception of a shared past and a common

history, it is partly through the retelling of such stories about this past that national unity is achieved.

### **Narrative, Story and Myth**

In the last twenty years there has been a burgeoning of interest in narrative as the fundamental way in which both individuals and groups make sense of life experience, and as key to the construction of both individual and collective identities, with this burgeoning of interest often described as the ‘narrative turn’. As Polkinghorne points out, “narrative is the fundamental scheme for linking human actions and events into interrelated aspects of an understandable concept” (Polkinghorne 1988: 13). In other words, there has been an increasing realisation by both social scientists and historians that narrative is the primary means by which we make sense of the past, and is the principal way in which experience is organised in order to seem meaningful from the perspective of the present. Charlotte Linde argues that, for individuals, life stories are central to the “creation of coherence”, and that “In order to exist in the social world with a comfortable sense of being a good, socially proper, and stable person, an individual needs to have a coherent, acceptable, and constantly revised life story” (Linde 1993: 3). By implication, in order for a collectivity – such as a nation – to exist and flourish, it too has to have a set of narratives which can be told and retold as part of a powerfully constitutive and ‘constantly revised life story’. It is as just such a ‘constantly revised life story’, retold as part of the ongoing development of proto-nationalism post-1902 that I understand the Brandfort testimonies.

Before exploring the role of narrative in the construction of such political and national identities, it is worth first considering the meaning of the term narrative.<sup>2</sup> As

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<sup>2</sup> I have found Callinicos 1995, Carr 1991, Flood 2002, Freeman 1993, Gabriel 2000, Linde 1993, Kerby 1991, Polkinghorne 1988, Ricoeur 1984, 1991, Samuel and Thompson 1991, and Tomkins 1992 useful in thinking about narrative, storytelling and myths.

Plummer points out, story is the “most basic element of narrative” (Plummer 2001: 187), and indeed it might be argued that ‘narrative’ and ‘story’ are in effect equivalents, with time and the temporal ordering of events as central to both. Carr draws out the connection between time and “narrative – or, more humbly, story and story-telling”, commenting that, “The two go together, in that narrative is our primary (though not our only) way of organizing our experience of time” (Carr 1991: 4-5). Simply put, stories are told ‘in time’ and about ‘a time’ and are thus embedded in a framework that is specifically and inexorably temporal. Ricoeur has written influentially of the relationship between time and narrative and argues that, “The world unfolded by every narrative is always a temporal world ... time becomes human time to the extent that it is organized after the manner of narrative; narrative, in turn, is meaningful to the extent that it portrays the features of temporal experience” (Ricoeur 1984: 3).

A related element of narrative or story is plot, “the dynamo of stories” (Plummer 2001: 187); and here plot is normally seen as the sequence of related events that are usually structured around a beginning, middle and end. Kerby comments that “narration can be conceived as the telling (in whatever medium, though especially language) of a series of temporal events so that a meaningful sequence is portrayed – the story or the plot of the narrative. It is the nature of a plot, traditionally considered, to synthesize events into a meaningful temporal whole, which it does by some form of closure or completion and by its developmental followability – that is, by giving a beginning, middle, and end structure to the narrative” (Kerby 1991: 38). Commentators also emphasise that stories are always conceived, told, read (or heard) and understood in a specific cultural context, and so stories within a particular social, cultural or political collectivity tend to conform to similar structures, plots and ways of organising time and events that will be recognisable to and therefore meaningful to audiences in that context. As Plummer indicates, “Even unself-

conscious tales that seem to be just simply, naturally ‘told’ are likely to be immersed in the narrative conventions of a culture” (Plummer 2001: 186), and Tonkin similarly argues that stories are always structured “according to known conventions” (1990: 34) and are located within ‘narrative frames’. However, stories also change over time according to the circumstances of telling and receiving, and as Gabriel notes, “Poetic licence is every storyteller’s prerogative – the acknowledged right to twist the facts for effect. This is the basis of the bond that unites storyteller and audience. The audience suspends disbelief, allowing the storyteller to apply his or her craft on the material” (Gabriel 2000: 31). As I shall show regarding the Brandfort testimonies, the use of ‘poetic licence’ and the accrual over time of rhetorical devices is not confined to fictional stories, but pervades the retelling of historical narratives too.

As part of his analysis of narrative, Ricoeur has also challenged what he regards as the false distinction made between the structures of narrative in its simplest story-telling sense, and history. He argues that “our Western culture has produced a major dichotomy, that drawn between history and story, i.e., between narratives which claim to be true, empirically verifiable or falsifiable, and fictional stories which ignore the burden of corroboration by evidence” (Ricoeur 1991: 103). Against this Ricoeur insists that history and story “share some common narrative structures whose temporal features in turn could easily be acknowledged” (1991: 104), and that historians do not simply relate facts about the past but retell the past as stories told from a present perspective. In much the same way that story-telling makes meaning from the past by organising experience in (culturally specific) narrative frameworks, for Ricoeur, “the material on which the historian works ... is a mass of unrelated events waiting for a story to be told about them” (Carr 1991: 170). Ricoeur contends that ultimately every narrated story deals with ‘reversals of fortune’, whether for better or for worse, and that as a result historical narrative is always ‘storied’,

in the sense that it relates the changes in fortune by particular groups or individuals in the past.

Ricoeur's rejection of a fixed distinction between the structures of 'history' and 'story' is shared by many social scientists and historians who are concerned with myths, their powerful historical influence and "what they may tell us about the symbolic categories through which reality is perceived" (Samuel and Thompson 1990: 1). As part of this, Tonkin argues for a dissolution of the distinction between 'myth' and 'proper history', and contends that definitions of myth as fictional narratives rely on a positivist view of history (Tonkin 1990), while others similarly warn against the crude weighing of 'myth' against 'reality' and state that myth is "embedded in real experience: both growing from it, and helping to shape its perception" (Samuel and Thompson 1990: 6). While my reading of the Brandfort protest testimonies and their retelling over time might be perceived as the historian's tendency to "puncture legends", "showing the artificiality of myth and its manipulable, plastic character" (Samuel and Thompson 1990: 4), this 'puncturing' does not deny the historical force and influence of the Brandfort stories as versions of a powerful myth. It instead is primarily concerned with pointing up the ways in which what has been passed off as 'historical fact' is instead a highly mythologised and ideologically-loaded account of the past told for specific political purposes.

Before turning to a detailed analysis of the Brandfort protest testimonies and their myth- and memory-making qualities, it is necessary to consider what a myth is and what might set it apart from narrative or story. For Ricoeur, myths are a class of narrative (1991: 103), and Passerini emphasises that myths are distinguished chiefly by their communal status: "myth is by definition collective ... shared by many ... beyond the limits of space and time" (Passerini 1990: 50). Myths tend to divide the world into 'good' and 'evil' and often have as their themes the survival of defeat or humiliation, culminating in defiance

(Samuel and Thompson 1990). As a specific variant of this, a political myth is an “ideologically marked narrative which purports to give a true account of a set of past, present, or predicted political events and which is accepted as valid in its essentials by a social group”, with political myths often concerning the origins of ‘a people’ and “stories of the exploits of cultural heroes” (Flood 2002: 44, 41). While political myths are often rooted in ‘reality’ and concern ‘actual’ past events, they quickly move away from these with constant retelling as “vehicles of ideological belief and supports for ideological arguments” (Flood 2002: 42). As such, “in exercising that power, national myths and the sense of national history which they help to build also raise fundamental questions of just who belongs and who does not” (Samuel and Thompson 1990: 18). As I shall show in more detail over the course of the chapter, the Brandfort protest story is a good example of a political myth in all these respects – it is presented as ‘factual history’ but is ideologically ‘marked’; it concerns themes of survival of defeat and the exploits of cultural heroines; it is predicated on ‘real events’ but almost immediately departs from these and makes mythologised meanings of them; and it certainly raises questions about who ‘belongs’ in (proto-) nationalist terms. I now turn to the ‘real events’ at the back of the Brandfort protest testimonies, and their retelling over time.

### **‘The Events’ and their Retelling in Women’s Testimonies**

The Brandfort protest involved a group of women who participated in a demonstration described as being about the quality and quantity of the meat ration in this camp. While accounts of the protest give different and sometimes conflicting details of the events, the basic story is consistent across the various testimonies. A group of women at Brandfort gathered on or around 8 November 1901 and complained to the camp superintendent, Mr. Jacobs, about the meat ration, which they regarded as insufficient, and

they demanded increased and improved meat supplies. When Mr. Jacobs informed them that, owing to wartime conditions, he was unable to procure better meat and instructed them to return to their tents, the protest apparently became overtly a political one, with the women involved waving the old Free State flag and singing the anthems of the former Republics. Violence of an unspecified kind broke out and the camp police were called to restrain the women. The leader of the protest in some accounts, Maria Magdalena (variously referred to as Mimmie, Miemie and Minnie) Els, along with another woman, Isabella Viviers, were both subsequently arrested and jailed for their part in the demonstration.

Maria Els herself wrote three separate accounts of the Brandfort protest (Hobhouse 1927; Neethling 1917/1938; 1944 WM 4128/29); also the incident, and specifically Els' role in instigating it, features in the testimonies of five other women (Le Roux in Postma 1925/1939; Le Clus 1920; Venter 1938 A248; Rabie-Van der Merwe 1940; Lombard A119/74 1949). Placing these testimonies along a timeline according to their date of writing enables the development of their structure and content over time to be mapped out, although this development is not always linear or cumulative in any simple sense. The earliest known account of the protest by Maria Els appeared in Hobhouse's 1927 collection of women's testimonies War Without Glamour (1927). Although this book was only published in 1927, in the Preface Hobhouse explains that, "since the middle of 1903 the manuscripts have all been in my possession" (Hobhouse 1927: 5), and Els' account itself is individually dated 26 May 1903 (Hobhouse 1927: 142). The first published version of Els' account appeared in Mrs. Neethling's 1917 Vergeten?, republished in revised form in 1938 as Mag Ons Vergeet?. The testimonies in Vergeten? were first published in 1917, having been collected in 1904 by Mr. Horak, who was at that time editor of Die Transvaler newspaper, and many of the original handwritten manuscripts of these testimonies are now

archived. However, while Els' original testimony is archived amongst these, it is evident from a note at the end of her account that her testimony was in fact not written for Horak in 1904, but much later, and directly for Mrs. Neethling herself. Her testimony is in fact dated 31 January 1916 (the year before *Vergeten?* appeared) and the note at the end from Els reads, "Mrs. Neethling may our beloved father give you strength to complete your work. Forgive me that I could not send you the history sooner. So have my hearty thanks for inclusion. Your loving grateful friend Mimmie Els. Give heartfelt greetings from me to your mother and daughter" (W19). This is a clear indication of the key role of cultural entrepreneurs such as Mrs. Neethling in orchestrating and producing women's testimonies, and suggests that Maria Els did not write a spontaneous testimony but was requested to write about her 'history' by Mrs. Neethling.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, Mrs. Neethling's solicitation of this account lends support to the overall contention I shall make in this chapter, which is that the Brandfort stories are not primarily about women relating their experiences of a meat protest, but instead show the myth-making activities of cultural entrepreneurs such as Mrs. Neethling, in concert with cultural workers such as Maria Els and others, in producing specific political meaning from these originating events.

Chronologically, the next account of the protest appeared in Mrs. Le Roux's testimony, dated 23 April 1917, which was published in Postma's *Stemme Uit Die Vrouekampe* in 1925 and republished in 1939 as *Stemme Uit Die Verlede* (Postma 1925: 15, Postma 1939: 32). This was followed by the account in Mrs. Le Clus' 1920 *Lief en Leed*, and then by a description of the protest in Bettie Venter's 'diary' of her experiences in Brandfort camp, written in 1938 around the 'Great Trek' centenary celebrations, and thus not a 'true diary' (Venter 1938 A248).<sup>4</sup> Hendrina Rabie-Van der Merwe's 1940

<sup>3</sup> The differences between Els' 1916 manuscript testimony and the published version in *Mag Ons Vergeet?* are discussed in Chapter Six, which deals with translation matters of this kind.

<sup>4</sup> Camp diaries in general, and Venter's 'diary' in particular, are discussed in more detail in Chapter Four, including issues concerning the form itself as well as uses of it in the South African context.

published Onthou! In die Skaduwee van die Galg makes some quite full references to Maria Els and her activities. Els' own final account, the provenance of which is not clear, consists of two typed sheets and is dated 1944, and is now archived at the War Museum of the Boer Republics (Rabie-Van der Merwe 1940, Els 1944 WM 4128/29).<sup>5</sup> The final account of the protest on the timeline is Mrs. Lombard's 1949 testimony, which forms part of the Renier collection in the Free State Archive Depot.<sup>6</sup> The overall timeline is provided below in Table 1.

Table 1: Chronology of testimonies of the Brandfort protest

Date of Writing	26 May 1903	31 January 1916	23 April 1917	1920	1938	1940	1944	1949
Author of Testimony	Maria Els	Maria Els	Mrs. Johanna Le Roux	Mrs. Le Chus	Bettie Venter	Hendrina Rabie-Van der Merwe	Miemie Ras (née Els)	Mrs. Lombard
Date and Title of Publication	1927 <u>War Without Glamour</u>	1917 <u>Vergeten?</u>	1925 <u>Stemme Uit Die Vroueka mpe</u>	1920 <u>Lief en Leed</u>		1940 <u>Onthou! In Die Skaduwee Van Die Galg</u>		
Date and Title of Re-publication		1938 <u>Mag Ons Vergeet?</u>	1939 <u>Stemme Uit Die Verlede</u>					

When the testimonies are organised chronologically in this way, several things begin to come into view. Firstly, four of the published versions of the story had been

<sup>5</sup> The account is archived as the *Herinneringe*, Reminiscences, of Mrs. Miemie Ras (née Els). Unlike her other two testimonies, which were published alongside other women's accounts, this testimony stands alone and is not part of a group. Incidentally, the style, grammar and punctuation in this later account indicate that Mrs. Ras (as she was when she wrote this account) was not a highly literate or well-educated woman, and was still using an earlier outdated form of Afrikaans in 1944. Her limited literacy and unpolished writing style were presumably obscured by the translating and editing work carried out by both Emily Hobhouse and Mrs. Neethling in preparing her testimony for publication. Although some of the manuscript versions of the testimonies that appear in War Without Glamour are now archived (A155), Els' testimony is not amongst these and so editorial interventions cannot be gauged.

<sup>6</sup> Mrs. Lombard's account was submitted to Renier on 19 July 1949 after her death, by her daughter Mrs. S.M. Haupt (A119/74).

written by 1920 and published by 1927, while, apart from Rabie-Van der Merwe's more oblique account, none of the subsequent three testimonies were published, and this suggests that particular stories have greater meaning and significance at some times rather than others. Secondly, the first published account of the Brandfort protest appeared in 1917 and this was very quickly followed by the writing of two further accounts, in 1917 itself and then in 1920, with this 'clustering' suggesting how certain stories were told and re/told after they entered the public domain. Thirdly, the testimonies can be divided roughly into two groups: those written before 1920, and the cluster written between 1938 and 1949, with this latter group of testimonies between 1938 and 1949 related to the upsurge in the re/publication of women's camp accounts that occurred in the context of the 1938 'Great Trek' centenary and related developments in Afrikaner nationalist politics, outlined in Chapter One.

### Fulfilling the 'horizon of expectation': the testimonies as rehearsed narratives

"When the women went to the Commandant to ask for better meat he said that the meat was good enough, because it was good enough for the women in the Transvaal camps. The women replied that they could not eat such meat. The Commandant, Captain Jacobs, said that he could not give them better, that it was war-time and impossible to obtain better ... Then the commandant said that they must go back to their tents otherwise he should throw them into the solitary prisoners camp" (Els in Hobhouse 1927: 141)

"Very early on the morning of 25 Nov. 1901, just as it was getting light, a few of the suffering mothers went through the camp to tell everyone to appear at nine o'clock in front of the office of the commandant. At the appointed time hundreds of women and girls had gathered there. They asked commandant Jacobs to make his appearance. He refused to do so, but asked of them what they wanted. Mrs Van Tonder was appointed to speak to him. She began: "Mr. Jacobs, we see no chance of living any longer on half a pound of meagre meat which is sometimes full of maggots, and acorn coffee mixed with vitriol. We cannot cook our food with this grass green, wet wood. You must make another plan; we are dying of hunger." He answered: "You can just be happy to get a bit of food; in other camps they are already eating horsemeat and dying of hunger. Go back to your tents immediately or I will make you go"" (Els in Neethling 1938: 35)<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> "Baie vroeg in die oggend van 25 Nov. 1901, net toe dit lig word, het 'n paar van die lydende moeders deur die kamp gegaan om elkeen aan te sê om om nege-uur voor die kantoor van die kommandant te verskyn. Op die bepaalde uur was honderde vroue en meisies daar bymekaar. Hulle versoek kommandant Jacobs om sy

"When the women asked to see the Commandant, this man sent the English doctor to them to ask what they wanted. The women answered that they wanted better meat, because they could not eat the 'dead meat' any longer. The doctor then called in English: 'Go to your tents and wash your dirty faces, then you will not die any longer, because you are dying from dirtiness'" (Le Clus 1920: 63)<sup>8</sup>

"On a certain day in October a group of women requested the commandant for better and more food. He swore at them and told them off" (Le Roux in Postma 1939: 32)<sup>9</sup>

"We appointed Mrs Van Tonder to speak to the Commandant; he was an uncouth colonial Boer. He was asked to come out. He refused, the coward. He sent the head doctor, Dr Martinus, to talk to us and ask us what we wanted. We want to talk to the Commandant was the answer. Mrs Van Tonder spoke so that he could hear, although he stayed inside. She said: 'Mr Jacobs, we no longer [see] a chance of living on half a pound of meagre meat, which is sometimes full of worms, and acorn coffee which is mixed with vitriol, and flour which is also mixed with vitriol. We cannot cook our food with green wood that is so wet' (Venter 1938 A248: 53)<sup>10</sup>

"Then another day 9 o'clock in the morning, then all the women trekked to the commandant to complain about the bad meat and requested them to give us better food and also marquee tents and also doctors for our sick people ... the commandant chased us away and said to us it is good enough for you to eat, that meat" (Els 1944 WM 4128/29)<sup>11</sup>

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*verskynning te maak. Hy weier om dit te doen, maar laat hulle vra wat hulle dan wou hê. Mev. Van Tonder was aangestel om met hom te praat. Sy begin: "Meneer Jacobs, ons sien geen kans om langer so van die halfpand 'vrekvleis' wat soms vol wurmies is, en van akker-koffie gemeng met vitriool te lewe nie. Met die gras-groen, nat hout kan ons ons kos nie gaar maak nie. Jy moet 'n ander plan maak; ons sterf van honger.' Hy antwoord: 'Julle kan maar bly wees om 'n stukkie kos te kry; in ander klomp eet hulle al perde-vleis en sterf van honger. Gaan dadelik terug na julle tente of ek sal julle laat gaan.'"*

<sup>8</sup> "Toe die vrouens vra om die Kommandant te sien, stuur die meneertjie die Engelse dokter na hul om te vra wat hulle wou hê. Die vrouens antwoord, dat hulle beter vleis wil hê, want hulle kan nie langer die vrekvleis eet nie. Die dokter roep hul in Engels toe: "Gaan na julle tente en was julle vuil gesigte, dan sal julle nie meer doodgaan nie, want julle gaan van vuilheid dood." Vrekvleis literally means 'dead meat' and in this context refers to meat from animals that have died from natural causes or starvation, rather than being specifically slaughtered for eating.

<sup>9</sup> "Op 'n sekere dag in Oktober het 'n klomp vroue die kommandant versoek om beter en meer voedsel. Hy het hulle uitgevloek en uitgestel." Mrs. Le Roux's statement in *Stemme Uit Die Verlede* is dated 23 April 1917.

<sup>10</sup> "Ons stel Mevrou Van Tonder aan om te praat, met die Kommandant, hy was 'n onbeleefde Kolonie boer. Hy word versoek om uittekom. Hy weier so 'n bang broek. Hy stuur die hoof dokter om met ons te praat Dr Martinus en vra wat ons wil hê. Ons wil met die kommandant praat was die antwoord. Mevrou Van Tonder praat hy kom dit hoor, maar hy bly binne sy sê Mr Jacobs, ons nie langer kans om 'n half pond vrek vleis, wat soms vol wurms is, en met akker koffie wat gemeng is met viterjoel, die meel is ook gemeng met viterjoel te lewe. Die groen hout wat so nat is, kan ons onse kos nie gaar kry nie."

<sup>11</sup> "Toe die ander dag moere 9 uur, toe trek die vroue op na die kommandant om te kla oor die slegte vleis en versoek hulle om vir ons beter kos en ook makietente en ook vir ons dokters vir ons siek mense te gee ... die kommandant jaag ons weg en se ver ons dit is goed genoeg vir julle om te eet: daardie vleis".

Each of these extracts describe the first phase of the Brandfort meat protest and rehearse broadly the same crucial narrative components that provide the central plot concerning British mistreatment of Boer women, although there are also some important differences between the testimonies, which I shall discuss shortly. The key elements of the story are remarkably consistent, although related in slightly varying terms: large numbers of dissatisfied women are described as “hundreds of women”, “all the women”, “a group of women”, while Mr. Jacobs dismisses the women’s complaints by saying the meat was “good enough”, “You can just be happy to get a bit of food” or simply, “he swore at them and told them off”, and his order for them to return to their tents was followed by the threat that he would “make you go” or “throw them into the solitary prisoner’s camp”.

Els’ Mag Ons Vergeet? testimony and the account by Bettie Venter reveal very strong repetitions and similarities. Both structure the sequence of unfolding events in much the same way, and Mrs. Van Tonder’s speech to Mr. Jacobs is virtually identical in both accounts. Elizabeth Tonkin’s deservedly important ethnographic study of storytelling about the past and the role of indigenous ‘oral historians’ in the Jiao Kru community of Liberia, argues that specific set forms in oral histories emerge because “successful tellings are imitated, and some performances become provinces of skilled personnel. Interactively, audiences and tellers develop conventions which cue ‘a horizon of expectation’” (Tonkin 1992: 97). Each testimony about the Brandfort protest similarly imitates aspects of the ‘successful tellings’ aspects of the others, and thereby fulfils this ‘horizon of expectation’ by formulaically rehearsing the most powerful and meaningful elements of this story, and framing these in a way that would be recognisable to a ‘knowing audience.’ This would have been other Boer or Afrikaner women, importantly including the women’s organisations, parties and congresses that proliferated post-war, all associated with the

emphasis on written as well as spoken Afrikaans as a key aspect of nationalist practices and purposes.

The Brandfort protest was re/told over time in these testimonies, something which is part of the wider trend in Boer women's concentration camp accounts, in which specific incidents were repeated in a rehearsed way. For example, the claims that hooks were commonly found in the tinned meat rations and that vitriol was added to flour and sugar in the camps are widely repeated in women's testimonies as incontrovertible evidence of British malevolent intent to deliberately murder Boer people.<sup>12</sup> These stories originated concerning one specific incident which occurred in Pietersburg camp, in which a huge tin of meat imported from the U.S.A. was found to contain some meat hooks, while the additives put into the dry rations such as flour and sugar to stop them hardening in high humidity occurred across the camps. While their purpose was widely known, the more credulous and uneducated would sometimes perceive these as poisons, and it is likely that tales of 'murder' were developed through oral re/tellings and circulated as women were moved from camp to camp and took such stories with them, and then after the war as people returned to their farms and exchanged their wartime tales. Accounts of the Brandfort protest are similarly characterised by an overall consistency of meaning, but also by the accretion over time of "the rhetorical embellishments of all story-telling: through re/telling, such stories accumulate strong mythic qualities and characteristics akin to those of 'urban myths'" (Stanley and Dampier 2005: 94), as I shall show.

There are some relatively minor inconsistencies across Els' three testimonies, although her basic tale of heroic patriotism remains unchanged, as it does in the other women's accounts. Thus Els variously recalls herself as 14, 15 and 16 at the time of the protest: in her testimony in War Without Glamour she claimed to have been 16 at the time,

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<sup>12</sup> See Chapter Two, footnote 80 on the meat hooks claim. Allegations about vitriol in the rations are made for example in Neethling 1938: 88, 148 and Postma 1939: 91, 119, 146.

but her 1944 testimony states she was a girl of 14, the kind of difference passing time easily accounts for. The date of the protest is also subject to some variation. In War Without Glamour, Els dates the unrest to 8 November 1901, although in Mag Ons Vergeet? she puts it at 25 November, and her 1944 testimony provides no date at all. Mrs. Le Clus sets the date at some time in early November (Le Clus 1920: 63), Bettie Venter concurs with Els' Mag Ons Vergeet? date of 25 November (Venter 1938 A248: 52), and Johanna Le Roux, writing in Stemme Uit Die Verlede, dates the uprising to sometime in October (Le Roux in Postma 1939: 32). Again, these are 'expected' differences easily accounted for by passing time and memory lapses. The Brandfort register of residents contains the following entry on the Els family:

Els, Rachel Elizabeth Maria	Married	48
1. Maria Magdalena *		17
2. Johannes Cornelis		10
3. Jan Johannes		8
4. Pieter Jacobus Johannes		4
Machil Maria	Single	43
Johanna Cathrina		
Occupation/farm: Slangfontein		
District: Wynburg		
Date of arrival: 12 August		
Stock: fowls, 4 oxen, 17 cattle, Sgd. P.A.R. Montgomery 10/8/01		
* 8.xi.01 arrested & sent to Bfl. [Bloemfontein]		
The rest of the family left camp 31.07.02 for Slangfontein (SRC 76, f.327)		

This camp record therefore suggests that Els was in fact 17 at the time of the protest, which took place some twelve weeks after the Els family arrived in Brandfort, on 8 November 1901, as Els herself stated in her testimony in War Without Glamour.

However, apart from these minor discrepancies in detail, there are some more significant differences between the Brandfort testimonies, for as Flood comments, even though political myths are "subject to more or less the same interpretation and implied meaning", this "will be expressed in many variants, given that no one narration of a story is likely to be absolutely identical to any other" (Flood 2002: 42, 41). In rehearsing and

repeating this tale, the Boer women testimony writers not only retained key aspects of the story, but over time also supplemented these with details they deemed significant, or which simply made for a 'good story' in the sense of resonating with widespread claims made in women's camp testimonies generally, with these a crucial means by which 'the history' of the Afrikaner *volk* according to nationalism was constructed and promulgated. As part of the nationalist myth-making at work in the re/telling of the testimonies over time, various rhetorical additions accumulated alongside the basic narrative structure, with these relating to Tonkin's 'horizon of expectation'. Tonkin also maintains that oral narrators introduce "evocative suggestions whose implications the knowing audience themselves link together as powerfully conclusive" (Tonkin 1992: 63).

One of the significant differences between the retellings of the protest concerns the statement in Bettie Venter's testimony that it was the doctor (rather than the superintendent, as in Els' and Le Roux's accounts) who was sent to deal with the women. According to Venter, Mr. Jacobs was "an uncouth colonial Boer"<sup>13</sup> and was too cowardly to come out of his tent, with his agentic and authoritative role in the other testimonies as an angry and determined opponent absent from Venter's version. In Mrs. Le Clus' account it is also the doctor rather than the superintendent who addresses the women, and she describes the doctor suggesting to the women that it was not poor meat but lack of personal hygiene that was causing the deaths in camp.<sup>14</sup> The addition of the doctor to the story by

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<sup>13</sup> Mr. Jacobs was likely to have been one of the men who had been magistrates or other government officials in the Boer Republics, some of whom were later appointed by the British as camp superintendents. He was thus a 'joiner' who had 'changed sides' and these men were often subject to contempt, recrimination and even abuse by those who remained 'loyal' to the Republics. Grundlingh describes the relationship between Republican women in the camps and the 'handsoppers' and 'joiners' as "extremely bad", and notes that the women often treated such men unsympathetically and abusively (Grundlingh 1979: 141).

<sup>14</sup> The assertion that poor hygiene and cleanliness on the part of Boer women contributed to sickness and death in the camp was often made during the war; the Ladies Commission isolated this as one of the causes of the spread of illness in the camps (Concentration Camps Commission 1902: 15-16). Mrs. Le Clus introduces this element here through the doctor's words, which she depicts as both unfeeling and unreasonable. Her remarks imply that the British claim about Boer women "dying from dirtiness" was not merely untrue, but was a cover to deflect the blame for deaths that were really caused by the British plan attempt to starve Boer women and children by providing them with inferior and deficient rations.

Mrs. Le Clus is significant, in that the large majority of women's testimonies depict the camp doctors as at best inept, and at worst as murderers who starved and poisoned Boer women and children in the camp hospitals.<sup>15</sup> The doctor's increasing presence across the different versions of this tale serves to corroborate one of its chief elements, that is, the deliberate British intent to harm and kill Boer people. Bettie Venter's reference to Mr. Jacobs as "an uncouth colonial Boer" and his retreat into his office in her version similarly connects with a well-rehearsed element in women's camp testimonies, that concerning the untrustworthiness, disloyalty and cowardliness of the 'joiners'. Finally, the contrast between the portrayal in most of the testimonies of Mr. Jacobs as a forceful figure of authority who instructs the women to return to their tents, contrasted with Mrs. Le Clus' and Bettie Venter's depictions of the superintendent as cowardly and so intimidated by the women that he sends the doctor to address them, indicates an aspect of the reworking of meaning in the story over time.

Els' testimony in Mag Ons Vergeet? includes Mr. Jacobs' reply to Mrs. Van Tonder's speech and his comment about the inhabitants of other camps eating horsemeat and dying of starvation; and in her War Without Glamour version, Mr. Jacobs threatens to send the women to the isolation or punishment camp (reserved for especially recalcitrant troublemakers of different kinds). These additions are dramatic, rhetorical devices of a kind that tend to characterise oral narratives, and Tonkin argues they are vital to the success of "all good accounts", by which she means accounts that are "persuasive to their intended recipients" (Tonkin 1992: 64). In this case, the rhetorical additions about horsemeat and the doctor accusing the women of being dirty mesh with and buttress wider post-war (proto-) nationalist claims about the British as intentionally mistreating Boer women. Consequently, whether they are specifically true does not require questioning

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<sup>15</sup> Thus for instance, contentions about the camp hospitals as places of deliberate murder can be found in Hobbouse 1927: 63, 126; Neethling 1938: 22, 31, 195; and Postma 1939: 29, 92.

because they are seen to be generally true, with this dominance of generalised and symbolic truth over truth as specific and verifiable detail as a key feature of myths.

In spite of these differences between the accounts of the Brandfort protest, they nonetheless consistently emphasise many of the same elements as structuring the story: the wronged, mistreated Boer women who made reasonable requests; the unjust, unsympathetic camp superintendent or doctor who refused these requests; Els' own personal bravery and patriotism in confronting the authorities; the camp women who loyally defended Els; the brutality of the camp police towards the women; and Els' eventual arrest and imprisonment. In the preface to War Without Glamour, Hobhouse wrote about Boer women's testimonies more generally that, "The universality and similarity of experience is striking. Had every woman of the two Boer Republics (apart from the few big towns) recorded her experience, the result would have been but a general repetition of these statements with minor variations of detail" (Hobhouse 1927: 5). Thus Hobhouse seemingly interpreted the strong parallels and repetitiveness in women's testimonies as a sign of their veracity, although she was also careful to distinguish their facts from their opinions in relatedly commenting that "I take no responsibility for any opinions expressed in these records" (Hobhouse 1927: 5). Instead it seems to me that there is something more complex and less one-dimensionally referential about these testimonies and their repetitions. This is that, as stories about the camps passed from individuals into the public domain, both by oral means and through publication of testimonies in books, magazines and other forums, they were in turn repeated by individuals. These stories were re/told and re/read beyond the original teller and published writer, until aspects of them became reproduced and absorbed as actual 'memory', even by those women who had not necessarily participated in the specific 'remembered' incident. The meanings of these rehearsed, repeated ritualised and powerfully symbolic stories became 'agreed' upon over

time as they were repeated, and it is these ritualised stories, rather than the messy complicated realities of private, individual experience, that are represented in women's camp testimonies.

The similarities in the narrative structure of the Brandfort testimonies also indicate the influence of story-telling devices on their construction for, as Vieda Skultans has argued, "The moment people talk about the past they remember it in the way stories are told; they are unable to ignore the conventions of story-telling" (Skultans 1998: 130). The testimonies of the Brandfort meat protest reflect this in the use of, for instance, set narrative formulations and stock phrases relating to requests for 'better meat', the meat being 'good enough', and orders for the women to 'go back to your tents'. However, the similarity between the testimonies of the Brandfort protest largely concerns the meaning ascribed to these events. Comparisons between the extracts given above indicate that the testimonies are consistent in their emphasis on two fundamental elements which give meaning to the story: the wronged, mistreated Boer women who made a reasonable request; and the unjust, unsympathetic camp authorities who refused this and ordered the women to return to their tents. Thus, as versions of a political myth, the 'uniformity' of the stories concerns the shared meaning made of the protest around a dichotomised depiction of 'us', the 'good' Boer women, and 'them', the morally 'bad' British authorities. In this regard, Samuel and Thompson comment that, in the context of national myths, "it is often persecution and common grievance which defines belonging" (Samuel and Thompson 1990: 19); and, in spite of the differences in detail between the Brandfort testimonies, they all evince this sense of belonging through shared grievance and persecution.

### **‘Poor meat’ and ‘dying of hunger’: connecting with key themes**

The Brandfort testimonies are ‘rehearsed narratives’ in re/telling a specific incident in a generalised and to an extent formulaic way to support widespread claims about the mistreatment of Boer women. In doing so, they also reproduce crucial interrelated themes found in women’s camp testimonies more widely. Here I am using ‘themes’ to mean the recounted incidents and experiences that recur across Boer women’s camp testimonies and result in their strong overall similarity. These include, although are not limited to, the presence of “kaffir hordes” who herd Boer women and children into camps, the camp hospitals as places of incarceration and murder, the camps as places of widespread starvation, and so forth. The Brandfort testimonies mesh with two such themes in women’s camp testimonies: the general complaints about ‘thin’ and otherwise inadequate meat, and the claims about camp inhabitants being starved to death. Assertions about inadequate food being the direct cause of camp deaths are widespread across women’s testimonies, and thus the reiteration of this allegation provides an instance of an established ‘horizon of expectation’ in Tonkin’s sense. In a number of the Brandfort testimonies, poor or insufficient meat is directly linked to starvation, and this is in turn related to the protest itself, which is thereby represented as a justified response to a deliberate campaign of mistreatment on the part of the camp authorities:

“The treatment in the camp was shameful, the food very bad, the meat uneatable, old, thin and full of vermin” (Els in Hobhouse 1927: 141)

“We and the children were dying of hunger, up to twenty a day – and sometimes more – were carried to the grave” (Els in Neethling 1938: 34)<sup>16</sup>

“They were on their way to the Camp Commandant to complain about the poor meat that they received, and they had good reason to complain too, because the rations were just so bad and the people were dying of hunger” (Le Clus 1920: 63)<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup> “Ons en die kinders het van honger gesterf, tot twintig – en partymaal meer – is per dag na die graf gedra.”

<sup>17</sup> “Hulle was op weg na die Kampbevelmantsant om te kla oor die slegte vleis wat hulle kry, en hulle het ook goeie rede gehad om te kla, want die rantsoene was maar nog so sleg en klein en die mense sterf van honger.”

"The meat that we received was totally inedible and the flour was too little to live on, but just too much to die from" (Le Roux in Postma 1939: 32)<sup>18</sup>

"We no longer saw any fat children; they became emaciated so that one could see their teeth through their cheeks, which were just covered by skin ..." (Venter 1938 A248: 52)<sup>19</sup>

"The meat the unfortunate camp people received, was very thin sheep, and I believe that we also received that which had died of starvation." (Lombard 1949: 7)<sup>20</sup>

These examples Brandfort protest examples have much in common with the frequently expressed sentiments in women's camp testimonies about 'thin', insufficient or infected meat:

"The meat that we received was that from sick animals..." (Alberts in Postma 1939: 91)<sup>21</sup>

"All the mutton was rotten, full of maggots and worms. In my tent I went through the meat carefully, but did not get one single piece that was useable" (Botha in Neethling 1938: 45)<sup>22</sup>

"The meat that we received was so bad and terrible that we were nervous to eat it – blue from thinness or sickness!" (Otto in Neethling 1938: 167)<sup>23</sup>

"The meat was seldom the full weight and in most cases very poor" (Viljoen in Hobhouse 1927: 64)

"The meat was often badly tainted and swarmed with maggots, the look alone made one feel sick" (Roos in Hobhouse 1927: 122)

"The meat was so thin that, even if a person cooked it from the early morning until late at night, there was not a speck of fat on it; yes one could not even make soup from it" (Van der Hever in Postma 1939: 96)<sup>24</sup>

<sup>18</sup> "Die vleis wat ons ontvang het, was totaal oneethaar en die meel was te min om van te lewe, maar darens te veel om van dood te gaan."

<sup>19</sup> "Ons sien geen vet kind meer nie hulle teer uit dat 'n mens hulle tande deur die wange sien, net vel oor ..."

<sup>20</sup> "Die vleis wat die ongelukkige kamp mense gekry het, was rek moer skape, en ek glo wel, wat gewrek het van moerte het ons ook maar gekry."

<sup>21</sup> "Die vleis wat aan ons gegee was, was die van siek diere..."

<sup>22</sup> "Al die skaapvleis was bederwe, vol mokers en wurms. In my tent het ek die vlees goed deurgekyk, maar het g'n enkele stukkie wat bruikbaar was, gekry nie."

<sup>23</sup> "Die vlees wat ons gekry het, was so sleg en aaklig dat ons bevrees was om dit te eet – blou van moerte of siekte!"

<sup>24</sup> "Die vleis was so moer dat, al het 'n mens dit ook van die vroeë môre tot die aand donker gekook, daar nie eens 'n ogie vet op was nie; ja 'n mens kon nie eens daarvan sop maak nie."

Meat was more than a central part of the Boer diet: a plenitude of fat-rich meat symbolised general prosperity and abundance; lean, fatless meat or a total absence of meat denoted low social standing and general deprivation. The notion that a diet very high in meat protein and fat was not necessary for good health was not part of Boer medical or social culture at that time, and in this regard Stanley has noted, “Caution is needed in interpreting Boer complaints about meat. Many Boer people ate meat in large quantities out of synch with prevailing norms in Europe. Even Hobhouse was perturbed at small babies being fed huge hunks of fatty meat and mugs of black coffee” (Stanley 2005a, in press). The complaints about ‘thin’ and insufficient meat in women’s testimonies are made alongside claims about camp inhabitants actually dying of hunger, indeed of starvation, because of this deficiency in the rations:

“She [my best friend] looked at me pleadingly and asked me to just give her a little food – one hour later she was dead” (Stander in Postma 1939: 37)<sup>25</sup>

“My daughters and I know that more than one woman and child in the murder camps literally died of hunger” (Scheepers in Postma 1939: 145)<sup>26</sup>

“In the camp I saw that families died of hunger” (Louw in Neethling 1938: 33)<sup>27</sup>

“My beloved child died of neglect and of hunger” (Botha in Neethling 1938: 48)<sup>28</sup>

The Brandfort protest testimonies repeat this emphasis on camp inhabitants ‘dying of hunger’ because of the inadequate meat rations and developed this into a story with mythical dimensions that connects with similar emphases in women’s camp testimonies generally. By connecting with strong themes in women’s camp accounts generally, the tale of the Brandfort protest fits into a repertoire of what constitutes ‘a camp account’, and echoes accepted well-rehearsed interpretations about the deliberate mistreatment of Boer

<sup>25</sup> “Sy het smekend na my gekyk en gevra om haar tog ‘n stukkie kos te gee – een uur later was sy dood.”

<sup>26</sup> “My dogters en ek weet dat meer as een vrou en kind in die moordkampe letterlik van honger ongekam het.”

<sup>27</sup> “In die kamp het ek gesien dat huisgesinne van honger gesterf het.”

<sup>28</sup> “My dierbare kind is dood van verwaarloosing en van honger.”

women and children. As mythologised accounts, the Brandfort stories, like women's camp testimonies more generally, "naturalize as fact what might have [had] different origins" (Tonkin 1990: 34). However, the retelling of the Brandfort protest has some stronger and more powerfully mythic aspects concerning Boer women themselves.

### **I, Us, They, We: Women locating themselves in the political tale**

"After this the Commandant sent for the two leaders, that is to say, Mrs. Nicholas Viviers and myself, Maria Els, aged 16, in order to have us punished; but the women would not allow it and went forth with us two, all singing, and I, Maria Els, carrying the Free State Flag ... The commandant then said he advised the women to go back to their tents and he would endeavour to provide them with better meat, but if he was not able to do so then they must be content. Then the women went back, but they had hardly been half an hour in their tents when armed soldiers came from four sides into the camp and demanded that I, Maria Els, and Mrs. Viviers should at once come out. The women again offered to rise, but I, Maria Els, said they should refrain because it was my desire that if they took me prisoner they should do it properly armed, even as the burghers were always captured. They took me and Mrs. Viviers away [to prison in Bloemfontein] immediately ..." (Els in Hobhouse 1927: 141-142)

"Almost 4,000 of us women moved out of the camp to the Boers. To stop us armed troops were sent after us and they dragged us back ... a month later inspector Barret went through the camp to do a report and from then on it went a bit better" (Le Roux in Postma 1939: 32)<sup>29</sup>

"The group of women became angry and stormed the Superintendent's tent and found him in his marquee tent, at his writing table. They asked him if this was meat he issued to decent white women? And the first woman was ready and threw a piece of meat at him, whereupon all the other women followed suit, and the rotten meat rained down on him. He crept out the back under the tent to the outside. The women also went outside and pelted him there too. When he had run away a good distance he shouted back: 'I'll give you better meat for the future.' One woman then asked: 'Can we trust you?' 'Sure you can!' he answered. After that we

<sup>29</sup> "Byna 4,000 van ons vroue trek toe die kamp uit na die Boere. Om ons te keer is gewapende troepe agter ons aangestuur en hulle het ons teruggedryf... 'n Maand later het inspektuur Barret deur die kamp gegaan om verslag te doen en daarvandaan het dit bietjie beter gegaan." Barret was a travelling inspector who visited the camp in the wake of the Ladies Commission to follow up suggestions and changes they had made. There is no evidence to suggest that 4,000 women deserted Brandfort camp at any time, and this may be a mythologised version of an event that occurred at Pietersburg camp in January 1902, when General Beyers' commando raided the camp there, causing the authorities to temporarily relocate the entire camp – of around 4000 people – to Colenso.

received After that we received tinned meat, which also smelled very musty, but was better” (Lombard 1949: 7)<sup>30</sup>

The above extracts all describe the second phase of the protest, after the women had made their initial complaint about the meat to Mr. Jacobs. A striking feature of the Brandfort testimonies is the degree of political meaning that is insistently attributed to the protest, interestingly with this political meaning inscribed into even the earliest account of the event by Els written in 1903, with its emphasis on the Free State flag, the unity of the women and the claimed political motivation for the arrest of the ringleaders.<sup>31</sup> This 1903 testimony, with its repeated quasi-legal formulation of ‘I, Maria Els’ points up and emphasises Els and her leading role in events as extraordinary, although how much this formulation and wording was due to Hobhouse’s translation of the text is uncertain.<sup>32</sup> As I will show, the type and degree of political meaning given to the protest changed over time, for the later accounts attribute the dissatisfied women with a degree of political intent absent from the earlier testimonies, stress the humiliation and castigation of Mr. Jacobs, and omit the punishment of Els and Viviers from the story. However, while politicisation of the meat protest is dominant across the eight women’s testimonies dealing with the Brandfort protest, this does not develop in a linear, chronological way and nor is this politicisation expressed in consistent or uniform terms.

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<sup>30</sup> “Die trop vrouens het kwaad geword en hul storm die tent van die Superintendent en vind hom in sy marquee tent by sy skryftafel. Hul vra hom of dit vleis is wat hy vir fatsoenlike wit vrouens laat uitdeel? En die eerste vrou was klaar en goei hom met die stuk vleis, waarop al die ander vrouens volg, en die vrot vleis reent op hom. Hy kruip agter onder die tent deur na buite. Weer is die vrouens buite ook en goei hom ook daar. Na hy ‘n goeie end weg gehardloop het; skree hy terug: - “I’ll give you better meat for the future.” Een vrou vra nou “Can we trust you?” “Sure you can!” was sy antwoord. After that we received Daarna kry ons ystervleis, wat ook maar baie benoud geruk het, maar was darem beter.” (Lombard: A119/74, 7).

<sup>31</sup> This is interesting because it is frequently claimed that nationalism only developed well after the war, although as I show there are clear signs of women expressing proto-nationalist sentiments before this.

<sup>32</sup> As discussed in detail in Chapter Six, Mrs. Neethling’s translation radically reworded and restructured Els’ 1916 testimony when she prepared it for publication in *Vergeten?*, and it is possible that Hobhouse’s later translation was influenced by Mrs. Neethling’s earlier one. Unfortunately, although several of the original handwritten manuscript testimonies that Hobhouse published in *War Without Glamour* are now archived (A155), Maria Els’ 1903 testimony is not amongst these.

In Els' 1903 testimony, the protest is certainly portrayed as political and republican, perhaps also as proto-nationalist, with the old Free State being carried and Els herself at the centre of the uprising as a leader and a *volk* hero. There are repeated references to her as 'I, Maria Els', emphasising both the formal testamentary character of this piece of writing and also her role in the unfolding events as key, with Mrs. Viviers 'there' but not so central. Her patriotic sense of responsibility is underlined and also her political importance, as shown by the other Boer women offering to revolt in support of Els and Viviers, as well as by the necessity of the British using armed guards in response, by taking pride in the punishment meted out to her, and seeing this as parallel to using armed soldiers to guard captured Boer commandos. The rest of her account, which I shall examine later in this chapter, describes her experiences in Bloemfontein prison.

Unlike Els, who depicts herself the *volk* hero of a united and distinctly political protest, Mrs. Le Clus' testimony in her reminiscences about camp life, *Lief en Leed* [For Better or Worse], refers to the Brandfort uprising as "*'n Groot Opskudding*", a Big Disturbance (Le Clus 1920: 63). She positions herself as a spectator and witness to the events of that day, rather than a participant within them, and interestingly makes no mention of Els at all. Mrs. Le Clus also claims that she herself was falsely blamed for instigating the protest: "I was then accused of being the inciter of the revolt, but I knew absolutely nothing about it" (Le Clus 1920: 65).<sup>33</sup> Mrs. Le Clus describes the uproar made by the women protestors as "*'n onaangename geraas*", an unpleasant noise, a comment which implies drawing her distance from it, and she also mentions a friend of hers, Drienie, who was "unfortunately caught up in the commotion" (Le Clus 1920: 63, 65)<sup>34</sup>, again with a sense of distance in this use of 'unfortunate'. Although she believed a protest against

<sup>33</sup> "Ek word toe beskuldig dat ek die aanspoorder was van die oproer, maar ek wis daar totaal niks van af nie."

<sup>34</sup> "*ongelukkig meegesleep met die oproer*". Mrs. Le Clus' friend Drienie is presumably the same Driena Le Roux referred to as beating an official on the head with a bottle in Els 1944 WM 4128/29: 1-2.

poor rations was justified, Mrs. Le Clus in a number of ways distanced herself from the actual events of the day, which she observed from her tent, seemingly disapproving of the unruly, violent aspects of the uprising as ‘unpleasant’, perhaps with this implying ‘unladylike’. By describing the protest, sanctioning the reasons for its outbreak and even suggesting that the British saw her as responsible for initiating it, Mrs. Le Clus demonstrates that her political allegiances lay with Boer women,<sup>35</sup> and indicates that she herself was seen as politically important figure; but at the same time, she also implies her classed gender position by disassociating herself from the ‘unbecoming’ aspects of the uprising.

This disapprobation of the ‘unpleasant’ aspects of the protest expressed by Mrs. Le Clus is not articulated by the other Brandfort testimony-writers, and these testimonies over time increasingly identify with what is portrayed as primarily a political uprising. Thus, Mrs. Le Roux’s rather triumphalist in tone testimony credits the protest with inspiring 4,000 women to desert the camp and attempt to join the commandos, and she includes herself in this through her phrase “to stop us” (Le Roux 1939: 32). In addition, the visit by Inspector Barret (one of the travelling inspectors) and the consequent changes made are attributed to the women’s actions, rather than to the camp authorities themselves. Mrs. Lombard’s even more triumphantly celebratory description of the day, from which any mention of Els being punished is absent, ends with the unmitigated victory of the protesting women over the weak, cowardly superintendent cowed by the feistiness of the Boer women, and it makes no mention of the arrival of armed soldiers or the arrest of the ringleaders. These versions of the protest in which the women involved were unqualified *volk* heroes fitted with later nationalist constructions of the Afrikaner people as boldly

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<sup>35</sup> Such a demonstration of allegiance may have been necessary, as Mrs. Le Clus was in fact English-speaking by birth and her birth surname was Roberts. She was evidently a woman of some means – upon arrival at Brandfort camp she immediately hired a servant, “*wat alles vir ons kon doen en ook vir ons kon kook en ons klere was by die spruit.*” [who could do everything for us and could also cook for us and wash our clothes at the stream] (Le Clus 1920: 44–46).

victorious. Vincent Perez's (1997: 26) observation that "The nostalgic impulse ... constructs a 'master' narrative designed to suppress most of what does not conform to the author's idealized projection of the past" suggests that Mrs. Lombard and Mrs. Le Roux's accounts might usefully be interpreted in this way, as idealisations of the past to fit present circumstances and views, which is one of the defining characteristics of post/memory.

Interesting and revealing in Lombard's account is a 'lapse' into English. Thus, after recounting the words of the superintendent in English, she relates subsequent events in English as well, before realising her 'error', crossing it out and returning to Afrikaans. This suggests that her decision to write in Afrikaans was a conscious political choice rather than a 'natural' one, and that the rigid moral and political distinctions between English and Afrikaans or Boer and Briton posited by the Afrikaner nationalism of that time (1949) were neither stable nor clear-cut, certainly concerning people of her generation.<sup>36</sup> Precise, unambiguous us/them moral distinctions are central to the construction of a national identity (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983, Smith 1999, Smith 2003) and certainly appear as sharp and polarised in Mrs. Lombard's account – Mr. Jacobs, for instance, is rendered ridiculous and ineffectual, while Boer women appear in complete possession of the moral highground. In Mrs. Lombard's testimony, 'race' is also overtly introduced as a factor in the Brandfort women's dissatisfaction. For her, the meat ration was not merely inadequate in itself, but was particularly inappropriate for the needs of "decent white women" (1949: 7), whose privileged racial position ought to automatically qualify them for better treatment.

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<sup>36</sup> Hertzog, for example, wrote in English – his letters to Mrs. Steyn were all written in English, for instance (A156). This was a cause of increasing dissatisfaction in nationalist circles in the 1930s, at a time when Afrikaner nationalism was being tied into an ever-closer relationship with the Afrikaans language.

### Further politicising the protest: flags and *volksleide*

“The Commandant heard us coming and came out with his police and took away the flag. He wished to take away the little flags which we two and other women were wearing, but we threatened to kill him if he did so” (Els in Hobhouse 1927: 141)

“Mrs Bella Vivier and I, Miemie Els, a girl of fifteen years, were dressed in the Free State colours. In rows of four we walked back [to our tents] while we sang the national anthem” (Els in Neethling 1938: 36)<sup>37</sup>

“Then the women became furious and they produced a small Transvaal flag and everyone sang the national anthem as loudly as they could” (Le Clus 1920: 63-64)<sup>38</sup>

“It was a big crowd [with] Miemie Els and Mrs Viviers in the centre with a Free State flag” (Venter 1938 A248: 54)<sup>39</sup>

“... then I Minnie Els (I was just 14 years old) and Mrs Viviers and Mrs Van Biljoen went forward. I carried the flag and we sang the Free State anthem and the commandant chased us away...” (Els 1944 WM 4128/29: 1)<sup>40</sup>

Accounts of the Brandfort protest accord varying degrees of political importance to the women’s actions, but all the extant testimonies imply or overtly state that the actions of the women on that day were not merely an expression of dissatisfaction with their rations. The emphasis by the testimony-writers on the waving of Orange Free State and/or Transvaal flags and the singing of *volksliede* [literally folk songs, but particularly the old Republican anthems] are important in the depiction of this event as a demonstration of nationalism. Flags and *volksliede*, potent symbols of nationalism, appear across the accounts and are not confined to the later versions, as Els’ 1903 written War Without Glamour testimony demonstrates. Flags and *volksliede* are usually interpreted as functioning to construct a *volk* as an “identity transcend[ing] the boundaries of time”

<sup>37</sup> “Mev. Bella Vivier en ek, Miemie Els, ’n meisie van vyftien jaar, was in die Vrystaatse kleure aangetrek. In ry van vier stap ons terug onderwyl ons die volkslied sing.” As I shall discuss in Chapter Six, in Els’ original 1916 testimony written for Mrs. Neethling she referred to the “Orange free state 4 colour”, “*het Oranjevrystaat 4 kleure*” (W19), indicating her lack of political knowledge (the Free State flag had three colours). Mrs. Neethling then ‘corrected’ this to “the Free State colours” (Els in Neethling 1938: 36 / 1917: 47).

<sup>38</sup> “Toe word die vrouens woedend en een van hulle haal ’n klein Transvaalse vlag te voorskyn en almal sing die volkslied so hard as hulle maar kan.”

<sup>39</sup> “Dit was ’n groot skaar Miemie Els en Mevrouw Viviers in die middel met ’n Vrystaat se vlag.”

<sup>40</sup> “... toe gaan ek wat Miemie Els is (ik was maar 14 jaar gewees) en Mev. Viviers en Mev. Bam Biljoen voor. Ik het die vlag gedra en ons sing die Vrystaat se volkslied en die komedant jaag ons weg ...”

(Akenson 1992: 73). Here the testimonies in which the flags and *volksliede* figure were written in 1903, 1916, 1920, 1938 and 1944, thereby implying a timeless, seamless connection with this seemingly spontaneous, spirited expression of patriotism, although their meaning, and the political and cultural context in which this was positioned, in fact changed markedly over this period. Els' account, for example, meant something very different when published in 1927 than it did when written in 1903.

The flags and *volksliede* in the women's testimonies are an early symbol of *volksseenheid* [unity of the people], and over time loyalty to the Boer Republics changed, to become Boer proto-nationalism and then Afrikaner nationalism. The emphasis at the start of each of the testimonies concerning the Brandfort protest is on poor rations, starvation and dying children, with later shifts in representing the second phase of the protest presenting the women protagonists as no longer the downtrodden victims of British mistreatment, but glorious heroes of the Boer Republics, united and steadfast in the face of hardship. The buoyant tone of 'flags and *volksliede*' proto-nationalism and the depiction of Boer women as feisty, heroic patriots resonates with other later women's accounts, particularly Hendrina Rabie-Van der Merwe's Onthou! In Die Skaduwee Van Die Galg (1940) and Sarah Raal's Met Die Boere in die Veld (1938), with these examples discussed in the previous chapter.

Els' statement in War Without Glamour about threatening to kill the camp superintendent also points to the ways in which women testimony-writers sought to represent the protest as violent and dangerous, as a political protest rather than a protest about meat, thus 'proving' their political importance and commitment. By all accounts the protest did lead to some violence, although women's testimonies imply that it was official brutality that caused the protestors to resort to physical aggression themselves:

"The Commandant then gave orders that the police must seize the women forcibly, and so the police began to strike with sticks; then the women seized pieces of wood

and bottles and struck back at the police with these. The women succeeded in beating back the police. Mrs. Maree was so seriously struck that blood streamed from the wound and she fainted" (Els in Hobhouse 1927: 141)

"The police tried to fight a path through; they struck open the jugular vein of a Mrs. Maree and in a moment she was full of blood" (Els in Neethling 1938: 36)<sup>41</sup>

"Then one of the police began to hit the women with a stick. With the first blow he struck a woman on her head, so that the blood was streaming over her face. In an instant the women grabbed bricks, bottles and pieces of firewood and defended themselves, so that the police had to flee to their commandant" (Le Chus 1920: 64)<sup>42</sup>

"The camp police came to intervene, but the women fell upon them so that more than one [of the policemen] had to be taken to a doctor" (Le Roux in Postma 1939: 32)<sup>43</sup>

"Then Commandant Jacobs showed up with 8 soldiers (Boer camp police) with their short sticks. He gave the order, "Go and get those 2 with the flags". Together we all shouted, "Do not allow them to be taken." "Take them all", he shouted, "Beat a path through and take them!" After that Boer boys struck the women left and right – a scandal – the biggest scandal I have ever seen ... then they [the women] struck back; one woman fought with a bottle, fists, kicks any sort [of defence]" (Venter 1938 A248: 54-55)<sup>44</sup>

"... then we stormed towards them and I took the whip that the commandant had in his hand, that he certainly wanted to drive us away with: he gave it to me too: because the three that were there surely saw that the women were now very angry, and while Aunt Driena Le Roux beat Van Eeden [camp official] on his head with an upside-down bottle (she asked, "Is he dead now?") the other men fled through the tents and I chased that same commandant with his own whip..." (Els 1944 WM 4128/29: 1-2)<sup>45</sup>

<sup>41</sup> "Die polisie probeer om 'n pad deur te veg; hulle het 'n mev. Maree se nek oor oorgeslaan en in 'n oomblik was sy vol bloed."

<sup>42</sup> "Toe begin een van die polisie die vrouens met 'n stok te slaan. Met die eerste slag tref hy 'n vrou op haar hoof, sodat die bloed oor haar gesig stroom. In 'oogwenk gryp die vrouens stene, bottels en stukke brandhout en verdedig hulle, sodat die polisie moes vlug na hul kommandant."

<sup>43</sup> "Die kamppolisie het tussenbeide gekom, maar die vroue het hulle so gekakel dat meer as een na 'n geneesheer geneem moes word."

<sup>44</sup> "Nou kom Komd. Jacobs en 8 soldate met hulle kort stokkies (boere kamp polliies) hulle daag op. Hy gee bevel, gaan hard daar 2 met die vlae, alger skree ons, laat hulle nie vat nie, wat ons alger hy skree, slaat 'n pad deur, en vat hulle! Daarna boere seuns slaat die vrouens lings en regs ('n skande) die grootste skande wat ek ooit gesien het ... toe slaat hulle terug een vrou het met 'n bottel geslaan, vuiste, skappe eenige soort."

<sup>45</sup> "... en toe storm ons op hulle af en ik vat toe sy sambok wat die komedant in sy hand gehad het wat hy seker ons mee woe dryf het: hy gee dit ook somar af: want die driewat daar was het seker gesien die vrouens is nou baie kwaad en terwyl tante Driena Le Roux en Van Eeden teen sy kop met 'n bottel geslaan het onderste boe toe vra sy (is hy nou dood) toe vlieg die ander mand deur die tente toe jaag ik die selfd komedant met sy eie sambok..."

When these depictions of the climax of the protest are examined in the chronological order of their writing, interesting things come into sight. The earlier accounts tend to emphasise the harm done to women protestors by the camp police, while later accounts highlight the injuries inflicted on the police by the women. Els' first two accounts stress Mrs. Maree's injuries and the blood streaming from this woman's wounds, and make only passing reference to the women's self-defence. In her last account, written in 1944, Els makes no mention of Mrs. Maree at all and instead describes a camp official being beaten over the head with a bottle, with Els herself chasing the superintendent through the camp while brandishing his whip at him. In this 1944 account, Boer women are no longer victims, but have taken matters into their own hands and have defeated their enemies by fighting back determinedly against injustice. Such changes in emphasis reflect (and in turn influenced) developments in the conception of Afrikaner (proto-) nationalism as active and victorious, rather than muted, passive and defeated. The earliest of the Brandfort testimonies depict Boer people as endangered by hostile forces, and their survival as something that has to be defended and fought for. This maps onto Donald Akenson's argument about the Afrikaner people having an historical perception of always being under threat from an enemy or enemies (Akenson: 1992), a defensive and negatively defined notion of national identity. While all accounts of the protest imply or state that moral right lay entirely with Boer women because they were starved and mistreated, the later accounts position the women's beating by the police as further reinforcement of this moral superiority. Contra this, the pelting of Mr. Jacobs with rotten meat described by some women (Bettie Venter, for instance) suggests that it was the women who turned violent first, and certainly beating a camp official on the head with a bottle and chasing the superintendent with a whip, if indeed these happened, indicate that the women's behaviour towards the camp authorities was at the least extremely assertive. Far from being oppressed

victims, the women were impassioned, aggressive defenders of their cause, or rather by the 1940s they had become so in the re/tellings of the tale.

In tracing representations of the Brandfort incident over time, the most marked change that occurs is the degree of political intent that later testimonies attribute to the women who participated in the protest. Early accounts depict the events of that day unfolding in a rather chaotic way, with each side suffering setbacks and victories, culminating in the quashing of the protest and the arrest of Els and Viviers. Later accounts invest the incident with a greater degree of political intent, and imply that the protest was a co-ordinated and successful attack on the ineffectual camp authorities, in effect an uprising or even rebellion, with authority yielding to the formidable determination, staunch patriotism, militancy and even violence of the Boer women. The later accounts of the protest fit with the objectives of post-1938 Afrikaner nationalism that encouraged the celebration of the bravery and heroism of Afrikaner ancestors, and looked forward to a future free of British domination. Investing the Brandfort women's actions with a militant, patriotic, anti-British intent gives a significance to the event that it might not otherwise have had. That is, it seems likely that most of the protestors would have been frustrated and upset women who linked the sickness in camp with what they perceived to be an inadequate and inferior supply of meat, and wanted to demonstrate their discontent with the meat ration to the camp authorities, perhaps also to express their general dissatisfaction with camp life, with a small minority being women of militant political persuasion, and/or women 'rowdies' who were troublesome to camp authorities in other ways, with Mrs. Le Clus and Maria Els perhaps representing these two 'types' of protest.

Notwithstanding the discrepancies in detail already highlighted, the Brandfort testimonies are largely consistent in their depiction of meaning in the protest. Similarly, although the testimony-writers position themselves in a variety of ways to the political

aspects of the protest, which are depicted in increasingly triumphant terms over time, nonetheless all the testimonies from Els' 1903 account onwards represent the protest as politicised to one degree or another. This suggests a number of things.

The first concerns the process by which women testimonies of camp experiences "took shape around the stories that were told, an oral tradition of powerful stories which were then re-worked and honed in written versions in women's testimonies produced in a nationalist framework. In so doing, only those testimonies and stories that served nationalist purposes were "heard" in the public political context of encouraging, collecting and publishing camp testimonies" (Stanley and Dampier 2005: 95). Women's personal testimonies produced 'memory' about 'the history of the camps', which assumed a referential and factual base through what Hobsbawm and Ranger have called 'invented tradition' (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983) in which, to use Halbwachs' phrase, a proto-nationalist 'history after the fact' (Halbwachs 1992) was organised and eventually became 'the history' of what had happened and almost unquestionable. The second is closely related and can be tellingly indicated by pointing out that, in spite of the well known and widely recognised divisions between Boer people within the camps and more widely, not one single contrary women's testimony exists in any of the known published and unpublished archive collections, strongly indicating their solicitation and use in the republican or proto-nationalist context of women's parties, proto-nationalist newspapers and magazines and Broederbond/F.A.K. connected 'cultural' organisations. And the third, again closely related, is that the camp populations included many thousands of Boer men, but across the known published and unpublished archive collections only a tiny handful by

men exist, including three by NGK *dominees* [ministers] and one by Hendrik Dahms, the uncle of Hendrina Rabie-Van der Merwe.<sup>46</sup>

### **Maria Els as ‘communal hero’ for nationalism**

The presence of mentions of the Brandfort protest in many camp testimonies, and the particular association of Maria Els with it, meant that over time her name became imbued with political significance.<sup>47</sup> The Brandfort protest exemplified women’s political involvement as republicans and proto-nationalists, with the name ‘Maria Els’ becoming shorthand for ‘real patriot’ and ‘true Afrikaner’. Such things are important in the construction of nationalism, for, as Anthony Smith has argued, “Nations are created in the historical and sociological imagination, through identification with generalised communal heroes set in equally generalized but vividly detailed locations and times” (Smith 1999: 44). Hendrina Rabie-Van der Merwe includes Els’ name in a list of women she met in Bloemfontein prison, also mentioning meeting Mrs. Roos and Mrs. Louw, whose testimonies appear in *War Without Glamour* and *Mag Ons Vergeet?* respectively, providing a good example of the in-group cross-referencing that characterises the women’s camp accounts as a whole. It was these women that Rabie-Van der Merwe participated in a self-tattooing ritual with, etching the letters *O.V.S.* (*Oranje Vrystaat*, or Orange Free State) into their arms (Rabie-Van der Merwe 1940: 285). This overtly and ‘visibly’ political act reinforces Maria Els and the Brandfort protest more generally as highly politicised and

<sup>46</sup> See the testimonies by the Rev. H.C. Hefer (Hobhouse 1927: 67-68), Ds. Winter (Hobhouse 1927: 73-73), Pastor G.F.C. Faustmann (Hobhouse 1927: 132-133). Hendrick Dahms’ testimony appears in Hobhouse 1927: 146-151. Perhaps the contribution by Mr. Dahms was included by Hobhouse because Rabie-Van der Merwe was meant to have produced a testimony for Hobhouse but did not, as indicated in Chapter Two.

<sup>47</sup> It is interesting to consider that, although Mrs. Bella Viviers also seems to have played a pivotal role in the protest and was imprisoned together with Els, she is not the focus of subsequent testimonies and wrote no testimony of her own. I have been unable to trace what happened to Mrs. Viviers after the war, although it is possible that like other ‘absent’ women ‘troublemakers’, such as the ring-leader of the Orange River Station protest discussed later in this chapter, she died before she could write a testimony. This seems particularly likely given Els’ statement towards the end of her *War Without Glamour* testimony that “Mrs. Viviers was taken ill and carried to the hospital where she lay five months” (Els in Hobhouse 1927: 142).

carrying a meaning well beyond the dissatisfaction with rations. Bettie Venter, indeed, made sense of the protest in purely political terms: "It is for our freedom that we suffer. I never heard that the suffering mothers said that the Boers must surrender. No oh no" (Venter 1938 A248: 57),<sup>48</sup> initially describing the protest as motivated by a demand for better rations, but ending by re/writing it as part of the Boer struggle for freedom and independence.

That Maria Els aligned herself closely with the post-1938 nationalist project is evident from her comments in 1944, projecting nationalist sentiments back onto her 1901 self: "but I felt, let our dear Lord just spare me further for the good of my people and the salvation of our souls and our land..." (Els 1944 WM 4128/29: 2).<sup>49</sup> Here Els represents her life as central to the good of the *volk*, and her wartime ambitions as entirely patriotic and political – the restoration of *ons land* to the Boer/Afrikaner people. Her description of her imprisonment further serves to strengthen her self-identification as a political hero. Like Hendrina Rabie-Van der Merwe, Els' imprisonment buttresses her credentials as a martyr of the *volk*, and in her accounts of her time in Bloemfontein jail (two weeks in all) in *Mag Ons Vergeet?* and her 1944 testimony, Els portrays herself as part of a select group of true Boer women patriots, as 'sisters':

"There [in the prison] we heard women's voices that called, "Sisters, sisters!" We thought at first that it was the voices of people who wanted to mock us, but Mrs Viviers said, "Miemie, the English have thrown us in jail, and there are surely more women here." Then we answered: "Sisters", and a whole lot of voices asked: "Sisters, where have you come from? What have you done?" We told them the whole story. They all called out: "Hurray for Nation and Fatherland! Be courageous and satisfied, sisters" (Els in Neethling 1938: 37)<sup>50</sup>

<sup>48</sup> "Dis vir ons vryheid dat ons ly. Ek het nooit gehoor dat die lyende moeders gesê het, dat die boere moet oorgee. Nee o nee."

<sup>49</sup> "... maar ik het gevoel: mag ons lieve Heer my net spaar nog veder tot beswil van my volk en Redding van ons siele en ons land..."

<sup>50</sup> "Daar hoor ons vrouestemme wat roep: "Susters, susters!" Ons dink eers dat dit die stemme was van mense wat met ons wou spot, maar mev. Vivier sê toe: "Miemie, die Engelse het vir ons in die tronk gegooi, en daar is selter meer vroue hier." Toe antwoord ons: "Susters", en 'n hele spul stemme vra: "Susters, vanwaar kom julle? Wat het julle gedoen?" Ons het hulle die hele geskiedenis vertel. Almal roep uit: "Hoera vir Volk en Vaderland!! Wees moedig en tevrede, susters." One of the women Els conversed with in this way was Hendrina Rabie-Van der Merwe, and so she is present indirectly in Els account, while Rabie-Van der

“Then the jail warder took us and locked us in and then Mrs. Beljon prayed and after the prayer we sang Psalm 146’s first verse, after we were finished singing we heard a woman call to us, sisters yes she said who are you, we are sister Beljon and girl Minnie Els aged 14 years, where are you from, from Brandfort camp ... O then they clapped their hands, then we heard how they prayed and cried” (Els 1944 WM 4128/29: 2)<sup>51</sup>

Els’ status as a nationalist figure is given much credibility here by the recognition and acknowledgement afforded her by other imprisoned (and by implication, politically-minded) Boer women, particularly given the repetitions of ‘sisters’ and the use of Els’ personal name. In Els’ earlier testimony, Mrs. Viviers is imprisoned and named with her, whereas in her later 1944 account no mention is made of Mrs. Viviers and instead it is Mrs. Beljon who is her fellow-prisoner, rather oddly described as ‘sister Beljon and girl Minnie Els’. In re/telling the tale, individuals and specificities are lost or changed over time apart from the centrality of Els herself, but the general meaning of the story remains clear and consistent. The scene Els describes in both of the above accounts conveys a sense of common suffering and patriotic camaraderie shared by the women prisoners, and positions Els herself as a key member of an in-group of stalwart Boer proto-nationalists. The second extract, in which stoical sisterly patriotism is expressed in prayer and psalm singing, once again underscores the Boer women’s moral authority and also connects with aspects of Afrikaner nationalism in which the *volk* hold an “apocalyptic vision of themselves as a chosen people” (Sparks 1990: 126).<sup>52</sup>

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Merwe specifically mentions Els’ name. Both women are focal points of their own stories but appear as bit-players in each other’s.

<sup>51</sup> “*toe neem die tronkbewaarder ons en gaan ons toe sluit: en toe mev. Beljon oor tot gebed en na die gebed sing ons Psalm 146 se eerste vers: na ons klaar gesing het: hoor ons ’n vrou roep na ons: syster ja se sy wie is julle ons is smster Beljon en dogter Minnie Els van 14 jaar: van waar kon julle: van Brandfort kump af ... O daar klop hulle hande: toe hoor ons hoe hulle bid en huil*”.

<sup>52</sup> See for instance Caughen 1997 on the Afrikaner myth of divine election.

### Contextualising: troubles travelling

The Brandfort protest is not isolated as an instance of Boer women in the camp system ‘causing trouble’ by defying the British authorities and expressing their discontent in a politically-charged way. In fact, throughout the camp system there were women who were branded ‘troublemakers’, who belligerently sought to disrupt camp life and cause as many difficulties to the authorities as possible, with Hendrina Rabie-Van der Merwe’s activities in this regard already discussed in Chapter Two. Often these women stirred up discontent and manufactured or exacerbated ill-feeling between camp inmates and officials, and were sent on from one camp to another more distant from their home region, acting as agent provocateurs and spreading unrest and conflict wherever they went. One example here is that at Heilbron a Mrs. Elizabeth Cronje was sent away from that camp in February 1902, “because she was insubordinate & a danger to the discipline of the Camp; on the morning she left she told the Asst Sup<sup>t</sup> dt that we could send her through h-ll [sic] & she would still come out a true Afrikander at the other end” (SRC 20/7630). Another example occurred in April 1902, when a major disturbance took place at Orange River Station camp, when a group of women who had been involved in some earlier trouble in another camp demanded the dismissal of the camp medical officer, Dr. King. When the women’s demands were not met, a group stormed the hospital and removed their sick children from the wards. One woman struck Dr. King in the face, and another verbally threatened the superintendent. This protest was quickly quashed, and the ‘ringleaders’ placed in the wired-in punishment enclosure before being transferred to Springfontein camp. Mrs. de Swardt, the woman who struck Dr. King in the face, was handed over to the Provost-Marshall for punishment (SRC 22/8270). Three of the other women involved in the protest, Mrs. H. Grobler, Mrs. A. De Kock and Mrs. A. Ross, were classed as ‘undesirables’ from Winburg camp, from whence they had been sent (SRC 22/8270).

It is puzzling that, although the disturbance at Orange River Station involved women engaging in activities at least equally militant to those described at Brandfort – the forcible removal of their children from hospital, the threatening of the superintendent, the assault of the doctor – this protest does not appear in any women's camp testimonies and has not taken on the politicised quality of the Brandfort protest.<sup>53</sup> The absence of testimonies of this event almost certainly relates to the context in which women's camp testimonies were produced, in which later-formed (proto-) nationalist networks orchestrated, published and distributed the testimonies of women tied into particular networks for political purposes. These networks actively solicited women's testimonies for publication, so that women outside of such networks or who had different political affiliations were considerably less likely to have had their testimonies encouraged into the public domain.<sup>54</sup> Also, some of these networks in the making were initially 'taken up' and their testimonies given prominence by key cultural entrepreneurs like Hobhouse and Mrs. Neethling, and this may well have cast the dye concerning which testimonies were 'heard', which incidents were re/told, and thus what came to be seen as 'the facts' and 'the history'. The absence of testimonies about the Orange River Station incident suggests that some of the key women who participated in the events of that day perhaps died before they were able to write up their experiences,<sup>55</sup> or perhaps were not part of the 'right' networks that would have encouraged their testimonies from the oral into the public sphere and the written word.

The ringleaders of the Brandfort protest, Maria Els, Mrs. Van Tonder, Mrs. Van Biljoen and Isabella Viviers, were women who, far from being silent victims or 'suffering

<sup>53</sup> Indeed, apart from the testimony by Mrs. Commandant A.J. De Kock in *War Without Glamour* (Hobhouse 1927: 20-22), none of the women's testimonies in any of the main collections relate to the camp at Orange River Station.

<sup>54</sup> Nationalist networks divided between groups who were more or less hard-line and also between the Transvaal and the Orange Free State.

<sup>55</sup> Mrs. de Swart, the woman who struck the doctor at Orange River Station, later died following childbirth (SRC 86).

mothers' in the camp system, loudly, repeatedly and sometimes violently gave expression to their political opinions. However, disentangling the 'real protest' from women's representations of it is now impossible. While Els' motives may indeed have been entirely political – to unite the camp women in a wave of patriotic pro-Boer fervour and thus make a political point to camp officials – it seems unlikely that the majority of camp women shared this political zeal. Worn out by the hardships of camp life and the daily realities of sickness and death, to say nothing of the deep rifts within the camp between women whose male relatives were still on commando and those who had taken the Oath of Neutrality or the Oath of Allegiance to the British, ordinary Boer women were not likely to have staged a political event of the sort described by Venter or Lombard.

#### **Contextualising: 'at the time' events**

Although the Brandfort protest can now be discerned only through Boer women's retrospective testimonies, which indeed have as post/memory 'replaced' the event itself, the incident can to an extent be re-historicised and contextualised by examining some 'at the time' events which were likely to have influenced its course and subsequent representation. There are two key events that occurred prior to the protest highly likely to have influenced both the events that followed, and how these were subsequently depicted. Firstly, in contextualising the Brandfort protest itself, it is important to consider the numbers of deaths that occurred in the camp in the months prior to the unrest:

Table 2: Mortality in Brandfort camp, June – October 1901

Month (1901)	Camp Population	Number of Deaths	Death rate <sup>56</sup>
June	1815	11	73
July	1865	13	84
August	3404	22	77
September	3867	138	428
October	3555	337	1256

(Compiled from Hobhouse 1902: 341-342)<sup>57</sup>

The sudden and huge increase in the death rate in September and October represented the peak of the measles epidemic in this camp, which then diminished in the subsequent months with a drop to 158 deaths in November, and by March 1902 the number of deaths had decreased to 24. For the women living through these circumstances, this devastating epidemic and the accompanying loss of life on such a scale must have seemed frightening and inexplicable, as indeed it did to many of the doctors and officials who attempted to battle the epidemics and their effects. Unsure of what or who was to blame for the dramatic numbers of deaths occurring in this concentrated way around them, at the very least Boer women would have felt overwhelmed by their circumstances, and the protest in November would undoubtedly have related, at least in part, to the extremely high death rate of October, even if this link is not made explicit in the testimonies. However, representations of the protest move well away from any ‘originating events’ concerning the epidemics and their consequences, and instead present the women’s motivations and actions during the protest as primarily political, with claims about the deficiency of meat and the generalised ‘starvation’ subordinate to this.

The second key contextualising event that occurred prior to the protest was the visit of the Ladies Commission to Brandfort camp on 29 October 1901, only ten days before the protest. The Commission instituted extensive, far-reaching changes in the camp, and it is

<sup>56</sup> Death rate is per 1000 per annum.

<sup>57</sup> Hobhouse compiled her statistics from the official parliamentary papers or ‘Blue Books’.

likely that everyone in the camp would have been aware of these changes and felt their effects, even if they were uncertain about precisely who had instituted the alterations or why. The Commission's main criticisms of Brandfort camp centred on the hospital, which they condemned as utterly unsatisfactory, and its report noted: "The nursing is totally inadequate, and hens saunter into the hospital marquees freely, with results which might be expected" (Concentration Camps Commission 1902: 81). They recommended the dismissal of Dr. Polson on the grounds that he had discharged several patients with temperatures – one had died as a result – and that he had been taking medical comforts (mainly brandy and fortified wine) intended for the camp sick for use in his own house. The Commission also immediately ordered boilers for the establishment of a soup kitchen, and arranged for the distribution of milk to children aged three and under to begin with immediate effect, "in view of the alarming mortality and weakly condition of the children of the camp" (Concentration Camps Commission 1902: 81).

On the specific matter of meat rations at Brandfort, the following observations were made: "Meat is issued daily from 6 to 8 a.m. The butchery shelter is extremely clean and well-kept. There has been the usual trouble about thin meat" (Concentration Camps Commission 1902: 80). This mention of the 'usual trouble' about thin meat related to the "much grumbling" about the lean meat rations that the Commission encountered at several other camps (Concentration Camps Commission 1902: 116).<sup>58</sup> At Bloemfontein, for instance, they described how "camp people showed their discontent with the meat by throwing large portions ... into the wide roadway of the camp", which the Commission regarded as "a wicked waste" (Concentration Camps Commission 1902: 40). They also

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<sup>58</sup> Camps at which the Commission made specific note of such complaints included Bloemfontein, Irene, Krugersdorp, Vredefort Road and Winburg. In most instances the Commission observed that if the fresh meat was considered by the camp officials to be too 'thin', inhabitants were issued with an extra weight of meat, or the fresh meat was substituted with tinned meat. There was an overall shortage of meat because of wartime pressures, and the animals slaughtered in the camps were often from captured stock that had been driven across many miles, resulting in their leanness.

pointed out that the rations were clearly adequate if people would destroy this quantity of meat. It seems that it was in fact the quality of the meat that was objected to, an objection only people adequately fed at a basic level can afford.

Although the Ladies Commission's visit occurred a mere ten days before the protest and had a significant, indeed major, effect on Brandfort camp (the reorganisation of the hospital, the dismissal of Dr. Polson, the initiation of the feeding scheme), it is not mentioned in any of the eight women's testimonies of the protest. Thus while Mrs. Le Clus notes that there were improvements in rations and mentions the scheme to distribute milk to young children, she ascribes these changes to the protesting women, and she makes no reference to the Commission but quite specifically attributes the improvements to the protest: "The result [of the demonstration] was good, because from that time everyone in camp got better meat and with the other rations sometimes a few onions or potatoes, rice and bottles of condensed milk for the small children" (Le Clus 1920: 64).<sup>59</sup>

The absence of any mention in women's testimonies of the Ladies Commission is in some respects unsurprising. Firstly, many Boer women were probably unaware at the time of the specificities of the Commission and its remit, although presumably the details of this would later have become more widely known. However and secondly, representing the protest as an overtly political one made for a considerably 'better story' than one in which a group of English women visited the camp and efficiently instituted favourable, humanitarian changes. Thirdly and relatedly, from even before the final composition of the Commission's membership was known, its existence was highly politicised and seen as

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<sup>59</sup> "Die uitwerking was goed, want van die tyd kry almal in die kamp beter vleis en by die ander rantsoene soms 'n weinig uie en ertappels, rys en bottels aangemaakte melk vir die klein kindertjies." As a 'grandee' woman, Mrs. Le Clus was well connected and would have known about the Ladies Commission visit and its significance.

oppositional to Boer interests.<sup>60</sup> In the testimonies, the protest is depicted as something larger and inherently political concerning Boer women's indignation at treatment they perceived to be at odds with their 'superior' racial and gender position, although this is only made explicit in Mrs. Lombard's account when she states that the women "asked him [the superintendent] if this was meat he issued to decent white women?" (A119/74: 7).<sup>61</sup> A similar comment is found in Mrs. Neethling's *Should We Forget?*, about the camp diet being "unsuitable for delicate women and children" (Neethling 1903: 79), with this symbolising more generally "how inappropriate British treatment of Boer women was", implicitly because, as Stanley points out, for Mrs. Neethling and others, "Boers were white and thus 'refined' rather than uncivilised" (Stanley 2002c: 114).

What the Ladies Commission *Report* suggests is that Brandfort camp in late October was in a state of disorganisation and that the appalling epidemic that had raged through the camp during that month had not been adequately grappled with by the camp administration. At the same time, the Commission's comments about 'thin meat' and the widespread and vociferous complaints about this from Boer women suggest that across the camp system women expressed their more general dissatisfaction with camp life by focusing on the lean meat rations, not least because of the strong symbolic role of meat, indeed fat meat, in notions of Boer identity. By the time the protest came to be represented in women's testimonies, this expression of dissatisfaction had taken on a more explicitly proto-nationalist dimension, with the accounts depicting the incident as a political one in which Boer women united behind their flags and *volkliede* as an assertion of independence and patriotism, with the contextualising events relating to the epidemics and the

<sup>60</sup> See A13, A64 (Free State Archives Depot) and also BC 28 (University of Cape Town) for information on responses to the appointment of the Ladies Commission by local relief committees in South Africa at the time, including the Dutch Ladies Committee.

<sup>61</sup> "van horn of dit vleis is wat hy vir fatsoenlike wit vrouens laat uitdeel?"

reorganisation of the camp by the Ladies Commission replaced by the heroic patriotic Boer women standing up for *volk en vryheid* as the agents of beneficial change.

### Universalising the tale: producing 'the history'

As part of stripping the temporal and historical specificities from this event, and its generalising in symbolic and mythic terms, the tale of the Brandfort protest has been told as one about other camps, where no such events are documented in any official sources. The processes of post/memory were at work from the moment this event was first represented by Els in her overtly political testimony of 1903, so that the story of the Brandfort protest and what it came to signify – Boer women's defiant rejection of British authority and proud assertion of their independence – eventually become generalised and severed from the originating events. As the story of the protest was re/told, the specific events in question came to be "cast as generally occurring incidents rather than one-off occasions, and they then entered general currency concerning what happened during the war" (Stanley and Dampier 2005: 96). Thus there are other extant testimonies in which 'meat protests' highly similar to that which occurred at Brandfort are described, one of them in the post-hoc 'diary' of Susara Roos, a young Boer woman who worked as a probationer nursing assistant in Bethulie camp:

"So one morning the meat was again inedible. I was just in front of the hospital and then saw a gathering of women proceeding to the camp commandant's tent the dr was also there and he is the man who had the say, he investigated the meat, and found it first class, ever-cheeky he came out, and gave the report But it was too good for words. before he was finished speaking, the first woman was finished. hit him with a thin shoulder [of meat] next to his cheek and then a second, and third, he ran to his tent not far from there, the women followed, and they threw the meat inside his tent. That was the last day of his reign he left the same night away, away, for ever away"<sup>62</sup> (Roos WM 6455/1: 9)

<sup>62</sup> "So was die vlys een more weer bemede eetbaar. Ek was net voor die Hospt en sien toe 'n op tog vroue na die kamp Kommandant se tent die Dr was ook daar en hy is mos die man wat die sê het, hy het die vlys ondersoek, en dit eerste klas gevind, hy kom ewe parmantig uit, en gee die uitslag Maar dit was te mooi vir woorde. voor dat hy klaar gepraat, Was die eerste vrou, klaar. slaat hom met, 'n maer blad langs die wang so

Roos' description of the crowd of protesting women attacking camp officials, in this case the doctor, with the meat they found so objectionable bears strong similarity to Mrs.

Lombard's testimony, with the man concerned also removed as the result of this woman's actions. Interestingly, the Ladies Commission Report on Bethulie camp, based on their 7 September 1901 visit mentions a Mrs. Roos, evidently the mother of Susara Roos, who voiced her complaints to the Commission about the meat ration received in camp:

"Mrs. Roos, mother of one of the nurses, was one of the most clamorous against the bad quality of the meat ration. She brought out some dried-up scraps which had evidently been exposed to a parching wind for several days. It was represented to her that if, instead of keeping it until it was little better than leather, she had made it at once into broth or stew she would have shown more practical capacity for making the best of things. The members of Mrs. Roos' family were receiving wages for work done in camp amounting to 17l. a month, so that she could easily have supplemented her rations if she had been so disposed" (Concentration Camps Commission 1902: 61)

Thus, while Susara Roos' post-war testimony represents a widespread collective protest as a response to the meat being 'inedible', and the women's actions resulting in an heroic triumph over the camp officials, the comments made at the time by the Commission indicate that the situation was more low key and also more complex than Roos' account implies. Firstly, the Commission stated in their Report that the whole of Bethulie village was very short of supplies and that, while the meat distributed in camp was indeed poor, it was impossible to obtain better in the whole area. Secondly, the military conditions and wartime deprivations that interfered with the supply and quality of meat at Bethulie are not alluded to Susara Roos' account, which strongly implies that the British were deliberately underfeeding Boer camp inhabitants and attempting to present the 'thin' meat as suitable food for Boers, whose ability to defend their 'rights' was underestimated by their enemy.

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*'n tweede, en derde, hy hardloop na sy tent nie ver van daan, die vrone agter na, en hulle gooi die vlyt tot hime sy tent. Dit was die laaste dag van sy regering hy is nog die selfde aond weg, weg, vir altyd weg.'*  
Although this document is archived as a diary, it is a retrospective, undated account written some time after the war. Roos' 'diary' and its hindsight qualities are discussed in Chapter Four.

Thirdly, if there had been any widespread protest, or even any marked degree of individual ‘troublemaking’ in advance of or during their visit to Bethulie, then the Commission’s weekly report or their overall Report of 1902 would have noted this, as they did ‘troublemaking’ of various kinds and arrangements (particularly sequestering in punishment camps or ‘bird-cages’) for punishing people elsewhere. What the Report comments on instead is a prominent and well-off individual, Mrs. Roos, making a vociferous and orchestrated protest. It is likely that Susara Roos’ post-hoc ‘diary’ therefore ‘forgot’ the specificities, and submerged those within the general parameters of women’s political protests, of which the events at Brandfort later became the mythologised archetype. And fourthly, Roos’ portrayal of a large group of women’s grievances suggests that she fully identified with the plight she proposes was at the basis of this and approved of their actions; while the relative affluence of her family and their likely ability to supplement their rations is absent from her version of these events. Indeed, her account of this incident re/works the events to make a political point about Boer women as defiant *volk* heroes who took on the British authorities and triumphed. Overall, then, Roos’ testimony about Bethulie resonates strongly with women’s testimonies about the protest at Brandfort, and its similarity in content and tone points to the canonisation or mythologising of this incident across women’s testimonies as a general one that ‘fitted’ events that occurred in many places, revealing or rather articulating the ‘real’ meaning of these.

Repetition of the camp meat protest story occurred in 1944 and then again in 1982, with many key features of the earlier narratives repeated in these later accounts. The 1944 account appears in D.H. Van Zyl’s In Die Konsentrasiekamp: Jeugherinneringe [In the Concentration Camp: Youth Reminiscences], and is set in Aliwal-North camp:

“The next day the camp was in chaos ... The main street was packed, and then all went singing and waving the slimy meat to the camp commandant’s tent. Angrily this mule-stupid venerable officer began to abuse the women. ‘If they are not satisfied with the food that Her Majesty’s troops themselves must eat, they can do

without it!" "Then rather without it and you under it", it sounded. In the blink of an eye the decaying meat rained down on the unfortunate official. Those who did not throw [meat], walked around him and mauled him with a mutton shoulder, leg or rib. A few of the ringleaders were arrested and taken to the 'wired in camp'. The uprising was not without consequences and better food did not stay away for long" (Van Zyl 1944: 23-24)<sup>63</sup>

In Van Zyl's account, as in those by Lombard and Roos, 'the women' are by implication a group of some size, the members of which physically assault the camp officials with cuts of meat, and the consequences here too are favourable for the protestors, with the women defeating the authorities and with improvements to the food rations directly resulting from their actions. Van Zyl also makes reference to the arrest of ringleaders, in keeping with earlier accounts of the Brandfort protest that comment on the arrest of Els and Viviers. Unlike at Brandfort and Bethulie, there is no direct or even circumstantial evidence other than that contained in Van Zyl's resolutely nationalist tale to indicate a protest of this kind having actually occurred at Aliwal-North; but certainly there are strong similarities in his representations of these events with those concerning Brandfort and Bethulie, which underscore the mythical, rehearsed aspects of this tale.

In M.C.E. Van Schoor's 1982 Kampkinders 1900 – 1902: "n Gedenkboek [Camp Children 1900 – 1902: A Book of Remembrance], two of the short reminiscences it contains relate to meat protests. One of these concerns Belfast camp, where *Ouma* [Grandmother] Johanna van Aardt reportedly incited a rebellion against the poor meat rations in which "the commandant was almost torn to pieces by furious women", with the result that "[t]he meat immediately improved and the old mother was even offered a

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<sup>63</sup> "Die volgende dag was die hele kamp in rep en roer. In die hoofstraat pak dit saam, en dan al singende en die slymvleis swaaiende na die kampkommandant se tent. Boos het ook hierdie botmouillige hoogwaardigheidsbekleders begin skel op die vroue. 'As hulle nie met die kos tevrede is wat Haar Majesteit se troepe self moet eet nie, kan hulle daarsonder bly!' 'Dan liever daarsonder en jy daarsonder,' het dit geklink. In 'n oogopslag het die onthindende vleis op die opgelukkige amptenaar gereën. Dié wat nie gegooi het nie, het hom bygeloop en met 'n slaapblad, boud of rib, toegetakel. 'n Paar van die leidsters is gearresteer en na die 'drankkamp' vervoer. Die opstootjies is nie sonder gevolg nie en beter voedsel het die kamp omgeby nie."

supplementary ration” (Mrs. J. van Aardt in Van Schoor 1982: 13).<sup>64</sup> In the same collection, I.W. de Jager describes an incident that occurred during the journey to a camp: “When the *handsopper* gave my mother a shoulder of meat with a ‘smell’, my mother screamed: ‘They are giving us rotten meat.’ She then hit the man with the meat and the other women followed her example” (I.W. de Jager in Van Schoor 1982: 18).<sup>65</sup> Here too angry Boer women beat camp officials with joints of meat and triumph over the cowed British authorities. As with the accounts by Roos and Van Zyl, the key elements are almost certainly drawn from the Brandfort events and are repeated well away from the original circumstances.

The central message of the Brandfort protest testimonies, as well as the more generalised accounts by Roos, Van Zyl and others, is a political one that stresses that Boer/Afrikaner women have always been a political force to be reckoned with. The Brandfort testimonies must be understood as part of what became over time a deliberately orchestrated proto-nationalist and then nationalist campaign to ‘remember’, in order to re/create ‘the history’ of the Afrikaner nation.<sup>66</sup> This call to remember for political purposes began immediately post-war, as evinced for example in Mrs. Neethling’s closing valedictory remark in Should We Forget?: “Above all we realise that we, Afrikanders of the Republics and the Colonies from the Cape to the Zambesi, are to-day, more than we ever were before, One People” (Neethling 1903:128). The constructed post/memory of the Brandfort protest, certainly up to 1944, was repeatedly re-made and re-produced in the public domain of Afrikaner ‘cultural’ and political organisations and emphasised Boer women as active political agents. This contrasts sharply with the *volksmoeder* or ‘mother

<sup>64</sup> “die kommandant is byna nitmekbaar gepluk deur die woedende vroue”, “Die vleis het onmiddellik verbeter en aan die grootmoeder is selfs ‘n bykomende rantsoen nitgereik.”

<sup>65</sup> “Toe die handsopper vir my ma ‘n blad met ‘n ‘reukie’ gee, skree my ma: ‘Hulle gee vir ons vrot vleis.’ Sy slaan die man toe met die vleis en die ander vrouens volg haar voorbeeld.”

<sup>66</sup> The titles of many camp accounts and collections of testimonies echo and respond to the call to remember, with Should We Forget?, Vergeet?, Mag Ons Vergeet?, and Onthou! In Die Skaduwee Van Die Galg providing some examples of this.

of the nation' image of Afrikaner womanhood developed by Elsabé Brink and others, who stress that post-1902 Afrikaner women were seen and saw themselves primarily as suffering, stoical mothers (Brink 1990, Kruger 1991, Du Toit 1996, Van der Watt 1998). The disruptive activities at the time of the war by some women in the camps, the highly nationalist 1930s and 1940s accounts by Raal and Rabie-Van der Merwe discussed in Chapter Two, and the keenly politicised testimonies of the Brandfort protest from 1903 onwards, more than problematise the *volksmoeder* interpretation of women's role during this period. Given that the Brandfort testimonies were produced at the very time that Afrikaner women were supposedly fulfilling their idealised and domestic role as *volksmoeders*, it is surely necessary to reconsider and reconceptualise the role of women within the Afrikaner nationalist project, recognising they were agents within and not just recipients of this.

The evidence of women's published and unpublished testimonies suggests that women were the primary agitators behind much proto-nationalism during and immediately the war, and then in the development of a more cohesive nationalist ideology. However, the agentic and central role played by women in this regard continues to be overlooked. Giliomee's 2003 *The Afrikaner: Biography of a People*, notes that at the time of the South African War Boer women were well known for their staunch Republicanism, and cites a comment made by a British visitor to South African during the war who remarked, "It was the *vrouw* [woman] who kept the war going on so long. It was in her heart that patriotism flamed into an all-consuming heat, forgiving nothing and forgetting nothing" (Giliomee 2003: 256); however, Giliomee completely fails to explore the possible effects of this on the subsequent growth of Afrikaner (proto-) nationalism. The important role of women's camp testimonies and personal accounts in both the growth of the Second Language Movement and the development of nationalist ideologies about the suffering yet finally

triumphant *volk* are left unremarked. The role of women in the prelude to and aftermath of the 1914 Rebellion, and the growth of nationalist structures in the form of the Women's National Parties that resulted from this, are not addressed either. Active, outspoken and influential proto-nationalist women such as Mrs. Neethling or Johanna Brandt-Van Warmelo are not even mentioned. A review of *The Afrikaners* by Afrikaans theologian Christina Landman berates the absence of women from Giliomee's analysis, and points out that when women do appear it is only in stereotypical roles: "Barefoot over the Drakensberg, in the concentration camps, and when they got the vote to help out-vote the Coloureds. That's presumably where the women were ... But beyond you can discern nothing that happened with women in South Africa in the last 300 years" (Landman 2003).<sup>67</sup>

However, there are signs that at least some commentators have begun to take account of the agentic role of women in the growth of Afrikaner nationalism.<sup>68</sup> Helen Bradford argues that while nineteenth century republicanism and Boer proto-nationalism gendered the *volk* as male, after the 1899-1902 war, in which many Boer men surrendered or 'joined', "women ... gatecrashed into a homosocial *volk*" (Bradford 2000: 207). As such, Bradford continues, "The Anglo-Boer war was the single most significant event fuelling not merely Afrikaner nationalism, but a regendered Afrikaner nationalism, transferring its weight from its (weak) male to its (strong) female leg" (Bradford 2000: 207). Louise Vincent has explored aspects of this 'strong female leg' in her examination of the Women's National Parties as 'the power behind the scenes', and contextualises their origins: "With the Rebellion quashed and rebel leaders jailed, Afrikaner women were called to action in cities and towns around the country ... petitions were drawn up, protest

<sup>67</sup> "Kaalvoet oor die Drakens-berge, in die konsentrasiekampe, en wanneer hulle die stemreg kry om die Kleurlinge te help uitstem. Dis glo waar die vroue was ... Maar verder kan jy nie 'n daai snars agterkom wat met vroue in Suid-Afrika gebeur het die afgelope 300 jaar nie."

<sup>68</sup> There are some indications too of a retheorising of white and Afrikaner masculinities in South Africa. See for example Du Pisani 2004 and Epstein 1997.

meetings held and representatives chosen. A direct result of all this activity was the founding in the Transvaal of the *Vroue Nasionale Party* (Women's National Party) more than a decade before white South African women were enfranchised" (Vincent 1999: 55). The vigorous and significant political work done by women in the development of Afrikaner nationalism as outlined by Bradford and Vincent, as well as women's representations of their roles in the Brandfort protest as political and agentic, shows up the invisibility of women from 'malestream' analyses of Afrikaner nationalism as historically inadequate, clearly demonstrating also the inadequacy of subsuming women's activities under the *volksmoeder* rubric. A radical revision of women's participation in the Afrikaner (proto-) nationalist enterprise is required, and is something I intend to take up in future research.

### Post/Memory and the Brandfort Protest Retellings

Ricoeur has commented that "As soon as a story is well known – and such is the case with most traditional and popular narratives, as well as the founding events of a given community – retelling takes the place of telling" (Ricoeur 1991: 110). The Brandfort story is exemplary as a 'popular narrative' wherein retelling has taken the place of telling. It is, as I have indicated, one of several noteworthy or iconic incidents that recur across women's camp testimonies; the repetition of this story is one example of a pattern evident in women's camp accounts, which frequently testify to identical incidents, repeat the same accusations, share formulaic narrative schemes and replicate stock phrases. The content of these repeated incidents, while important and revealing about what was regarded as meaningful or significant for the construction of a useable nationalist past, is perhaps less significant than the pattern of remembering, reinterpretation, repetition, retelling and rewriting itself, which reflects the orchestrated, organised, (proto-) nationalist provenance

of women's camp testimonies. The content and form of women's camp accounts more generally are in many ways mirrored in the telling and re/telling of the Brandfort protest: many of the camp narratives show a similar preoccupation with the absence of meat, contain accusations about vitriol in rations, express the view that camp inmates were routinely starved to death, and generally make political capital of the events of the war and the camps.

Accounts of the Brandfort protest suggest the crucial importance of stories and narratives for articulating ideological and political interests and convictions. Flood emphasises that myths are a key way in which political narratives find expression, and are "narratives of the past ... which their tellers seek to make intelligible and meaningful to their audiences" (Flood 2002: 41). In this instance, narratives of the Brandfort protest sought to make meaning of the events related by stressing the camp authorities as morally 'bad' (by depicting them in a range of negative ways, as incompetent, unreasonable, uncaring, authoritarian or cowardly), and Boer women as morally 'good' as well as heroic political agents. This meaning would have presumably resounded in specific ways in the particular contexts of retelling of each version of the tale, according to the then-current notions of (proto-) nationalism being expounded. However, there is a prevalence in nationalist discourse generally of dichotomised moral orders such as that represented in these testimonies, and Kerby's comments about the role of narratives in this regard are pertinent: "Narratives are clearly a primary vehicle of ideologies, both nationally and on the level of the individual – the ideologies we inherit and those we fabricate in our conversations with ourselves and others – and they are a powerful force in providing a delimited world where good is good and bad is bad" (Kerby 1991: 63).

The production of the Brandfort testimonies as political myth raises questions about myth-making and memory-making in women's war and camp testimonies more generally

that do not always have ready answers. On the role of myth-makers, Flood contends that “The mythmaker identifies himself or herself as the representative of the group and the interpreter of its interests. The story is told in order to convey a practical argument which will lead the group to behave in a way that the mythmaker believes is necessary for its well-being” (Flood 2002: 53). There is clear evidence that Maria Els’ first published testimony was solicited by Mrs. Neethling, and it seems probable that her 1903 testimony was obtained by Hobhouse in a similar manner. In addition, and as I shall show in detail in Chapter Six, the translation of Els’ first published testimony by Mrs. Neethling for *Vergeeten?* (1917) shows strong signs of radical reworking and change, including the insertion of the recurrent ‘I, Maria Els’ phrase not present in the original. Thus, while Els is at the centre of the Brandfort protest story and its retellings, and appears in some respects as a myth-maker as ‘representative of the group and the interpreter of its interests’, this is at least partly the work of cultural entrepreneurs (in this instance Mrs. Neethling in particular). It is in fact the key cultural entrepreneurs who are the primary myth-makers, and who controlled and shaped the representation of Maria Els and the Brandfort story, and acted in a similar way regarding women’s testimonies more generally.

Tracing the retelling of the Brandfort protest over time sheds considerable light on the post/memory processes that characterise the production of women’s camp testimonies more widely. I have indicated how even the first account of the Brandfort protest written in 1903 by Maria Els departed considerably from the originating events, instead representing the incident as a more political one in which Boer women defended their freedom and independence. Thus, the moment that stories began to be told about the events at Brandfort, “post/memory and ‘memory itself’ overlap and cannot easily be prised apart” (Stanley 2005a, in press), with this overlaying of memory by post/memory paralleled by the overlaying of events by stories and myths. However, once this mythologised account of

the protest had been told, it did not remain entirely static but was retold many times over, with each teller adding twists and embellishments although maintaining and reproducing the overall (proto-) nationalist meaning from the story and structuring it “according to known conventions” (Tonkin 1990: 34). Over time, depictions of the protest moved further and further from ‘the events’, portraying the women’s actions as increasingly heroic, the officials as increasingly defeated, and the meaning of the incident as stronger evidence of Boer women’s rejection of their wartime treatment and their active and stalwart patriotic involvement in opposing this. The testimonies re/worked the originating events relating to wartime shortages into a more sinister plot by the British to starve the Boer people; and an increasingly triumphalist tone prevailed, with Boer women emerging as (proto-) nationalist heroes of the *volk*.

Overall, however, the stories and their retelling are marked by a relative lack of change over time with post/memory ‘immediately’ present in 1903, and temporality and change thereafter both central and yet curiously ‘flat’. Unlike ‘ordinary memory’, which is usually strongly marked by the passing of time and temporal distinctions between past and present, post/memory suspends temporality, and as shown in the Brandfort testimonies, in a sense removes time, with 1903 and 1949 conflated. This absence of change over time or acknowledgement of time’s passing, commented on in relation to Onthou! and returned to later in the thesis, is a curious and yet distinctive feature of post/memory.

I have shown how the Brandfort stories were re/told and re/read beyond the original teller, until aspects of them became reproduced and absorbed as actual ‘memory’, even by those women who had not necessarily participated in the specific ‘remembered’ incident. The meanings of these rehearsed, repeated, ritualised and powerfully symbolic stories became ‘agreed’ over time as they were repeated, and it is these ritualised stories, rather than the messy realities of private, individual experience, that are represented in women’s

camp testimonies. Summerfield's account of the cultural approach to history is pertinent to the retelling of the Brandfort story, as it points up the way in which 'story' can be seen to superimpose 'events' to the extent that they merge into one: "[the cultural approach to history] suggested that prevailing discursive constructions of the past 'contaminate' memory, in the sense that they overlay it with later accounts and interpretations of the period of history to which a memory relates, to such an extent that it is impossible for anyone to remember what they did and what they thought at the time independently of this 'patina of historical postscripts and rewritings'" (Summerfield 2004: 66). In the South African case, where this 'patina of historical postscripts and rewritings' was actively orchestrated and produced as part of proto-nationalism, such 'discursive constructions of the past' overlay 'the past' and 'memory' in ways that, like the retellings of the Brandfort protest, are difficult to disentangle.

As I have already indicated, the displacement of 'events' by 'accounts' mirrors the displacement of 'memory' by 'post/memory' in key ways, and helps to elucidate the contours of post/memory itself. Post/memory occurs both 'all at once', but also changes to some degree over time, according to the context in which it is produced and received. While 'the events' are specific and individual, post/memory is generalised, extrapolated and motivated – it is produced by imaginative investment. Ricoeur's insistence on the shared narrative structures of history and story is useful in thinking about the retelling of the Brandfort protest, where 'story' and 'history' in a sense converge: while the Brandfort stories display the attributes of political myth they have been treated as 'history' and 'the facts' about the Afrikaner past. However, historicising and contextualising representations of the Brandfort protest indicates women's camp testimonies are not referential 'memory itself' of a specific event in a specific context, but rather post/memory about the camps as re/worked, retrospective, generalised, dehistoricised and proto-nationalist. Samuel and

Thompson comment that, in myths, where ‘fact’ and ‘memory’, or ‘events’ and ‘story’ most diverge is precisely where “imaginative investment breaks in” (Samuel and Thompson 1990: 7). The gap between ‘the events’, which seemingly concerned dissatisfaction about meat rations as well as women’s more general distress about high death rates and so on, and the later mythologised stories, which concern the moral distinctions between the camp authorities and Boer women, and the latter’s defiance and political heroism, indicates clearly where the ‘imaginative investment’ of post/memory has intervened. In the following chapter I make use of Boer women’s ‘at time’ camp writings – primarily letters and diaries – to explore further these questions concerning temporality and referentiality, and also to consider the extent to which assumed temporal immediacy has interacted with post/memory in these earlier writings, which are presumed to be ‘uncontaminated’ by the later ‘patina of historical postscripts and rewritings’.

## Chapter Four

### Writing 'Within the Whirlwind'?<sup>1</sup> Camp Letters and Diaries

"Letters are always 'in the present tense', not literally in terms of verb tenses but by being written at a particular point in time which influences their content, even if not explicitly [...] Letters thereby share some of the temporal complexities of photographs; they not only hold memory but also always represent the moment of their production, and have a similar 'flies in amber' quality" (Stanley 2004b: 208)

"Not only in space does the diary point-of-view assert its focal position, but also in time. Every diary entry declares, 'I am Here, and it is exactly Now'" (Fothergill 1974: 9)

This chapter examines Boer women's writings produced at the time and in the context of the South Africa War, or at least those which represent themselves as such. If the post-hoc testimonies and hindsight nationalist accounts such as Rabie-Van der Merwe's 1940 Onthou! exemplify the processes of post/memory in their retrospective re/working of originating events, what of personal letters and diaries written at the time of the war and in the camps? Are these similar or different, in what regards and to what extent? A popular assumption about letters and diaries, with their supposed qualities of immediacy around the 'moment of writing' and daily-ness concerning the temporal location and spacing of 'entries', is that these documents are 'truer' or more 'authentic' reflections of the experiences and memories of the writer than retrospective writing benefiting from hindsight. This is because of the particular location of letters and diaries in time and space. Therefore, in critically re-reading Boer women's letters and diaries, I consider the ways in which these texts are positioned by their writers and some readers in relation to both time and space, and questions of referentiality that relate to this.

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<sup>1</sup> "Because the diarists wrote from within the whirlwind, the degree of authenticity in their accounts is perceived by readers to be stronger than that of the texts shaped through hindsight" (Young 1988: 25).

Using detailed examples from Boer women's unpublished letters and published and unpublished diaries, I shall assess whether and in what ways these 'at the time' forms of writing are distinctive and thus offer alternative views to those presented by 'the history' as expounded by the (proto-) nationalist inspired testimonies. In discussing this, I shall contrast letters and diaries as forms of personal writing with each other and also with the post-war testimonies,<sup>2</sup> especially with regard to their status as historical documents which directly 'refer', in the sense of 'recording memory' of 'the events' and thereby seemingly providing readers with a glimpse of 'what really happened'. In relation to this, I shall consider the extent to which letters and diaries written by Boer women while actually in the camps bear out the argument that all memory is in a sense post/memory, always in an uncertain, changeable relationship with originating events.

In the first part of this chapter, I examine ways in which camp letters are demonstrably different from the post-war testimonies, both in their 'present tense' purchase on time and space and concerning the disparities in subject-matter and tone connected with this. The second part of the chapter considers camp diaries and begins with an analysis of Bettie Venter's so-called camp 'diary', the provenance and 'authenticity' of which are shown to be problematic. This is then contrasted with an example of a 'real' diary kept at the time, and the question of what constitutes a 'real' diary is considered in relation to this example. Turning to documents that appear to be diaries kept in camps at the time of the war, I then discuss the layers of re/writing which can sometimes be glimpsed at the back of these diaries and contemplate the implications for reading these documents as diaries written at the time, when they were more likely produced in the same (proto-) nationalist context as many of the post-

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<sup>2</sup> The post-war testimonies referred to in this chapter are primarily those collected in Hobhouse 1927, Neethling 1938 and Postma 1939, but also include the individual testimonies by Le Clus 1920, Raal 1938 and Rabie-Van der Merwe 1940.

hoc testimonies. Finally, my discussion then focuses in detail on Tant' Alie of the Transvaal: Her Diary (Hobhouse 1923b) as an exemplar of the complex and often uncertain temporal dimensions of Boer women's diaries, to contemplate whether or not these documents can be regarded as diaries or whether they are closer to the post-war testimonies, and reflect on the problems relating to referentiality that pertain to this.

### Thinking about Letters

A letter may be defined as a written, often dated communication from one or more sender(s) to one or more recipient(s).<sup>3</sup> Letters may take a number of different forms and a single letter could take several of these forms at the same time, with these including but not limited to notes, bills, postcards, greeting cards, personal letters, business letters, letters to the editor, testimonials, petitions, open letters and so forth. Letters may also contain or even slide into other forms such as diaries or poems. Stanley usefully delineates three conceptual features of letters: letters are "dialogical", in the sense that they are "not one person writing or speaking about their life, but a communication or exchange between one person and another or others" (Stanley 2004b: 202, original emphasis). Secondly, "the structure and content [of letters] changes according to the particular recipient and the passing of time", and they are thus "perspectival" (Stanley 2004b: 202-203, original emphasis). Time and its passing are central to the way in which letters are written and read, a theme I shall return to later. Thirdly, letters are "emergent", in the sense that "they have their own preoccupations and conventions ... [which] are likely to change according to particular correspondences and their development over time" (Stanley 2004b: 203, original emphasis).

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<sup>3</sup> The following usefully discuss letters and letter-writing: Altman 1982, Barton and Hall 2000, Brodhead 1993, Decker 1998, Earle 1999, Gilroy and Verhoeven, Jolly 1995, Montefiore and Hallet 2002, Rappaport 2004 and Stanley 2004b.

Ken Plummer has pointed out that “Letters remain a relatively rare document of life in the social sciences”, and that this limited use of letters in research is paralleled by a scarcity of theoretical scholarship on the letter as a ‘document of life’ (Plummer 2001: 52). Plummer’s remarks are echoed by Erika Rappaport, who has observed in relation to colonial India that “Personal letters are an especially fruitful and yet under-theorised source” (Rappaport 2004: 235). However, there are signs that increasingly “the letter is now recognised as occupying a respectable position in the study of the past” (Earle 1999: 10). Until recently when letters were used in historical or social research, they were read for their “informational content” rather than their “performative, fictive, and textual dimensions” (Decker 1998: 4). When letters have been used as historical sources, they have generally been treated as repositories of ‘facts’ about the life and times of letter-writers and recipients, and it is only lately that the assumption of “a straightforwardly referential relationship between letters and lives” has been questioned (Stanley 2004b: 27). There is now a growing acceptance that “letters do not really provide transparent access to history” (Decker 1998: 9), and a clear trend towards analysing the textual and narrative aspects of letters. Questions about the dimensions of time and space in letters, their dual nature as both public and private, the construction of epistolary relationships and narrative devices in letters as a genre of life-writing, have all replaced the tendency to treat letters as strictly factual, referential documents.

This more recent theorising of letters has also emphasised the apparently fixed temporal location of letters in the writing moment, or what Decker calls “the letter genre’s continuous present tense” (Decker 1998: 5). Letters represent the writing moment in that they crystallise the writer’s present time and space as the letter takes form, and for this reason Stanley has likened letters to photographs, arguing that they have a “similar ‘flies in amber’

quality” (Stanley 2004b: 208). Crucially, camp letters are differently situated in time and space than later forms of camp testimony, or even, as later discussion suggests, camp diaries. Written during the war and in the ‘present tense’ context of camp life, their provenance and their temporal location and specificity is more certain, that is, more certain by the externalist criteria of envelopes and dated franks on postage stamps. Relatedly, they display a sense of the moment, an everydayness, a looseness and individuality of both structure and subject-matter, that is largely absent from women’s testimonies, which I have argued in the previous chapter are retrospectively re/worked accounts written up after the war and produced for very different communicative purposes.

In considering Boer women’s camp letters, I shall point up the distinctiveness of the letters as documents of the time, as compared to the testimonies examined in Chapters Two and Three. The letters, unlike the later testimonies and many of the camp diaries discussed later in this chapter, are more demonstrably ‘of the time’ and ‘in the space’ of camp life, and this is evinced in a number of key ways which I shall sketch out. However, I begin by examining how and when Boer women wrote camp letters and the whys and wherefores they present as to why they wrote them; I shall propose that, unlike the later testimonies, such letters were written in a spontaneous and ad hoc way by women who were largely unaccustomed to writing but needed to maintain contact with distant relatives and friends. I then consider some of the ways in which time and space have been inscribed into the camp letters, and show how their provenance as specifically ‘of the time’ is made manifest by more than postage stamps. Given the ways in which time is configured in these letters, I shall also illustrate how this affects both their content and tone by exploring themes that recur across the camp letters and contrast these with the post-war testimonies.

**“Letters are a great deal to us”<sup>4</sup>**

At the height of the concentration camp system, there were between 90, 000 – 100, 000 white camp inhabitants, of whom a large proportion were children. Although the literacy rates in the Boer Republics are not now knowable, it is probable that only a minority of Boer women were literate.<sup>5</sup> Most of them lived isolated rural existences and many of those who had been educated would have been only functionally literate, able perhaps to just read parts the family Bible and sign their names and little else. In some ways, then, it is therefore not surprising that the camp letters now archived at the War Museum of the Boer Republics number in their hundreds rather than their thousands, or that there are apparently only a dozen or so extant camp diaries. The quantity of ‘at the time’ writing by Boer women, or at least that which has entered the public domain, is very small.<sup>6</sup>

Letter-writing, however, was the only means by which Boer women and children in the camps could keep in contact with distant family and friends, and so even those not in the habit of writing letters would have been more likely to have done so under these circumstances. While this is the usual function of letter-writing, the importance of letters was heightened in wartime for camp inhabitants who had been dislocated from their communities and families, and many of whom had relatives whose health, safety or whereabouts were uncertain. As Decker has argued with regard to U.S. Civil War letters, “The correspondents are separated for long periods without prospect of reunion or certain knowledge of where the other may be.

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<sup>4</sup> WM 6344/25, Lottie Roussouw, Kroonstad

<sup>5</sup> Giliomee notes that in the Cape Colony 1875 census it was estimated that only 43 percent of white children between the ages of five and fifteen could read and write, adding that, “For Afrikaners the proportion was undoubtedly considerably lower”, and that even when children did learn to read and write, “the level of these skills was, in most cases, extremely rudimentary” (Giliomee 2003: 211). The literacy rates of the two Boer Republics would have been equal to, or more likely lower than, those of the Cape Colony.

<sup>6</sup> There may be numbers of camp letters and diaries that still remain in private hands. The relatively small quantities of war and/or camp letters and diaries by Boer women stands in contrast to the vast number of women’s letters and diaries from the U.S. Civil War, taking the considerable discrepancy in population size into account, but also that this was some fifty years earlier than the South African War.

Each writes with a heightened sense of the other's mortality. And because the war disrupts an already unreliable post, they must write with the expectation that their letters will miscarry" (Decker 1998: 79). Letters were an essential means of establishing or maintaining contact with far-away relatives and friends, and women in camp mainly wrote letters to their Prisoner of War (P.O.W.) husbands and sons, or to family members in other camps. On this point, Lottie Roussouw, who was in Kroonstad camp, wrote to her cousin Lottie Theron in Harrismith that "You must remember that we have nothing but strangers round us and that letters are a great deal to us in this time of separation" (WM 6344/25, Lottie Roussouw, Kroonstad).<sup>7</sup> While the post-war testimonies discussed in Chapters Two and Three were orchestrated by (proto-) nationalist circles and entrepreneurs produced for specific political purposes, camp letters were not written in this collective way but were much more the spontaneous means by which individuals kept in touch and communicated about inter-personally meaningful events.

The form that many camp letters take is a product of the likely levels of literacy of their writers, who were not fluent letter-writers but were conversant with the basic structure of the letter. During the nineteenth century, letter-writing manuals dictated the appropriate form and content of letter, "explaining the rules for polite correspondence in the texts of the letters" through 'model letters' (Schultz 2000:113). Those Boer women who had a basic level of literacy would have been familiar with the rules laid down in letter-writing manuals, shown in their rather rigidly structured letters. Thus most start with formulaic greetings and end with one of a number of stock phrases. An example here is that Mrs. E.P. Erasmus' letters to her

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<sup>7</sup> Lottie Roussouw was one of the daughters of Johanna Roussouw (alternatively spelled Rousseau), whose testimony of her experiences of Kroonstad camp appears in *War Without Glamour* (Hobhouse 1927: 88-100). Lottie Roussouw's letters were all written in English, as was her mother's original testimony (A155 /176 / 1).

husband and son are remarkably uniform, all beginning with “Dear and never forgotten child”<sup>8</sup> or “Dear and never forgotten spouse”<sup>9</sup>, always followed by an assurance that she is still alive, an account of her health, and then either an acknowledgement of a letter received or a chastisement for not having received a letter. Her standard closing in letters to both her husband and son is, “So I will come to a close with the pen but never with my burning heart”, or “now I must come to a close with my pen but never with my longing heart”, usually followed by “with a kiss of love your longing mother E.P. Erasmus” or “with a kiss of love your longing spouse and children until we meet again E.P. Erasmus”<sup>10</sup> (WM 5690, Mrs. E.P. Erasmus, Springfontein). These specific expressions appear in many other camp letters, which also tend to follow a similar structure. But in spite of this standardised format, indeed sometimes as a result of it, many of these letters read as poignant and full of feeling, even if inscribed in a formalised way.

On the question of literacy, it is worth noting that it is not always possible to tell if the senders and the writers of camp letters were in fact the same person, as many illiterate women would have dictated or proposed letters to their literate children, neighbours or friends, upon whom they depended either to take down their words verbatim, or perhaps shape them into a ‘proper letter’ from something spoken and informal.<sup>11</sup> There are few signs in the extant archived letters that any of the writers of these were engaged in reading or writing of other kinds, although a single mention in a letter from Mrs. E.P. Erasmus to her son suggests that

<sup>8</sup> “*lieve en nooit vergentende kint*” Throughout the chapter quotes from Boer women’s letters and diaries will be provided translated into English in the main text, with the original Taal (or Afrikaans) given in footnotes. Where no footnote is provided, the quote is taken from an English original.

<sup>9</sup> “*lieve en nooit vergetende echenoot*”

<sup>10</sup> “*So zal ik tot sluiten komen met de pen maar nooit met myn brandende hart*”, “*Nu moet ik tot sluiten komen met de pen maar nooit met myn verlangde hart*”, “*met een kus de liefde u verlangde moeder E.P. Erasmus*” “*met een kus der liefde u verlangende echgenoot en kinders tot weder zien E.P. Erasmus*”

<sup>11</sup> An example of this is a land transaction document found inside the Winburg Camp Register (SRC 90, f. 212), signed by Mrs. Fourie but clearly written by someone else. This document is discussed in Chapter Five.

she read on a regular basis: “you ask me if I have enough books here we get nothing but our food” (WM 5690/116, Mrs. E.P. Erasmus, Springfontein).<sup>12</sup>

### **When? ‘At the time’ and ‘in the space’**

Unlike the later testimonies and many of the camp diaries, the provenance of the camp letters is much more straightforwardly ‘of the time’. All the camp letters are dated during or immediately after the war, and although the large majority have not been archived with their envelopes with postmarks to verify their ‘at the time’ status, some are, and also there are other signs that the letters were indeed written during the war itself. Firstly and most obviously, some camp letters are stamped with the triangular censor’s stamp, indicating that the letter, like the majority of wartime letters, passed through the official censor’s office during the period of censorship. Secondly, the style in which the letter writers provided their addresses is very much ‘of the time’ with almost none using the term ‘concentration camp’. For instance, Katie Diedrichs gives her address in her letters to her brothers at St. Helena as “Springfontein Junction, Refugee Camp, O.R.C.” (WM 4150), while Maggie Brink refers to “Howick Women’s Camp” (WM 5848).<sup>13</sup> Thirdly, unlike the neatly ‘worked up’ testimonies, camp letters are fragmented, ‘untidy’ and provisional, both in content and appearance. Typically, the letters show frequent amendments, additions and corrections, with multiple endings and comments written in the margins and elsewhere outside the main body of the letter, all indicating the rather ramshackle, *ad hoc* ‘at the time’ immediacy of the letters.

Fourthly and crucially, the letters are written in the hybridic Taal that predated the more formalised post-war Afrikaans, and this locates them firmly in the 1899 – 1902 temporal

<sup>12</sup> “u vraag my of ek boeke genoeg hier heb wy kryg niets dan onse kos”

<sup>13</sup> “Howick Vrouwen Kamp”

context. Taal is far less recognisable to a present-day reader of Afrikaans which began to be standardised post-war as part of the Second Language Movement and was only legally recognised as a distinct language in 1918 (Hofmeyr 1987: 107). Moreover, some of the letters use an interesting mix of language, combining both English and Taal in the same letter and even in the same sentence. In a letter from Katie Diedrichs in Taal to her brothers at St. Helena dated 4 May 1901, the following has been added in Taal at the top of the first page, “Mother gives her hearty greetings to you all”<sup>14</sup> and in the left-hand corner in the same hand in English, “God be with you till we meet again” (WM 4150/8, Katie Diedrichs, Springfontein). In another of Katie Diedrichs’ letters, she combines English and Taal in the same sentence, writing that “*Ek hoop dat het u allen nog wel en zal wel gaan till the end*” [I hope that you are all going well and will go well till the end] (WM 4150/12). Nettie Holtzhausen at Harrismith camp writes almost entirely in English, but sometimes inserts Taal phrases, such as: “She has been dangerously ill, and sometimes we thought it would be as you said, she would ‘*vlieg weg Hemeltjie toe*’ [fly away to heaven], but she is better now” (WM 6344/50, Nettie Holtzhausen, Harrismith). This loose, hybridic use of language in the letters clearly predated the post-war attempts to “standardise a middle-class variant of Afrikaans” as part of the “manufacture of an Afrikaans literary culture which was an important terrain in which nationalist ideologies were elaborated” (Hofmeyr 1987: 105, 95).

These material and structural aspects of the camp letters attest to the provenance of these writings and indicate that, unlike the later testimonies, they were not written up as part of the post-war development of Afrikaner (proto-) nationalism. This is not to suggest that letters have a directly referential relationship with the lives or the historical events at the back of them, but rather that they construct these things in different ways owing to their particular

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<sup>14</sup> “*Moeder geef haar hartlike groete aan u allen*”

purchase and location in on time and space. There are further textual aspects of the camp letters that point to their location in what Decker calls a letter's 'continuous present tense', as illustrated by the following extracts from Boer women's letters, which are not simply 'in the present tense', but in which the writers are 'fixed' in the time and space of the writing moment:

"my dear child this afternoon I sit myself down to write you a few lines to tell you that we are all still well" (WM 3667/2, Mrs. M.C. de Jager, Bethulie)<sup>15</sup>

"I must sit down this evening to make our welfare known to you" (WM 4663/21, Bettie Erasmus, Bethulie)<sup>16</sup>

"Mamma is practising her songs, and the rest are talking while the little ones are romping, so you must please excuse all my mistakes" (WM 6344/57, Lottie Theron, Harrismith)

"the wind here is continuously so unpleasant and also so uncomfortable in the tent that I can't write properly" (WM 5690/137, Mrs. E.P. Erasmus, Springfontein)<sup>17</sup>

"do not be offended that I have not written you much the wind is so unpleasant that I cannot write I will write to you later" (WM 5690/112, Mrs. E.P Erasmus, Springfontein)<sup>18</sup>

"There is now a terrible storm and Mama and the children have gone to church, the water threatens to pour through our tent" (WM 5848/32, Maggie Brink, Howick)<sup>19</sup>

In these extracts, the reader is 'returned' to the moment and the space of writing by the use of phrases such as 'this afternoon', 'this evening' and 'now', for, as Stanley has argued, "the present tense of the letter recurs" and "persists", even after the death of the writer and recipient, in the written text and its inscribed immediacies (Stanley 2004b: 208). In part, this enables the reader to visualise the writer and their writing context, as for instance with Lottie

<sup>15</sup> "myn lieve kind heden middag plaas ik my neder om aan u een paar regelen te melden wy zyn nog alles vris"

<sup>16</sup> "moet ik my in dezen avond nederzitten om u ons welstand bekend te maken"

<sup>17</sup> "de wind is hier gedureg zoo onstuinig en ook zoo ongerieflyk en de tent dat wy niet behooryk kan skryf"

<sup>18</sup> "neem my niet kwalijk dat ik niet veel schryf de wind is zoo on stuinig dat ik niet kan schryf ik zal u later schryf"

<sup>19</sup> "Het is nu een vreeselyke storm en Mama en de kinderen zyn naar kerk, de water dreigde ons tent kuinen te stroomen"

Theron's comments about her mother practising songs and the children playing around her, or Mrs. Erasmus' remarks about the unpleasant wind at Springfontein. These references to their surroundings during the writing moment strongly evoke the present-time material realities of camp life as experienced and represented by individual Boer women, rather than the homogenised generalised and highly interpreted 'take' on this that emerges in the later testimonies developed as part of the (proto-) nationalist 'the history'.

#### **"The monotony of it all": Ordinarity and everyday life in camp letters**

Boer women's post-war camp testimonies, as argued in previous chapters, were produced as a key aspect of the development of Afrikaner (proto-) nationalism and for specific political purposes. One indication of this is that these testimonies show signs of being 'rehearsed narratives', with their strong similarity of content and structure and their re/working of the past to fit with (proto-) nationalist notions about the British intentionally mistreating and even murdering Boer women and children in the camps. The emphasis in the testimonies is on mistreatment, death and suffering bravely borne for *volk en vaderland*; there is absence of depictions of 'everyday' aspects of camp life, with the resulting perception that no 'normal life' was possible in the camps.<sup>20</sup> This contrasts markedly with camp letters, where 'ordinarity' and everyday life form the dominant subject matter. Far from being filled with invectives about 'subversive' or 'unruly' black people, poor meat rations, children being starved to death or the murderous behaviour of camp authorities, the camp letters predominantly concern matters of an ordinary, domestic nature, with letter writers often

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<sup>20</sup> 'Normal' and 'everyday' life are of course socially constructed categories and the content and meaning of everyday life is culturally determined. However, if 'everyday life' concerns the ordinary, routine practices that make up day-to-day existence, such as sleeping, walking, working, cooking, eating, family life and socialising, then there is very little if any writing about everyday life in Boer women's camp testimonies. For a more detailed discussion of representations of 'everyday life' in the camps see Dampier 2005.

commenting on the mundane daily drudgery of camp life and the lack of ‘news’ to pass on to their recipients:

“Plenty of hard work under very difficult circumstances all day gives us a well earned rest at night, and every day is a repetition of the other. The monotony of it all would be too hard to bear, but for the letters from our various friends and relatives” (WM 6344/54, Lottie Roussouw, Kroonstad)

“further I can write you nothing in particular because I have no news” (WM 5690/118, Mrs. E.P. Erasmus, Springfontein)<sup>21</sup>

The letters are filled with details of personal concerns, especially around money matters, which suggest how families of means were better able to withstand the exigencies of camp life:

“Mama does not have a penny more money the whole family is dependent on me and M. [Maria, her sister] and if we get no work I do not see how we can live” (WM 5747/13, Mattie Pretorius, Bloemfontein)<sup>22</sup>

“it is difficult to write money for paper and stamps is scarce and more can not be got” (WM 5690/116, Mrs. E.P. Erasmus, Springfontein)<sup>23</sup>

“We have a new marquee now all to ourselves you cannot think what a treat it is after having lived in the same tent with other people for 10 months. We have a bedroom sitting & Dining room & a small pantry...” (WM 6252/13, S.C., Bloemfontein)

“We have our old piano here with us, which is a great thing in camp. Major Cavendish was so kind as to send for it” (WM 6344/57, Lottie Theron, Harrismith)

Like camp photographs, which show inhabitants participating in a wide variety of ‘everyday’ activities such as playing sport or attending school, camp letters also comment on these mundane, everyday, ordinary aspects of camp life:<sup>24</sup>

<sup>21</sup> “*verder kan ik u niets byzonder schryfwant nieuws heb ik niet*”

<sup>22</sup> “*Mama heeft geen pennie geld meer de heele huisgezin is van M. en my afhankelyk en als wy geen werk krygen zie ik niet hoe wy leven kunnen.*” Both Mattie and Maria Pretorius worked in Bloemfontein camp at various points, both in the camp hospital and the camp school, but were employed informally. Their letters constantly expressed concern that their jobs may be lost to more qualified people who were brought in over the course of the war to fill formal, permanent positions.

<sup>23</sup> “*het ga zwaar om te schryf met papier en stempes de geld is schaars en kan ook niet meer kryg*”

“On the 31<sup>st</sup> & new Year’s Day we played a most enjoyable tennis tournament. My father & I again drew lots together but we fell out again towards the end; however we hope to do better in future, to keep Rtz [Reitz, their home town] up” (WM 6344/56, Lottie Roussouw, Kroonstad)

“this week there is to be an exhibition on Friday of all the work that has been made in the camp by the school children & teachers & as Cornie [her daughter who helped in the camp school] is so smart there will be a good deal of her work & what her pupils did” (WM 6252/10, S.C., Bloemfontein)

“Tell Aunt Cobie that Dinah Müller was married on Tuesday” (WM 6344/25, Lottie Roussouw, Kroonstad)

Camp letters, as with camp photographs, offer representations of these ‘everyday’ activities – tennis matches, schools, exhibitions, weddings – as part of camp life in a way that is absent from the later testimonies, in which these domestic, everyday details are excluded in favour of telling a political story that emphasises the victimisation, mistreatment and even ‘murder’ of Boer women and children. However, more important than the actual absence of these ‘everyday’ events in the post-war testimonies is what this represents concerning their lack of specificity and domination by generalisation, which contrasts with the letters, which are strongly particularised and specific.

#### “I wish I could show you the Baby”: Family matters

While the post-hoc camp testimonies are dominated by bitter recriminations about the mistreatment of Boer women and children and by expressions of proto-nationalism, the majority of camp letters are written in a conversational rather than a polemical style and often concern family matters and family news, commenting very little on wider political matters. For example, Mrs. M.C. de Jager’s letters from Bethulie camp to her son Jiems, who was with

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<sup>24</sup> There are several thousand camp photographs, depicting a wide range of images of camp life and portraying aspects of everyday, domestic camp activities seldom represented in camp testimonies.

his uncle as a P.O.W. at St Helena, are full of maternal solicitude, encouraging him to attend school and warning him that he should be obedient to his uncle and careful with money:

“my child I am happy to hear that you are in school your brothers who are here with me also go to school they are going on well jiems my child be obedient to your uncle and [? submit to the authorities] is my child a sweet child our lord has love for man and also respect for one obedient child do not be naughty be quiet and peaceful then it will go well with you all my child” (WM 3667/3, Mrs. M.C. de Jager, Bethulie)<sup>25</sup>

“my child I am so happy that your uncle is with you be obedient to your uncle jiems be quiet and humble my child trust in me trouble can come of godlessness because our w~~er~~ world is so barbaric I must warn you my child. jemie I sent you money when you have received it look after your money well” (WM 3667/4, Mrs. M.C. de Jager, Bethulie)<sup>26</sup>

Another example concerns Mrs. G. Pretorius of Boshof and her daughters Maria, Mattie and Ellen, who were all at Bloemfontein camp. Their letters to the husband and father of the family, Mr. J.P.L. Pretorius, a P.O.W. in India, relate primarily to Mrs. Pretorius’ baby daughter born on 21 August, around the time family arrived in camp:

“the Lord is good he gave me on the twenty first August a daughter she is big and healthy but seriously thin she looks like Gerrie ... I wish I could show you the Baby I must still get her registered I want to baptise ^her^ Baka it means [unreadable], or should I wait until Boshof, write what I must do I will wait with writing until I have had a letter from you” [At the top of the letter] “I send hairs from baby then papa can see how it looks” (WM 5747/2, Mrs. G. Pretorius, Bloemfontein)<sup>27</sup>

“Papa with our health it is going sadly because we are all sick. Nellie has been sick for more than one month, she wants to use nothing. Marie Groenewald’s child is dead; Nettie is in the hospital she is suffering from measles. Aunty Annie’s baby is seriously sick from inflammation and the other children are all getting better from measles ...

<sup>25</sup> “my kint ik is bly omte hoor dat u in school is u broerzes wat hier by my is gaat ook school helle gaat vliks aan jiems my kint wees gehoorzaam voor u oom in onder danig ver die over u gestalt is my kint een zoet kint het ons here lief in de mens het ook respekte voor een gehoorzaam kint jiems moet tog niet stout wees wees stil in rustig dan zal het goed gaat met u allen my kint”

<sup>26</sup> “my kint ik is zoo bly dat u oom by u is wees gehoorzaam ver u oom jiems wees stil in minlik my kint in my waar kwaat kan kom in goidekoosheid want ons wehl werlt is zoo boos ik moet u waar wehuw my kint, jemie ik het gelt aan u gestuur als gý het kryg pas u gelt goet op”

<sup>27</sup> “de heer is goed Hy heef myn op den een en twintig ten Augustus een Dochterje geschonken zy is groot en vris maar erg mager zy lyk naar Gerrie ... ik wensch dat ik de Babie aan u kan wys ik moet maar nog lat registreer ik will ^haar^ Baka laat doop het beteken Gelveen, of zal ik maar wag tot op Boshof, schryf wat ik moet doen ik zal wag met schryven tot ik eers een brief van u het” “Ik zond haartjies van baby dank an papa zien hoe lyk dit.” Mrs. Pretorius always addressed her husband as Papa in letters to him.

Baby is already big and it is going well with her she just coughs a little" (WM 5757/4, Maria Pretorius, Bloemfontein)<sup>28</sup>

"Dear papa there is but little news to write the children are all well again Baby is so darling and says daddy must come visit just a cough plagues her a little" [At the end of the letter] "Baby sends 2 kisses to her daddy" (WM 5757/6, Mrs. G. Pretorius, Bloemfontein)<sup>29</sup>

In these letters Mrs. Pretorius and her daughter relate their family news and circumstances to their distant husband and father, conveying a strong sense of individuals grappling with the difficulties of separation and 'keeping in touch' that the war entailed. While the post-hoc testimonies read as generalised and politicised, these letters inscribe the personal and everyday, the particular reactions and emotions of the writers, giving support to the comment that letters "Of all documents are the most essentially human" (Vulliamy 1945: 7).

#### **"The longing is unutterably great": Letters negotiating absence**

While themes about rations, hunger and mistreatment in hospital recur in the later testimonies as apparently causing Boer women the greatest dissatisfaction and consequently being the 'worst' aspects of camp life, letters written at the time suggest that separation from family, friends and familiar environments was in fact the most difficult aspect of camp life for many Boer women:

"send me his [Jan's] most recent letter that you have I miss you all so much" (WM 5690/130, Mrs. E.P. Erasmus, Springfontein)<sup>30</sup>

<sup>28</sup> "Papa met ons gezondheid gaat het maar treurig want wý zýn maar allen ziek. Nellie is al meer dan een maand ziek, zý wil niets gebruik. Marie Groenewald se kind is overleden, Nettie is in die Hospitaal zý leg aan die mazels. Aunty Annie se baby is slecht ziek aan de Inflamatie en de ander kinders is allen oom aan gezond worden van die mazels ... Baby is al groot en met haar gaan het goed net zý hoes een beetje".

<sup>29</sup> "Lieve papa de nuws is maar min om te schryf de kinders is allen weer gezond Baby is zoo lieflyk en zeg papie moet kom keur met de hoest plaag haar een bietje" "Baby stuur 2 zoentjies aan haar papie"

<sup>30</sup> "stuur my tog zýn jongste brief dat u van hem het ik verlang tog zoo veel naar u allen"

“Brother I do not know if you are still alive, but I must try at any rate, because I am here [Bloemfontein camp] as a stranger, separated from my parents and sister I do not know where one of them is” (WM 4663/5, Miss C.E.M. Erasmus, Bloemfontein)<sup>31</sup>

“my darling I can never write to you of my heart’s longing because I know you feel the same because we are after all one flesh and body and oh my love I think so much of our former lives....” (A363, Mrs. Jacobs, Bethulie)<sup>32</sup>

“dearest you write you have sent me a portrait I have still not received it I think it will come later from Jan I have a portrait where he and the two Jans and all the Van Vuurins stand together it was for me a great happiness to see them altogether with each other but believe me that my tears fell when I saw them and thought how long we have been so far and wide from each other” (WM 5690/143, Mrs. E.P. Erasmus, Springfontein)<sup>33</sup>

“I have not news to write is your longing great [?] the longing is unutterably great” (WM 5690/135, Mrs. E.P. Erasmus, Springfontein)<sup>34</sup>

It is through their letters that these women mediated “the binary opposition of presence to absence” that long-distance letter-writing in an age of uncertain communications and wartime involved (Decker 1998: 12). Their letters often contain little ‘news’ but instead expressed the sadness and longing caused by separation from their intended recipients, and refer continually to the loving bonds between writer and recipient. Consequently in a sense these letters ‘stand in’ for the writers themselves when read by the recipients, strongly invoking what Stanley refers to as “a simulacrum of presence” around these ties of love and familiarity (Stanley 2004b: 209). It is also likely that these Boer women are expressing thoughts and feelings in letters that they might not have done were it not for the extremes of war. Erika Rappaport has

<sup>31</sup> “Broeder ik weet niet of gij nog leef, maar ik moet maar op een waag probeer want ik is hier als een vreemdeling, verwyderd van myn ouders en zuster ik weet niet waar een van hun zyn”. Miss Erasmus was later sent to live with Mr. and Mrs. Venter at Bethulie camp. She refers to them as her parents but they were presumably the parents-in-law of her sister, who was at the time living at Kimberley camp.

<sup>32</sup> “my liefste ik kan u tog nooit myn hart verlaangen schryf nie want ik weet gij gevoel de selfde want ons zyn tog een vlees en lichaam en acht myn hartie ik gedink tog zoo veel aan ons vooriege leevens...”

<sup>33</sup> “lieve u schryf u staar my een potred ik heb het nog niet ontvang ik denk hy zal later kom van Jan heb ik een potred waar hy en de twee Janne en alke van vuurins staan het was my een groot blydschap om hen allen zoo hy elkander te zien maar geloof my dat wy trannen storten als wys hen zoo aanschouwen en denk hoe lank ons al zoo ver en verwyd uit elkander is”

<sup>34</sup> “niemans het ek ik niet om u te schryf is wy verlang veel de verlangste is on uitspreeklyk groot”

argued in relation to long-distance letters that “physical distance necessitated the articulation of conflicts and desires that otherwise would not have appeared in letters between those who lived near one another” (Rappaport 2004: 253), while in the letters I am concerned with, the effects of distance are compounded by those of war and the possibility that the recipient might be dead or wounded already before the letter arrived.

### ***Illness, Death***

While I have stressed that camp letters largely focus on family news and everyday domestic life rather than the themes that dominate the later testimonies, the letter-writers did sometimes write about illness and death, in particular when it concerned family members and friends. Information about who was ill and how they were improving or deteriorating was an important topic in many camp letters. News of the deaths of friends, relatives and acquaintances was passed on in letters too, sometimes in a rather matter-of fact way. For example, writing to her son, Mrs. E.P. Erasmus added at the top of the first page after she had signed off that “uncle Johans dewet [sic] his wife is also dead” (WM 5690/115, Springfontein)<sup>35</sup> with no further comment or explanation. And at the end of a letter to her father, Maria Pretorius wrote: “P.S. Baby of Aunty Annie is dead”, also with no additional comment (WM 5747/4, Bloemfontein).<sup>36</sup> When Mrs. Jacobs died at Bethulie camp, her husband was informed of this in a letter from a nephew written on 11 December 1901 which stated, “my dear uncle I must let you hear these mournful tidings that your wife died on 26 november and further my dear uncle my throat is so sore I can almost not write ... my mother

<sup>35</sup> “oom Johans dewet zyn vrouw is ook dood”. ‘Oom’ or ‘uncle’ and ‘Aunty’ or ‘Tannie’ are respectful, honorific forms of address used to indicate the age and social standing of the addressee, and do not necessarily refer to actual family members.

<sup>36</sup> “P.S. Baby van Aunty Annie is overleden.”

is still well and uncle [your] children are also well” (A363, Jacobs, Bethulie).<sup>37</sup> The seemingly abrupt and even callous manner (for present-day readers) in which these messages conveying news of death have been written must be located in a context in which ‘uncle’ and ‘aunty’ were honorific forms of address and did not necessarily refer to actual relatives, and where ordinary death rates in the Boer Republics before the war would have been high, and people were thus more accustomed to passing on and receiving such news.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, letters written in this context had to fulfil a number of functions, and given the expenses associated with writing and posting letters, writers would have had to use their letters to convey a wide variety of information ranging from the mundane to the momentous.

Of course not all news of death was passed on with matter-of-fact detachment. Mrs. du Toit had two children who died in Aliwal North camp within a week of each other,<sup>39</sup> and the letter conveying this news to her husband is worth quoting at length, for it communicates a tone of individual sadness and loss absent from the later testimonies:

Camp  
10<sup>th</sup> Oct 1901

My beloved Husband,

How heavily it falls upon me to write these lines, with a grieving heart I must say that our dear children are no more. Naomi died on the 12<sup>th</sup> of August and Francie on the 18<sup>th</sup>. They had the measles and then got the inflammation, I prayed earnestly to the Lord to spare Francie because I had to give up Naomi, but it was decided otherwise, he was so much better the doctor had good faith, it was all in vain I never thought that Naomi was so sick she was always so quiet and patient never having complained or cried. Giel also had the measles and after that enteric fever but now by God’s goodness he is healthy again. We are now all well – oh now it must still hit me that formerly feared so much. I hope the Lord will give me strength and mercy to bear this ... Now my darling I must close with my scratching my hand nearly shakes to write all this to you and to think of all the sadness that you must receive all at once without anyone with you ... Greetings from Mother and Bettie. Koos is also here.

<sup>37</sup> “mý liefje oom moet ik u dese droevig tyding doen hooren dat u vrouw dood is 16 november in verder mý liefje oom mý keel is zoo zeer dat ik byna niet kan schryf ... mý ma en nog gezond in oom ze kinders is ook gezond”

<sup>38</sup> On the likely pre-war death rates in the Republics see Van Heyningen 2002.

<sup>39</sup> The du Toit children’s deaths are recorded in SRC 104, which states that Naomie died in the family’s tent while her brother Francie (Francois) died in the hospital shelter.

Receive the heartfelt greetings and love of your loving and grieving wife (WM 5592/11, Mrs. du Toit, Aliwal North)<sup>40</sup>

What ‘falls heavily’ on Mrs. du Toit is the devastating personal loss of her two children and that ‘now it must still hit me that formerly feared so much’, that writing about this in the ‘now’ of the letter made this ‘hit’ her again. In addition, the latter part of the letter amply conveys her knowledge that ‘all this’, which her ‘scratching’ has written, will be experienced all at once in the ‘now’ of her husband reading it. The grief and pain she felt at having to convey this news to her husband when he was far away and alone is almost palpable. It is also notable that Mrs. du Toit did not apportion blame to anyone for her children’s deaths – indeed, her remark about the doctor indicates that she had confidence in his judgement, and nor does she present them as sacrifices made for the *volk*.<sup>41</sup> There is no tone of directed bitterness or righteous indignation that characterises the later accounts. Her letters represent these deaths as a personal family tragedy both experienced and written to her husband in a detailed way that later camp testimonies do not have.

Mrs. du Toit spent many months struggling to make sense of the deaths of her children and in letters to her husband rehearses some aspect of this, reflecting on their absence and her ongoing grief, and in this, although she mentions the doctor’s orders not to give her sick son meat, she does not suggest or imply that this is what killed him:

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<sup>40</sup> “Kamp 10de Oct 1901 Myn dierbare Man, Hoe swaar valt het my om u deze reijelen te schryven, met een bloedend hart moet ik zeggen dat onze lieve kleinen niet meer gyn. Naomi is de 12de Augustus gestorven en Fransie de 18de zy houdden de masels en kryf toen de Influmisie, ik het de Heer tog ernstig gebeden om Fransie te sparen daar ik Naomi moest geven maar het was anders besloten, hy was zoo beter de docter had goeden moed, het was ook te vergeefs ik het nooit geslacht dat Naomi zoo ziek was zy was altyd zoo stil en geduldig heeft nooit eens gesteund of gehuil Giel had ook de masels en daarna de slepende koorts maar is nu door Gods goedheid weder frisch. Wy zyn nu allen gezond – ach nu moet my nog trefwat zoo voor gevreesd het ik hoop de Heer zal [page 2] my kracht en genade geven voor het ook nog te dragen ... Nu myn liefing niet ‘ik’ sluiten met myn gekrap myn hand weigend byna te schryven als ‘ik’ aan u denkt die al die [page 3] treurigheid op eens moet ontvangen zonder iemand by u. God dank de Heeris overal. Groete van Mama en Benie, Koos is ook hier. Ontvang de hartelike groete en Leifede van uwe liefhebbende en Treurende Vrouw”

<sup>41</sup> Even if Mrs. du Toit had felt the doctor was to blame for her son’s death, her knowledge of censorship would presumably have prevented her from saying so in a letter.

I have just got back from the churchyard I went to look at the grave of our darlings ... some graves have sunken in but their grave is still in good order, oh my darling their death and absence gets heavier every day I know they are safe now but O! the empty places and the clothes and shoes that are no longer worn I cannot see them without tears, pray often for me it is all we can do" (WM 5592/17, Mrs. du Toit, Aliwal North)<sup>42</sup>

Here many bitter tears have been shed and are still shed daily I still hear dear Francie's voice all the time, he was so much better [...] he always asked for meat, and this he should not eat, oh the soft poorly voice still sounds in my ears "I am so hungry" How I promised him everything when he was better because the doctor said he could not eat it [meat]. Naomie asked for nothing other than water two days before her death ^she^ asked for nothing ... she never opened her eyes if ^I^ said to her "open your little eyes and look here is mama" then she opened one a little but closed it again immediately" (WM 5592/14, Mrs. du Toit, Aliwal North)<sup>43</sup>

It is today six months since dear Naomi was buried, their absence is bigger every day, it sometimes as if I will find them at home then when ^I^ go to sleep in the evening everything looks so abandoned and lonely in the tent" (WM 5592/16, Mrs. du Toit, Aliwal North)<sup>44</sup>

In addition, in one of her later letters Mrs. du Toit noted improvements in camp life and praised the superintendent, again conveying not only the absence of 'bitterness', but also more strongly a sense that officials could be beneficent albeit in terrible circumstances:

It is now much better in the camp than at first we now get fire making things and each week a few vegetables and jam every 15 days our c[amp] superintendent is a good man" (WM 5592/15, Mrs. du Toit, Aliwal North)<sup>45</sup>

<sup>42</sup> "Ik komdt juist terug van het kerkhof ik heb naar de graf van onze lievelingen gaan kyk ... sommige grafien ingezakt maar hun graf is nog in goede orde, ach myn liefing hun dooden en gemis word elken dag swaarder ik weet zy zyn veilig maar o! die ledige plaats en de klederen en schoenen die niet meer gedragen word ik kan het niet meer gedragen word ik kan het niet aanzien zonder tranen, bid vir my het is al wat wy doen kan"

<sup>43</sup> "hier is veel bitter tranen gestort en word nog daagliks gestort de stem van lieve Franseï hoor ik nog gedurig, hy was tog zoo beter ... hy heeft altyd vleesch gevraeg en die moest hy nie eten, ach die zachte swakkerstem klink nog altyd in myn oren (ik het zoo honger) hoe hen ik hom alles beloofd als hy beter is want hy kon het niet eten heeft de Doktor gezecht, Naomie heeft niets anders als water gevraagd twee dagen voor haar dood heeft ^zy niets^ gevraagd als ik moest haar alles geven haar oogen heeft zy nooit oop gemaak als ^ik^ aan haar zeg maak tog oop die oogies en kyk hier is mama dan maak zy dit een weinig open maar sluit het dadelik weer"

<sup>44</sup> "Het is van dag zes maanden dat lieve Naomie begraven is, hun gemis word elken dag grooter, het is soms of ik hen by de huis zal krygen als ^ik^ avonds gaan slapen dan lykt alles zoo verlaten en eenzaam in de tent"

<sup>45</sup> "Heet gaat nu in de kamp veel beter dan eerst wy krygen nu vuurmaak goed en elken week een weinig groenten, en jam alle 15 dagen ons k superintendent is een goede man". When the Ladies Commission visited Aliwal North camp in September 1901, they were appalled by the conditions there. They despaired at the filth, described the rationing system as the worst they had seen in any camp, the hospital arrangements as "in a state of utter confusion" and recommended, "Remove the superintendent and thoroughly reorganise the camp"

Mrs. du Toit's grief about her children's deaths centres on her acute awareness of their absence, and of the quietness, loneliness and emptiness experienced as a result. Her letters concern her own emotional reactions and her difficulties in coming to terms with what has occurred, to the absence which 'gets bigger every day'. Her comments about the doctor refusing her son meat are interesting, for while Mrs. du Toit does not imply that her son died because of the doctor's meat ban, it was these sorts of tales that were likely to have been orally re/told during and after the war as deliberate murder and then later written up away from their original context, as stories about British doctors starving Boer children to death.<sup>46</sup>

In other camp letters too, it is possible to detect the likely origins of stories re/told in the testimonies as generally occurring 'facts' about the camps. For example, many of the testimony-writers allege that sick children were torn from their mothers' arms and forced into hospital to be murdered by medical staff. However, the extant camp letters suggest that the origin of this derived from more 'ordinary' sentiments about mothers wishing to care for their children themselves, but realising that their children stood a better chance of recovering if sequestered in the camp hospitals with their tight regimes of controlling contact with people at a contagious stage and of family visiting:

"the poor mothers must give their children up to be nursed in the hospital you know it is a Holy duty for a true mother to nurse her child herself" (WM 5747/3, Mrs. G. Pretorius, Bloemfontein)<sup>47</sup>

"now the Doctor says this morning that I must go to the Hospital and when I ask how will it go with my dear child he said to the children's Hospital is it not hard the

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(Concentration Camps Commission 1902: 55, 56). This letter of Mrs. du Toit's was written on 3 February 1902 when the superintendent condemned by the Ladies Commission had been replaced.

<sup>46</sup> This claim is made in testimonies that appear in Hobhouse 1902: 94, 126-127; Neethling 1938: 31, 48, 195 and Postma 1939: 28-29, 63, 92, 145.

<sup>47</sup> "de arme moeders die hun kinders moet afgeven om in de hospetalen verpleeg te worden u weet dit is een Heilig plig voor een ware moeder om haar kind zelve te verplegen"

children [her two older daughters] wanted to ask nicely to be able to keep her" (WM 5747/17, Mrs. G. Pretorius, Bloemfontein, original emphasis)<sup>48</sup>

A similar instance here involves Lottie Roussouw, whose brother Jimmie eventually died in Kroonstad camp as a result of his heart condition, writing of this in one of her letters, "He [Jimmie] is in the camp hospital now under Dr v.d. Wall, & we can only see him on Sundays and Wednesdays. It is the best we can do for him else we would never have parted from him" (WM 6344/47, Lottie Roussouw, Kroonstad, my emphasis).<sup>49</sup>

Finally here, while the subjects of illness and death occur frequently in the camp letters, the circumstances producing this are not treated as unchanging. Thus Mrs. du Toit's above comments about improvements at Aliwal North are echoed in other women's letters, remarking on the changes that have taken place in their camps:

"Dear brother, we can never thank the Lord enough that he heard our prayers so it ^is^ five days since there was last a burial held it has truly never been so over the last eight months" (WM 4663/19, Bettie Erasmus, 25 February 1902, Bethulie)<sup>50</sup>

"so I have no news to write with the sickness it is now going reasonably not so many people are dying here" (WM 5690/142, Mrs. E.P. Erasmus, 9 March 1902, Springfontein)<sup>51</sup>

While the testimonies tend to depict circumstances in the camps as unchanging, and universally and unremittingly bad,<sup>52</sup> most camp letters written in the first months of 1902 comment on improvements to rations and reduced illness and death rates, with several letter-

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<sup>48</sup> "nu zeg de Dokter ben morgen dat ik moet na die Hospitaal en toen ik vraag hoe zal het met myn lief kindje gaan toen zeg hy na de kinder Hospitaal is het tog niet hard de kinders wel mooi praat om haar tog te behouden."

<sup>49</sup> Johanna Rousseau's testimony in *War Without Glamour* has a very different tone to it, with her claiming for example that her hospitalised son told her, "I am neglected" (Rousseau in Hobhouse 1927, 94).

<sup>50</sup> "Lieve broeder, ons kan de Heere nooit genoeg danken dat hy ons gebieden zoo verhoord het ^is^ heden vyf dagen dat hier laatst begraafenis gehouen is het is waarlyk nog nooit zoo geweest sedert de laaste acht maanden"

<sup>51</sup> "zoo heb ik geen nieuws om u te schryf met de siekte gaan het nu reedelyk hier sterf niet meer zoon veel mense"

<sup>52</sup> For example, in the foreword to *Mag Ons Vergeet?* Mrs. Neethling states, "the camps were – some better, some worse – actually all more or less the same" ["die kampe was – party beter, party slegter – tog almal min of meer dieselfde"] (Neethling 1938: iv).

writers expressing their admiration for camp superintendents whom they perceived to be the source of positive changes.

#### **“God is over everything”: Religion as sense-making**

“although we are so far and wide from each other but our hearts never so far god is over everything and will release us in his time and bring us again to each other maybe not on earth then in heaven” (WM 5690/134, Mrs. E.P. Erasmus, Springfontein)<sup>53</sup>

As already evident, religion provided a key way in which many of the letter-writers attempted to make sense of their wartime and camp experiences. In contrast, the testimony-writers mainly framed their experiences in (proto-) nationalist terms as part of the wider sacrifices made by the *volk* in their struggle for *vryheid* and to secure *ons land* for the Boer/Afrikaner people. But as the following examples indicate, Boer women at the time were more likely to interpret their experiences in religious and specifically Christian terms:

“Do not worry yourself so over me up until now I have not lacked anything I hope the Lord will continue to care for me and in his time ^He^ will make everything well for us once again” (WM 5592/15, Mrs. du Toit, Aliwal North)<sup>54</sup>

“the old letters those you still wrote home [before Mrs. Erasmus went to Springfontein camp] we also received and you ask there after your horse and corn and goats but there is nothing left to think about we are now here with only our clothes and our bedding that is our riches and without money but that is all also nothing because it is just worldly things” (WM 5690/114, Mrs. E.P. Erasmus, Springfontein)<sup>55</sup>

“If our dear Father in Heaven did t not pity us we would never stand this tearing apart from every one & every thing & place we hold dear” (WM 6344/4, Lottie Roussouw, Kroonstad)

<sup>53</sup> “al ben ons zoo ver en verwydert uit elkander maar onze harte zyn nooit zoo ver en god is over al en zal ons verlos op zyn tyd en weer by elkander breng meschien niet op aarde dan in den hemel”

<sup>54</sup> “Bekommer u niet zoo veel over my tot hietoe heb ik nog geen gebrek gehad ik hoop de Heer zal verder voor my zorg en op zyn tyd zal ^Hy^ alles weder voor ons wel maken”

<sup>55</sup> “de ou briewe die u mog naar huis geschrjfh heb ook ont vang en u vraag daar in naar u paard en koren de bokken maar daar is niets meer om over te denk ons is hier alleen met ons kleere en bedegoed dit is ons rykdom en sondergeld maar dit is ook nog alles niets wam het is maar werelks goed en is ook maar geleen en ik denk ons zal alles uit betaal word en ons is met wagens hier heen gekom en ook en end met de trein van betanie tot hier zoo kan ik niet meer schrjfh is dat de ziekte hier erg is ^in^ de camp de masels en de koors de mense sterf ook veel ook veel bekende en familie”

These women invoke religion in a variety of ways, including so as to be able to ‘stand this tearing apart’. Thus Mrs. du Toit tells her husband not to be overly anxious for her welfare for she is in God’s care, and trusts that God will improve their fortunes in his own time. Mrs. Erasmus tells her son not to be concerned that they have lost everything in the war, because these are merely worldly possessions; in her letter to her husband (WM 5690/134, Springfontein) she assures him that God will reunite them again one day, even if in heaven. Lottie Roussouw’s comments echo those of many Boer women letter-writers who express similar sentiments about their faith in God enabling them to survive the ‘tearing apart’ from everything they ‘hold dear’ and make sense of the often bewildering hardships of the war its disruptions and of camp life.

#### **“O the lovely voice of peace”: Political diversity**

In Boer women’s post-war testimonies, camp populations are presented as politically homogenous: apart from a few traitorous *hendsoppers* and joiners, all Boer men were fighting on commando and all Boer women were stalwart patriots and republicans. In fact, they were extremely varied, comprising people from all classes in the Transvaal and the Free State, who were also divided by religious affiliation, language diversity, and rural/urban differences as well as political allegiances. They included both British and Boer supporters, as well as those who were neutral and those who simply wanted an end to the conflict. While the testimony-writers depict camp inhabitants united by opposition to the camp authorities and support for the republics, some letter-writers provide an alternative view:

“We have a very good commandant I respect him really in secret as my father outwardly almost nobody can show friendship towards him I believe that they will then have many Afrikaner enemies”<sup>56</sup> (WM 4150/12, Katie Diedrichs, Springfontein)

“... we know nobody well enough to call them friends here, & besides this whole camp contains very few really nice people” (WM 6344/53, Lottie Roussouw, Kroonstad)

“who is it that will not allow [sic] you to write in English. I thought it was only in this camp we had to do with narrow-minded beings. I am treated with politeness by the authorities because I can even argue our point in their language & I respect our first superintendent because he was so anxious to learn Dutch. he spoke it well when he left us” (WM 6252/11, S.C., Bloemfontein)

It is apparent from these extracts that not everyone in the camps shared the same political views, and that some people or groupings within them attempted to control any expression of ‘friendship’ towards the authorities. Thus Katie Diedrichs here expresses her admiration for the superintendent at Springfontein, but also recognises that any public expression of this would earn her “many Afrikaner enemies”. For rather different reasons (her mother Johanna’s testimony in War Without Glamour conveys the wealth, social standing and educational level of the family), Lottie Roussouw in Kroonstad emphasises the lack of “really nice people” in a camp with an overwhelming poor, uneducated *bywoner* population. And also S.C. (her full name has not been preserved in her letters, nor subsequently in the archive collection), who was English-speaking but identified with the Boer cause, had had her credentials as a loyalist called into question but saw assumptions about English-speaking equalling British-supporting as coming from “narrow-minded beings”, and was also willing to give respect to a superintendent because he endeavoured to better communicate across the divide.

The political diversity of the camps can be seen in letters concerning the announcement of the Peace on 1 June 1902. The later testimonies universally depict women reacting with appalled disbelief, crying and fainting with grief at the loss of republican

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<sup>56</sup> “Wý hebben een zeer goede commandant ik bemind hem werkelyk in stilheid als myn vader uiterlyk kan byna niemand vriendschap bewyst aan hem ik geloof dat men dan veele Afrikaaner vyanden zult hebben”

independence.<sup>57</sup> In some contrast, in a 10 June 1902 letter from Ladysmith Refugee Camp, Rosie Van Reenen wrote, "Did not the much longed-for peace surprise you? I cannot tell you how we feel about it. I think we are more puzzled than anything else. One thing is certain; as it has happened, it is best; & will certainly prove to work for our good" (WM 6344/65, Rosie Van Reenen, Ladysmith). None of the uncontrollable grief or bitter resentment often depicted in the testimonies features in her letter, but rather a sense of uncertainty and reserved judgement and the feeling that 'as it has happened, it is best'. Mrs. Erasmus' letters to her son Jan and husband suggest there were other Boer women who were thankful and relieved when the war ended:

"dear son ^now^ I must write to you that hearts are so full of joy and happiness because the day of peace has dawned in our land ... O that we can we can now expect you all yes what will we give the dear lord for his love and mercy that he also spared us ^all^ so" (WM 5690/119, Mrs. E.P. Erasmus, Springfontein)<sup>58</sup>

"O I can never tell you of our thankfulness that the day of peace has dawned O the lovely voice of peace sounds in our ears" (WM 5960, Mrs. E.P. Erasmus, Springfontein)<sup>59</sup>

Mrs. Erasmus' responses centre on her thankfulness that nobody in her immediate family had died and her happy anticipation of the return of her son and husband from P.O.W. camps. Her relief about the end of the war was not shared by her son Jan, who did not want to sign the Oath of Allegiance to Britain, which all prisoners of war were required to sign before being

<sup>57</sup> Such depictions occur in testimonies in Hobhouse 1927: 10, 85, 136; Neethling 1938: 6, 136 and Postma 1939: 9, 12, 17, 98, 128, with Mrs. E.M.J. Grobler's remarks typifying this: "On the 31<sup>st</sup> of May, 1902, the sad news was proclaimed that our beloved independence was lost and Peace concluded. It was not Peace with joy but with heaviness; in the camp was universal weeping, and we could not believe it till our leading men came back" (Grobler in Hobhouse 1927: 10).

<sup>58</sup> "lieve zoon ^nu^ moet ik u schryf dat ons harten is zoo vol vreugde en blydschap omdat de dag is aangebreek van vrede in ons land... o dat wý u allen nu kunnen verwachten jaw at zal ons de lieve heer vergelden voor zýn liefde en genade dat hy ons ook nog ^allen^ gespaard hef"

<sup>59</sup> "O wy kunnen u onze dankbaardeid nooit aan u vertellen dat die dag is aangebreek van vrede O die lieflyke stem van vrede klink in onze ooren"

sent back to South Africa. In a letter about this, Mrs. Erasmus does not appear interested in the political implications of the Peace at all but simply wanted to see her son again, thus urging him to sign the Oath to expedite this. Although the correspondence is one-sided with consequent “implications for understanding the whole” (Stanley 2004b: 220), nonetheless it seems from his mother’s letters that Jan Erasmus saw signing the Oath either as a political betrayal or else feared being treated as a traitor when he returned:

“dear child it pains me to my heart that you are still so reluctant to sign the declaration ... my dear son let me just advise you it <sup>is</sup> wrong to think so it is completely different if you sign the declaration <sup>then</sup> you freely return do not be afraid to sign you will have no regret from it and you need never be ashamed when <sup>you</sup> arrive here in our land because there is not one man in our land who has not signed all the veld burghers also uncle louw and uncle frans and grandfather all signed so do not be afraid uncle G. C. dewet [General Christiaan De Wet] said here that we must all sign so I am not afraid there is no obligation on our people now dear child do not think I would advise you wrongly because what is one mother’s heart for her child I have also lost much and am already grey from all the suffering under the Englishman but let us [unreadable] and not resist the will of god because the Englishman can do nothing outside the will of god” (WM 5690/121, Mrs. E.P. Erasmus, Springfontein)<sup>60</sup>

Once again the events of the time are interpreted as ‘the will of God’ rather than the result of British malevolence; for Mrs. Erasmus, there is nothing to fear from ‘the Englishman’ because he can not operate outside God’s control. Overall her responses to the Peace are personal ones and are not concerned with the loss of the republics or the ‘enslavement’ of the Boer people under British domination.

<sup>60</sup> “lief kind het spyt my van harte dat u nog zoo in twyfel is om de deklarasie te tekenen ... my lieve zoon laat my u toch raden dit <sup>is</sup> verkeerd om zoo te denken het is geheel anders als u de deklarasie tekenen <sup>dan</sup> kom u vrij terug wees niet bang om te tekenen u zal er gaan spyt van hebben en behoef u nooit te schamen als <sup>u</sup> hier in ons land kom want hier is niet een man in ons land op hy teken allen de veld burgers ook oom louw en oom frans en oupa heb ge teken zoo wees niet bang oom G. C. dewet heef hier gezeg zy moet het allen teken zoo ben ik niet bang hier is geen verbintnis op ons volk nu lief kind dink niet dat ik u zal verkeerd raden want wat is toch een moeder hart voor haar kind ik he boek al veel geleden en is ook al grys van al dat zwaar onder engelsman maar laat ons teure zyn en niet opstaan tegen de wil van god want engelsman kan niets doen buiten de wil van god”

### **Camp Letters: Time and Narrative**

Time is the definitive aspect of letters that sets them apart from other forms of personal writing about the camps. However, ‘time in letters’, and ‘letters in time’<sup>61</sup> is neither straightforward nor static. It can usefully be thought about using terms advanced by Ricouer in relation to narrative time’s ‘threefold present’: present-present, present-past and present-future (Ricouer 1984: 31, 42). Letters in general are written ‘in the present’ or in the ‘moment of writing’ and might relate events concerning the present-present or present-past or anticipate events in the present-future. However, in contrasting camp letters with later testimonies, it is temporal proximity – a present-present narrative time – to the events related that distinguishes the letters from testimonies, in which later narrative time is present-past. The present-present perspective of letters is evinced by what Jolly refers to as instances of epistolary “synchronicity of narrative and event” (Jolly 1995: 49), as shown by statements from women’s camp letters such as: ‘this afternoon I sit myself down to write you a few lines’, ‘so uncomfortable in the tent that I can’t write properly’ and ‘there is now a terrible storm’. In each instance the ‘event’ – sitting down, feeling uncomfortable, a storm occurring – and the ‘moment of writing’ overlap. This present-present ‘time in letters’ is not only evinced in this literal and minute sense, but also in the wider sense that these letters are both ‘about the war’ and written ‘at the time’ of the war, and as later discussion will show, there is no such guarantee concerning many of what are presented as diaries.

The present-present narrative time of the camp letters gives them a not only a distinctive purchase on time that distinguishes them from the post-hoc testimonies but results in perspectives and subject matter that differs markedly from the retrospective accounts. Camp letters strongly evoke not only the present-present of the writer (which is by definition always

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<sup>61</sup> This draws on Adam’s ‘time in events’ and ‘events in time’ (Adam 1990: 3).

in the past for the reader, as I shall shortly discuss), but often also the present-time material or spatial context in which the letter was written, as in “Mamma is practising her songs, and the rest are talking” (WM 6344/57, Lottie Theron, Harrismith). As Earle points out, letters are “concrete historical artefacts strongly rooted in particular contexts. As such, letters display the signs of the distinct environments in which they were conceived” (Earle 1999: 2). Camp testimonies do not usually explicitly evoke the ‘distinct environments in which they were conceived’ or written and their attempts to evoke the environments in which the past-tense events related took place have none of the ‘present-ness’ or temporal immediacy of letters.

There are several other characteristics of camp letters that set them apart from the later testimonies owing to their different purchase on time. *Camp letters are generally concerned with specificity and particularity in their treatment of both events and individuals.* While the letters display a preoccupation with ‘everyday life’ and its mundane, daily, ordinary details, the testimonies are written ‘at a remove’ and at the level of the general and ‘forget’ these specific, mundane details, with grand statements about ‘freedom and independence’ appearing in their place. The dominance in the testimonies of the political and the “big picture” contrasts with a concern in the letters for the personal and the everyday – family, friends and their absence are dominant themes. Similarly, in their treatment of illness and death, camp letters inscribe individual and particularised emotional responses to these events, which are not interpreted in generalised terms as sacrifices for the *volk* as they are in the later testimonies, which are shaped by their post-hoc (proto-) nationalist writing context.

Structurally as well as in their interpretations of ‘at the time’ events, camp letters are ‘open-ended’, sometimes literally so with multiple endings and postscripts. The open-ended and provisional aspects of the letters are well illustrated by Rosie Van Reenen’s reaction to the

Peace quoted earlier with her comments, “Did not the much longed-for peace surprise you?” and “I think we are more puzzled than anything else” (WM 6344/65, Rosie Van Reenen, Ladysmith). Unlike in the testimonies, where perspectives are ‘closed’, where a fixed ‘line’ is promulgated and the past is ‘known’, the uncertainties of the present-present are manifest in camp letters. In addition, where the post-war testimonies indicate Boer people as united, and propose a ‘sameness’ of politics, class and so forth, the written ‘within the whirlwind’ quality of the letters instead suggest political heterogeneity and class multiplicity. The letters also convey that Boer women held politically and socially diverse views, and made sense of wartime and camp hardships in a range of ways, including by invoking the ‘will of God’, not necessarily the *volk*.

In all these respects, letters contrast with the testimonies and confirm that these were produced retrospectively in a co-ordinated way, with individual experiences of and responses to the war and the camps subsumed by ‘the history’ in (proto-) nationalist terms. While I concur with Decker that “letters do not really provide transparent access to history” (Decker 1998: 9), nevertheless I do maintain that, because they were written at the time, they offer representations and interpretations of the war and the camps that do not always accord with ‘the facts’ and ‘the history’ as articulated post-war by the (proto-) nationalist movement.

There are other dimensions of time at work in the writing and re/reading of letters that require consideration here as well. Letters are written in the present, but when they are read they are read in both the present of the reader and the present-past of the writer. On this temporal ‘slipperiness’ in letters Stanley has commented:

“all letters are ‘dead letters’ that in a sense never arrive: the letter that was written and sent is rather different from the one that arrives and is read because changed by its travels in time and space, from the there and then of writing to the here and now of reading. Letters also do things to and with time: when a letter is read, its reader of

course knows that time has passed and the ‘moment’ of writing has gone; but at the same time, the present tense of the letter recurs – or rather occurs – not only in its first reading but subsequent ones too” (Stanley 2004b: 208)

This ‘recurrence’ or indeed occurrence of the present tense is partly why the camp letters so powerfully evoke both the ‘moment’ and the physical context of writing. It was an awareness of this that ‘fell so heavily’ on Mrs. Du Toit when she wrote to tell her husband of the death of two of their children; he would ‘receive it all at once’ in the present of his reading her letter. However, there is an additional dimension of ‘letters in time’ that occurs when a collection of extant letters are read in their entirety after their original context of writing, posting, receipt and reading has passed. When the letters were originally sent, each one was written and read in the uncertainty of a succession of present-present moments as these unfolded for the people concerned. However, when the letters are read as a whole after the passing of time, the whole of this time-period is already over and ‘known’ to the reader, while the original writers and readers remain somehow ‘trapped’ in the present-present of the letters. As Ricoeur comments, “Reading the end in the beginning and the beginning in the end, we also learn to read time itself backward, as the recapitulation of the initial course of action in its final consequences” (Ricoeur 1984: 105).

Stanley refers to the temporal gap between the ‘then’ of the original writing and reading and the ‘now’ of reading a collection of letters as a whole as a conceptual feature of the ‘epitolarium’, the “full number of someone’s letters that have become part of the public archival record” (Stanley 2004b: 218). Concerning my reading of Boer women’s camp letters, as ‘sets’ of correspondence they have been read all at once rather than in the serialised way they were originally written and read, and I have also read them in the ‘now’ of 2005, all of which have implications for the way I read and understand these letters, but implications that

are not always easy to discern. But what is clear is that my tracing temporality, themes, perspectives and interpretations across these letters as I have done in this chapter is necessarily predicated on my post-hoc positioning and consequent ability to see ‘overall’ what at the time was fragmented and emergent.

### **Diaries: “Sedimented into a particular moment in time”**

Diaries share many of the ‘present tense’ temporal specificities of letters, so that these two forms of personal writing are often thought to have much in common and are discussed together (Plummer 2001). However, as discussion here will show, Boer women’s camp diaries help problematise assumptions about the assumed ‘present tense’ characteristic of diaries more generally. Fothergill’s observation about diary entries used as one of the epigraphs for this chapter sees these as declaring “I am Here, and it is exactly Now” (Fothergill 1974: 9), something strongly echoed by Plummer’s stress on the importance of temporality in diaries:

“[T]he diary is the document of life *par excellence*, chronicling as it does the immediately contemporaneous flow of public and private events that are significant to the diarist. The word ‘contemporary’ is very crucial here, for each diary entry – unlike life histories – is sedimented into a particular moment in time: they do not emerge ‘all at once’ as reflections on the past, but day by day strive to record an ever-changing present” (Plummer 2001: 48)

While there are different forms that a diary can take, diaries as a genre of life writing or ‘chronicle of daily life’ are usually defined by being written at the time of or very shortly after the events they recorded and so are seen to be characterised by immediacy, dailiness and a preservation of ‘the moment’, a common moment of both experiencing and writing.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> I have found the following useful and have drawn on them in my discussion of diaries: Bell 1998, Blodgett 1989, Bottoms 1995, Bunkers and Hoff 1996, Keagle 1988, Malinowski 1989, Moffat and Painter 1974, Nelson 1997, Ponsonby 1923, and Simons 1990.

In his introduction to Malinowski's<sup>63</sup> diary, Raymond Firth outlines one form of the diary as an *aide-mémoire*: "A diary in the ordinary sense can be a simple chronological record of day-to-day events. This is what many people keep, or try to keep, as a kind of *aide-mémoire* to their recollections or as a kind of justification to prove to themselves that the days that have gone by have not been completely wasted" (Firth in Malinowski 1989: xvii). However, some diaries take the form of appointment or engagement books, in which day-to-day meetings, 'to-do' lists, reminders and activities are recorded and planned, with some journal forms of this adding in extra commentary by the writer. The form most commonly associated with diaries is the day-to-day diary, or what Ponsonby defines as "the daily or periodic record of personal experiences and impressions" (Ponsonby 1923: 1). Some diaries are written with a focus on a particular event or delineated time, such as travel diaries or wartime diaries. All these forms of diary can be 'personal' or 'impersonal', and the assumption that diaries are always 'personal' and 'private' is belied by the number of diaries written for another person, with diaries thus blurring into letters, as suggested by the 'Dear Diary' form.<sup>64</sup> The notion of the diary as a 'space' in which the self is constructed and explored runs through some theoretical literature on diaries,<sup>65</sup> although as Blodgett points out, "the diary that deeply investigates the self and may function as therapy or emancipation provides neither the normative standard nor necessarily the epitome of style for diaries. Using a diary to explore personal inner space for the sake of growth ... is contemporary practice, not the typical historical reality" (Blodgett 1989: 4). Certainly some diaries bear signs of 'deep' introspection, but there are many others

<sup>63</sup> Bronislaw Malinowski (1884–1942), the Polish anthropologist.

<sup>64</sup> See for example the diaries of Hannah Cullwick, which were written 'for' Arthur Munby (Stanley 1984).

<sup>65</sup> This characteristic is frequently ascribed to women's diaries; see for example Culley 1985, Moffatt and Painter 1974.

that are primarily concerned with what might be regarded as mundane, daily minutia rather than grand musings on the meaning of life.

Diaries usually take the form of daily entries, although the regularity and frequency of entries varies across different kinds of diaries and also within a particular diary over time. Diaries are certainly serial and episodic in nature, and while over an extended period patterns and trends may emerge in diary-writing, diaries are often inconsistent or even experimental in both style and content. Although diaries are sometimes sites of reflection for their writers, their dailiness and immediacy has also been seen to provide more accurate ‘at the time’ and ‘on the spot’ representations of contemporaneous occurrences and experiences. In short, given their location in time and space, diaries are taken to embody strong referential qualities concerning representing events without a hindsight perspective intruding on and ‘contaminating’ this.

In his discussion of U.S. women’s Civil War writings, Nelson argues that their wartime diaries have been presented as “unreflective, personal record[s], untainted with interpretation or analysis that might alter the authoritative male history of the war” (Nelson 1997: 55).<sup>66</sup> It is thus the personal, private, supposedly non-analytical aspects of women’s diaries, as well as their ‘I was there’ and ‘this is what I wrote at the time’ qualities, that for some commentators confer upon them veracity as truthful, factual repositories of wartime experiences. James Young has written of authenticity as both a product and a guarantee of factual veracity in relation to Holocaust diaries:

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<sup>66</sup> In the South African case, Boer women could (and did) lay claim to representing the only (white) adult experiences of the camps, and their writing was therefore not perceived as a challenge to the “authoritative male history of the war”, although it did in many ways provide the female equivalent to the many tales of the brave, hardy, *bittereinder* (bitter ender) burghers who fought on commando. However, Nelson’s point about the supposedly private, unreconstructed nature of women’s Civil War diaries giving them a ‘special’ authority holds for Boer women’s diaries too.

“Because the diarists wrote from within the whirlwind, the degree of authenticity in their accounts is perceived by readers to be stronger than that of the texts shaped through hindsight. Operating on the same phenomenological basis as print journalism, in which the perceived temporal proximity of a text to events reinforces the sense of its facticity, diaries can be more convincing of their factual veracity than more retrospective accounts. Like photographs, which represent themselves as metonymical remnants of their objects, the diary accrues the weight and authority of reality itself” (Young 1988: 25)

However, even if by only a very short space of time, diaries are, also by definition, records of past events or feelings experienced or observed by the diarist, and so are subject to the workings of hindsight, as with other ‘documents of life’.

In addition to this, Young comments that “even diarists themselves – once they enter immediate experience into the tropes and structures of narrative – necessarily convert experience into an organized, often ritualised, memory of experience” (Young 1988: 25). Thus while diary writing “is sometimes perceived as a private and spontaneous activity, unstructured, uninhibited, it flows on from day to day, a modest little stream of consciousness”, Janet Bottoms proposes that “in reality it is very far from this, though the writer may not be fully conscious of the process of selection and structuring which is taking place” (Bottoms 1995: 110). This selectiveness and its inscription into what Young calls ‘the tropes and structures of narrative’ of memory is also compounded by the passing of time, thus the emphasis on the immediacy and dailiness of diary-writing. The self-described camp ‘diaries’ that I discuss here draw on these legitimating features of diaries in general, in particular personal, spatial and temporal closeness to ‘real life’, in spite of the fact that these characteristics are actually absent from what are better described as simulated diaries.

There are approximately a dozen published or archived documents that are self-represented as diaries written by Boer women in camps during the war, although other

characteristics of them suggest that their status as diaries ‘in the strict sense of the term’ is actually debatable.<sup>67</sup> In addition, there are several women’s wartime diaries also in archive collections, which are mainly written by English-speaking, urban women and are not camp diaries.<sup>68</sup> Many of the first group, the published and unpublished camp diaries, do not appear to be ‘strict’ diaries, but were evidently rewritten from ‘at the time’ documents or else were written from scratch long after the war, drawing on hindsight, and frequently this was within a (proto-) nationalist framework. Thus the so-called *dagboeke* or diaries by Susara Roos (WM 6455/1), Bessie Schabert (MSB 437, 1 (1)), Rensche Van Der Walt (Van Der Walt 1965)<sup>69</sup> and Bettie Venter (1938 A248) all appear to be imitations of the diary genre, but without being misrepresentations of this in any simple sense. These documents shows strong signs of being written up long after the war and have much in common in both tone and content with the post-hoc testimonies, as I shall show through a detailed examination of Bettie Venter’s diary. The camp diaries by Janie Kriegler,<sup>70</sup> Adriana Coetzee (WM 5978/1), Miem Fischer (Fischer 1964),<sup>71</sup> Alie Badenhorst (Hobhouse 1923b),<sup>72</sup> Henrietta Armstrong (Van Rensburg 1980)<sup>73</sup>

<sup>67</sup> This term draws on the title of Malinowski’s posthumously published diaries (Malinowski 1989).

<sup>68</sup> For example, the diaries of Isabella Lipp (CL A1661) and Clara Levisseur (A72/5.79), both of which were written in English. Lipp’s diary records her experiences and impressions as a British-supporting resident of Johannesburg during the first eight months of the war. Levisseur and her family were English-speaking Boer supporters and her diary deals with her daily life as a Bloemfontein inhabitant between 18 August 1899 and 22 February 1900.

<sup>69</sup> The book was compiled, edited and translated by Kezia Hamman (Van der Walt’s niece) and published in 1965 as a ‘commemorative book’ with the co-operation of the Bethulie Camp Cemetery Committee and the South African War Graves Board. Proceeds from the sale of the book went to the Bethulie Camp Cemetery Committee.

<sup>70</sup> Janie Kriegler’s diary is part of the Kriegler family private collection. I have made use of a portion of the diary (15 July 1900 – 24 January 1901) transcribed by Betty Welz, to which she and her husband Johan Kriegler kindly granted me access.

<sup>71</sup> Mrs. M.A. Coetzee, granddaughter of Miem Fischer, was described as owning Fischer’s original diary at the time of publication.

<sup>72</sup> The current whereabouts of Alie Badenhorst’s original diary are not known although Hobhouse’s letters of the 1920s suggest that the manuscript was given to Badenhorst’s son Wessels.

<sup>73</sup> Henrietta Armstrong’s original diary is archived with the papers of the South African’s Women’s Federation (SAWF) at the State Archives in Pretoria (TAD A1819 (3)) and an edited version was published in 1980. I use the word ‘original’ here in its most general sense, for as I discuss later, even some of the ‘original’ diaries appear to have not been written in this form ‘at the time’ but to result from re/working after the war.

and Johanna Brandt-Van Warmelo (Brandt-Van Warmelo 1905)<sup>74</sup> all appear to be based on some form of account kept by the authors at the time and in the environment of camp life, but were later reformulated and sometimes extensively rewritten, with the result that these too cannot be treated straightforwardly as diaries ‘in the strict sense’. Some of these diaries are certainly comprised of dated, daily entries and do deal with everyday camp experiences; but nevertheless they also show, to varying degrees, clear signs of later having been reworked from rougher forms of writing into ‘proper’ polished diaries, thereby divorcing these texts from the very temporal and spatial locatedness upon which diaries are seen to have validity as repositories of factual veracity about historical events.

#### Bettie Venter: Hindsight and Nationalism

“I had to write everything over again in this book my war book is torn pages and pure dutch in between now I am writing in my mother tongue”<sup>75</sup> (Venter 1938 A248: 106)

Of the Boer women’s accounts presented as diaries, it is the camp *dagboek* or diary of Bettie Venter (née Grobbelaar) that most clearly enables assumptions about these camp diaries being diaries as documents written at the time and ‘in the space’ to be problematised.<sup>76</sup> In reading it, it becomes evident that this is not a diary ‘in the strict sense’ of being written at the time of the war, but is rather a retrospective account of the author’s experiences as a young woman in Brandfort concentration camp that mimics some aspects of the diary form. I start by

<sup>74</sup> Johanna Van-Warmelo-Brandt’s manuscript diary, upon which parts of her 1905 *Het Concentratie-kamp van Irene* was based, is now stored at the archives of the Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk in Pretoria.

<sup>75</sup> “*Ek moes alles oor skryf in die boek my oorlog boek is stukkende blaai en pure nederlands tussen in nou skryf ek in my moeder taal.*” This kind of translation choice and the conscious decision to adopt Afrikaans as a ‘mother tongue’ for political reasons are discussed in more detail in Chapter Six. Page numbers do not appear in the archived manuscript diaries by Venter, Armstrong, Coetzee or Schabert. I have numbered the pages for ease of reference here.

<sup>76</sup> The document is archived specifically as Bettie Venter’s *Dagboek* (Diary).

considering the likely provenance of the document, how and why it was written and the complex ways in which time is inscribed within it.

Firstly, there are material and structural aspects of Venter's diary that suggest that it is likely to have been written up retrospectively and is a 'diary', rather than a diary in the strict sense. It is contained in one single, A5 ruled notebook and is written in a uniform, rather painstaking, child-like and very even handwriting throughout. There are virtually no corrections, additions or amendments to the text, which gives the appearance of having perhaps been copied out 'in neat' from a rougher version. It is also apparent from the content of the 'diary' that it was based very loosely, if at all, on any writing done at the time of the war, as I shall show.

Secondly, unlike the camp letters, which are written in the contemporary hybridic Taal of ordinary spoken use by uneducated Boer people which is difficult for present-day readers and speakers of Afrikaans to understand, the Venter 'diary' is written in a post-war and indeed 1930s form of Afrikaans (that is, the 'modern' written form produced out of the Second Language Movement). In addition, attention to its form shows that the greater part of Venter's 'diary' is not written as daily entries, and often jumps forward by a whole month from entry to entry, for example from '17 September 1899' to '1 October' to 'November 1899' to 'January 1900', with some short entries recording the events of several months rather than a single day. For instance, the entry for January 1900 reads, "January 1900. January went quietly by the brothers just write how the canons greet them every day",<sup>77</sup> and this is followed by an entry headed "February 1900" but which actually covers the period up to June 1900. In addition, there are frequent switches between the present and past verb tenses: "The silence on the farm is heavy, the corn is ripe, we have just 2 work kaffers to cut the corn, we helped a little help

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<sup>77</sup> "Januarie 1900. Januarie is stil virby die broers skryf net hoe die kanonne hulle elke dag groet."

but it is too hard work to cut with the scythe. the first day we were fit. the 2<sup>nd</sup> day my back was stiff” (Venter 1938 A248: 3).<sup>78</sup> The past tense of the last two sentences here, like many others in the document, help create uncertainty about when the entry was written, and helps cast doubt over the provenance of the whole diary.

These uncertain temporal dimensions of Bettie Venter’s manuscript are reflected in the author’s alternating use of her birth name and married name. At the time of the war she was called Bettie Grobbelaar, although on the last page of the ‘diary’ she signs herself Bettie Venter, the married surname she assumed in 1904, with this again suggesting the retrospective origins of the manuscript. Interestingly, and clearly indicating that no deliberate misrepresentation was intended, the information about her marriage and resulting name change is actually provided in the ‘diary’ itself: after the main entries concerning the war, a paragraph appears which reads “On the 11<sup>th</sup> October 1094 I was married to Johannes Petrus Venter grandson of Pieter Albert Venter” (Venter 1938 A248: 97).<sup>79</sup> However, time fractures are not so easily ‘solved’, for the first page of the manuscript bears a photograph of the author, alongside which she has written “I am here 19 years old – Bettie Venter”,<sup>80</sup> and thus while the photograph may depict the author ‘as she was’ at the time of the war, the caption was added after her 1904 marriage. Thus the presence of the photograph renders the production of the ‘diary’ overall temporally ‘suspect’ and imprecise because narrative time within it keeps shifting.

There are further interesting signs that the manuscript was written some years after the war, with some specific indications that this probably occurred in the late 1930s. Thus towards

<sup>78</sup> “Die stilte op die plaas is swaar, die koring is ryp, ons het net 2 werks kaffers om koring te sny, ons het beetje gehelp maar dit is te swaar werk om met ‘n sekel te sny. die eerste dag was ons fluks. die 2de dag was my rug styf.”

<sup>79</sup> “Op die 11de Oktober 1904 is ek getrouwd met Johannes Petrus Venter klein seun van Pieter Albert Venter”

<sup>80</sup> “Ek is hier 19 jaar oud – Bettie Venter”

the back of the 'diary' notebook, after the narrative of the war has ended and its 'official' diary-entries stop, Venter added further entries that move backwards and forwards in time, suggesting that she wrote things down that she deemed noteworthy in the order in which they occurred to her. Significantly, the first of these is dated 16 December 1938, the date on which the foundation stone of the Voortrekker Monument was laid, and it reads as follows: "The 16th December 1938 I was in the guard of honour, at the laying of the foundation stone, of the Voortrekker Monument I am the own grandchild of my grandmother Hester C.P. Coetzee born Venter she was a daughter of Willem Adriaan Venter, Voortrekker" (Venter 1838 A248: 97).<sup>81</sup> On the opposing page, a blue triangular cardboard ticket bearing the words "Voortrekker Centenary Pretoria / Guard of Honour / 14 – 16 Dec. 1938"<sup>82</sup> and thus from the day in question has been pasted in.

The presence of Great Trek centenary memorabilia strongly suggest that this 'diary', like many other women's camp accounts, was written up at the time of these celebrations and was thus embedded in and emanated from the Afrikaner nationalist politics of that time.<sup>83</sup> This is further supported by Venter's laying claim in this entry to a Voortrekker lineage; as outlined in Chapter One, public commemoration of the Great Trek and the concentration camps was crucial to the cultural and political development of Afrikaner nationalism in the 1930s. These two things were indeed frequently represented as the twin cornerstones of the Afrikaner past, with both seen to represent the testing of the Afrikaner people and their stoicism, bravery and godliness in the face of suffering.

<sup>81</sup> "Die 16de Desember 1938 was ek 'n eere wag, by die hoeksteen leg, van die Voortrekker Monumentek is eie klein kind van my oma Hester C.P. Coetzee geb. Venter sy is 'n dogter van Willem Adriaan Venter, Voortrekker."

<sup>82</sup> "Voortrekker Eeupees Pretoria / Erewag / 14 – 16 Des. 1938"

<sup>83</sup> Other camp accounts published at this time include Neethling 1938, Raal 1938, Postma 1939, Rabie-Van der Merwe 1940 and Van Zyl 1944.

It is highly probable, then, that Venter wrote her camp ‘diary’ in the late 1930s, although the reasons for her choosing the diary form are unclear. Her reference to her earlier ‘war book’ give no indication of whether or not this was a diary, although this does not seem likely. As these brief extracts will have suggested, Venter’s erratic use of punctuation, poor grammar and rather stilted, wooden writing style – which my translations have followed as closely as possible – indicate that she was unaccustomed to writing, and that she did so as part of the orchestrated nationalist call to ‘remember’. It is possible that she had heard about one of the well-known published camp diaries, such as Het Concentratie-kamp Van Irene (Brandt-Van Warmelo 1905) or Tant’ Alie of the Transvaal (Hobhouse 1923b), and deemed this the ‘correct’ form that camp writing should take. In addition, that she had read or heard about and was influenced by women testimony-writers in her selection of what and how to represent her camp ‘memories’ seems certain considering her description of the Brandfort ‘meat riot’, which bears strong similarities to Maria Els’ testimony in Mag Ons Vergeet? (Neethling 1938) discussed in Chapter Three.

The political nature of Venter’s ‘diary’ is also evident from various of the expressions she uses, which are very similar to those articulated in the post-war testimonies, but which seldom appear in letters written at the time of the war. For instance, she writes, as though in a narrative present, that “It is for our freedom that we suffer. We want to be free from the yoke of the Englishman” (Venter 1938 A248: 57) and, “It looks as if all the Afrikaners are dying out, the suffering has no end” (Venter 1938 A248: 77),<sup>84</sup> present-tense statements of political opinions and generalisations that were not articulated by women writing letters at the time. In this regard, towards the end of her ‘diary’ she comments:

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<sup>84</sup> “Dit is vir ons vryheid dat ons ly. Ons wil vry wees van die Engelsman se juk”, “Dit lyk of al die Afrikaners uitsterf, die ellende het nie ‘n end nie.”

“No pen can describe the heavy suffering that we went through, and what I have written about in this book is the truth, I have good reason I helped my Father a lot in his work and I served my people. I will never betray my nation, may my descendants always stand by their God, who is also my God, who gave us the strength to bear everything that was laid on us” (Venter 1938 A248: 95)<sup>85</sup>

Venter’s emphasis on service to her people, steadfastness to her nation, and the God-given strength and resilience of the Afrikaner people, all resonate with sentiments expressed in the post-war retrospectively written testimonies. My conclusion about Venter’s manuscript from all the factors I have discussed is that it is clearly a retrospective account produced thirty years on during a period of high nationalism, albeit one that has adopted some of the conventions of the diary format, perhaps to support the truth-claims she makes within it by employing her ‘I was there, I saw and experienced it’ status as knowledgeable witness.

As with many of the post-war testimonies, where specific incidents, such as that concerning the meat hooks in Pietersburg camp, were told away from the context or their occurrence and written about as generally occurring events, so too regarding post/memory as it impacts Venter’s ‘diary’, the specific vanishes and what is inscribed are decontextualised and universalised ‘statements of fact’ used to comment on the camps overall. This is well illustrated by a small newspaper cutting of a notorious photograph of Lizzie Van Zyl<sup>86</sup> which Venter pasted into her ‘diary’, writing on it: “So looked a camp child. I had to look after such

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<sup>85</sup> “Die swaar lyding wat ons deurgemaak kan geen pen beskryf nie, en wat ek in die boek geskryf het, is die waarheid, ek het goeie verstand ek het my Vader baie gehelp in sy werk ek het my volk gedien. my nasie sal ek nooit verrai nie, mog my nageslag altyd staan by hulle God, wat my God ook is, wat ons krag gegee het om alles te dra wat op ons gele was.”

<sup>86</sup> Lizzie Van Zyl was photographed by Emily Hobhouse at Bloemfontein camp, and when this photograph was published it caused a furore about conditions in the camps. The photograph has subsequently been reproduced many times, often in a nationalist context to ‘prove’ that camp inmates were starved. Stanley has discusses the case of Lizzie Van Zyl, the use of this photograph and argues that it has been manipulated, elongating and distorting Lizzie’s body. See Stanley 2005a, in press.

thin children" (Venter 1938 A248: 111),<sup>87</sup> and writing alongside it, "Nellie S. in the camp at Bloemfontein."<sup>88</sup> The puzzling case of Lizzie Van Zyl as one of the 'faded flowers'<sup>89</sup> children is removed by Venter from its specific historical and also its epidemiological context and made into a general representation of 'the camp child', clearly implying that all camp children looked like this. Indeed, the post/memory dimensions are confirmed by the fact that Venter did not know the correct name of the child concerned.

The existence of 'diaries' written many years after the events recorded is not confined to Boer women's camp writings. Thus, in her discussion of Fanny Burney's diaries,<sup>90</sup> Judy Simons points out that Burney "wrote much of her later journal deliberately for posterity, months or even years after the events it describes had occurred" (Simons 1990: 20). Simons argues that, in spite of this, "with the aid of her astonishing memory she was able to recall scenes and recreate scenes in specific detail" (Simons 1990: 32). I find this argument flawed in two main ways. Firstly, the assumption that an event, a memory of that event, and a representation of that same event, all map directly and neatly onto each other is highly problematic, particularly so when a long period of time has elapsed between the event and its subsequent representation. Accounts of the past are always motivated and selective, whether they are written 'at the time' or much later. Secondly, and with specific regard to the diary genre, the notion that an account written years after the episodes it records can still be a diary in any meaningful sense of the word does not stand. As Plummer emphasises, the diary is "contemporaneous" (2001: 48); it chronicles daily life and preserves some sense of the living

<sup>87</sup> "So lyk 'n kamp kind Sulke maer kinders moes ek oppas". Venter had worked informally in the Brandfort camp hospital as a Boer probationer nurse for a time.

<sup>88</sup> "Nellie S. in die camp van Bloemfontein"

<sup>89</sup> This is the term Hobhouse used to describe Lizzie Van Zyl and the other perplexing cases where children slowly 'faded' away in the aftermath of measles and/or pneumonia.

<sup>90</sup> Fanny Burney (1753-1840) was a novelist and lady-in-waiting in Britain at the court of Queen Charlotte, wife of George I.

and particularly the writing ‘moment’. The episodic, immediate properties of the diary are characteristics of writing ‘at the time’ and cannot easily be recreated years later, for hindsight and a different narrative time tend to intrude into the temporal immediacy of ‘present moment’ writing. In the case of Bettie Venter’s ‘diary’, this is preoccupied with ‘the big picture’ – the politics of the war, the deliberate mistreatment of Boer women and children, the future of the Republics and the *volk* – all concerns of the post-war period which stand in sharp contrast to the heterogeneous mixture of weather observations, comments on daily activities, family news and private emotional responses, present in camp letters demonstrably written at the time. The diaries of Susara Roos and Rensche Van der Walt, too, contain similar signs of not being written at the time of the events they describe: they both take a hindsight and generalised perspective and are demonstrably not diaries in Fothergill’s ‘I am Here, and it is exactly Now’ sense.

#### **Diaries ‘in the strict sense of the term’**

In arguing that the ‘diary’ of Bettie Venter is in fact not a diary ‘as such’ but instead a retrospective account that shares many of the characteristics of the post-war testimonies, it is necessary to consider what a ‘real’ diary may look like, if Venter’s is to be excluded from this category. While I recognise that ‘the diary’ can take different forms, as indicated above, and also that “remaining within the framework of genre conventions can be unnecessarily limiting” (Stanley 2004b: 203), it is also worth examining camp diaries that are most ‘like’ and ‘unlike’ diaries ‘in the strict sense of the term’. For me, the key feature here concerns temporal closeness to or distance from the events or impressions recorded. An examination here of what a ‘real’ diary might look like is particularly necessary because many of the

published camp diaries have in the past been uncritically and unproblematically presented as having, and straight-forwardly accorded, the referential status associated with the diary genre, even when written five, ten, twenty, thirty or even forty years after the events in question. In spite of what seems to me the clear signs that Bettie Venter's manuscript 'diary' was written in 1938, Elizabeth Van Heyningen has discussed it as the "naïve unpublished diary" of "the young Bessie [sic] Grobbelaar" (Van Heyningen 1999: 35), and treats claims made in it as entirely referential. Marais (1999), Jansen (1999b) and Raath (2002b) all draw on Boer women's camp diaries – diaries whose 'moment of writing' is neither clear nor certainly 'of the war', in my estimation – as straightforward diaries, and quote from them to support fact-claims about the war and the camps. As Janet Bottoms (1995) points out, in any diary a 'process of selection and structuring' is taking place, but this process changes over time; and as Plummer (2001) emphasises, temporal immediacy is the crucial defining feature of diaries, which are always "sedimented into a particular moment in time" (Plummer 2001: 48). I conclude that a 'diary' written twenty or thirty years after the events it records is not simply another sort of diary; it is not a diary at all in any meaningful sense of the term.

Of the dozen or so (published, archived and in private hands) documents that purport to be camp diaries, it is not possible to ascertain with certainty the provenance of even one single one as a diary 'in the strict sense' which was definitely written at the time of the war, although there are some that are more 'like' a diary than others. For a few, this is because no manuscript version exists, alongside the fact that their published or typescript forms have characteristics similar to those of the Venter 'diary'. Most of the camp 'diaries' occupy an in-between status: they appear to be based on some kind of documentation kept at the time, in the camps, but were then later shaped into what the authors deemed to be 'proper' diaries, but in

doing so they inscribed into them more than one narrative time, a strain towards generalisation, and signs of later political views and concepts. An example of a diary ‘in the strict sense of the term’ is provided by the diary of Anna Barry, who was not a camp inhabitant, but a young woman living with her family in the Ficksburg district at the time of the war (A243.8).<sup>91</sup> Parts of her manuscript diary are now archived, with a version of this later published in 1960 as *Ons Japie: dagboek gehou gedurende die Driejarige Oorlog* [Our Japie: diary kept during the Three Year War (Barry 1960)].<sup>92</sup> Barry’s manuscript diary is not contained in a single notebook nor written in a neat, uniform hand, but on different kinds of paper, at different times as indicated by writing differences, with some sheets of paper badly torn and very scrappy. Some pages are written in English and others are in Taal. Many pages have been crossed through, some with lines and squiggles and others with cross-hatched writing. For example, several pages written in Taal have been cross-hatched with English phrases and sayings such as “A friend in need is a friend indeed”, “Value a good conscience more than praise” and “Use time as though you knew its value”. These schoolgirl adages are repeated over and over across the pages, perhaps to obscure the actual diary-writing beneath, although they also appear to be a writing exercise of some sort, and it is not certain which came first, although the likelihood is that the diary was written over an earlier writing exercise, both protecting the diary from any casual prying eye by making it difficult to read, and also providing a supply of paper in a context of shortage.

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<sup>91</sup> Anna Barry later married Charles Reitz, a nephew of Frank Reitz, former President of the Orange Free State and State Secretary of the Transvaal during the war. Letters in the Reitz collection (A243) from Anna Barry to her parents indicate that she was English-speaking.

<sup>92</sup> Japie was Anna Barry’s brother and was wounded during the war and later died; he was buried near the P.O.W. camp Diyatalawa in Ceylon.

Anna Barry's diary bears signs of having a 'rough' and 'neat' form: there are the crossed through and cross-hatched pages comprising the 'rough' form, and there are also a few loose sheets from an exercise book, very neatly written, apparently forming part of a neat, tidied up version. The diary has dated entries, and although not all of the manuscript text is now fully legible, the parts that are, are written in the present tense and bear every sign of being written at the time. The rough, untidy, haphazard, ramshackle aspects of the diary suggest that it was indeed written contemporaneously by a young woman as she experienced the changed familial and personal circumstances brought by the impact of the war, and also continuing to live her 'ordinary life' as best she could. In many places, words or phrases have been crossed out and changed, and the text contains a number of amendments and insertions of the kind that occur when writing in an unplanned, unpolished, private and provisional manner. Anna Barry's diary thus contrasts sharply with Bettie Venter's worked-up version which emerged 'all at once' as part of a politically-motivated public commemoration project, and I conclude that Barry's is indeed a diary 'in the strict sense of the term', while Venter's is a 'diary', mimetic but at basis actually other.

Having discussed in depth the Bettie Venter 'diary' and the diary of Anna Barry, I now want more briefly to review some more examples of camp diaries and where these are located in relation to 'diary' and diary forms, with these including those by Brandt-Van Warmelo and Alie Badenhorst examined in more detail in what follows. I begin with the published example of Tant Miem Fischer se Kampdagboek: Mei 1901 – Augustus 1902 [Aunt Miem Fischer's Camp Diary: May 1901 – August 1902], first published in 1964 and then republished in 2000. A brief note at its start informs the reader that "This publication is a verbatim transcription of Miem Fischer's original diary, with just the spelling Afrikanerised where necessary. It was

prepared for publication by her granddaughter, Mrs M.A Coetzee, who owns the original manuscript.<sup>93</sup> Clearly Mrs. Coetzee and the publishers of the book want to highlight the text's authenticity as a diary and as a primary historical document. Thus it is described as a 'verbatim' transcription of an 'original' diary, which the reader is assured still exists and therefore is hypothetically available to 'prove' the claims made about the closeness of the published text to this original. However, a close reading of Miem Fischer's diary suggests that, while the text might have been based on an 'actual' and probably much rougher document kept during the war, much of this was later rewritten and shaped into a polished account threaded through with strongly (proto-) nationalist sentiments. In addition, if Coetzee's claim to have only adjusted or 'Afrikanerised' the spelling of Fischer's manuscript 'where necessary' is true, then this in itself indicates that Fischer wrote the manuscript some time after the war. That is, if it had been written during the war itself, it would, like the letters written at the time, have been written either in Dutch or Taal and would have required full translation.

In the introduction to the diary, Fischer explains why she wrote a diary, but her explanation reveals a great deal more about the diary's likely provenance:

"I had seen and heard of many diaries, but had never written one myself. My life was, from what I could remember, too simple to say anything about it. [She then provides a description of her life as a simple, wholesome Boer woman]. How things changed and we had to be civilised, I had to still learn – also to live without meat, butter, milk, vegetables, eggs and fruit which all farmers had in plenty, was still a closed book. Later, when our land became so rich through gold fields, it was said that we were uncivilised and that England must help us right. How it would all get done, I could not grasp, but I know it now, in the bitter end, all too well – and I fear that it is just the beginning of my schooling.

<sup>93</sup> "Hierdie uitgawe is 'n woordelike weergawe van kant Miem Fischer se oorspronklike dagboek, maar met die spelling verafrikaans waar nodig. Dit is vir uitgawe voorberei deur haar kleinkogter, mev. M.A. Coetzee, wat die oorspronklike manuskrip besit."

Therefore I am going to try to record everything that was deemed necessary for the civilisation of the Boer woman. If I am lucky, it can still be useful to some or other uncivilised creature” (Fischer 2000: 5-6)<sup>94</sup>

This extract implies that the ‘diary’ or parts were re/written or even written from scratch after the war, as Fischer’s comments ‘I had still to learn’, ‘I fear that it is just the beginning of my schooling’ and ‘I am going to try to record’ suggest, although the introduction may have been written later and appended to the original diary. Fischer’s bitter, sarcastic tone here is sustained throughout the book, as she recounts her experiences in Standerton and Merebank camps. And in the diary, there are several indications of a possible retrospective re/working of an original text, particularly its use of square brackets with ‘explanatory’ additions:

“6.6.01 We arrived in the Standerton Burgher camp [later the murder camp], where we were offloaded on a heap of sand” (Fischer 2000: 14)<sup>95</sup>

“The doctor [if he is one] is too refined to go to see the ill in the tents...” (Fischer 2000: 48)<sup>96</sup>

It is unclear whether these additions were inserted by Fischer at the time or at a later point when she edited the diary, or whether they were added when the book was prepared for publication after Fischer’s death in 1956. However, the highly politicised tone and content of Fischer’s comments fits with the later testimonies, in which the view that the camps were part

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<sup>94</sup> “Ek het al baie dagboeke gesien en van gehoor, maar self nog nooit een geskryf nie. My lewe was, vandat ek kan onthou, te eenvoudig of te eenvoudig om iets van te sê. Hoe dinge verander en ons beskaaf moes word, moes ek nog leer – ook om sonder vleis, botter, melk, groente, eiers, en vrugte wat alle boere volop het, te leef, was ’n geskote boek. Als kind het ek nooit veel van beskawing gehoor nie. Later, nadat ons land so ryk aan goudvelde geword het, is daar gesê dat ons onbeskaaf is en dat Engeland ons moes reghelp. Hoe dit alles gedoen sou word, kon ek nie begryp nie, maar weet dit nou, hekkas, alte goed – en ek vrees dat dit nog maar die begin van my skooltyd is. Daarom gaan ek probeer om alles wat tot beskawing van die boerevroue nodig gaag word, op te teken. As dit my geluk, kan dit nog vir die een of ander onbeskaafde skepsel tot nut wees.”

<sup>95</sup> “Ons kom aan in die Standertonse Burgerkamp [later die moordkamp], waar ons op ’n hoop sand afgelaai word.”

<sup>96</sup> “Die dokter [as hy een is] is te fyn om in die tente na die siekes te gaan kyk...”

of a deliberate British attempt to harm or even exterminate Boer women and children predominates.<sup>97</sup>

Fischer's reaction to the declaration of peace on 1 June 1902, supposedly written at the time, are remarkably bitter and are framed entirely in (proto-) nationalist terms: "1.6.02 Peace, victory for England, struggle and slavery for us and our children? Such a peace? Oh, then rather the camp misery, with all its horror. Should the bodies in the extended cemeteries now not be luckier than us?" (Fischer 2000: 119).<sup>98</sup> Here Fischer suggests that death is preferable to living as a 'slave' under British rule, and the fierce (proto-) nationalism inherent in this remark contrasts with reactions to the peace in letters written at the time by Boer women, in which expressions of relief or resigned acceptance dominate. Thus, while Fischer's 'diary' is written in keeping with the diary form in the sense that it is written as daily entries, there are a number of aspects of its content and tone that cast doubt over whether the text was written 'at the time' and 'in the place', or whether it was later re/written as part of the (proto-) nationalist project that encouraged women to write up their war and camp experiences for specific political purposes. That Fischer was "her whole life a stalwart member of the Women's Federation [S.A.V.F.]" (Fischer 2000: 2)<sup>99</sup> indicates that she was active in (proto-) nationalist circles and her account may well have been solicited and written up in this context. The 'moment of writing' is further complicated by the reproduction of a section of Miem Fischer's diary in Mrs. Neethling's 1917 *Vergeten?* and 1938 *Mag Ons Vergeet?* (Neethling 1938: 230 –

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<sup>97</sup> She claims, for example, that doctors deliberately murdered patients in hospitals (Fischer 2000: 26), and that vitriol was mixed into the camp rations (Fischer 2000: 86).

<sup>98</sup> "*Vrede, oorwinning vir Engeland, stryd en skawerny vir ons en ons kinders? So 'n vrede? O, dan nog liever die kamp-ellende, met al sy verskrikking. Sou die lyke in die uitgestrekte kerkhous nie nou gelukkiger wees as ons nie?*"

<sup>99</sup> "*haar lewe lank 'n ywerige lid van die Vrouefederasie*". This refers to the South African Women's Federation [Suid-Afrikaanse Vrouefederasie or SAVF] mentioned in Chapter One. This information appears in the preface to the diary, presumably written by Mrs. Coetzee, which gives a brief biography of Miem Fischer.

234).<sup>100</sup> While this implies that (parts of) the diary was written long before its publication in 1964, it does not confirm that this was a diary written ‘at the time’. Instead, the appearance of the extract in Mrs. Neethling’s collection indicates Fischer’s involvement in the post-war (proto-) nationalist circles that orchestrated and published women’s testimonies, and the likelihood therefore is that her ‘diary’ was written up after the war as part of, or perhaps stemming from, this.

The unpublished English diary of Janie Kriegler, of which I have studied only a partial typescript rather than the full handwritten manuscript, concerns her experiences as a young woman in the war and in the camps at Pietermaritzburg, Howick, then Merebank, where she and her mother and siblings were sent.<sup>101</sup> The family had previously lived at Heidelberg in the Transvaal, but, after the death of the husband and father of the family in June 1900 (following an injury sustained in a battle near Brandfort in April 1900), they were sent to Pietermaritzburg. Janie Kriegler’s diary starts on 15 July 1900: “I have so often thought of keeping a diary but yet never could get so far. Today however I feel lonely & sad, with nothing to do – I am tired of reading & also of playing sacred music & feel in no mood to go out visiting, so I will begin one & first of all will put down some remembrances of the saddest time I have ever lived through (Kriegler: 1, original emphasis). She then goes on to describe her feelings of loss and grief following the death of her father (who had died about six weeks prior to this entry being written). The next entry is dated 20 July 1900, and covers the period

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<sup>100</sup> The extract in Mag Ons Vergeet? is worded slightly differently to the published diary, although not in any major way. The Van Zyl collection (TAD W19) now contains various of the original manuscripts of the testimonies published in Mag Ons Vergeet? Amongst these papers, the extract from Miem Fischer’s diary appears written in Mrs. Neethling’s own handwriting on two sheets of loose paper, and in a version of *Taal* rather than in Afrikaans. The two pages also show Mrs. Neethling’s corrections and amendments, although whether these were mistakes in her copying from an original or part of her editing work can now not be determined.

<sup>101</sup> The Merebank Register of Residents records Janie Kriegler’s age as nineteen on 28 October 1901 (DBC 126). The testimony of Janie’s mother, Mrs. Isabella Kriegler, appears in Mag Ons Vergeet? (Neethling 1938: 107–138).

between April and June, recording in retrospect the day she learned that her father had been wounded in battle, the journey she and her mother took to the Free State to care for him, her father's long illness and eventual death and her terrible grief afterwards. The following entry is dated 24 December 1900 – after an interval of five months – and covers events for both 24 and 25 December, when Janie and some of her siblings journeyed to Pietermaritzburg to join their mother, who had gone on ahead.

The remainder of the typescript diary – from 26 December 1900 to 24 January 1901 – takes the form of daily, dated entries that describe events of that same day. These all evince a temporal immediacy and present-ness in their treatment of time, and usually begin with “This morning...” The contents of the diary concerns Janie's day-to-day experiences and activities in the camp, with descriptions of the weather, the family tent and the work entailed in keeping it clean and tidy, gossip about friends and neighbours, walks taken, the habits of her dog ‘*Oorlog*’ (‘War’) and accounts of meals eaten, all included. However, there also signs of the (proto-) nationalist statements that so dominate the later post-war accounts, such as her comments on 1 January 1901: “Who knows, perhaps by next January this time, we will all be back in in [sic] our homes with our friends in a Free, Free Country where Englishman [sic] will never again have anything to say. That is the hope & trust of us all here” (Kriegler: 12). Later she remarks: “Really we have many brave women among us – how proud, doubly proud I am now, that I also belong [among] these brave, longsuffering, patient Africander women, how many heroes & heroins [sic] have we not amongst us!” (Kriegler: 22, 22 January 1901). Thus Janie Kriegler's diary seems to be a ‘real’ diary in the sense that, apart from in the ways that I have indicated, it was written up on a day-to-day basis and concerned daily events. But at the same time, (proto-) nationalist statements of this kind cast some doubt on the temporal

basis of the diary. Moreover, the unknown relationship between the typescript and the handwritten original add to the impossibility of determining with certainty the provenance of the latter as ‘of the time’.

The last example I would like to review here in examining ‘diary’ and diary form is the unpublished archived manuscript diary of Bessie Schabott; this is contained in a single large A4 notebook and is written in a uniform hand throughout (MSB 427).<sup>102</sup> While, as I shall show, the document was evidently written after the war rather than at the time, it is written in a form of Afrikaans closer to the Taal of wartime letters, and not in later standardised post-1920s Afrikaans, suggesting that it was written up in the decade or so after the war. Bessie Schabott was captured with her four young children by the British military on 14 November 1901 and sent to Standerton for a few weeks, before being transferred to Merebank camp.<sup>103</sup> Bessie Schabott’s ‘diary’ bears many signs of not being written at the time of the war. Thus although specific dates are sometimes referred to, there are no daily dated entries. Schabott also makes it amply clear that some parts of the ‘diary’ were written retrospectively, with part of her description of Standerton camp for instance beginning “Another look back at the bitter days at Standerton” (MSB 427: 18),<sup>104</sup> obviously indicating that this was written in hindsight. Schabott’s account shares many of the characteristics of the later camp testimonies and uses similar phrases as these do to describe her situation after the British looted her farm: “to leave you with just clothes on your body” and, “without anything just the clothes on your body”

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<sup>102</sup> Interestingly, the Schabotts were cousins of the Kriegler family (Uys 1981: 199), and both families were inhabitants at Merebank camp over a similar period. Bessie Schabott’s diary mentions Bella (Isabella) Kriegler attending the funeral of Bessie’s baby Isabella, who died in camp on 13 January 1902 (MSB 427: 26, and see DBC 132 for this death in the official records). It is possible that the writing or later publication of Mrs. Kriegler’s testimony inspired Bessie Schabott to produce a camp account of her own, and this would be in keeping with the family links evident between Boer women testimony-writers more generally, as well as the way in which many camp testimonies were solicited by and produced within (proto-) nationalist networks of women.

<sup>103</sup> The family’s arrivals and departures from these camps are recorded in DBC 98 and 127.

<sup>104</sup> “Nog een terug blik op de bittere daagen te Standerton”

(MSB 427: 4, 10).<sup>105</sup> Like many of the testimony-writers, she makes claims about camp inhabitants dying of hunger and refers to her son Kobie as being “*net vel en been*”, ‘just skin and bone’ (MSB 427: 25), and she also places great emphasis on not being able to forget certain days or events and the importance of remembering: “I will never forget it, and I myself hope that up to my 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> hundredth generation the uncivilised treatment from the Englishman and handsoppers will not be forgotten with me and my children” (MSB 427: 22).<sup>106</sup>

Schabort’s writing reveals her as a staunchly committed (proto-) nationalist. She sarcastically refers to “*ons beschaafde vyand*”, our civilised enemy, when describing the behaviour of the British military (MSB 427: 1, 10). Throughout the ‘diary’ she makes various statements of patriotic, (proto-) nationalist intent:

“I die for my people and a righteous cause” (MSB 427: 17)<sup>107</sup>

[On her husband’s capture] “But I bore it all for my Freedom, I never thought I suffered too heavily, that was one matter for us that we could never contemplate, even if we had to give our own lives ... more than once in my heart I wished to be a man, I would fight to my death” (MSB 427: 27)<sup>108</sup>

“It appeared as if the Englishman wanted to murder us and exterminate us as far as he could” (MSB 427: 29)<sup>109</sup>

These strongly politicised and past-tense remarks are in keeping with the tone and contents of the testimonies published later in the context of the rise of Afrikaner (proto-) nationalism, and contrast sharply with the camp letters discussed earlier, in which specificity and individual

<sup>105</sup> “U dan net met kleren ann de lyf te laten”, “zonder iets alleen hun kleren aan de lyf.” This phrase appears in several women’s testimonies; see for example Neethling 1938: 100, 220 and Postma 1939: 31.

<sup>106</sup> “Ik zal het nooit vergeten, in Ik hoop zelf tot in my 4de en 5de gehonderdsie geslag zal de onbeschaafde handelinge van Engelsman en handsoppermet met my en myn kinderen niet vergeten word.”

<sup>107</sup> “Ik sterf voor myn volk en rechtvaardige zaak”

<sup>108</sup> “Maar Ik heb dit alles voor my Vryheid gedraagen, En nooit gedink Ik ly te swaar, het was voor ons een zaak dat wy nooit aan kon gedinken al moest wy ons eigen leven geef ... meer als eens in myn hart begrest een man te wezen, Ik zou vechten tot myn dood.”

<sup>109</sup> “Het schynt of Engels man ons wil moor en uitrooi zoo ver hulle kan”

responses dominate over generalised, politicised statements. Schabert's 'diary' was almost certainly written up in the post-war context, although, unlike Fischer's 'diary', it does not mimic the diary form but is largely written in the style of a memoir. I turn now to exploring in more detail the complexities of time and writing in the diary of Johanna Brandt-Van Warmelo.

### **"Write as much as possible in diary form": Re/written Diaries**

Of the Boer women's camp diaries, Johanna Brandt-Van Warmelo's (1905) Het Concentratie-kamp van Irene on first reading seems most like a diary 'in the strict sense'.<sup>110</sup> This diary deals mainly with the two-month period from mid-May to mid-July 1901, when Van Warmelo worked as one of the volunteer 'nurses' at Irene camp, near Pretoria.<sup>111</sup> The group of volunteers, mostly young Boer women from prominent Pretoria families, were not actually nurses but lived and worked in the camp as helpers to the doctors. They visited inhabitants in their tents, reported cases of serious and contagious illnesses and distributed medicines, assisted in cases of minor illness; and in the Irene case they also distributed aid, much of it clothing and other items provided by the Irene *Hulpkomitee* [Help Committee] under the leadership of Mrs. Bosman of Pretoria. Johanna Van Warmelo left Irene camp in mid-July, and all the volunteer nurses were eventually dismissed from the camp in October 1901 after they were suspected of pursuing a republican or proto-nationalist political agenda in the camp. The presence of the volunteers proved controversial in another respect too, with the Ladies Commission expressing concern that they brought in forbidden 'Dutch medicines',

<sup>110</sup> When, in August 1902, Johanna Van Warmelo married Louis Brandt in Holland, she decided to retain her birth surname, hence the double-barrelled 'Brandt-Van Warmelo'.

<sup>111</sup> Mrs. Henrietta Armstrong was older, more experienced and not of the same privileged social order as the other volunteers. They included Miss Cilliers, sister of the well-known Afrikaans poet, the sisters Sophie and Mary Dürr, Miss Malherbe, Miss Findlay, Mrs. Stiemens and Mrs. J.C. Preller, a relative of Gustav Preller. Apart from Mrs. Armstrong, these women came from elite Republican families, in Johanna Van Warmelo's case with her authority in part deriving from her (deceased) father, a well-known NHK clergyman.

seen as representing an alternative source of authority to that of the superintendent, and so deemed “a dangerous element in camp” (Concentration Camps Commission 1902: 119).<sup>112</sup>

In the foreword to *Het Concentratie-kamp*, Brandt-Van Warmelo explains that the book is the publication of “my diary, written in the camp itself”, and that the diary is more about herself than she would like, with this resulting from writing a personal diary in which you “pour out your heart” without a thought of future publication (Brandt-Van Warmelo 1905: foreword, 11).<sup>113</sup> She adds that, had she known that the diary would later be published, she would have written more fluently and skilfully as well as less personally. These various disclaimers strongly imply that the published diary is exactly the same as the personal, ‘unskilful’ original, although she does add that the published book contains only half the original diary, which contained too much about her own complaints and suffering. However, one implication is that only ‘personal’ material has been removed, and another is that the diary has been shortened rather than having been rewritten and reformulated.

The published diary is in Dutch and is written in the form of daily entries in the present tense, thereby conveying a sense of immediacy and of experiences recorded almost as soon as they happened. The temporal and spatial present-tense of the diary effectively evokes the ‘then’ of camp life, as in its first entry of 12 May 1901, in which Brandt-Van Warmelo writes that she is “... writing in the warmest place I can find, namely my bed, with the pale candlelight flickering and casting shadows on the white walls of the tent, [so] I am afraid that my writing will often be almost illegible. Yesterday I was still at home, surrounded by luxury,

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<sup>112</sup> Commenting on the departure of the volunteers camp superintendent Essellin noted, “The Pretoria Voluntary Nurses left for good during the month and there seemed to be no great amount of weeping and wailing. These women filed into my office on the morning of their departure and were very angry at being allowed to return to their homes, which leads me to the conclusion that they were not voluntary nurses, in fact they were anything but nurses” (DCB 11, Irene Monthly Report, 31 October 1901).

<sup>113</sup> “*mijn dagboek, in het kamp zelf geschreven*”, “*hart uit te storten*”

and now?" (Brandt-Van Warmelo 1905: 13).<sup>114</sup> In its succession of entries, Van Warmelo (as she was during her time at Irene) recorded her day-to-day experiences as a volunteer in the camp, expressed her opinions about the running of the camp and the work of the doctors, and also her growing despair at the spread of the epidemics and the illnesses and deaths the camp inhabitants had to contend with. There are numerous aspects of its content that suggest the diary was written at the time, including that it is written as Van Warmelo interpreting the camp illnesses and deaths in the present-tense context of people struggling to cope with an overwhelming and unexpected set of epidemics which form and then engulf camp life, rather than framing this in terms of deliberate murder, as most of the post-war testimonies do. For example, although Van Warmelo deplores the rations as entirely unsuitable for the very young and the very old, and she also writes that far too little was done to alleviate the suffering of the Irene camp population overall, she admires the dedicated hard work of some of the camp doctors and acknowledges that their task in caring for the sick was sometimes aggravated by women who would not listen to doctor's orders on basic hygiene matters (Brandt-Van Warmelo 1905: 78).

At the same time, there are intimations in the diary, alongside these, of the proto-nationalist 'line' on the camps that later came to dominate 'telling the tale'. For example, Brandt-Van Warmelo's description of the camp rations as "rotten meal, tough, often bad meat, black sugar" echoes those in many testimonies, as does her claim that many poorly children simply "died of hunger" because they could not stomach these rations (Brandt-Van Warmelo 1905: 16).<sup>115</sup> Also parts of the diary valorise Boer women as "the mothers and the wives of the

<sup>114</sup> "aangezien ik schrijf op het warmste plekje dat ik vinden kan, nl. in mijn bed, en het vele koorslicht flikkert en schaduwen werpt op de witte wanden van de tent, vrees ik, dat mijn schrift dikwijls bijna onleesbaar zijn zal. Gisteren avond was ik nog thuis, omringd door weelde, en nu?"

<sup>115</sup> "verrot meel, taai, dikwijls ziek vleesch, zwarte zuiker" "sterft van honger"

Transvaal men with lion hearts”, and as *volk* heroes who bore their suffering “patiently and resignedly” (Brandt-Van Warmelo 1905: 71).<sup>116</sup> And while Brandt-Van Warmelo does not make direct allegations about the deliberate mistreatment or eradication of Boer people, some of her comments do imply this. Thus at a number of points she writes, in a number of variants, that “it breaks my heart, to think of the extermination of our race on a great scale, not only the battle field, but also in the camps, where women and children die of cold and neglect” (Brandt-Van Warmelo 1905: 71).<sup>117</sup> Thus, while there are aspects of the diary that read as ‘of the time’, there are others that position it closer to the retrospectively re/worked post-war testimonies.

These indications of retrospective re/working come into even clearer sight when the diary manuscript in English (AB-VW, *Dagboek*),<sup>118</sup> purportedly written in the camp itself, is compared with the published version, which is in Dutch. While Brandt-Van Warmelo’s comment about her original diary being shortened for publication is evidently true (that is, insofar as the manuscript version is the original), the published version contains amendments, additions and omissions not covered by this disclaimer and which are of a kind that renders questionable her contention that the published version is “my diary, written in the camp itself” (Brandt-Van Warmelo 1905: Foreword). One point here is that Brandt-Van Warmelo’s diary was originally written in English is not acknowledged at any point in the published Het Concentratie-kamp.<sup>119</sup> Another is that many of the excluded passages in fact relate less to personal detail of her own hardships and complaints, and more to the lighter-hearted aspects of

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<sup>116</sup> “*de moeders en de echtgenooten van die Traansvaalsche mannen met leeuwenhartten*” “*geduklig en berustend*”

<sup>117</sup> “*het breekt mijn hart, te denken aan die uitroeiing van ons ras op groote schaal, niet allen op het slagveld, maar ook in kampen, waar vrouwen en kinderen sterven van koude en verwaarloozing.*”

<sup>118</sup> AB-VW throughout refers to the *Argief* [Archive] Brandt-Van Warmelo at the N.H.K. Archive, Pretoria.

<sup>119</sup> More detailed discussion of the translation of Brandt-Van Warmelo’s diary from English into Dutch and from unpublished manuscript to published book is provided in Chapter Six.

her camp experiences. Thus the excisions include her frequent walks in the nearby plantation, the teasing and in-jokes amongst the volunteers, friendships with some of the doctors, visits and presents from her mother, and the card games and entertainment she enjoyed in the evenings with the other volunteers and medical staff. There are also instances of specific details in the original that have been altered in the published version. For example, “1000 cases of sickness” in the manuscript – a kind of exaggerated broad indication of scale – has been altered to the more specific 500 cases in the published book (AB-VW, *Dagboek* IV, 12 May 1901: 4; Brandt-Van Warmelo 1905: 14).

In another instance, Brandt-Van Warmelo describes camp inhabitants approaching her to reminisce with her about her late father, Rev. N.J. Van Warmelo, whose work as a minister in the *Nederduitsch Herformeerde Kerk* (NHK) they remembered. In both the manuscript and published diary, she explains that people questioned her about her family and related their memories about her father, but she also comments that she seldom had time to stop and talk with them. In the published version, a further sentence has been added that does not appear in the manuscript: “They all said how grateful they were, that he was spared the sight of the suffering of his people, whom he loved more than life itself” (Brandt-Van Warmelo 1905: 22).<sup>120</sup> An even more telling example concerns Brandt-Van Warmelo’s comments about women who frustrated the doctors and volunteers by keeping their tents tightly shut up, denying water to fever patients and “looking horrified” at the idea of washing a measles patient, which are followed in the manuscript by the sentence, excised from the published book, “And they [the women] are stubborn with the stubbornness of crass ignorance” (AB-VW, *Dagboek* IV, 19 June 1901: 163). It is clear that the manuscript diary was considerably

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<sup>120</sup> “Hoe dankbaar zijn zij allen, dat het gezicht hem gespaard is van de ellende van dit volk, dat hij meer lief had dan zijn leven.”

reworked to produce the published version, with interesting results. The diary was published in Dutch, the language of Republican elites, rather than Brandt-Van Warmelo's first language of English.<sup>121</sup> The published version selects so as to emphasise Van Warmelo's role as a serious nurse whose time at Irene was spent earnestly helping its inhabitants, and the 'correction' of 'minor mistakes' result in underscoring the generous, selfless nature of the Boer people themselves and minimising any criticisms made of Boer women.

Brandt-Van Warmelo's letters from Holland in 1902 and 1903, written to her family in South Africa, confirm that her diary was at the least indeed extensively revised for publication, and also cast doubt on the provenance of the archived 'original' manuscript. On 19 July 1902 she wrote from Holland to her mother,

"I feel my powerlessness here and have decided to do my little best for 'land en volk', viz: wield the pen! I am going to write a book, dear friends, on the subject of Irene Camp, & that right soon. Miss Jennie advises me to lose no time and to write as much as possible in diary form, just as I wrote on the spur of the moment at Irene" (VW to Mrs. VW 19 July 1902, *Korrespondensie* folder 3, AB-VW, my emphasis)<sup>122</sup>

If, as this extract strongly suggests, Van Warmelo wrote Het Concentratie-kamp from scratch, then this clouds the origins of the 'original' manuscript too, because in spite of the differences I have indicated between the two, the greater part of the published version closely overlaps with the manuscript. In her letter of 17 August 1902, Van Warmelo explains that "About the half of my diary is not fit for publication & will have to be left out, but there are lots of other things to put in"; and on 11 November 1902, her letter comments that, "I have been working

<sup>121</sup> Brandt-Van Warmelo did not speak let alone write Dutch until immediately before her marriage to Louis Brandt in August 1902.

<sup>122</sup> 'Miss Jennie' refers to Nannie or Jennie De La Rey, wife of the Boer General and author of *A Women's Wanderings and Trials During the Anglo-Boer War*, published in 1903 in English and in Dutch. All Brandt-Van Warmelo correspondence referred to in this chapter is from *Korrespondensie* folder 3, AB-VW.

out my diary” (VW to Mrs VW, Liana and Fritz<sup>123</sup>, 17 August 1902; B-VW to ‘Dearests’, 11 November 1902). On 24 December 1902, she told her family that the diary was “completely worked out for publication” and that she would, with the encouragement of Emily Hobhouse, be seeking a publisher for it in England (B-VW to ‘Mother, Sisters & Brothers’ Christmas Eve 1902).<sup>124</sup> In the end, however, the book was not published in England, with both Hobhouse and Mrs. De La Rey advising that publishers thought the market was glutted with books in English about the war and the camps. Then during 1903, the rewritten diary was translated into Dutch by Brandt-Van Warmelo’s husband Louis Brandt, and it was eventually published in 1905 by Hollandsch-Afrikaansche Uitgevers-Maatschappij (H.A.U.M.).<sup>125</sup>

These letters clearly show that Het Concentratie-kamp was not simply a shortened version of “my diary, written in the camp itself”, but was rather a document written from scratch after the war ‘as much as possible in diary form’ and then translated into Dutch, with the particular purpose of doing her political best for ‘land en volk’. While some substantial and significant differences exist between what is purportedly the ‘original’ diary and the published book, the origins and status of this ‘original’ are shown to be uncertain given this new information about the rewriting process which took place. What is now archived as the original diary may be just that, or it may more likely be a document written after the war, based loosely on rougher notes kept by Van Warmelo at the time, which was then radically cut down and amended for publication, then translated into Dutch in sections and with excisions, additions and amendments. Whichever is the case, what was published in 1905 as “my diary, written in the camp itself” was most certainly not written “day by day strive to record an ever-

<sup>123</sup> Liana and Fritz are Brandt-Van Warmelo’s siblings.

<sup>124</sup> From the correspondence it seems that Brandt-Van Warmelo could not interest an English publisher in her book because most felt that the public were tired of topics pertaining to the war.

<sup>125</sup> This company had published Should We Forget? (Neethling 1903) and later published Brandt-Van Warmelo’s Die Kappie Koomando (1913c).

changing present” (Plummer 2001: 48), and it is difficult not to conclude that these things are not made visible in the published text precisely in order to mis/represent the result in order to claim for it validity and facticity through ‘sedimenting it into a particular moment in time’.

As I have indicated, the uncertain provenance and ambiguous ‘writing time’ of Brandt-Van Warmelo’s ‘diary’ is shared with other Boer women’s diaries. Apart from those I have already discussed, the Camp Diary of Henrietta T. Armstrong<sup>126</sup> (Van Rensburg 1980) is a severely edited version of Armstrong’s ‘original’ manuscript diary dealing with her experiences at Irene camp, with the manuscript bearing clear signs of having been written up ‘in neat’ after the war, based on a case workbook kept at the time concerning details of her daily work in the camp. Armstrong’s manuscript is contained in two exercise books and is written in a very neat, regular hand throughout. Moreover, it contains at least two references to “my readers”, which clearly indicate that the ‘diary’ was written retrospectively and with an eye to publication (Van Rensburg 1980: 81, 92). Also the unpublished archived manuscript diary of Adriana Coetzee concerning Pietermaritzburg camp appears to be a tidied up version of an earlier, scrappier document; it features no crossings out, amendments or additions of the kind prevalent in Anna Barry’s diary, for example (WM 5978/1). However, the multiple re/writings that confuse the temporal position and writing time of Boer women’s camp diaries, rendering their provenance uncertain and their diary-status questionable, is perhaps best demonstrated using the exemplar of Alie Badenhorst’s diary.

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<sup>126</sup> Mrs. Armstrong was a founding member of the S.A.V.F. in 1904 and also active in the Women’s National Party.

**Tant' Alie of the Transvaal: Her Diary 1880-1902**

Translated from the Taal by Emily Hobhouse and published in 1923, Tant' Alie is perhaps the best-known of Boer women's war or camp diaries. It gives an account of Alie (Aletta) Badenhorst's life between 1880 and 1902, with the majority of the narrative focusing on her wartime experiences in the Transvaal. Hobhouse explains in her Preface that her motive in publishing this diary was "to tear the glamour from war, to reveal it in all its hideousness", and to put forward Alie Badenhorst's "simple tale" "for the yet unborn, the masses of quiet people in all lands – upon whom, in the long run, the brunt of war inevitably falls" (Hobhouse 1923b: 6, 9). According to Hobhouse, Alie Badenhorst (who died in 1908) apparently shared these peace-promoting aims, and wanted her "journal" to be published "for children's children, desirous that future generations should know and avoid the cruelty of war" (Hobhouse 1923b: 8).

The diary is not made up of daily entries, apart from a few sporadic instances; and while roughly chronological in its narration of events, the way in which it was written up over time is by no means clear. In the Preface, Hobhouse refers to the diary "long laying by in manuscript", and recalls meeting Alie Badenhorst shortly after the war, although she provides no specific details about how the diary came to be in her possession (Hobhouse 1923b: 5). Their meeting took place in 1903 when Hobhouse conducted her tour of the 'ruined areas', gathering many of the Boer women's testimonies she later published in War Without Glamour.<sup>127</sup>

The first lines of the diary itself are undated and are: "The evening is still. I sit by the window and look at my children below as they play near the kraal, while the Kaffir boy is

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<sup>127</sup> Hobhouse's 1903 tour is described in Balme 1994, chapter 28 and her meeting with Alie Badenhorst is mentioned on p. 490.

milking” (Hobhouse 1923b: 17). This is part of an introduction, the writing-time of which is set during the war, and which ends by addressing the reader, “And that you shall better understand me I must needs go back a little” (Hobhouse 1923b: 18). Badenhorst then gives a retrospective account of her childhood and young womanhood as Alie de Wet, including details of her first failed betrothal, her decision to convert to a life of devout Christianity, her betrothal and marriage in 1886 to Frikkie (formally, Frederick) Badenhorst, and the birth of her children. Her narrative then jumps six years to 1893, then to 1895 and 1896 when Badenhorst gives her account of the Jameson Raid as a preface to the war: “We Boers had been vexed with the English before, but the Jameson Raid wrought us to a pitch” (Hobhouse 1923b: 65). After this she goes on to describe aspects of her home life on the family farm, the build-up to the war, Frikkie’s departure to join his commando, his capture at Modder River in February 1900 by the British and internment at Simon’s Town as a Prisoner of War. Throughout the book, but in this first section in particular, letters from Frikkie to his wife have been interleaved into the text, and these provide a detailed account of his experiences on commando and later as a P.O.W.

All this takes up about half the published book, at which point, in an entry for late April 1900, Badenhorst comments, “Striving to forget this weary time of sorrow I began to write this book, for being no longer able to write to him [Frikkie] I felt that I must give utterance to my thoughts and sufferings” (Hobhouse 1923b: 142, my emphasis). The reader therefore at this point is encouraged to assume that all that has preceded this has been retrospective; and also and by implication that from this point on the text will be written as a diary with entries of ‘the particular moment’. However, much of what then follows is written in the past tense – for example, “The following day, I think it was the 9<sup>th</sup> of May” – and does

not take the form of dated, daily entries (Hobhouse 1923b: 146). Then, a further forty pages into the narrative, Badenhorst writes:

“That evening of the 23<sup>rd</sup> [November 1900] my work was done, and sitting by the window as usual it came into my head that I had not so much to do as in former days of peace; for we could get no thread to sew with or cotton to crochet, or anything to knit. So I thought I would write a book and now I have just come to the point where I began. I said to myself that first I must go back to show what my life has been, and now that I have done so, and told you all that has past in my life up to this evening and I shall take up the thread of my tale from this moment. I began by writing on my first page:— The evening is still. I sit by the window and look at my children as they play near the kraal, while the Kaffir boy is milking. I have written it all down now and again as I have found time and leisure” (Hobhouse 1923b: 180, my emphases)

This is followed, in comments assigned to April 1901 after her capture by the British, by Badenhorst writing that: “The English did not even give me time to run back for my diary, or rather history-book, which I had written, to bring it with me; and I have had to begin it again. So I have written this part again in captivity” (Hobhouse 1923b: 212, my emphases).

It is unclear whether Badenhorst began writing her account in April or November 1900, and whether she then had to rewrite it all in April 1901. However, whatever Badenhorst may have written during the war, this was not a diary ‘in the strict sense’, but rather more like the personal ‘history-book’ to which she refers above. Whatever form this document took, it was by no means directly equivalent to what became Tant’ Alie of the Transvaal: Her Diary 1880-1902. It is likely that Badenhorst kept a wartime notebook of some kind, a ‘history-book’ in which she wrote reminiscences of her early life and recorded some of her experiences, ‘thoughts and sufferings’, although probably not on a daily basis in a diary-form in the ‘strict sense’. It also seems likely that at some point, probably after the war, she then rewrote much of her (already rewritten) wartime notebook, shaping this into a fuller more coherent narrative. It is also likely that this rewrite was done specifically with Hobhouse’s

visit and publication in mind, because Badenhorst demonstrably wrote for an audience and makes several direct addresses to readers:

“Now if perchance any one who read this cannot believe that one can have such a foreboding they certainly never knew what anxiety is” (223)<sup>128</sup>

“Some of my readers may condemn these women” (279)

“Well – if you would know [what happened in April 1902], read the newspapers of April 3<sup>rd</sup>” (304)

“If there is one of my readers who has not yet known what it is to lose one’s country, such a one is not able to feel with us” (313)

In addition, while Badenhorst may have written the book “primarily for her family”, as Hobhouse claimed, she also addresses herself to a specifically non-Boer readership. Thus at various points she refers to ‘we Boers’, explaining the habits and preferences of ‘her people’ as if to uncomprehending outsiders:

“We Boers do not like the sea; we fear it” (136)

“Poor Boers, you know nothing of this ‘English nonsense’ that a sick person must eat nothing” (266)

“We Boers too, are not wont to live in a town, we long to be free on an open farm” (313)

Thus, apart from what Hobhouse describes as a wish to promote peace, it seems that one of Badenhorst’s motives in writing for an audience was to help outsiders gain a better, more sympathetic understanding of ‘the Boers’ as she represented them. Her comments imply she was portraying ‘the Boer’ for a perceived foreign readership, and this in itself indicates that the published version of this text at least was not a diary, but rather a sort of memoir. In addition, it is useful to contemplate the extent to which Hobhouse herself was involved in the

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<sup>128</sup> This and other quotations in this section are from Hobhouse 1923b and are given with page numbers only.

rewriting process as part of her editing and translating work. Details of the extent of this are now impossible to determine; and, because the whereabouts of the original manuscript are now unknown, the precise provenance of the book necessarily remains speculative.<sup>129</sup>

Nonetheless, the complex layers of re/writing indicated in the text, and the skilful use of Frikkie's letters, belie Hobhouse's description of the book as "a simple tale" (6), and hint at Hobhouse having a more prominent role in preparing the text than she makes clear. While, as I shall discuss in Chapter Six, 'the history' has treated Tant' Alie uncritically as a straightforward diary, a review by Ruth Alexander published in The Nation in 1924 recognises that the book is not 'entirely' a diary and also emphasises its fictional dimensions, which Alexander deems a positive feature of the book: "I say 'the story' advisedly; for although the book is virtually a diary, and though she appends by way of epilogue a special affirmation of its absolute truthfulness, Tant' Alie of Transvaal has given us a story as fascinating as any novel ... of unusual interest and importance" (Alexander 1924: 169, my emphasis).

The content of Tant' Alie reflects its uncertain writing context in several interesting ways. While much of the diary is rather dry, repetitive and parochial, it contains "facts" that both conflict and accord with 'the history' produced and promoted in (proto-) nationalist circles after the war and outlined in Chapter One. Firstly, in August 1900, while Alie Badenhorst and her family were still living on their farm in what she describes as a state of prosperity, a terrible measles epidemic broke out in the area. Badenhorst's children contracted the disease and she comments that "I never saw such measles as they had, it was more like blue spots", with Hobhouse adding a footnote here, that "During the war a very virulent kind

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<sup>129</sup> Hobhouse's translation practices in general as well as some of her specific translations of certain testimonies that appear in *War Without Glamour* (1927) are discussed in Chapter Six. From letters written by Hobhouse at the time of the book's publication it is evident that Mrs. Badenhorst's family were then in possession of the original manuscript (A156 1/1/12, 27 May 1923).

of measles prevailed which was commonly called the black measles" (Hobhouse 1923b: 168). By the time the epidemic had run its course, two of Badenhorst's young nieces had died, and she writes that "those who had been sick were well again, though many of the black children died. The measles was strong; there were ten black children dead and two white" (Hobhouse 1923b: 172).

Accepted "facts" about the deaths in the camps, much repeated in women's testimonies, state that Boer women and children were starved to death, or killed in the camp hospitals by cruel English doctors and nurses, although in reality the majority of camp deaths amongst children under five were caused by measles and its sequela. Badenhorst's account of its outbreak on her farm and the surrounding area suggests that this powerful variety of measles spread rapidly across large areas of South Africa and exacted a high mortality rate, first in rural farming areas and then later in the camps where populations of people were highly concentrated.<sup>130</sup> Badenhorst herself does not however make this connection and, like most other Boer women testimony-writers and contra her own experiences, attributed the camp deaths to starvation and mistreatment:

"In truth, we had a Provost-Marshal over the camp who had no heart; there in the food-stores stood cases full of butter and jam piled up; but no, the women might have none of it" (261)

"[I]f only the money wasted on medicines and nurses were spent on food, and if the people were fed on that food, then they would not die ... Instead, here we are, hearing it said that the mothers killed their children with food, and seeing the English carry them off to the camp hospital in heaps, where we saw them die like flies" (262, original emphases)

"Poor little ones! how much you suffered, real famine. The mothers might never buy anything; there were usually vegetables to be bought, but they might not go out of the camp to buy anything ... It is thus the children are starved and so become sick; then

<sup>130</sup> In various camps people arrived suffering from measles and then infected inhabitants already living in these.

they are taken to the camp hospital, while what they really need is strengthening food” (274)<sup>131</sup>

In this respect, then, Badenhorst’s account, written or rather written up in 1903, coincides with (proto-) nationalist post/memory of the camps in which deaths caused by disease and the privations of war were re/written as deliberate murders by starvation and reinterpreted as sacrifices made by “women and children innocent sheep led to the slaughter” (Hobhouse 1923b: 315).

In spite of the way that Badenhorst’s diary has been received and referenced subsequently, including during the recent centenary years, Alie Badenhorst and her children were never inhabitants of a camp at all. After the family were removed from their farm on 15 April 1901 by the British, they were taken to the camp at nearby Klerksdorp. However, immediately upon their arrival the camp doctor apparently informed the Provost-Marshal that Mrs. Badenhorst was “ill with a cough and must not sleep that night in camp” (Hobhouse 1923b: 212).<sup>132</sup> Consequently Badenhorst and her five children went to stay at the home of her niece, Maria Conradie, in the town of Klerksdorp. In their report, the Ladies Commission commented that the town of Klerksdorp “practically joined” the camp and also recorded that 324 individuals who lived in town were part of the camp, in the sense that they received rations and their children attended its school (Concentration Camps Commission 1902: 133). The day after her arrival in Klerksdorp town, Badenhorst was then examined by a doctor, who

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<sup>131</sup> According to the Ladies Commission who visited the camp in early October 1901, inhabitants of Klerksdorp camp had considerable purchasing power at Poynton’s shop in the camp, to the extent that they noted that the shop found it difficult to keep supplied. They also reported this was one of the few camps with a vegetable garden where mealies and pumpkins were grown, and that a soup kitchen had been established by the camp authorities to dispense soup to children and invalids; and although this contained rice and vegetables, “the people do not seem to care for it” (Concentration Camps Commission 1902: 135).

<sup>132</sup> The Badenhorst family are recorded in the Klerksdorp camp register of residents, and interestingly next to the heading ‘Tent Number’ the following appears: Town 144. Badenhorst herself makes no reference to ever being transferred from the town to live in tent in the camp itself, and presumably the crossing out was a bureaucratic error. The family are recorded as leaving for their farm on 5 August 1902 (DBC 75).

“gave me a certificate, that I could not live in camp, and this was also signed by the chief doctor” (Hobhouse 1923b: 213). The family were therefore able to remain in Maria Conradie’s house in town until the end of the war, even after Maria herself obtained a permit to go to live with relatives in the Boland. Badenhorst’s story shows that by no means all Boer women were forced into the camps, while the willingness of the local military and civil authorities to allow her to remain in town (and to permit Maria Conradie to go her relatives in the Cape Colony) suggests that some British officials were not as heartless and inflexible as they were later insistently depicted in women’s camp testimonies.

In addition, the political situation during the war as represented by Badenhorst is considerably more complex than most other Boer women’s testimonies or the nationalist ‘the history’ has admitted of. In these, it is implied or stated that all Boer men fought bravely on commando during the war, with those who surrendered or ‘joined’ depicted as cowardly traitors to their *volk*.<sup>133</sup> Alie Badenhorst makes her own political position quite clear, she had a “true Boer heart”, the war was provoked by the British, a “cruel enemy”, and the Boers were fighting for “their land they would never yield” (Hobhouse 1923b: 79, 93, 309). However, while the majority of her male relatives fought on commando, there were nevertheless members of her family who did not support the Boer cause. Her niece Maria Conradie, for instance, “took the British side, and was often speaking of the English good qualities, and did not believe the Boers could ever stand up against them” (Hobhouse 1923b: 79). Although Badenhorst did not agree with this view, clearly she remained on good terms with Maria (whose own husband fought on commando) and lived in her home in Klerksdorp. Also, on her initial arrival at Klerksdorp camp, Badenhorst found that her brother-in-law Piet du Toit was a

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<sup>133</sup> Some examples include Hobhouse 1927: 34, 148; Le Clus 5, 10, 84; Neethling 1938: x-xi, 7, 14, 72, 93, 135, 166; Postma 1939: 34, 54, 63, 142 and Rabie-Van der Merwe 1940: 92

‘joiner’ working in the camp for the British: “He did his best, for he was placed over the women, to manage for them about wood, tents and all else, and when the doctor came he went round the camp with him to see the sick, and he had his hands full, for he dealt out the medicines” (Hobhouse 1923b: 214). Badenhorst makes no criticism of her brother-in-law’s position, he and his daughter lived with the Badenhorsts at the Conradie house, and when he fell ill she cared for him until his death in September 1901. Thus the clear-cut political and moral distinction between ‘patriots’ and ‘traitors’ inscribed into nationalist post/memory and ‘the history’ were actually more ambiguous and fluid, with Badenhorst’s depiction of this more in keeping with ‘at the time’ letters than with the post-war testimonies, although probably ‘written up’ at the same time as the latter.

There are aspects of this diary, then, that read as ‘of the time’ and have immediacy and ‘sedimentation into the moment’. However, overall Tant’ Alie does not have the ‘I am Here, and it is exactly Now’ quality that Fothergill asserts diaries do. This is a re/written and largely retrospective written up account, and its original context of writing and subsequent re/working remains opaque. It cannot, therefore, justify the implicit claim of referentiality conventionally assigned to diaries, although presumably the text was presented as a diary so as to lay claims to this status.<sup>134</sup> Indeed, this is attested to in a short epilogue at the end of the text, which consists of a sworn declaration that reads, “All that stands written in this book is the truth, and the truth alone. I have brought forward nothing but the truth to write, and so I sign myself, A.M. Badenhorst (born de Wet)” (Hobhouse 1923b: 319).<sup>135</sup> In the Preface, Hobhouse defends the veracity of the book in similar referential terms: “I can vouch for the truth of the picture. I

<sup>134</sup> While I do not argue that diaries written at the time necessarily have a greater claim to referentiality, and recognise that all diaries are selective and situated, this process of selection and positioning changes over time.

<sup>135</sup> The testimonies in Postma 1925/1939 all took the form of statements sworn before either a magistrate or justice of the peace, a form of attestation designed to emphasise their quasi-legal ‘truth, whole truth, nothing but the truth’ status.

met nearly all the people mentioned in its pages, visited nearly all the places ... the facts agree with my experience”, adding, however, the caveat that she “take[s] no responsibility for the opinions expressed, but merely give[s] them as written” (Hobhouse 1923b: 7).<sup>136</sup> These claims by both Badenhorst and Hobhouse are highly problematic, not just in the sense that all assertions of referentiality are, but because they represent the book as a diary written by a ‘simple’ Boer woman during the war. Against this, a close reading of it shows that in demonstrable fact this is not straightforwardly a diary and nor was it written at the time and in the immediacy of the moment, and also that it has been significantly marked by someone not the author herself.

In grappling with questions of truthfulness and referentiality in diaries generally, Fothergill comments that “They [diaries] are not necessarily ‘truthful’ – in the sense that a court of law recognises truthfulness – but they are actual, true to life. Even in their disguises, evasions and lies diarists are responding to the pressure of first-hand experience...” (Fothergill 1974: 10, original emphasis). Like Tant’ Alie, the majority of Boer women’s ‘diaries’ are not diaries ‘in the strict sense’, because the women who wrote them were not ‘responding to the pressure of first-hand experience’, but instead recording and reshaping their experiences in hindsight and within a collective political framework. The result is that these camp ‘diaries’ have a different purchase on time and space than writing produced at the time, notably letters. In many respects, Boer women’s ‘diaries’ are far closer to the post-war testimonies orchestrated and written after the events in question, than to “actual, true to life” letters written at the time. I now turn to a more focused discussion of ‘time and narrative’ across these

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<sup>136</sup> Hobhouse makes a similar comment in the Preface to War Without Glamour (1927) about ‘taking no responsibility for the opinions expressed’, thus drawing her distance and implying not she was not entirely in sympathy with the political views expressed.

different kinds of diaries and how attending to this puts greater temporal depth to the idea of post/memory.

### **Diaries, Letters and Post/memory**

As I outlined earlier, while diaries can take a number of different forms, as a genre of life writing or ‘chronicle of daily life’ diaries are in a direct sense defined by being written at the time of or very shortly after the events they record; and, like letters, are seen to be characterised by a sense of immediacy and dailiness and a preservation of ‘the moment’, a common ‘moment’ of both experiencing and writing. This close or even overlapping temporality of ‘events’ and ‘writing’ is often seen to confer referentiality on diaries, or at the least a stronger referentiality than texts written from the ‘contaminated’ perspective of hindsight can claim. However, in the course of my investigation of published and archived Boer women’s diaries, apart from the diary of Anna Barry I have not found a single instance of a camp diary that can be said to be conclusively ‘of the moment’ and with certainty having been written at the time, with temporality in these ‘diaries’ often multiple and slippery.

Employing the terms of Ricoeur’s ‘threefold present’ enables the some of this slippery temporality of Boer women’s diaries to be grasped. The diaries of Bettie Venter and Johanna Brandt-Van Warmelo exemplify the constantly shifting of narrative time in Boer women’s diaries, but in different ways. In Venter’s diary, narrative time slips between the present-present of 1938 and the present-past of 1899-1902 in ways that are highly visible and overt, making it clear that purposeful misrepresentation was not Venter’s intention. In some contrast, the slipperiness of narrative time in Brandt-Van Warmelo’s ‘diary’ is much more difficult to apprehend, for temporal fissures and seams have effectively been made to vanish.

In order to mimic the temporal specificities of a 'diary in the strict sense', Brandt-Van Warmelo effectively (and purposefully) conflates the 1902/1903 moment of writing with the 1901 events she represents, with the result that what is written is not a diary, but a retrospectively re/worked document written, in accordance with Mrs. De La Rey's injunction, in 'diary form'. The re/writing of Brandt-Van Warmelo's camp 'diary' will come into clearer focus in Chapter Six, when aspects of the book's translation and production are scrutinised in more detail.

An important part of discerning the provenance and writing context of a published diary is access to the materiality of an original manuscript. Time, its passing and the moment of writing are usually inscribed in these manuscripts in ways that reveal aspects of their context of production. For example, the manuscript diaries of Bessie Schabert, Adriana Coetzee and Mrs. Armstrong are all neatly written up in tidy exercise books, with even, consistent handwriting throughout and minimal mistakes, crossings out, insertions and so on. This contrasts strongly with the diary of Anna Barry, which is written on scrappy sheets of paper, with crossings through, untidiness and with a 'rough' and also a 'neat' form, all of which evince the diary's 'at the time-ness'. The absence of archived original manuscripts for the diaries of Janie Kriegler, Miem Fischer and Alie Badenhorst make it difficult to determine their temporal provenance with any degree of certainty, but with Tant' Alie bearing signs of particularly complex, unstable and shifting narrative time, as I have indicated

Overall, the layers of reworking and rewriting evident at the back of Boer women's camp diaries mean that they cannot lay claim to the present-present confluence of 'event' and 'writing' of diaries, nor to the referentiality associated with this. Written in a narrative time of present-past that is seldom made visible, these consequently share the temporality of the post-

hoc camp testimonies. However, in the case of the ‘mimicked diaries’, the temporal gap between ‘events’ and ‘writing’ is not always made clear, and in some cases is actively concealed in order to manipulate how the diary appears to be situated in time. As a result, there are several similarities between the testimonies and the post-hoc ‘diaries’. The ‘diaries’ of Venter, Fischer, Schabort and Brandt-Van Warmelo in particular evince the (proto-) nationalist preoccupation with the ‘big picture’, politics and the ‘freedom and independence’ of the *volk*, all things prevalent in the post-war testimonies produced explicitly and openly in the (proto-) nationalist context. With the exception of the diaries of Barry and Kriegler, it is not the ‘everyday’ and the mundane which are depicted in Boer women’s ‘diaries’, nor particularised and individual emotional responses to events, but rather the generalised and homogenised rhetoric of the post-war testimonies. Indeed, I take this to be indicative of the similarities in their context of production, with the diaries of Brandt-Van Warmelo, Venter and Fischer all evincing signs of an explicitly (proto-) nationalist ‘moment of writing’. In this sense the camp ‘diaries’, or rather what are presented and have largely been treated as ‘diaries’, and the camp testimonies both stand in stark contrast to letters written at the time, before the (proto-) nationalist concerns that so strongly influenced the production, content and tone of the testimonies and ‘diaries’ had begun to be fully and widely articulated. Unlike letters, which were written at the time and for personal or individual reasons, camp ‘diaries’ were produced in largely the same political context as testimonies, although the writing up of camp experiences ‘in diary form’ by effacing the temporal gap between ‘events’ and ‘writing’ was most likely done with an eye to laying claim to the referential and ‘within the whirlwind’ qualities of diaries. At this point, I want to examine in what ways my discussion of letters and

diaries and their relationship to time and narrative throws additional light on the post/memory process.

In this chapter, I have explored Boer women's unpublished letters and un/published diaries as examples of personal writing (ostensibly) produced at the time of the war and in the camps. In doing so, I have questioned whether or not, and in what ways, these forms of 'at the time' writing are distinctive and thus offer alternative views to those presented by 'the history' expounded by the later (proto-) nationalist testimonies. With regard to Boer women's letters, these differ markedly from the later testimonies in a number of key ways. While the post-hoc testimonies were often solicited and orchestrated by (proto-) nationalist organisations, camp letters were written in a spontaneous way to communicate with geographically distant friends and relatives, and their provenance and content is demonstrably 'of the time'. At the same time, I have indicated regarding some letters the likely origins of specific and 'ordinary' incidents that were later decontextualised and re/told in the testimonies as generally occurring 'facts' about the camps, concerning for example the removal of children to hospitals. Earlier I emphasised that post/memory emerges "almost as soon as something is experienced" (Stanley 2005a, *in press*, *my emphasis*), and here I want to strongly underscore the 'almost'. That is, while letters are undoubtedly structured, selective and mediated, nonetheless their temporal closeness to 'the events' offers a glimpse, however small, limited and situated, of what might lie behind post/memory. I want to retain the distinctiveness of 'documents of life' written at the time of the events they record, and those written ten, twenty or thirty years after the originating events. Thus while I maintain that the processes of post/memory begin almost the moment an event has been experienced, I stress this 'almost' as part of holding onto the

distinctiveness of ‘at the time’ writing, not as referential, but nevertheless as different from writing after the event.

However, that post/memory processes intervene and begin to subsume and replace ‘memory itself’ ‘almost as soon as something is experienced’ is well illustrated by the ‘diaries’ of Brandt-Van Warmelo and Alie Badenhorst, both produced a relatively short time after the end of the war. Although Brandt-Van Warmelo wrote her ‘diary’ in late 1902 and 1903, and Badenhorst presented her manuscript to Hobhouse at some point in 1903, both of these show extensive signs of re/writing and both are mediated and motivated versions of the past, in the sense that post/memory is. These ‘diaries’ which were re/worked by Boer women outside the immediate ‘whirlwind’ of camp life exemplify post/memory as “delayed, indirect, secondary” (Hirsch 1997: 13, 22). In addition, Brandt-Van Warmelo’s and Badenhorst’s ‘diaries’ both indicate the early emergence of post/memory as a ‘take’ on the events of the war and the camps in which Boer women are depicted as innocent victims and the British as deliberately malicious, although in Tant’ Alie the ‘line’ on these things is less one-dimensionally and straightforwardly (proto-) nationalist than in Het Concentratie-kamp van Irene. These ‘diaries’, together with the post-war testimonies, helped produce post/memory as a version of the past that ‘forgot’ the specificities of ‘memory itself’ and replaced these with post/memory as marked by generalisation and homogenisation of time, space, events, people and their reactions.

The similarities across the post-hoc ‘diaries’ reflect the curious relative lack of change in post/memory over time. Overall, the diaries of Johanna Brandt-Van Warmelo, Bettie Venter, Bessie Schabert and Miem Fischer all take a similarly (proto-) nationalist ‘line’ on the events of the war and the camps, depicting Boer women as both innocent and wronged, and

the British as at best inept and uncaring and at worst as actively murderous. These ‘diarists’ explicitly declare their political allegiances as pro-Boer and/or (proto-) nationalist, with the common ‘line’ across their ‘diaries’ indicative of how post/memory shaped not only ‘the history’ but also determined who might ‘speak’ and be ‘heard’. ‘Ordinary memory’ does shift and change over time, from small incidentals though to major ‘mis-rememberings’ (and forgettings), with this well-investigated and theorised in the relevant literature from Freud on. That these accounts do not change over time, but appear somehow as ‘time-free’ seems to me one of important characteristics of post/memory, as I commented in Chapter Three, and I shall return to this point in later chapters, together with the role of networks of (proto-) nationalist women and especially the activities of the key cultural entrepreneurs.

In much the same way that post/memory passes itself off as ‘memory itself’, so too Boer women’s post-hoc ‘diaries’ pass themselves off as ‘the thing itself’, by apparently being characterised by the confluence of ‘event’ and the ‘moment of writing’. So successful are they at subverting and manipulating narrative time within them, that the mimicked ‘diaries’ are utterly confident of their claim to the referentiality associated with ‘actual’ diaries:

“what I have written about in this book is the truth” (Venter 1938 A248: 95, my emphasis)

“This publication is a verbatim transcription of Miem Fischer’s original diary” (Coetzee in Fischer 2000, my emphases)

“my diary, written in the camp itself” (Brandt-Van Warmelo 1905: foreword, 11, my emphases)

“All that stands written in this book is the truth, and the truth alone” (Hobhouse 1923b: 319, my emphasis)

It is only through careful, critical attention to narrative time within these ‘diaries’, coupled with consideration of the context in which they were re/worked and re/written, that

the temporal disjunctures between 'events' and 'writing', and thus between 'memory' and post/memory, become evident. Their orchestration by cultural entrepreneurs to fill the apparent gap in (politically suitable) documents written 'at the time' and in the camps is central in placing these re/written 'diaries' at the centre of post/memory as a politicised and 'overproduced' version of the past that operates as a substitution for 'memory' itself. In moving beyond women's writings produced in this (proto-) nationalist context, and the narrow range of ways of testifying and types of experience that consequently predominate, Chapter Five reconsiders what constitutes a 'testimony', and endeavours to rehabilitate the stories of women, and some men, whose lives, camp experiences and methods of attestation made them 'unsuitable' for inclusion in the (proto-) nationalist canon.

## Chapter Five

### ‘Died making no sign’? Expanding Testimonies

“South African women, taken generally, never lend themselves to much use of the pen and the few who have, not without effort, expressed themselves on paper can and should be taken as spokeswomen for the tens of thousands who suffered as they did but who either had no skill in writing, no material at hand or died making no sign” (Hobhouse 1927: 5).

“The South African War is unusual in that testimonies of a substantial number of Boer women have also been collected and published...” (Van Heyningen 2002: 189).

This chapter seeks to explore and widen the concept of ‘testimony’ in relation to women’s experiences of the concentration camps of the South African War, and to problematise Hobhouse’s twin assumptions above that women who did not write ‘died making no sign’ and that those who did ‘express themselves on paper’ should be taken as representative of those who did not. As my discussion of the very low numbers of women’s personal writings about the war in Chapter Four indicates, Van Heyningen’s assertion about the collection and publication of the “testimonies of a substantial number of Boer women” is incorrect: overwhelmingly Boer women did not testify to their war and camp experiences, or at least not in ways that were recognised by ‘the history’.

The unspoken assumption behind Van Heyningen’s claim is that testimonies are by definition collected and published. As I have shown in the Chapters Two and Three, the majority of women’s testimonies that entered the public domain were orchestrated by cultural entrepreneurs and written by members of relatively small, self-referencing networks of (proto-) nationalist women who, in helping to further their political agenda, told stories that conformed to a (proto-) nationalist meta-narrative. It is therefore highly problematic to assume, as Hobhouse does and as elsewhere in her discussion Van Heyningen implies, that these testimonies can be taken as representative of the socially and politically diverse camp populations.

As part of rethinking and expanding testimony here, I focus first on definitions of what characterises a testimony, doing so with specific reference to the *testimonio* genre, which has been the subject of both fascinating and extensive critical and theoretical attention highly relevant to the South African case. I then consider the collected and published women's testimonies which are mentioned in the above Hobhouse quotation and how these can be plotted across a number of definitional dimensions, thereby allowing useful comparisons to be made with other forms of testimony that have historically not been admitted to the *de facto* canon of 'women's camp testimonies'. Combining the widest definitions of testimony and attestation with innovative use of the camp records, I then go on to show in a variety of examples how many women whose accounts were not 'collected and published' nevertheless produced testimonies in which they attested to aspects of their camp experiences, and thus certainly did not 'die making no sign'. This rethinking of testimony not only broadens the scope of what constitutes 'a testimony' in general terms, but also challenges what has hitherto been a nationalist monopoly on testifying to these events, and as a consequence it allows a whole other range of experiences and people to come into focus.

### Testimony and *Testimonio*

At its most basic level, testimony simply means "an eyewitness account" (Lincoln 2000: 134)<sup>1</sup> and has its origins in the legal context of testifying or giving evidence in a court of law. To testify is to provide under oath a first-person account of a particular event or set of circumstances, although over time the notion of testimony as specifically an alternative to authorised versions of events has developed. For instance, in her research on

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<sup>1</sup> However, Lincoln's primary concern is to point up the differences between her self-professedly 'Eurocentric' understanding of testimony as an eyewitness account, and what she perceives to be an absence of facticity in *testimonios*.

post-Soviet Latvia, Vieda Skultans comments that “Pitted against official versions of the past are the steadily growing numbers of testimonies of witnesses” (Skultans 1998: 51). As a form of life writing, testimony’s specific Latin American incarnation, the *testimonio*, has been defined by Beverley as “a novel or novella-length narrative in book or pamphlet (that is, printed as opposed to acoustic) form, told in the first-person by a narrator who is also the real protagonist or witness of the events he or she recounts, and whose unit of narration is usually ‘a life’ or significant life experience” (Beverley 1989: 12-13).<sup>2</sup> Gugelberger in fact stresses that testimonial literature and testimonial discourse more generally must not be conflated with *testimonio*, which he sees as set apart by an explicitly activist agenda and a desire to effect change (Gugelberger 1996: 4). As I commented in Chapter Two, in the *testimonio*, as Yudice puts it, “Truth is summoned in the cause of denouncing a present situation of exploitation and oppression or in exorcising and setting aright official history” (Yudice 1991: 17). So while a *testimonio* might ostensibly concern the life of a particular individual, it is also always a public and political text in which particularised life experience is narrated in order to expose a general system of oppression and to make a related case for change. Doris Sommer indeed argues that “testimonials are related to a general text of struggle” (1988: 129), while Marin points out that, as a result of this, testimonial writing “has always been seen as a kind of writing from the margins” (Marin 1991: 51).<sup>3</sup>

Beverley’s emphasis on written, first-person, self-authored accounts strongly aligns *testimonio* with autobiography and other self-authored texts featuring a singular subject and an individual life. However, at the same time *testimonios* have in fact challenged many

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<sup>2</sup> The *testimonio* literature I have found helpful and drawn on here includes Beverley 1989, Gugelberger 1996, Kokotovic 1999, Lincoln 2000, Marin 1991, Nance 2001, Skłodowska 1996, Sommer 1988, Tierney 2000a, 2000b and Yudice 1991.

<sup>3</sup> As outlined in Chapter Two, the association between *testimonio* and marginality and/or oppression has tended to confer on testimony-writers a moral authority that is sometimes highly problematic, as shown in the particular case of Rabie-Van der Merwe’s *Onthou!* (1940).

of the suppositions about life writing as necessarily written, individual, personal, and self-authored. Some theorists have argued that what distinguishes *testimonios* is “the self-professed eschewal of the first person singular subject” (Marin 1991: 52), and while testimonies might be “life histories narrated in a first-person voice”, they are actually “strikingly impersonal” for, while they are provided by individuals, the self in testimonials is a “collective subject” concerned with raising political consciousness (Sommer 1988: 109, 111). In other words, *testimonio* writers and speakers do not always depict their experiences as individual in the mode of traditional autobiography, but often portray themselves as representative figures whose experiences are shared by many others, whose life stories are more-or-less interchangeable with those depicted in the *testimonio*. For Sommer, this “collective subject of the testimonial” is partly a result of the “oral quality” of *testimonios*: “as a device, the orality helps to account for the testimonial’s construction of a collective self. For unlike the private and even lonely moment of autobiographical writing, testimonies are public events” (Sommer 1992: 118). Similarly, Felman argues that testimony does not offer “a completed statement, a totalizable account ... In the testimony, language is in process and in trial, it does not possess itself as a conclusion” (Felman 1992: 5). Thus its oral roots are an important feature of testimonial writing, contributing both to its fractional, provisional nature and to its construction of a collective subject.

In addition, while Beverley characterises *testimonios* as first-person and self-narrated, many *testimonios* are collaborative products “in which individuals and groups not in possession of the Western representational technology of writing communicate their vision of the world and their version of often cataclysmic events ... through a literate intermediary” (Kokotovic 1999: 29).<sup>4</sup> Thus *testimonios* blur the boundaries of oral and written, self-authored and other-authored, individual and collective. The recognition that

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<sup>4</sup> Many of the best-known *testimonios* are products of such collaborations, including Barrios 1978, Menchu 1984 and Montejo 1968.

testimony does not have to be directly self-authored accords with the acknowledgement by those feminist theorists interested in “Listening to women’s voices, studying women’s writings, and learning from women’s experiences” and recognising that women’s personal narratives, and by implication testimonies, “can take many forms, including biography, autobiography, life history – a life told to a second person who records it – diaries, journals, and letters” (Personal Narratives Group 1989: 4). Widening what constitutes testimony to include “a life told to a second person who records it” gives recognition and a public voice to a far broader spectrum of personal testimonies and testifiers.

As a form of testimonial writing concerned with instigating political change, *testimonio* brings together many different and sometimes conflicting dimensions of personal writing, two aspects of which I want to comment on. Firstly, narrating the lived personal experience of one person, *testimonio* is primarily focused on public, political matters and so, while the subject of a *testimonio* may be the individual speaker/writer, at the same time the *testimonio* subject is often a collective one, ‘the many’ of whom the speaker/writer is simply one representative. The orthodoxy here has become that in *testimonio* “The singular represents the plural not because it replaces or subsumes the group but because the speaker is a distinguishable part of the whole” (Sommer 1988: 108). However, against this, clearly some *testimonio* writers and speakers promote a self that is both unique and set apart, as suggested by the title of I, Rigoberta Menchu (Menchu 1983). And secondly, while for Beverley the ‘finished product’ of *testimonio* is a written text, many other theorists have emphasised the genre’s oral roots of as contributing to the construction of a collective subject. This emphasis on the *testimonio* taking the form of “a life told to a second person who records it” or combining self- and other-authored aspects, strongly problematises “the notion that any text is singularly created” (Tierney 2000: 543).

At the heart of *testimonio* theory, then, are some strongly argued but conflicting views of central matters concerning the text and its authorship. As I shall indicate in the ensuing discussion in this chapter, in the South African War case, these conflicts exist and are rooted in the actual circumstances in which some women's testimonies were 'heard' and others were not, some were solicited for 'collecting and publishing' and others were not, and consequently some exist in the public domain as 'women's testimonies' while many more, expressed in more indirect, oral or non-public contexts, can be brought at least partially into sight by widening 'testimony' to 'attestation'.<sup>5</sup>

### Plotting Boer Women's Testimonies

As a form of testimonial writing, Boer women's camp accounts can be usefully plotted across the definitional dimensions of *testimonio* outlined above, in order to facilitate comparison later in the chapter with less 'conventional' forms of testimony. Almost without exception and in keeping with many *testimonios*, Boer women's testimonies are public and political in both content and intent. They are retrospective accounts and cannot seek to change the circumstances of the war or the camps, but they are strongly motivated by a desire to change the way these events are represented. For instance, in Should We Forget? Mrs. Neethling claims that "no people have ever been misunderstood, misrepresented like the Boers" (1903: 9) and that her book, which includes testimony of her own wartime experiences as well as her witnessing of other women's sufferings, corrects this by "writ[ing] the story of the Boer women, as they showed themselves during the war, truly, fairly", and "bringing to light some of the facts and phases" of the war (Neethling 1903: Introduction, 127). Ironically, while Boer women were initially writing their testimonies against what they perceived to be 'official' and

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<sup>5</sup> My discussion on widening testimony around the notion of 'attestation' and 'making her mark' draws on Stanley 2005c.

erroneous versions of these events (such as the parliamentary ‘Blue Books’, the Ladies Commission Report or unsympathetic accounts in certain newspapers or official weekly gazettes),<sup>6</sup> they and those who joined them in later publications were in the process of producing what became the ‘official record’ of nationalism and which over time became the only authorised, sanctioned version of the war and the camps, emanating largely from elite Boer social and political circles. Thus, unlike the majority of *testimonio* speakers and writers, most of the Boer women testimony-writers were actually not writing from the ‘margins’, and those testimonies written in the late 1930s in particular were produced at a time when what was being constructed as ‘the Afrikaner people’ was a rapidly rising and powerful elite rather than an oppressed minority.

Like *testimonios* more generally, Boer women’s collected and published testimonies were also aimed at effecting political change at the time they were written. Thus, the Foreword to Stemme Uit Die Verlede declares that the book is aimed at gaining a wider appreciation of the true role of Boer women in “building up Land and Volk” (Fick in Postma 1939: Foreword)<sup>7</sup>, echoing the consciousness-raising objectives of many *testimonios*. Sarah Raal’s Met Die Boere in die Veld articulates explicitly nationalist aims: “My hope and expectation is that the effort will be worth it and will contribute to awakening a love of the fatherland and an awareness of the nation amongst our young generation, and to draw the ties closer that bind us as an Afrikaner people” (Raal 1938: *Voorwoord* [Foreword]).<sup>8</sup> As a result of these political aims and statements, and in common with many *testimonios*, Boer women’s testimonies are remarkably impersonal although on the surface they all ostensibly concern the details of ‘a life’.

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<sup>6</sup> In a later book, Mrs. Neethling also states her intention to ‘correct’ the official record, where she specifically names the Ladies Commission Report, which she condemns as “superficial and one-sided” [“oppervlakkig en eensydig”], and as an instance of the misrepresentation of the camps (Neethling 1938: x).  
<sup>7</sup> “opbou van Land en Volk”

<sup>8</sup> “My hoop en verwagting is dat die moeite werd sal wees en daartoe sal bydra om die vaderlandsliefde en volksbewussyn by ons jong geslag aan te wakker en die bande nouer te trek wat ons bind as ‘n Afrikanervolk.”

Commenting on something similar with regard to Latvia, Skultans argues that “The constraints of large-scale historical events necessarily produce a certain measure of similarity and repetition [in testimonies]. However, testimony resists generalization. It emphasizes the separateness and solitude of each narrator. Its impact is cumulative rather than abstractly generalizable” (Skultans 1998: 51). My view of Boer women’s South African War testimonies is very different: production as part of the growth of Afrikaner (proto-) nationalism renders both their structure and their content generalised and generalisable. They embrace rather than resist generalisation and they do not emphasise the “separateness and solitude” of personal experience and individual response, but rather universalise representations of the war and the camps in ways that help promote a united, independent Afrikaner nation.

While some Boer women’s testimonies, such as those by Brandt-Van Warmelo (1905, 1913), De La Rey (1903), Le Clus (1923), Raal (1938), Rabie-Van der Merwe (1940) and Van Helsdingen (1903), are individual, self-authored accounts, many more women’s testimonies appear as part of collections by Hobhouse (1902, 1927), Postma (1925, 1939) and Neethling (1917, 1938), and/or were written in response to collective ‘calls’ to witness on behalf of the *volk* in various newspapers and magazines. The testimonies in the published collections lie somewhere between the individual and collective forms, with numbers of women telling their stories in terms of ‘my experiences’ and others in terms of ‘we women’, with the testimonies in Stemme Uit Die Verlede (Postma 1939) taking the specific form of sworn statements which are marshalled together as the collective evidence of a number of witnesses. The testimonies in these collections were written, gathered, published, distributed and read in a communal context, with some women testifiers making explicit reference to the role of other contributors, for example in

writing that “There is still a lot more I could write, but others must also get a chance to air their feelings” (Louw in Neethling 1938: 34).<sup>9</sup>

The collective, cross-referencing, mutually-authorising aspects of these anthologies of testimonies, then, are likely to be due to the oral origins of many of these accounts as stories exchanged and re/told both during and after the war, thereby gaining widespread coverage and credence over time, and Chapters Two and Three provided examples of particular stories redacted from an oral tradition into ‘I-witness’ statements. Thus, while the testimonies in these collections are ostensibly individual and self-authored, they draw on a collective body of oral stories pertaining to these events and are presented in compilation form, with women often replicating elements of the same stories, and family links and shared experiences between individual authors are clearly discernable even when not made explicit.<sup>10</sup>

As I indicated at the start of the chapter, *testimonio* theorists have frequently called attention to the supposed “eschewal of the first person singular subject” (Marin 1991: 52) by *testimonio* writers and speakers, who are seen to depict themselves and their experiences as typical and representative of a larger communal group. Hobhouse presented the testimonies in War Without Glamour in this way, suggesting that the experiences represented in the testimonies in her collection were interchangeable with those of any Boer woman, by claiming that “Had every woman of the two Boer Republics (apart from the few big towns) recorded her experience, the result would have been but a general repetition of these statements with minor variations of detail” (Hobhouse 1927: 5). Some

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<sup>9</sup> “Daar is nog baie meer wat ek kon skryf, maar ander moet ook ‘n kans kry om aan hulle gevoelens lug te gee.”

<sup>10</sup> As an example of this, in Mag Ons Vergeet? Betty Hofmeyr (the ‘widow of Stephanus Hofmeyr’), whose testimony appears on pages 226-227, is also the mother-in-law of the (unnamed) writer of the letter that appears on pages 210-211, whose testimony also appears in War Without Glamour (Hobhouse 1927: 104-106). The links between the two women and their three testimonies are not referred to anywhere, and each account provides the same evidence and works to corroborate the other. Moreover, further research indicated that the ‘unnamed’ writer of the letter on pages 210-211 was Mrs. Neethling’s niece, Mrs. Hofmeyr.

women testimony writers overtly located themselves as part of a wider collectivity, as indicated by Cornelia Makwayer's signing of her testimony "Your fellow-grieving Afrikaner friend" (Makwayer in Postma 1939: 65).<sup>11</sup> Others claim, not so much to typify Boer women as to speak for them in the role of emissary, with Johanna Brandt-Van Warmelo declaring in Het Concentratie-kamp van Irene that "These are the experiences of one Transvaal woman, that she survived during the war ... but what stands written up herein is also the experience of thousands of mothers of the South African people" (Brandt-Van Warmelo 1905: 123).<sup>12</sup> The majority of the writers of the individual, self-authored testimonies, most notably Brandt-Van Warmelo, Raal and Rabie-Van der Merwe, absolutely do not depict themselves or their experiences as representative or typical of Boer women, but instead portray themselves as unique, active, heroic agents. Far from eschewing the first person singular subject, these testimony writers focus almost entirely on an 'I' that is set apart from the collective mass of Boer women and is a singular, daring, adventurous individual. In focusing on the collective subject of *testimonios* in general, I do not think the theoretical literature has taken adequate account of instances where *testimonio* writers do not represent themselves as "a distinguishable part of the whole" (Sommer 1988: 108) but as uniquely distinctive, extraordinary and heroic.

In addition, in common with many *testimonios*, Boer women's testimonies blur notions of single authorship or self-authorship with their complex layers of re/writing, collaborative writing and translation. As I have indicated in previous chapters, the majority of Boer women's testimonies have undergone at least one and usually several layers of re/writing and translation, and most involved collaborative work of one kind or another. Thus Mrs. Neethling's Should We Forget? (1903) recounts not only the author's wartime

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<sup>11</sup> "U mede-bedroefde Afrikaanse vriendin"

<sup>12</sup> "Dit zijn de ondervindingen van een Transvaalsche vrouw, die den oorlog mede heeft doorgemaakt ... maar wat hierin staat opgeteekend, is ook de ondervinding van duizende moeders van het Suid-Afrikaansche volk".

experiences, but also records those of the people she encountered in visiting various of the camps during that time; and in The Brunt of the War (1902), Hobhouse offers not only her own account and analysis of the effect of the war on women and children, but reproduces many short extracts from letters and also statements written by others about their first-hand experiences. Hobhouse collected, edited, translated, arranged and published both Tant' Alie of the Transvaal (1923) and the testimonies in War Without Glamour (1927). The testimonies in Stemme Uit Die Verlede and Mag Ons Vergeet? were translated twice: the former from Taal into early Afrikaans (1925) and then later Afrikaans (1939); the latter from Taal into Dutch (1917) and then into later Afrikaans (1938). Although both books contain testimonies written by the individual women concerned, both also bear the imprint of their authors in the form of editorial changes, overall structure, layout, footnotes, forewords and introductions. The layers of re/working in Johanna Brandt-Van Warmelo's Het Concentratie-kamp van Irene have been discussed in Chapter Four, although it is worth remembering here that this book was also the product of a collaboration, with Louis Brandt translating the text and centrally involved in the rewriting process, and Brandt-Van Warmelo having overall guidance provided by both Emily Hobhouse and Mrs. De La Rey.

The complex ways in which Boer women's testimonies map onto definitions and characteristics of testimony and the more specific form of *testimonio* are seldom recognised when these testimonies are read by or referred to in South African historiography. Instead it is widely assumed that these are straightforwardly, self-authored, individual testimonies in which women relate their personal experiences of the war and the camps and are factual historical sources, and it is only accounts of this apparent kind that have been acknowledged as 'women's camp testimonies of the camps'.<sup>13</sup> Jansen, for example, only focuses on written, self-authored, individual accounts, and assumes that the

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<sup>13</sup> As discussed in Chapter Two, South African historiography has treated Boer women's camp testimonies as unproblematically factual and referential, with Coetzer 2000, Marais 1991 and Raath 2002a, 2002b all using testimonies in this way.

only ways Boer women ‘left behind a sign’ of their war and camp experiences was in “heart-rending diaries, letters and memoirs”, although only the published testimonies are referenced (Jansen 1999: 3). Forms of attestation that are non-written, other-authored, and most crucially, that do not conform to ‘the history’ in nationalist terms, have not been recognised as such. In the remainder of this chapter, I shall seek the traces of women who did not participate in the nationalist post-war campaign of testifying, but who nonetheless testified to their experiences in the diverse alternative ways I refer to in general terms as attestation. I shall examine the concepts of testimony and attestation at the most basic and general level, stripping them of the particular assumptions about life writing outlined above which have become associated with testimony. Doing this brings into focus a variety of different forms of women’s attestations that have previously been neglected or ignored in post/memory of the South African War and concentration camps.

### **Redefining Testimony**

As already stated, testimony has its origins in the legal context of a court of law, and under these circumstances refers to the evidence sworn as the truth by first-hand or eye-witnesses. Felman locates testimony in the context of a ‘crisis of truth’, arguing that “testimony is provided, and is called for, when the facts upon which justice must pronounce its verdict are not clear, when historical accuracy is in doubt and when both the truth and its supporting elements are called into question. The legal model of the trial dramatizes, in this way, a contained, and culturally channelled, institutionalized, crisis of truth” (Felman 1992: 6, original emphasis). However, as Felman also points out, testimony has over time come to have meanings and significance “way beyond the implications of its limited, restricted usage in the legal context” (Felman 1992: 6). It is this ‘way beyond’ I want to pursue.

The wide array of meaning and shades of meaning of the term ‘testimony’ and related words gives an indication of the multiple interpretations and uses connected with the concept. Dictionary definitions of the term ‘testimony’ in the O.E.D. include: “Personal or documentary evidence or attestation in support of a fact or statement; hence, any form of evidence or proof”, “An open attestation or acknowledgement”, “An expression or declaration of disapproval or condemnation of error; a protestation” (Oxford English Dictionary Vol. XI 1970: 225). The characterisation of testimony as “personal or documentary evidence” is congruent with Felman’s (1995: 5) assertion that ‘to testify’ means “to vow to tell, to promise and produce one’s own speech as material evidence for truth”. This conception of testimony allows for a far broader rubric that incorporates many of the examples I discuss below, particularly those where individuals produced their own verbal and/or written statements in the context of providing evidence to prove a particular point under dispute. The specific form of testimony that Felman (1995: 5) calls “an expression or declaration of disapproval or condemnation of error; a protestation” encompasses documents such as petitions and letters of complaint or protest, which are forms of “open attestation” specifically concerned with “declaration[s] of disapproval”.

The term ‘testify’ signifies a similarly wide range of meanings, including: “To bear witness to, or give proof of (a fact); to assert or affirm the truth of (a statement); to attest”, “To profess and openly acknowledge (a fact, belief, object of faith or devotion, etc.); to proclaim as something that one knows or believes”, “To declare solemnly” and “To give evidence of, display, manifest, express (desire, emotion, etc)” (Oxford English Dictionary Vol. XI 1970: 224). Thus ‘to testify’ may simply mean “to bear witness” to a statement, fact or assertion of truth, for instance by verifying or endorsing a document with a personal signature, thus producing a testificate – “a writing wherein a fact is attested” (Oxford English Dictionary Vol. XI 1970: 224). However, documents can also testify to – in other

words, be a manifestation of – a particular desire, emotion or set of circumstances, and this potentially accommodates a seemingly limitless array of personal and also ‘official’ writings in which the thoughts, feelings and actions of individuals are expressed and testified to.

Testimony is also connected to the testimonial, including in the sense of an ‘objective’ reference in which one person bears witness to the character, skills and qualities of another person, but also in the sense of testifying of a distinctly positive, eulogising kind. Definitions of ‘testimonial’ take a number of different forms, including those I have also indicated: “A written attestation by some authorized or responsible person or persons, testifying to the truth of something; an affidavit, acknowledgement; a certificate”, and “A writing testifying to one’s qualifications and character”, but also taking account of a wider set of meanings: “Of, pertaining to, or of the nature of testimony; serving as evidence; conducive to proof”, “Something serving as proof or evidence; a token, record, manifestation” (Oxford English Dictionary Vol. XI 1970: 224-225). In a testimonial, therefore, it is usually a third person who acts as a first-hand witness and objectively testifies to the character or conduct of another. The resulting testimonial testifies, not only to the character and qualities of the person whom the testimonial is explicitly ‘about’, but also concerning the character, interests and perspective of the speaker/writer of the testimonial, who may be a designated ‘authority’ or an individual (or collective) who, for other reasons, has been deemed a reliable, responsible and knowledgeable I-witness.

According to Coady, testimony is “an illocutionary act”, that is, an action performed by saying or writing something “under certain conditions and with certain intentions such that we might naturally think of the definition as giving us conventions governing the existence of the act of testifying” (Coady 1992: 25). Coady follows this wide definition of testimony with an investigation of the specific legal roots of testimony as

evidence provided by witnesses in a court of law. While Coady's definition centres on "the idea of testimony as the content of a speech act", he also includes within this "material which is not an obvious product of the sort of explicit speech act of testifying" (Coady 1992: 48, 50). As a key part of extending the testimony paradigm, Coady includes documentary testimony such as "church registries of births and deaths, private diaries, confidential diplomatic minutes, newspaper reports", even where the original speaker or writer of these documents was unaware that s/he was testifying (Coady 1992: 50). While it might be argued that testimony has to be knowingly performed to be construed as testimony, Coady contends against this, that "where we can legitimately create an author-reader situation it would seem natural to extend the notion of testimony to cover such cases ...particularly where the document in question was concerned, for whatever reason, to set the record straight" (Coady 1992: 50). Thus while testimony is conventionally seen as a form of life writing specifically concerned with consciously bearing witness to the life and experiences of individual/s, Coady's discussion considers a much broader notion of testimony that takes account of documentary and other forms of testimony that pertain to the South African examples that follow.

Using the widest possible interpretative frame based on the definitions outlined above, testimony can include: legal and semi-legal depositions, sworn statements, testificates, references, testimonials, petitions and applications, as well as forms of documentary testimony and what Coady refers to as 'institutional testimony', or "the sort of testimony that is enshrined in publishing practices" (Coady 1992: 222). A subset of this is testimonial life writing of the 'collected and published' kind referred to in the quotation from Van Heyningen at the start of this chapter, as well as the specific form of *testimonio*; and it can be plotted across a number of dimensions, including self-/other-authored, written/oral, public/private, and self-as-representative/self-as-unique. In what follows and

as part of my reconceptualisation of testimony, I make use of a wide variety of examples drawn from the Orange River Colony (O.R.C.) and Transvaal official camp records to illustrate the diverse ways in which women attested to their war and camp experiences. These examples are ‘testimonial’ in the sense that they attest to the conduct, character or experience of an individual or group, with either the attester or another ‘I-witness’ recording this. Rethinking testimony around ‘attestation’ and ‘making a mark’ or leaving a trace, and using the extensive official camp records to seek out such traces, enables the focus to move away from the ‘collected and published’ testimonies and the political project they are associated with, and to recognise the testimonies of women – and men – which have thus far been neglected or ignored. In drawing on the official camp records, I have been careful not to equate ‘appearing in the records’ with testimony. Each of the examples I discuss involves a personal attestation of one kind or another that falls outside the ‘usual’ day-to-day routine recording of arrivals, departures, illness, deaths and births, because it involves camp inhabitants ‘making a mark’ or ‘having a mark made about them’ in an unusual or distinguishing way.

**“We the undersigned inhabitants”: collective testimony as “an expression or declaration of disapproval ... a protestation”**

An important form of collective testimony is the petition, a substantial number of which are now archived as part of the official camp records. These petitions were addressed to local camp superintendents of the O.R.C. or Transvaal refugee camps or the Chief Administrators of the of the O.R.C. and Transvaal annexed provinces, and were drafted and signed in the camps by collectivities of inhabitants who wished to ‘make a statement’ about a particular aspect of camp life and usually, although not always, make a related request for change. These petitions testify to the experiences and concerns of a collective of camp inhabitants; in them, the petitioners attest to or proclaim what they see

as ‘the facts’ about a specific aspect of camp life, in much the same way that writers of the later post-war testimonies claim to attest to ‘the facts’ about the war and the camps more generally, but with the petitions also blurring into other forms of written attestation, including letters, depositions and signed statements.

Petitions tend to cluster around particular camps, with both Kroonstad and Bloemfontein producing larger numbers of petitions than elsewhere. One of the Kroonstad petitions, dated 26 March 1901, concerns a request for increased rations, and like many of the petitions takes the form of a testimony within a letter:

“Dear Sir!

We the undersigned inhabitants of the above named Camp take with due respect the liberty to bring our requirements before your notice:–

1<sup>st</sup>. The rations which we receive here are insufficient for us ...

2<sup>nd</sup>. We have here in Camp very aged persons; even as old as 94 years, & this monotonous food ... is certainly injurious to their health ...

3<sup>rd</sup>. We get no candles & soap.

4<sup>th</sup>. The issue of passes to the town is insufficient according to the present Pass System ...

These are the reasons why we humbly & respectfully beg you to take our grievances into favourable consideration & to recommend this Memorial to higher authorities. Hoping to get a favourable reply we remain yours respectfully

Signed only by full grown persons (bona fide)

C.R. Botha

[List of 494 signatures]” (SRC 4/1012)<sup>14</sup>

Here the collective “we the undersigned” testify to Kroonstad’s superintendent, Mr. Webb, about the circumstances in which they were living and to which they objected, outlined in four main points with the specific wording of the petition seemingly devised by C.R. Botha, the first signatory. If ‘to testify’ is taken as “to proclaim as something that one knows or believes”, as suggested by the OED definition given above (Oxford English Dictionary Vol. XI 1970: 224), then petitions of this sort certainly fall within the rubric of collective ‘camp testimony’, specifically as a form of protestation. Complaints about rations in petitions are usually fairly detailed and precise, and not expressed in the general

<sup>14</sup> The requests made in this petition were refused, with Webb as superintendent of Kroonstad arguing that “if any concessions are made to the people in this respect they will only give rise to further demands” (SRC 4/1012).

terms common to the later testimonies which indiscriminately condemned the ‘poor rations’, especially of meat. For example, a petition dated 26 June 1901 from 596 inhabitants of Bloemfontein camp called for scrapping of the potato ration and asking that it be replaced with an increased quantity of flour (SRC 19/7517),<sup>15</sup> while a petition of 29 June 1901 from “we the undersigned Ladies” at Vredefort Road camp made a particular request for increased firewood signed by 82 women (SRC 9/3077).<sup>16</sup>

Significantly, another Kroonstad petition dated 29 August 1901 is written in the same handwriting as the earlier one concerning rations, and with the same C.R. Botha as first signatory (SRC 11/4287). This petition, signed by 111 men, requested permission from the military authorities for the signatories, who had all taken the Oath of Allegiance, to be allowed to farm along the nearby railway line. C.R. Botha was evidently the instigator and organiser of both petitions, and this solicitation and co-ordination of testimony is an interesting parallel between the petitions-as-testimony and the single-authored testimonies produced post-war, which were also orchestrated and produced by local organisers in the shape of cultural and political workers. Indeed, when a petition was submitted at Bloemfontein camp in February 1902 signed by 182 people requesting that all those placed in the reformatory camp should be given trials during which they could plead their cases, the matter of solicited petitions was raised directly (SRC 20/7565). Thus the then-superintendent of Bloemfontein, Mr. Bennett, wrote to Captain Trollope, Chief Superintendent of the O.R.C. Refugee Camps, stating that “I beg to inform you that no one is sent by me to the Reformatory Camp, without being examined”, adding,

“This petition has evidently been started by friends of one Plassyn, who was placed in the Refty. Camp for concealing a case of sickness ... I have already mentioned

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<sup>15</sup> The request to abandon the potato ration and increase the quantity of meal issued was responded to positively and granted by Captain Hume, the camp superintendent at Bloemfontein.

<sup>16</sup> The office of the chief superintendent of Refugee Camps in the O.R.C. responded positively to this request by ordering a fortnightly supply of match wood for the camp and informing the superintendent at Vredefort Road, “in the meantime issue such rations of fuel as you think necessary for the comfort of the refugees” (SRC 9/3077).

this man to you as being an agitator & a writer of petitions. A family called Meyer have also had a good deal to do with the enclosed ... Several of the names on the attached are known to me as belonging to old offenders, loafers, agitators & rotters in general”

Here as elsewhere, and as outlined in Chapter Three, ‘troublesome’ groups of women (and in this case possibly including men, although this is not made explicit) acted in the camp as political organisers or ringleaders, in this instance drawing up a petition regarding the contentious question of the Reformatory Camp and its role as a place of punishment for those who disobeyed camp rules, but also for those who were regarded by the authorities as ‘undesirable’ because of their political views and propensity to ‘stir up trouble’. It is also clear from this particular petition that not everybody whose signature appears on the list signed their own name. Instead some sets of surnames appear in a single hand; for example, seven people surnamed Meyers signed the petition, but with five of these signatures appearing consecutively in identical handwriting. This suggests that individual women agitators organised different groups involved with the petition, with each of these women signing, not only her own name, but also those of the rest of her family on their behalf, either on the assumption that they supported the petition or because they definitely supported it but were illiterate and could neither read the contents of the petition nor sign their own names. The shaky or painstaking appearance of some signatures suggests that those who could write and sign their names did so infrequently and were functionally literate in only the loosest sense.

Another camp petition concerns a request made on 9 August 1901 at Harrismith by a group of 26 camp inhabitants, originally from the town of Reitz, for the authorities to reconsider a decision to transfer them to Heilbron camp. In this instance the petitioners did not attest to hardships or make lists of complaints, but instead used the petition to provide positive evidence in support of their case to stay at Harrismith:

“Thus far we are indeed happy to be here – the treatment was good on the whole and the health very good. We have no just cause of complaint. We are grateful for the treatment here and do not know how it will be at Heilbron ... we have bought stoves, erected kitchens and got together various articles of furniture, we would be at sea again if removed ... Our children are just in full swing in their schoolwork. For the above reasons and others we very humbly beg for the esteemed permission of the Military Authorities and Yours to remain here with our families” (SRC 11/4315)

While the testimony given here is motivated by a particular request, it nonetheless testifies to the experiences of its signatories, or rather how they chose to represent these in such public and ‘official’ documents, and points up the truism that camps differed both from each other and internally over time (and as shown also by the different responses to the petitions). Certainly not all the camps were viewed as universally and unchangingly ‘bad’ with all inhabitants perpetually dissatisfied with conditions, as the post-war testimonies suggest. Instead the inhabitants at the time themselves discerned important differences between camps, as evinced by the Harrismith petitioners’ articulation of doubts about “how it will be at Heilbron”. Combined with their expressions of satisfaction with conditions at Harrismith, this belies depictions in later testimonies of all camps as equally and unchangingly deficient, and inhabitants as constantly deprived and oppressed.

Official correspondence attached to the petition reveals that the petitioners’ request to stay at Harrismith was granted. The camp superintendent wrote to Chief Superintendent Trollope that “I think theirs is a reasonable request, & would strongly recommend it being granted if possible”. Trollope’s office concurred with this judgement and added, “No people need be transferred to other camps against their wishes” (SRC 11/4315, 12 August 1901). The Harrismith petition indicates that camp inhabitants were not simply victims of the concentration system, but were active agents who were sometimes able to intervene successfully on their own behalf. Camp inhabitants who drew up and signed petitions produced their “own speech as material evidence” in support of the protests or complaints they were testifying to and seeking redress for (Felman 1992: 5).

A further interesting example of a petition-as-testimony takes the form of a letter dated 23 November 1901 written and signed by Gert Oliphant and additionally ‘marked’ by the X of a second petitioner, Daniel Marome. These two men were inhabitants of the ‘Native Refugee Camp’ at Honingspruit near Kroonstad, and their petition concerns complaints about scarcity of food. The petition is addressed to “The Deputy Administrator, Bloemfontein” and states:

“We the undersigned Natives at present residing in the Native Refugee Camp at Honingspruit desire to bring to your Honour’s notice that there is considerable dissatisfaction in our Camp caused through our not being able to get enough food. We have to work hard all day long but the only food we can get is mealies and mealie meal, and this is not supplied to us free but we have to purchase same with our own money ... We humbly request your Honour to do something for us otherwise we will all perish of hunger, for we have no money to keep on buying food” (CO 46 4282/01)

The petition is written in what, judging from his signature, is evidently Gert Oliphant’s handwriting, and, next to the ‘X’ of Daniel Marome, Oliphant has written “his mark Daniel Marome”. This petition is a striking example of two black men personally attesting to their camp experiences in their own words and making their ‘marks’ in the official record. In response to the petition, the O.R.C. Administration requested a full report from Mr. Gresson, a District Inspector for the Native Refugee Department, and in addition informed Gert Oliphant in a letter dated 2 December 1901 that “His Honour has received the petition addressed to him by you and Mr. D. Morome on the 23<sup>rd</sup> instant, and has requested Mr. Baker, the Resident Magistrate of Kroonstad, to visit the Native Refugee Camp at Honingspruit ... You will then have an opportunity of seeing him and stating your case to him” (CO 46 4282/01).

Ultimately Oliphant and Marome’s complaints were rejected, with Mr. Baker stating: “I personally saw Oliphant and enquired into his alleged grievance. He is one of the highly educated Natives who evidently does not use his advantages in the right

direction but is a source of trouble and annoyance to all who have dealings with him.” Mr. Gresson’s report was equally dismissive of the petition and its writers. He stated that there was no scarcity of food at Honingspruit, but that ‘Natives’ were expected to do a certain amount of (farm) work in order to receive rations and that, when he had looked into previous complaints about lack of food, “invariably I find that this is owing entirely to their own laziness ... a large number proving themselves unwilling or too lazy to work”. Those who could not prove they had been working “on the Lands” could not get their ration tickets filled. Mr. Gresson’s account of the petitioners is lengthy:

“Coming to Gert Oliphant himself he is the last man that ought to complain, he would have been sent out long ago to work for Govt. but that he was engaged as an Assistant by the appointed Schoolmaster for the camp & has on this account been allowed certain priviledges [sic], he was very adverse to doing any work himself & caused a great deal of annoyance to the Supt. of Camp and discontent amongst the Natives by his talk & grumbling. I finally sent him into Kroonstad to work, unfortunately the post, censoring of Kaffir correspondence, that I hoped he would get had been filled before his arrival & instead of returning to Camp to report himself he persuades Daniel Marome, for whom I had also obtained a good position in one of the Kroonstad Hotels, to desert his place” (CO 46 4282/01, 26 December 1901)

Mr. Gresson’s report was deemed “quite satisfactory” by the O.R.C. Administration and the petition was dismissed. Nonetheless, the authorities did take the petition seriously, as shown by the letter to Oliphant acknowledging its receipt, the request for a full report from the District Inspector, and the arrangements made for the Resident Magistrate to meet with the complainants personally. A petition written and signed by black men was not simply dismissed out of hand, but was addressed and processed through official channels, albeit in ways that reflected the seeming inability of ‘the system’ to know how most appropriately to deal with a “highly educated Native” who was in fact better suited and evidently more inclined to work as a schoolroom assistant than a farm labourer, in order to ‘earn’ his food rations. The petition itself is an important example of personal testimony, and while the official response was dismissive of the petition, it nevertheless treated this as personal I-

witness testimony which required investigation, while the petitioners were dealt with as named individuals and addressed as ‘Mr. Gert Oliphant’ and ‘Mr. D. Marome’.

As a form of collective attestation, the petitions discussed above are located at the intersection of a number of different definitional dimensions. They are other-authored, in the sense that one person usually composed the wording of a petition; but they are also self-authorised, as each petitioner endorsed the resulting document with his or her signature. However, this is complicated in the case of those petitions where it is evident that not all signatories did in fact sign their own names, in turn signalling that, while ultimately taking a written form, petitions almost always have oral roots, particularly when some signatories are illiterate. Finally, as a collective and public form of attestation, the way in which some camp petitions were orchestrated and drawn up mirrors the post-war processes whereby politically enterprising individuals organised and produced many of the collected and published compilations of testimonies, with black people and disagreeing whites ‘written out’ of ‘the history’.

### **“I, the undersigned”: individual testifying and ‘making a case’**

In addition to collective petitions, the camp records contain many examples of letters from individual camp inhabitants petitioning the authorities and making requests and applications, usually concerning passes or permission to transfer family members from one camp to another. As instances of attestation, these letters are manifestations and expressions of the particular concerns, wishes and requisites of their writers, as well as sharing some of the characteristics of petitions in their ‘making a case’ aspects. My first example here concerns an application dated 26 March 1901 by Mrs. Aletta Botha, an inhabitant of Kroonstad camp, which she submitted to the Resident Magistrate at Kroonstad asking that her P.O.W. husband be granted parole and transferred from

Ladysmith to join her in Kroonstad (CO 8/594/01). The application is not strictly a letter – it is not addressed to anyone – but instead takes the form of a declaration expressed in a quasi-legal way that begins “I the undersigned wish to bring to the notice of the authorities...”, and it ends with Mrs. Botha’s signed name. As well as being an application for specific action, it is also a testimony of her experiences during the war to date:

“[My husband] gave up his arms in May 1900, took the oath of neutrality, and after remaining quietly at home, was taken prisoner three months later Aug 15<sup>th</sup> on his farm for no reason that we know of. Our house was burnt down, all our livestock taken, and with seven little children I was compelled to come to Kroonstad. Here I was laid up for several weeks with fever, and two of my children are at present dangerously ill with the same disease. My request is therefore that my husband will be released on parole to this place to aid me in this time of calamity and sickness. Hoping that the entreaties of a mother and wife in distress may avail in bringing my husband back to his family I am yours respectfully. Aletta Botha.”

Here is a written, self-authored document, in which an individual woman has testified to and given evidence of her personal wartime experiences in much the same way as the ‘conventional’ post-war testimonies do, in this instance with the additional element of making a case for change. Mrs. Botha’s request was refused by the General Officer Commanding-in-Chief (G.O.C.) at Kroonstad, who presumably withheld permission on military grounds (CO 8/594/01, 3 May 1901). A similar application was made in April 1901 by Elizabeth Geldenhuys, also of Kroonstad camp, to have her P.O.W. husband paroled from Green Point, although the part of the correspondence indicating whether this application was successful or not is not now extant (CO 14/1047/01).<sup>17</sup>

In a letter to Major Goold-Adams (at that time Deputy Administrator of the O.R.C.) of 11 April 1901, Agnes B. Lowe, who was evidently living in a house located in a part of the greater camp at Bloemfontein,<sup>18</sup> requested the release of her husband from jail and permission for herself to proceed to Lydenburg (CO 12/859/01). A letter from Lieutenant

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<sup>17</sup> The clustering of applications around particular camps may have resulted from the idea of writing such letters spreading internally within camps, especially in the wake of a successful application.

<sup>18</sup> Mrs. Lowe gives her address as “Long Street, Railway Camp”.

Gray at Bloemfontein police station, where Mr. Lowe was imprisoned, to Goold-Adams reveals that he had been jailed for “harbouring a soldier and supplying him with liquor.” Furthermore, Gray’s letter contains elements of the testimonial form by attesting to the characters and circumstances of both Mr. and Mrs. Lowe: “He is a drunken good-for-nothing fellow and his wife admits that she can do very little to influence him. Mrs. Lowe is a decent little woman with a small baby, and not in good health”. As an example of a women’s testimony, Mrs. Lowe’s letter is worth quoting *verbatim*. It is in English, clearly her first language, and although it is a written, self-authored **personal account**, it indicates that its author was only functionally literate:

“Dear Sir  
 I hear by take It upon my self to ask you if you would Kindly counsider My  
 Housbounds case And see What you can do for me as I am not in the best of health  
 or I would not trouble you ... It is very hard for to Scarfise [sacrifice] Home and all  
 one has and then come Back to nothink at all and have to Lay on the Bear Bords  
 and nothink under or over one as I did ... Kindley give my Housbond and my Self  
 A Pearmite [permit] to go to Proutear [Pretoria] or LidenBurg [Lydenburg] or some  
 Wheare Els north words but not South Please do Dear Sir for God Sake see What  
 can you do for me a true Britisher ... I am hear all alone And it is not Safe for a  
 Wouman to be in A House with out A Man ... So I Remaine yours Truley and  
 Faithful Sirvent  
 Agnes B. Lowe  
 A true And faithful Briticher”

The spelling, grammar and punctuation mistakes in Mrs. Lowe’s letter indicate that, while she was an English-speaker, she was only functionally literate, and although her letter takes a written form, it reads more like the spoken word. As part of making a case for her two requests, Mrs. Lowe’s letter is also a testament to her experiences – for example, sleeping on bare floorboards – and her feelings of insecurity in her husband’s absence. Gray comments in his letter that “The last paragraph of the letter is intended to emphasise her loneliness now that her husband is a prisoner”, although it is likely this is a coded reference to the possibility of lone white women being (sexually and otherwise) attacked by black people, specifically men. Mrs. Lowe’s professed loyalty as a ‘true Britisher’ did

not help to further her case, for neither of her requests were granted: she was informed that the authorities were unable to release her husband from jail, and that “it is not possible at present (and will not be for some time), for you to proceed to Lydenburg” (CO 12/859/01, 19 April 1901).

Women whose testimonies are excluded from the nationalist canon are generally those who inhabited the economic, social or political margins as perceived by (proto-) nationalist circles. And as a poor, English-speaking, semi-literate ‘Britisher’ with a disreputable husband in jail, in the post-war proto-nationalist context of testimony-writing and collection, Mrs. Lowe would surely have been just such a marginal figure.

Immediately post-war, proto-nationalist rhetoric implied that before the conflict all Boer people had lived lives of plenty as prosperous farmers in the ‘Garden of Eden’ paradise of the two Republics. For instance, the opening chapters of Mrs. Neethling’s Should We Forget? depict “the comfort, the abundance in which the majority of the Boer families lived [pre-war]”, and she states as “simple fact” that the British disrupted this harmonious existence by seeking to strip the Boers of their wealth and also by disrupting ‘race’ relations between Boers and black people (Neethling 1903: 19). This is often advanced in the rest of her book in parallel with a defence of the Boers as a civilised, pious people, in response to British wartime claims about the Boers as backward and barbaric.

In reality and contra Mrs. Neethling, not all Boers were prosperous or wealthy before the war; nor were they all refined and educated; and nor were social divisions and hierarchies absent. The claims about Boer prosperity before and even during the war (prior to ‘scorched earth’) were made partly to emphasise their European and ‘civilised’ way of life, partly to suggest that the Boers lacked the marked class divisions that existed in European societies at the time, and should therefore not be treated like uncivilised (and by imputation) black people. The emphasis on Boer prosperity is reinforced by the absence in

the public domain of camp testimonies by poor or working class women. This is particularly noticeable in the collections by Hobhouse (1927) and Neethling (1938), in which the testimonies of elite Boer women, many of them the wives of *landdrosts* [magistrates] or church ministers predominate. M.M. Postma's (1939) collection brings together testimonies of women from a wider social spectrum, but it does not contain accounts by the desperate and destitute women who made up the main portion of the camps' inhabitants. Part of the difficulty in finding personal accounts for such women is, of course, that they were frequently illiterate, or like Mrs. Lowe, only functionally literate.

A small but fascinating group of letters written from Orange River Station camp testifies to something of what the poorest women in the camps might have experienced (WM 3970/1-4). These letters are addressed to a Miss Lourens (she is variously referred to as 'Miss' and 'Mrs' and the spelling of her name is inconsistent), who probably worked on a relief committee of some kind, which collected and distributed clothing and other items to destitute families in Orange River camp.<sup>19</sup> On their visit to the camp on 26 August 1901, the Ladies Commission noted that most of its inmates were well-dressed, but that some were very poor (Concentration Camps Commission 1902: 70). The four archived letters addressed to Miss Lourens all request relief of different kinds, and are written in Taal by women who were functionally literate only.

In my translations of two of these letters here, I have retained the punctuation and capitalization in the original letters, as this best conveys the style of writing and levels of illiteracy of the writers:

Groot River  
The 15<sup>th</sup> December

Mrs Lourins please be so good as to send me 10 yards ^linen^ and 10 yards pink flannelette I will be grateful if you do this because I am to be confined [give birth] and I have nothing if you don't send me something and I don't know how it will go

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<sup>19</sup> I have not uncovered any trace of Miss Lourens or her work at this camp in the official record, so she is not likely to be a camp inhabitant, but someone from the local area involved in relief work.

and I have no money to buy one drop of medicine it is hard to be here in such a condition

I have 3 children the eldest is a girl she is 10 years and the others are 2 boys the 1 is 6 years and the 1 is 14 years with them it goes hard too I am in I line tent number 15 I will be happy if you send me 10 yards linen this I need very badly and 10 yards flannelette you will yourself know what is necessary I hope you will do something for me please

YD van den berg

i line tent no. 15 (WM 3970/3)<sup>20</sup>

Refugee Camp  
Orange River Sta.  
13 Feb. 1902

Dear Mrs Louwrens

I am ashamed but still going can I do nothing else I am going to ask you can you not please send me one corset ^no.1^ believe me that I am truly in need otherwise I would not have asked you at one time I hope to again be in a position to repay you

Dear Mrs Louwrens how happy will I not be if you can send this to me

Mrs Louwrens my mother's bedding is very bad her blankets are badly torn also her mattress cover is finished and we have no money I remain with good expectations your friend

Maria Van Niekerk

H line tent 25 (WM 3970/4)<sup>21</sup>

As in the letters of application discussed above, these two letters provide testimony of personal circumstances as part of making a case to motivate practical help and assistance. Nothing that has been written about the organisation and provision of 'relief' in the camps at a general level conveys the individual sense of desperation at straitened personal circumstances that these letters express, particularly in the original Taal. The tone

<sup>20</sup> "Grooterivier 1901 Den 15 Deesember Mrs Lourins wees als u blief zoo goed in stier ver my 10 jaard ^lenne^ in 10 jaard pink vleinet ik zal dankbaar wees is u het doen want ik moet in de bed kom in het niets is u niet vir my iets stier dan weet ik ni hoe zal dit gaan ik het geen geld om te koop in het geen drupel medezyne dit is maar hard om hier in zoo een toestand te wees ik het 3 kinders de oudste in een mysje zy is 10 jaar en de ander is 2 zeens de 1 is 6 jaar in de 1 4 jaar met het gaan dit ook hart ik is in I lyn tent nomer 15 ik zal bly wees is u ver my 10 jar lenne stier die het ik vreeslyk nodig in 10 jar flennet u zal zelf weet wat nodig is ik hoop u zal tog iets aan my doen als u blief YD van den berg I lyn tent nom 15"

<sup>21</sup> "Refugee Camp Orange River Sta. 13 Feb. 1902 Geachte Mrs Louwrens Ik bien schaam maar nogthans gaat kan ik niets anders ik gaat u vragen of gy my niet als u blief een borsrok kan sturen ^no. 1^ geloof my dat ik het waarlyk van hode heb anders zal ik u het niet gevraag heb een maal hoop ik weder instaat te wees u weder te vergoeden nu Liewe Mrs Louwrens hoe blyde zal ik niet wees als jy het aan my kan sturen Mrs Louwrens myn moeder haar bedde goed is zeer sleg haar kombarsen is zeer stukkend ook haar matras slopen zeer gedaan en ons het geen geld ik blyf met goede verwachting u vriedin Maria van Niekerk H. lyn tent 25"

of deprivation and need in the letters, combined with the simple, halting style of writers not accustomed to letter-writing, poignantly suggest the hardships such women endured. While these letters appear to be self-authored, it is possible they could have been written by others (neighbours, family members) on behalf of Mrs. Van Den Berg and Mrs. Van Niekerk, but presumably their authors would nonetheless have verbally proposed or dictated the content of the letters.

Both women emphasise that they have nothing, and Mrs. Van Niekerk is at pains to point out that she is “truly in need” and would like to repay any charity given to her in the future. This was probably in response to various clampdowns on the relief system by officials, who had found some women fraudulently claiming relief, with many distributors favouring only their friends and family, or people who agreed with their (republican) politics. While the relief committees distributed a wide range of items, including various types of food, clothing, candles, writing paper, bedding and ‘comforts’, the requests in these letters are for materials for clothing, clothing and bedding, and not for food. It is impossible to know the socio-economic circumstances of Mrs. Van Den Berg and Mrs. Van Niekerk before the war, although their levels of literacy provide some clues, while Mrs. Van Niekerk’s comment that “I hope to again be in a position to repay you” implies she was previously economically better-off and hoped to be so again.

It is interesting to consider that Emily Hobhouse’s actual relief work centered on providing aid to women like Mrs. Van Den Berg and Mrs. Van Niekerk, and yet in her Report (1901), The Brunt of the War (1902) and War Without Glamour (1927), it is mostly the lives and experiences of the well-off and the well-connected that are emphasised and discussed. Women of the social class of Mrs. Van Den Berg and Mrs. Van Niekerk have also been largely ignored by ‘the history’ as it has developed in nationalist terms. Not only did their penury clash with notions of the Boer people as prosperous and independent, but

their letters convey a humble pleading and gratitude at odds with nationalist images of Boer women in the camps as proud, stoical and often openly defiant. In addition, the implication of such letters is that camp inhabitants had access to charity, help and care from various sources and this conflicts with depictions of the camps as places of utter and unmitigated neglect. These four letters to Miss Lourens all have as their substance testimony in the sense of attesting to experience, although this is framed in the letter form and deployed as part of making a case for change. While individual, self-authored, personal and written, the illiteracy of their authors has resulted in their testimonies reading more like the spoken word. Aletta Botha's "Our house was burnt down, all our livestock taken", Agnes Lowe's "It is very hard for to Scarfise [sacrifice] Home and all one has", Mrs Van Den Berg's "I have 3 children the eldest is a girl she is 10 years and the others are 2 boys the 1 is 6 years and the 1 is 14 years with them it goes hard too", and Mrs. Van Niekerk's "my mother's bedding is very bad her blankets are badly torn also her mattress cover is finished and we have no money", are all straightforwardly testimonial statements, nonetheless they are very unlike the later 'written up' post-war published testimonies in their specificity and modesty of expression, and therefore very like the letters written by women in the camps discussed in Chapter Four.

#### **Signatures, Certificates and Testificates: "writing[s] wherein a fact is attested"**

While there have been some recent studies focusing on the black camps, little scholarly attention has been paid to the presence of black people in the so-called 'white' camps.<sup>22</sup> In fact, numbers of black people lived at nearly all of the 'white' camps, mostly employed by the camp administration as, for instance, clerks, nurses, orderlies, pharmacy assistants, transport drivers, sanitation workers, 'runners', police or watchmen, while only

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<sup>22</sup> See Stanley 2005a, in press for a full discussion of black people in the 'white' camps.

a minority were the privately employed servants of Boer inhabitants. Very little has been written about the lives and experiences of these people, and indeed most discussions of the camps right up to the time of writing this thesis ignore their presence altogether. Attempts to redress past historical inaccuracies with regard to black experience in the camps has focused exclusively on the black camps: “The example of the oblivion of the concentration camps for blacks poses a challenge to black historians in South Africa to start writing their own history” (Du Pisani and Mongolo 1999: 181-182). Instead of grappling with the rather messy and complex realities of black people in the ‘white’ camps as well as the black camps, present-day historians largely continue to reinscribe fixed black/white divisions that in fact did not always exist at that time. This is partly why much of the literature which sets out to rewrite the war and revise the history of the camps fails to do so, because to a great extent ‘the black camps’ have simply been tacked on to existing interpretations of the ‘white’ camps. A fundamental reassessment of the records and attendant rethinking of interpretations around the primacy of nationalist-influenced assumptions in past historiographies has not taken place.<sup>23</sup>

One of the truisms about black people and the concentration camps is the absence of black people’s own testimonies about their experiences. It is true that no extant self-authored, first-person testimonies written by black people specifically about concentration camp experiences have come to light, although, as the petition by Gert Oliphant and Daniel Marome shows, the official records do contain instances of black people attesting to their experiences in other ways. Bemoaning the lack of black voices simply reinforces the silence around black experience and hampers reworking of the existing war/camp historiography, much of which has its roots in actively seeking to exclude and suppress black people’s history. By writing about black people in the war, rather than searching

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<sup>23</sup> There are some signs however of a more general revisioning of gender and race matters in these past historiographies. See for example Bradford 2000, 2002; Brink 1990; Du Toit 2003; Stanley 2002b, 2002c, 2003, 2005a; Stanley and Dampier 2005; Vincent 1999, 2000.

more innovatively for instances of black people producing their own commentary on their experiences, inscribed in their own ways, historical accounts have tended to depict black people as either invisible or passive and victimised. Repeating the lament that “What is absent are the voices of black women. Their history can be only dimly discerned through the observations of others” (Van Heyningen 1999: 24) reinforces this silence about black experience and reprivileges existing accounts by white women in the nationalist canon.

In her discussion of Boer women’s ‘autobiographical texts’, Jansen declares “I don’t know of a single text about black people’s camp experiences” (Jansen 1999: 2). Against this, careful and attentive reading of the camp records brings to light many aspects of black people’s experiences in the war and the camps, some of these ‘marked’ by black people themselves, as with my discussion earlier of the petition from Gert Oliphant and Daniel Morome. Amongst the camp records are documents in which black people have testified to their encounters with the concentration system in a direct and personal way. One interesting instance of this concerns a death notice found ‘out of place’ in the Vredefort Road Hospital register (SRC 124), for an inhabitant of R camp at Aliwal North.<sup>24</sup> The deceased is named as ‘Chrissie’, a 6-month-old baby from Zastron in the O.R.C., who died on 27 April (the year is not stated). The word ‘Native’ is written at the top of the page and underlined, and the baby’s parents are named as Claas and Anna. At the foot of the page, the cause of death has been recorded as influenza, and beneath this Anna, the mother of the dead child, has made her mark, an X. Here is an instance of a black woman making her mark in the records in her own hand and thereby personally testifying to her first-hand experience that her daughter died in this camp. That Anna was called upon to sign her daughter’s death certificate (this was not universal practice – many

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<sup>24</sup> There were relatively large numbers of black people living in the ‘white’ camp at Aliwal North. Boer families were allowed to keep one servant each in this camp, and these servants were rationed. Black deaths were recorded in the same register as white deaths. ‘Race’ was always recorded against names in this death register, with descriptions including ‘Dutch’, ‘European’, ‘Native’, ‘Basuto’ or ‘Native Bastard’ (SRC 104).

of the death certificates in other camps were simply signed by the medical officer) suggests that the camp authorities at Aliwal did not disregard black people's deaths as by definition insignificant. Cause of death had to be established, proper procedures had to be followed and formal documents drawn up and signed.

A death notice similarly 'marked' by 'race' was filed at Orange River Station camp in 1902. This records the death of "Katit (Native)", a child of two years and three months from Brandvlei, the farm of F. Oosthuizen in the Jacobsdal district (SRC 23/8320). Katit died on 17 April 1902 and the cause of death is recorded as "(a) Whooping (b) Ac [Acute] Nephritis". The parents of Katit are named as Bartman and Griet and the word 'natives' appears in brackets after their names. Griet has signed an X at the bottom of the death notice and the words "mothers mark" have been entered above this. Accompanying this death certificate is a letter written on 1 May 1901 by Mr. Nowers, superintendent of Orange River Station camp, to Trollope as Chief Superintendent of O.R.C. camps in Bloemfontein: "I beg to state that the ^death of^ native Katit was included in my telegraphic return of children died in Camp. I cannot remember having received instructions that native deaths must not be included in my returns. The death of Natives is generally included in telegram at foot of same, vide telegram 13 April. I am sorry for this oversight". This letter, then, was in response to Mr. Nowers omitting Katit's name from a returns telegram and his being reprimanded by the central camp administration for this. This exchange demonstrates that, far from being ignored or discounted, 'native' deaths in the O.R.C. had to be bureaucratically accounted for and recorded in the same way as for whites, although there was evidently some uncertainty about exactly how this ought most appropriately to be done. There were in fact very few black people living at Orange River Station, and when the Ladies Commission visited the camp they noted that "Mr Nowers approves of inmates having Kaffir servants, but they are not willing to come"

(Concentration Camps Commission 1902: 71). Orange River Station camp was an isolated place, and black servants who did not wish to follow their employers there clearly acted according to their own interests and did not go. Mr. Nowers, it seems, had quite clear ideas about ‘race’ and propriety, and thought it appropriate to their superior racial status that Boer people had black servants, but this did not mean that he thought them of no account in an organisational (and perhaps even in an ethical) sense.

The Xs made by Anna and by Griet are moving in their simple attestation of their children’s deaths, and also represent the individual, personal signs of affirmation made by these two women. A person’s handwritten signature is their scripted name or distinctive legal mark, of which ‘X’ is a valid form, used for purposes of identification and authorisation. A signature is legally-binding and not only authenticates a document but does so using the unique individual mark of the signatory. When Anna and when Griet signed their Xs testifying to the veracity of the information on their children’s death certificates, these then became testificates – writings in which facts are attested. Moreover, with their signatures written in their own hands, Anna and Griet testified to ‘having been there’ and experienced loss and suffering in a parallel way to the women who wrote later testimonies about this. Although Anna and Griet’s testimonies are not self-authored, they are self-authenticated and relate to their personal, particularised experiences, rather than the politically-informed generalisations that dominate the post-hoc testimonies. Thus Jansen’s assumption about the absence of a “single written text about black people’s camp experiences” (1999: 2) must be set against these testificates, in which black people’s camp experiences have been inscribed and have been attested to by their own hands, in their own ways.

A further example of a testificate, this time concerning a Boer woman, is a signed lease agreement on a loose sheet of paper found inside the Winburg Camp Register (SRC

90, f. 212), on a page where Jan Hendrik Viljoen has been recorded as a camp resident. Beneath Viljoen's name, the name Maria has also been entered indented, indicating her surname was Viljoen too, and both are recorded as coming from Koppienkraal, Ficksburg. Next to the Viljoen names, "Looking for a farm" appears, and beneath this a date, 18.11.02, which is presumably when Jan Viljoen, possibly with Maria, left Winburg camp – well after the declaration of peace on 1 June 1902. Dated 14 November 1902, this short testificate is written in Taal and states, "I the undersigned give permission on this day to the gentleman Jan Hendrik Viljoen to come over to the farm Koppies Kraal dist Ficksburg to take up residency By my hand Mrs. P.E. Fourie". While the signature is apparently in Mrs. Fourie's hand, the rest of the document, including the "Mrs" is in a different handwriting. Jan Viljoen was most likely in the process of becoming a *bywoner* on Koppieskraal farm, with Mrs. Fourie an owner or part-owner of the land. Whatever the finer details of the actual agreement, this is a testificate in which Mrs. Fourie attested by her own hand to the facts contained in the document even though she did not write all of the document herself. 'Making her mark' on this matter indicates that she was in a position of some control and authority with regard to the farm, not usual for a Boer woman at that time.

The signature is an important form of personal attestation. It is what Felman calls "the act of signing and of saying 'I'" and is a way for testifiers to "perform their own unique and irreplaceable witness" (Felman 1992: 265, 218). Anna's and Griet's Xs and Mrs. Fourie's shaky unpractised signature are a form of testimony "in which individuals and groups not in possession of the Western representational technology of writing communicate their vision of the world and their version of often cataclysmic events" (Kokotovic 1999: 29). Recognising their 'marks', as well as Mrs. Fourie's signature, as

testimony reclaims from the nationalist monopoly on testifying who has the right or ability to 'speak' about wartime events.

**Testimonials “by some authorized or responsible person”: Testifying behaviour of Johanna Booyans, Miss Moltzer and Carolina Fourie**

Amongst the official camp records are several interesting documents which attest to or certify the mental states of particular women camp inhabitants whose behaviour, itself a testament of their experiences, was deemed to be abnormal or disruptive by medical and camp authorities. While the physical deprivations of camp life are discussed at great length in post-war published testimonies, relatively little has been written about individual women's specific emotional and mental health responses to the war or the camps. The few such responses that are mentioned are generally framed in terms of (proto-) nationalism, with women stoically bearing painful hardships for the good of the *volk*. Certainly there is no hint in any of the published testimonies of the severe mental and emotional stresses one might imagine resulting from the extreme strains of the war and camp life.<sup>25</sup> By acknowledging these documents as testimony, as 'signs left behind', the experiences of another group of Boer women who did not testify in written, self-authored, public forms come into view.

The first example here concerns the case of Mrs. Johanna Elizabeth Booyans, an inhabitant of Springfontein camp who was certified as a 'lunatic' on 9 August 1901 (SRC 11/4294).<sup>26</sup> The primary documentation takes the form of a “Medical Certificate that a Person is a Lunatic” signed by two camp doctors who attested that Mrs. Booyans, a twenty-nine year old woman recovering from the death of two of her three children and

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<sup>25</sup> My conception of emotional ill/health has been informed by twentieth century ideas about this, and amongst Boer people at this time ideas about emotional life and health would have surely have been very different. Nevertheless, even recognising these differences in perspective, camp life entailed emotional stresses and strains of various kinds and these pressures must have affected inmates in a variety of ways.

<sup>26</sup> There are several documented cases in the camp records of inhabitants being certified as 'insane' and admitted to 'lunatic asylums'.

who had also had measles herself, was “a person of unsound mind”. The medical certificate is a standardised form of the kind used at the time to determine and classify ‘madness’ in a person, and as a “written attestation by some authorized or responsible person or persons, testifying to the truth of something” it states:

“Facts indicating insanity or Idiocy observed by myself:

Wild appearance.

Telling stories about her husband waiting for her at the station. Threatening to kill some of her friends with a knife.

Exposing her sick children to cold.

Facts indicating Insanity or Idiocy communicated to me by others:

John Maritz, who watched the patient states that she talked incoherently on occasions and said her husband awaited her at Bloemfontein, which was not the case.”

On the basis of these ‘facts’ testified to by two doctors, Mrs. Booyans’ diagnosis was pronounced as “acute mania” following measles and she was described as “noisy and v dangerous”, and it was also noted that this was her first attack of mental disturbance. Springfontein camp superintendent William Gostling submitted the medical certificate to Captain Trollope at the O.R.C. camp headquarters at Bloemfontein, and Mrs. Booyans was placed in isolation and treated with bromides and chloral hydrate. Then on 16 August 1901, Gostling wrote a follow-up letter to Trollope in which he offered a revised view of Mrs. Booyans’ case:

“Since I submitted the Medical Certificates in the above case a marked mental improvement has taken place in the patient, and I would suggest (this with the Doctors [sic] entire concurrence) she should be allowed to join her mother and sister in the Refugee Camp Bloemfontein for which she has, now an intense longing, I would ~~suggest~~ send an attendant with Mrs. Booyans and her child. The doctors agree that with the present symptoms, her mental derangement, which was caused by the death of two of her children and a severe attack of measles in her own case, may pass off” (original emphasis and excisions)

Mrs. Booyans’ response to the death of two of her children was perceived to be violent, pathological and outside the range of ‘normal’ responses to the death of two children, by the doctors who interpreted this within their framework of sane and ‘insane’ behaviours. Her behaviour provides a glimpse into the particular emotional reactions of one Boer

woman; threatening people with knives and imagining her husband waiting for her at the station were active manifestations of Mrs. Booyans' grief, probably exacerbated by physiological factors in the aftermath of measles. Mrs. Booyans' conduct can be read as a testament to her experience of her children's deaths, in the sense that it "give[s] evidence of, display, manifest, express (desire, emotion, etc)" (Oxford English Dictionary Vol. XI 1970: 224), and so while appearing in the official record is part of her attestation, so too is her behaviour. Interventions by the authorities were in accordance with standard practice at the time, but also show a marked degree of concern for Mrs. Booyens by attempting to reunite her with her family in accordance with her "intense longing". Ultimately it was decided that the camp at Bloemfontein was too overcrowded, and so Mrs. Booyans' mother and sister were sent from Bloemfontein to be with her in Springfontein instead.

A related example of a woman whose behaviour attested to her experiences, and whose traces in the records constitute a testimonial as 'something serving as proof or evidence; a token, record, manifestation' and attested to by an authorised person concerns a Miss Moltzer. In March 1901, Miss Moltzer was sent back and forth between Bloemfontein concentration camp and the town's 'lunatic asylum' (CO 7/488/01). Dr. Pern, the principal medical officer at Bloemfontein camp, certified that Miss Moltzer had suffered "an attack of acute hysterical mania" that necessitated her transfer to the asylum. Mr. Mills, who was in charge of the asylum, thought this 'mania' was most likely a feverish hallucination brought on by the typhoid fever from which Miss Moltzer was suffering, and for which Dr. Pern had been treating her. Upon deciding that Miss Moltzer was not insane and therefore did not require treatment at the asylum, Mr. Mills sent her back to the camp. Less than a week later Dr. Pern returned her to the asylum, and wrote an angry letter to the Bloemfontein camp commandant, Captain Nelson, defending his decision and commenting in dismissive terms about Mr. Mills, "[who] is not a qualified

doctor & so I must excuse his lack of knowledge as to how typhoid is conveyed.” (Mr. Mills claimed that another inmate at the asylum had contracted typhoid from Miss Moltzer). Eventually the camp authorities arranged to send Miss Moltzer to her brother in Holland, because her sister, Mrs. Heinemann, who was in Bloemfontein camp, “does not treat her as kindly as she should considering her infirmity.”

Although it was eventually agreed that Miss Moltzer was not in fact ‘insane’ – Dr. Pern wrote that he was not anxious to “sign her up as a lunatic” and had sent her to the asylum mainly because her outburst had upset other patients in the camp hospital – she was still written about in ways that implied she was mentally unstable. Captain Nelson referred to her “infirmity”, while Mr. Wilson, secretary to the O.R.C. administration, wrote that “a Refugee Camp [is] not the best place for a person afflicted like Miss Moltzer”, although he also thought the decision to send her to the asylum had been “regrettable”. As a woman perceived to be or actually “afflicted” by mental instability of some kind, Miss Moltzer was marginalised in every sense – she was treated unkindly by her sister, she disturbed other camp hospital patients to the extent that they asked for her to be sent away, and at the asylum she was not wanted either as she was “admittedly not insane”. Post/memory of the camps has not taken account of women like Miss Moltzer, whose emotional responses and stories do not fit the nationalist mould of stoicism or defiance, and this has entrenched ‘forgetting’ about women like her. Like Mrs. Booyans, her behaviour too was a manifestation of her experiences and made a significant ‘mark’ on the official record. The correspondence relating to her case reveals that, while Miss Moltzer was marginalised in one sense, she was not neglected or cruelly treated by the camp authorities, as many women claim to have been in their published testimonies. Her mental distress was noticed and acted upon, and instead of simply abandoning her in the asylum or putting her in her care of her sister, the authorities acknowledged Mrs. Heinemann’s unkind treatment of

Miss Moltzer and arranged to have her sent to her brother in Holland instead. Far from ignoring or mistreating her, the various camp officials (doctor, commandant and the office of the O.R.C. camp administration) exchanged letters, sought explanations and took steps to solve the problem of what to do for the best and where to send her. The resulting documentation forms a collective testimonial, a record or 'mark', of Miss Moltzer's experiences, as manifest in her conduct, as a resident of Bloemfontein concentration camp.

In fact Miss Moltzer's story does not fit the nationalist grand narrative of the camps in a number of respects. Her apparent mental instability is incongruent with notions of the *volk* as hardy stoics, while her sister's unkindness and the responses of others in the hospital cut across the image of the Boers as a united, community-minded people who helped one another in times of difficulty. Also, the relative concern displayed by the camp authorities when dealing with her case is certainly not consistent with women's testimonies which depict the camp officials as always callous and in effect murderers of women and children. Using the correspondence about Miss Moltzer to construct an account of her experiences not only illustrates the effects that camp life may have had on some women's perhaps already fragile emotional and mental health, but also draws attention to the sort of women whose stories have been excluded from 'telling the tale' and thus from 'the history'.

A third example of documentary testimony pertaining to an 'extreme' situation concerns the case of Carolina Fredricka Fourie, a 24-year-old woman who slit her own throat on 20 December 1901 while a resident of Krugersdorp camp. Her entry into Krugersdorp camp is recorded in the register of residents:

Date of entry: 10.6.01

Fourie, Carolina      23      F      M

[Written over her name in pencil, and circled in black ink reads: Died cut her throat 20/12/01]

Tent No. 2/97

Husband on commando

Address: Doornfontein, Krugersdorp  
Children under 12: Petrus Jacobus 12 (1) (DBC 79)

Carolina Fourie's name appears in a register containing the names of twelve women who died in camp, along with lists of the possessions they left behind and various other details about their families and estates (DBC 80). The purpose of this particular register is not clear – the dates recorded in it appear to be random, and although each entry is headed “Death Notice: In accordance with the Orphan Chamber Law 10 November 1869”, not all of these women had children. Mrs. Fourie's details are recorded in the following way:

Death Notice

In accordance with the Orphan Chamber Law 10<sup>th</sup> November 1869

1. Carolina Fredricka Fourie
2. Ventersdorp (Transvaal)
3. Jacobus Abraham & Cornelia Van der Merwe
4. 24 years
5. Stock & Grain Farmer
6. Married
7. 20<sup>th</sup> December 1901
8. Burgher Camp Krugersdorp
9. No will
10. No property
11. Estate under Twenty five pounds
12. No children

Inventory of the effects of the late Carolina Fredricka Fourie who died in Burgher Camp Krugersdorp on 20<sup>th</sup> Desember 1901

- 2 Tin Trunks
- 1 chair (bend wood)
- 1 Bed Stead
- 1 Round Table
- 1 Table Cloth
- 2 Feather Beds
- 9 Pillows
- 1 Sheet
- 1 Gents Coat
- 1 Bath Sundries
- 1 Counterpane
- 2 Candle Sticks
- 1 piece Dress Material
- 2 pieces Carpet
- 1 Broom
- 1 Camp Kettle
- 1 Bucket

1 Machine [sewing]  
 1 Small Wooden Chair  
 1 Wooden Box Sundries  
 6 Blankets (DBC 80)

While Mrs. Fourie's 'inventory of effects' might appear paltry in today's terms, under the prevailing wartime and 'removed' circumstances her possession of bedstead, feather beds, blankets, sewing machine and furniture meant that she was very much better off than many other camp residents. It is notable that in the register of residents Petrus Jacobus, aged 12, is named as her child, whereas on her death certificate she is listed as having no children. Given that her recorded age was 24, it seems highly unlikely that Petrus Jacobus was her child, and he was most likely a cousin, nephew or brother-in-law placed in her care, or else a step-son. Taken as a whole, the entry in the register of residents, and the more detailed information provided in the death notice, as well as the inventory of effects, together form a documentary account of the life and death of Carolina Fourie in Krugersdorp camp.<sup>27</sup> It is possible from this "token, record, manifestation" to discern Mrs. Fourie's age, the names of her parents, her place of birth and place of residence, the occupation of her husband, her childlessness, the manner of her death and the quantity of her possessions.

However, this 'appearing in the records' is not sufficient to discern testimony in the sense I have been using it, as a deliberate and explicit witnessing and attestation. What makes this an instance of attestation is Mrs. Fourie's self-inflicted death; her insistent testimony of her experiences was expressed in this specific way and erupted into the public and formal sphere. Her 'making a mark' was the 'marking' of her throat with a knife, this being the 'sign' she left behind of her experiences and emotional responses. Carolina Fourie is a more than problematic figure in nationalist terms, because her self-inflicted

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<sup>27</sup> Carolina Fourie's death certificate is number 284 amongst those filed in DBC 81. Her death was certified on 21 December 1901.

death absolutely cannot be interpreted as a heroic sacrifice made for the future of the *volk*. Mrs. Fourie's rejection of suffering and endurance represents an individual choice and in this sense a betrayal of nationalist collective values. Nowhere in any camp testimonies or histories are self-chosen deaths discussed, although the records document quite a substantial number of these, as well as murders.<sup>28</sup> In addition, her rather brutal choice of method is not in keeping with the insistence on Boer women's 'delicacy' found in proto-nationalist writings about the camps.<sup>29</sup> Mrs. Fourie's self-inflicted death contrasts markedly with the triumphalist sentiments found in so many camp testimonies and death represents what Nuttall refers to as a "cracking [of] the narrative frame" of collective endurance and stoicism that structures the prevailing proto-nationalist testimonies (Nuttall 1998: 79).

The testimonies of Johanna Booyans, Miss Moltzer and Carolina Fourie incorporate two dimensions. Firstly, the conduct and choices of these women are themselves forms of attestation by which their experiences and emotional reactions were manifest and expressed. Both Mrs. Booyans and Miss Moltzer exhibited emotional responses to their circumstances that were considered 'insane', while Mrs. Fourie's self-inflicted death constituted a powerful comment on her reaction to her experiences. Secondly, while these women appear in the official records, it is not simply their passive 'appearance' in these that is testimonial, but rather the specific types of documentary testimony in which the officials were in response mode to these women as agents. The documentary testimonies relating to the three women are all collective, written accounts, although with some oral components, as for instance the reported observations of Jan Maritz who had informed the doctor about Mrs. Booyans. Each set of documentation was

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<sup>28</sup> At this time the term 'suicide' did not exist; people killed themselves. 'Suicide' as a term was invented by and popularised through Durkheim's 1897 study and accrued ideas about mental im/balance and mental illness that it did not have previously (Durkheim 1979).

<sup>29</sup> See for instance Mrs. Neethling's 1903 Should We Forget?, in which the word 'delicate' is repeatedly used to describe Boer women and children.

produced by a number of witnesses or other ‘authorities’: two doctors signed Mrs. Booyans’ certification of ‘lunacy’, with Gostling later attesting to her behaviour and giving it a different meaning; Dr. Pern and Mr. Mills constructed competing testimonies concerning Miss Moltzer; and the information on record about Carolina Fourie was compiled by a number of anonymous clerks. The results are public documents that testify to the personal characters and conduct of women reacting in what might be regarded as ‘extreme’ ways to their circumstances. The behaviour of all three women ‘marked’ them as different from and ‘other’ to the majority of Boer women and caused ‘marks to be made about them’ by the camp authorities that further entrenched their distinctive status.

### **Testimony as ‘bearing witness’: Ella de Kock, Hester Swanepoel and the Hattenghs**

Amongst the papers now archived in the Colonial Office collection at the Free State Archives Depot is a set of correspondence relating to the rape of Ella de Kock (CO 1/13/01). The correspondence dates from late January and early February 1901, when Ella de Kock and her family were living as refugees in Brandfort. At that time she was thirteen years old and between six and seven months pregnant as a result of the rape, which had taken place when she and her family were still living on their farm. The man accused of raping Ella de Kock, one D.J. Orffer, had worked as a schoolteacher in government employment on the de Kock’s farm, and was being held in prison and awaiting trial. However, British officials seemed unsure of the legality of the case against him, with much of the correspondence centring on this. General Pretymen, Military Governor of the O.R.C., wrote to Milner, High Commissioner for South Africa, on 29 January 1901 to explain the legalities of the case. Under Roman Dutch Law (which governed the Orange Free State at the time the alleged rape took place), the legal age of consent for girls was 12 and it was argued that, as Ella de Kock was 12 at the time of the rape, and her “actual

‘consent’ is not denied”, it would not be possible to sustain a case of statutory rape in a magistrate’s court, even though the O.R.C. was by this time a British colony subject to British laws.<sup>30</sup> General Pretymen noted that the case could be tried in a Military Court under Martial Law, in which case the accused would be dealt with under English Statute Law and his offence would be “punishable with 2 years imprisonment”. However, this option was regarded as ultimately untenable, because “the accused might be convicted of a crime which probably did not exist under the existing Law of the Land.” Finally, General Pretymen noted that a third possibility would be for Ella de Kock to marry Mr. Orffer, “who is willing and anxious to marry the girl” (when she came of legal age to marry at 15), but added that “both the girl and her parents are strongly opposed to the marriage. Therefore it does not appear that any good purpose would be served by obtaining such an undertaking from the accused.” A loose piece of paper on which various notes relating to the case were written reveals that Orffer was willing to marry Ella de Kock and that he had £100 in a savings account and £200 in the Post Office at the Cape Colony.

In her own statement made before a Justice of the Peace on 14 January 1901 Ella de Kock testified to her version of what had taken place:

Sworn declaration

I the undersigned Ella Cathrina de Kock living at Ferdinand’s Kraal in the district of Hoopstad in the Orange River Colony make oath and swear as follows.

I was twelve years old on the 13<sup>th</sup> April 1900 & live at Ferdinand’s Kraal in the district of Hoopstad – Am at present with my father & mother in the Refugee Camp at Brandfort.

I know a certain Daniel Johannes Orffer a Government Teacher who formerly held School on farm belonging to my father & lived with us in our house at Ferdinand’s Kraal as a Boarder & lodger. He came to live with us about May 1898 & remained until about the middle of July 1900 when my father ordered him to leave owing to a letter from myself to him about certain matters which my father had picked up.

On various occasions (three times in all to the best of my knowledge and recollection) the Said D.J. Orffer had sexual intercourse with me & in consequence of which I am now with child (enceinte).

The connection took place with me in my a bedroom in my fathers house.

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<sup>30</sup> In Britain, the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885 had set the age of sexual consent for girls at 16 years.

Orffer assured me that nothing would happen to me. Since he left our house I have had no conversation with him but he wrote several letters to me which he brought or sent to our house & gave to our Kaffir boy "Thys" to give to me. I refused to take the letters with the exception of one which I took & read wherein he stated that as I would not have anything further to do with him he did not intend to visit or have anything further to do with me or my family.

I swear positively that Orffer is the only person who has ever had sexual connection with me.

I was ~~against~~ afraid to inform my father or mother what had occurred because I feared they would say I was a consenting party & would perhaps thrash me.

Orffer wrote a lot of letters to me during the time he was with us & whilst he was on commando, all of which he asked me to give back which I did.

I was a pupil of his and attended his school.

I make this declaration well knowing & acknowledging the binding power of an oath & declare the foregoing statement to be the whole truth & nothing but the truth.

So help me God.

[signed in her own hand] Ella Catharina de Kock

Thus done & sworn before me at Brandfort on this 14<sup>th</sup> day of January 1901.

Harry [?Ram] Res. Justice of the Peace

Like the testimonies collected in Stemme Uit Die Verlede (1939), Ella de Kock's testimony takes the form of a legal statement sworn before a Justice of the Peace, although in this instance the document has been visibly signed in her own hand. Felman argues that it is by the act of signing that "authentic witnesses assume at once their discourse, their speech act and their responsibility toward history" (Felman 1992: 266). While it is predominantly a bald statement of fact, Ella's testimony also gives some clues about her lived personal experience, which seems to have been dominated by her loss of faith in Orffer after he said 'nothing' would happen to her, and her feelings of guilt and fear of her parents' anger when they learned what had taken place.

The remaining correspondence pertaining to Ella de Kock indicates the likely outcome of the legal case. In a letter to the Bloemfontein Crown Prosecutor on 21 January 1901, the Brandfort Justice of the Peace who had recorded her statement commented, "It appears to me to have been a love affair." S.H. Barber (a legal advisor to the O.R.C. administration) did not think there were legal grounds for a case against Orffer, because it

appeared that Ella de Kock was “a free agent & a consenting party”, although he added that, “In this particular case the seducer held a position of trust & was no doubt able to influence the girl to a very great extent and his seducing her was a most cowardly & disgraceful thing ...” Mr. Wilson, Secretary to the O.R.C. administration, wrote to the Military Governor’s office on 11 February 1901 to relay Milner’s final recommendations on the matter:

“it does not appear to him [Milner] to be one [a case] in which criminal proceedings could be taken with any probability of success, and that he is unwilling that it should be tried by a Military Court ... I am to add that in the High Commissioner’s opinion the case should be dealt with, if at all, in the Civil Courts, and he is advised that the girl could bring an action against Orffer for damages for seduction, as well as an action for maintenance of the child, if it lives, and for the expenses of her confinement ... There is of course no obligation upon the girl to marry her seducer, and as both she and her parents are averse to such a step, no useful purpose would, as you say, be served by obtaining an undertaking from him to marry her when she is of full age ... The High Commissioner assumes that the accused is no longer in the service of the Government.”

This letter ended official correspondence about the case, which presumably remained legally unresolved. As for Ella de Kock herself, other parts of the official records shed some light on subsequent events. She is recorded entering the camp with her family in the Brandfort Register of Residents:

De Kock, Jacobus Johannes	Married	42
" Martha Sophia	Wife	38
1. Ella Cathrina		13
2. Martha Sophia		7
3. Margaretha Johanna		6 mon.
Oath of neutrality: Hoopstad June 1901		
Occupation/farm: Ferdinandskraal, about 1200, owner		
District: Hoopstad		
Date of arrival: 11 September		
Stock rounded up: Yes, no receipt given for part		
Left: 5.7.02 for Ferdinandskraal (SRC 76, f.423) <sup>31</sup>		

<sup>31</sup> Brandfort camp was officially formed in March 1901, although in his testimony Mr. de Kock states, “About 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> January [1901] I & my family were ordered to accompany the other refugees to Brandfort where we are now staying”, indicating the existence of an earlier, informal and unofficial camp. Either this register reflects the date that the de Kock’s ‘officially’ entered actual camp at Brandfort, or it was compiled retrospectively and the date refers to the date on which the information was recorded.

That the six-month old baby Margaretha Johanna recorded here is Ella's baby is confirmed by an entry in the composite register of births in and out of wedlock for all the O.R.C.

camps, which records the only possible match for the child:

Camp: Brandfort  
 Name of Parents: J & M de Kock  
 Sex: Female  
 Date of Birth: 18.3.01  
 Remarks: (SRC 100)

There are no 'remarks' (such as 'illegitimate') entered next to this birth, and it appears that Ella's parents recorded their own names as the baby's parents, probably in an attempt to preserve at least the appearance of propriety, if only on paper. The baby's date of birth fits with Ella's testimony, while the de Kock initials given here match those recorded for Ella's parents in the camp register. There is no further documentation relating to this family and, as none of them have been marked as dead in the camp register, it seems likely that they all survived the war, including Ella's baby daughter.

The story of this alleged rape and subsequent illegitimate baby is incongruent with the usual depictions of the Boer people as pious and sexually chaste and Boer men as always chivalrous and honourable, for Orffer's name and the reference to his time on commando in Ella de Kock's statement indicate that he was indeed a Boer man. In terms of its location across the definitional dimensions of testimonial writing and *testimonio* utilised in this chapter, Ella de Kock's statement is oral and written, other-authored but self-authenticated, and concerns her as a unique individual and her specific personal experience, rather than containing politicised generalisations. As a form of testimony, Ella de Kock's signed declaration both attests to her personal experience and is also a legal statement in which she bears witness to Orffer's actions as part of producing evidence in the case against him.

A further interesting example of a testimony made in the context of ‘bearing witness’ is the written statement by Hester Swanepoel, who was a resident of Bloemfontein camp, containing allegations about Mrs. Van Zyl, mother of Lizzie Van Zyl, whose death became a key part of the controversy about the camps and the causes of mortality in them (CO 49/4492).<sup>32</sup> Following Lizzie’s death in May 1901, “In June 1901 a line-drawing of the photograph of Lizzie Van Zyl was published in New Age, together with Hobhouse’s comment that the food and heat were perhaps responsible” (Stanley 2005a, in press). In response to this Dr. Pern, the principal doctor at Bloemfontein camp, wrote an angry refutation published in the Westminster Gazette on 20 January 1902, alleging that Lizzie’s death had been occasioned entirely by neglect on the part of her mother.<sup>33</sup> Dr. Pern attached to his reply to Hobhouse the testimony “in writing by her own hand” of Hester Swanepoel, who had lived in a neighbouring tent to the Van Zyl family. In this Miss Swanepoel stated that she had witnessed first-hand the negligence of Mrs. Van Zyl towards her children in general, and towards Lizzie in particular:

“Bloemfontein Refugee Camp

Dec. 15<sup>th</sup> 1901

I Miss Hester Swanepoel Distinctly remember Lizzy V Zyl before she was removed to Hospital her Mother did not look after her children at all & this one in particular I myself told Dr Pern that the child was starved & nearly dying & Mrs. V Zyl used to go down to the dam & wash clothes all day & not even return in the middle of the day ... I often used to get up at night time because the child was crying so ... My mother & Sister can prove what I state  
Hester Swanepoel”

In her rejoinder to Pern the following week, also published in the Westminster Gazette, Hobhouse declared that “He [Pern] brings forward the testimony of some neighbours, the Swanepoels, to support his accusation. This evidence, written some months after the event, would not, I believe, be legally considered evidence.” Regardless of its actual legal status,

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<sup>32</sup> I refer to the use of the Lizzie Van Zyl photograph in Chapter Four, and the case of Lizzie Van Zyl is discussed in detail in Stanley 2005a, in press.

<sup>33</sup> The handwritten original of Dr. Pern’s rebuttal is now archived as part of CO 49/4492.

Hester Swanepoel's statement (like Ella de Kock's) is a testimony in the original sense of the word, as the evidence provided by a first-hand witness in a legal (or semi-legal) context. In the context of the 'crisis of truth' surrounding the case of Lizzie Van Zyl, Hester Swanepoel's testimony was produced, as Coady phrases it, "to set the record straight" (Coady 1992: 50), although in fact her evidence was ignored and no legal case against Mrs. Van Zyl was ever made.

Hester Swanepoel's testimony also reveals something of the divisions that existed between camp inhabitants. Mrs. Van Zyl was the wife of a *bywoner* and her financial situation compelled her to earn a living washing other people's clothes in camp. Hester Swanepoel, on the other hand, was evidently literate and English-speaking, both indications of her likely social status. Hester Swanepoel's testimony against Mrs. Van Zyl shows none of the signs of solidarity or fellow-feeling that the post-hoc (proto-) nationalist testimonies imply existed between women camp inhabitants during the war, united as one *volk* by the suffering they endured at the hands of a common enemy. Similarly, at Vredefort Road camp, a mother and daughter-in-law, the Hattenghs, testified against a fellow camp inhabitant, Mrs. Potgieter, about her allegedly anti-British and pro-Boer remarks (SRC 10/ 3788), and this case too not only underscores the political disunity that existed amongst Boer people at the time, but also the willingness of camp residents to 'inform' on fellow Boers.

The two Hattengh testimonies were made on 26 July 1901, a few weeks after a portion of the railway line near Vredefort Road camp had been blown up by Boer forces, which, according to Superintendent Brink, had been followed by a period of "disturbances" in camp. Brink believed that these disturbances could be traced back to Mrs. Martha Potgieter, who had attempted to "incite" women in the camp to similar acts of sabotage as the railway explosion. Part of the evidence for this was the statements of two women, Mrs.

Annie Hattengh and her daughter-in-law Eliza Hattengh. Their testimonies were provided orally and then translated by the camp superintendent, Mr. Brink (a Boer), and written down by Colonel Robert Wallace, the Commandant of Vredefort Road (the surrounding area under military control). Mrs. Annie Hattengh's testimony states:

"I know Mrs Martha Potgieter & knew her at Parÿs before she came here. I remember the day the explosion took place on the Line near here. I was sitting in Mrs Potgieter's tent in the Refugee Camp ~~she~~ I remarked 'It is a terrible thing that such things take place' Mrs Potgieter said 'The Boers must blow up the line because it is their Railway: they must do so more & more as it is the Boer's train; they must go on doing so, in order that the English may be exterminated in the trains'. Mrs Potgieter is always speaking against the English, both at Parÿs & in the camp here – her remarks would undoubtedly have a disquieting effect & would cause evil, not to myself but to others ... I am myself quite happy & satisfied here, but I would like my stove from Theodora [her home] & I wish the war was over. I have no objection to sign the above statement.  
[in a different hand] A C hattengh  
Signed by said Annie Hattengh in my presence, Mr. Brink Suptd. of Camp having first read same over to her in Dutch. Robert H. Wallace"

The testimony of Eliza Hattengh takes the same form, is also apparently signed but not written by her own hand, and relates more or less the same information as her mother-in-law's account, although she adds, "I have no ill feeling against her [Mrs. Potgieter], but we are all under the British now & I want her & all to join hands ... I would liked {sic} to get my husband back, as I am sick. I think he is at Green point." The Hattengh testimonies do not only concern Mrs. Potgieter and her conduct, but also reveal certain things about the Hattenghs themselves. Thus it seems both women hoped their testimonies against Mrs. Potgieter would be 'rewarded' by the authorities – Annie Hattengh mentions wanting her stove, and Eliza Hattengh clearly hoped her husband would be transferred from Green Point to live with her Vredefort Road camp. Mrs. Potgieter's own testimony was not sought by the authorities, for Colonel Wallace was concerned that this would expose the Hattenghs as informers.

Like the testimonies of Ella de Kock and Hester Swanepoel, the Hattengh statements are testimony in the sense that they attest to the character and conduct of another person. They also have a legal dimension, and in this case and in the aftermath of the Hattengh testimonies, the authorities debated whether or not Mrs. Potgieter should be jailed at Kroonstad, although it was eventually decided that placing her in the reformatory section of the camp would be sufficient punishment. The military situation in the Vredefort Road area at the time was volatile, and in the context of a war Mrs. Potgieter's remarks consequently were not simply dismissed as 'idle gossip', but followed up and taken seriously as part of intelligence gathering. As part of enforcing British authority and stabilising the political and military situation, such remarks could not, in the view of the officials concerned, be left unnoticed or unpunished.<sup>34</sup> Interestingly, the correspondence about this case also reveals that Mr. Potgieter was living in camp with his wife (after being transferred from Green Point after having taken the Oath of Neutrality), and was described by Brink as "a quiet man and has behaved himself properly". It seems likely that Mrs. Potgieter was one of the 'troublesome' camp women who acted as political ringleaders and incited unrest and commotion among their compatriots as an expression of proto-nationalist sentiments.

### **Testimony as a 'crisis of truth'**

In the examples above and the related discussion, I have offered a rethinking of testimony to include a wide variety of documents, encompassing petitions, individual letters of application, 'begging' letters, testificates, institutional and documentary forms of testimony, sworn legal statements and testimonials, and accounts of attestation originating outside the documentary. Each of these instances accords in some way with Felman's

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<sup>34</sup> Remarks of a 'political' or incendiary nature were forbidden under Martial Law anyway.

location of testimony in the context of a ‘crisis of truth’: “testimony is provided, and is called for, when the facts upon which justice must pronounce its verdict are not clear, when historical accuracy is in doubt and when both the truth and its supporting elements are called into question. The legal model of the trial dramatizes, in this way, a contained, and culturally channelled, institutionalized, crisis of truth” (Felman 1992: 6, original emphasis). While I find Felman’s term helpful, I make use of it with some disclaimers. While her ‘crisis of truth’ implies a dichotomised sense of ‘right’ versus ‘wrong’, ‘fact’ versus ‘fiction’ and ‘truth’ versus ‘falsehood’, the examples I have discussed in this chapter indicate that in the context of testimony this is usually considerably more complex, and seldom simply a case of the morally ‘good’ testifying against the morally ‘bad’. So for example, in Mrs. Booyans’ case the doctors and Superintendent Gostling provided conflicting testimonies about her mental health, Dr. Pern and Mr. Mills clashed over the case of Miss Moltzer, and Hester Swanepoel’s testimony against Mrs. Van Zyl was contradicted by Hobhouse and ultimately dismissed. Conclusive truth and absolute moral right are not always easy or straightforward to discern in these testimonies. In addition, Felman’s use of the word ‘crisis’ implies a contestation over truth that is public as well as highly charged and dramatic. In fact, as most of the examples discussed in this chapter indicate, testimony as a ‘crisis of truth’ usually concerns matters of a much more modest, mundane and low-key kind. Petitioners attesting to the ‘truth’ of their experiences concerning rations, or women writing begging letters which testify to the ‘truth’ of their poverty, or mothers affirming with their signatures the ‘truth’ of the circumstances of their children’s deaths, do not readily fit with Felman’s use of the term ‘crisis’, and are contestations or confirmations of truth of a much more ‘ordinary’ and everyday kind.

However, and bearing these disclaimers in mind, the testimonies I have discussed here did emerge in the context of a ‘crisis of truth’, in the specific sense that each was

produced or enacted in order to make a case, bear witness or establish ‘the facts’ in some way. These testimonies were provided because called for in cases where “the facts upon which justice must pronounce its verdict are not clear, when historical accuracy is in doubt” (Felman 1992: 6), even though the establishment of these ‘facts’ was seldom clear-cut, and even though this often occurred in ordinary, mundane circumstances. Thus, it is in terms of this much broader idea of ‘a crisis of truth’ that rethinking and reconceptualising testimony in the context of the South African War and concentration camps can most usefully be achieved. At the time they were produced, each of the testimonies examined here were concerned to verify or prove or exemplify a truth-claim in a context of presumed, unspoken or open contestation. The petitions and individual letters of application all sought to offer positive proof and evidence in support of the requests being made; while the mothers’ marks and other signatures affirmed the facticity of the documents they endorsed; the documentary testimonies concerning Mrs. Booyans, Miss Moltzer and Carolina Fourie were official responses concerned to establish ‘the truth’ concerning these women and their conduct, itself a testament to their experiences; and the testimonies of Ella de Kock, Hester Swanepoel and the Hattenghs were all made as statements of fact in order to ‘prove’ their views regarding a contentious case. These examples and many more like them, not just the collected and published testimonies, emerged as part of a ‘crisis of truth’, and it is under this broad heading that they can all be conceived of as testimony, thus allowing a much wider range of documents to be recognised as testimony and the individuals or collectivities connected to them to be acknowledged as testifiers.

That the post-war published testimonies – both individual and collective – were part of a ‘crisis of truth’ has to an extent already been tacitly shown, as for instance in Mrs. Neethling’s claim to correct past representations of the Boers by “writ[ing] the story of the

Boer women, as they showed themselves during the war, truly, fairly” (Neethling 1903: introduction, 127). Hobhouse maintained that she sought to represent civilian suffering in war “with truth and moderation” (1902: xvi)<sup>35</sup>; Mrs. Le Clus stated that “Everything that I have written herein, is what we personally saw with our own eyes and is the simple truth” (1923: foreword).<sup>36</sup> Because they took the form of sworn statements, the testimonies collected and published by Postma (1925, 1939) were expressly concerned with making quasi-legal truth-claims, as emphasised by some women ending their statements with a version of the courtroom formula that “I declare that everything written here, is the full truth and nothing other than the truth” (Oosthuizen in Postma 1939: 16).<sup>37</sup> Even much later, when ‘the history’ of these events had been fully established in nationalist terms, women’s published testimonies were still written in the ‘crisis of truth’ mode, as if pitching themselves against an unspoken challenge to the veracity of their claims, as evinced by Rabie-Van der Merwe’s statement that “I want to assure my readers that I have exaggerated nothing, and have written down nothing that is not true” (1940: 4).

As well as being produced within this earlier ‘crisis of truth’, the previously unrecognised examples of testimony discussed here can be read as part of a present ‘crisis of truth’ about, not so much the events, as the meanings, of the South African War and the concentration camps. In post/memory of the concentration camps, all camp inhabitants are positioned (with one or two heroic exceptions) as ubiquitous victims of an unchanging and inflexible system, whereas expanding testimonies as I have done indicates that, both individually and collectively, camp residents acted as agents, sometimes successfully influencing aspects of ‘the system’ as it pertained to them. While post/memory has ignored

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<sup>35</sup> In *The Brunt of the War* in particular, Hobhouse was writing quite explicitly against those who had previously disputed her version of events and had branded her as unpatriotic, and she used the forum of the book to “publicly deny[ing] the accusation, so widely made in the press and elsewhere, that I have slandered the British troops” (Hobhouse 1902: xv).

<sup>36</sup> “*Alles, wat ek hierin geskryf het, is wat ons persoonlik en met ons eie oë gesien het en is die eenvoudige waarheid*”.

<sup>37</sup> “*Ek verklaar dat alles wat hier geskrywe is, die volle waarheid en niks anders as die waarheid is nie.*”

the presence of black people in ‘white’ camps or deemed black camp experience as ‘mute’, the petition and testificates discussed show black men and women positively and actively attesting to aspects of their personal experiences as camp inhabitants. In the documentary testimonies, the particularised emotional reactions of the women concerned are attested to in a way that contrasts with the manner in which such matters are glossed in post/memory, which depicts Boer women’s responses in generalised ways and emphasises stoicism over personal, individualised experiences of grief or distress. Finally, the additional expanded examples of testimonies presented here attest to the social, political and economic diversity of the camp populations, with many women illiterate or semi-literate, poor and indifferent to the Republic cause. However, through the processes of post/memory, this diversity has been obscured by ‘the history’, which has emphasised Boer unity and solidarity as part of a (proto-) nationalist project which centred on undermining divisions and promoting the notion of a single *volk*.

Felman argues that testimony “seems to be composed of bits and pieces of a memory that has been overwhelmed by occurrences that have not settled into understanding or remembrance” (Felman 1992: 5). This is perhaps the key way in which the expanded examples of testimony I have examined here differ from the testimonies produced post-war. While the latter retrospectively claimed to tell ‘the whole truth and nothing but the truth’, the expanded testimonies discussed here could indeed be described as ‘bits and pieces of a memory’, for none attempt to tell a complete story, but concern specific and largely personal experiences as they affected individuals and as this needed to be recorded in the context of organisational requirements. These expanded testimonies also illustrate the richness of the camp records as a source of information on women’s experiences of camp life, as they encountered or ‘came up against’ the camp authorities in one way or another. Far from being dry, routine registers filled with impersonal statistics,

these camp records document women's various engagements with camp officials and British administrators in a very wide sense. These interactions between women and the official bureaucratic apparatus of the camp system produced a variety of testimonies that allow the stories, however partial, of women who were later 'forgotten' by the 'collecting and publishing' process to be told and contemplated. Such women did not, as Hobhouse would have it, 'die making no sign', but in fact left behind a variety of marks and traces that, when recognised as part of my expanded notion of testimony, challenge many of the tenets of 'the history' as produced by the post/memory processes.

The expanded testimonies discussed in this chapter add further to making sense of post/memory. The wide variety of forms of attestation, as well as the range of people and experiences these indicate, point up the 'forgetting' that is a central aspect of the post/memory process. In other words, these show how people, experiences, interpretations and ways of attesting that were outside (proto-) nationalist networks and the interests of cultural entrepreneurs were 'forgotten', and replaced instead by the collected and published accounts by women who were part of these networks, and the experiences and interpretations which prevail in these. Post/memory therefore entails structured, organised remembering as well as forgetting. This 'structured forgetting' was organised against memories subversive of the (proto-) nationalist project – those of black people, Boer men in camps, and Boer women who were poor, illiterate, apolitical, or those deemed 'unpatriotic' or mentally 'unsound'. The layers of re/working, re/writing and other forms of translation at the back of these post/memory processes form the subject of the following chapter.

## Chapter Six

### The Politics of Language and Translation in the Production of Boer Women's Testimonies

“Translation, of course, is a primary method of imposing meaning while concealing the power relations that lie behind the production of that meaning” (Bassnett 1998: 136)

Using the term ‘translation’ in a wide sense, to indicate transferral from one medium of communication to another, almost without exception Boer women’s published camp testimonies have undergone translation, often in complex, multifarious ways that have sometimes been obscured and are consequently difficult to trace. In this chapter I use the term translation to refer, not only to the translation of a text from one language to another, but also translation from the spoken word to a written text, from one form of writing to another, and also the broader processes of selection, interpretation and re/writing involved in the translation from an unpublished to a published text. Three examples will indicate the ubiquity of these translation processes concerning Boer women’s testimonies.

Firstly, most of the testimonies published in War Without Glamour (1927) were translated by Hobhouse from Dutch or Taal into English, and she also edited these accounts and reshaped them from letter to testimony form, indeed in some cases probably writing them up from a spoken form. Hobhouse also translated Tant’ Alie (1923b) from Taal into English, with some of the reworking that this entailed (again, including probably from a spoken to a written form) having been discussed in Chapter Four. An Afrikaans version of Tant’ Alie was later produced and published in 1939, with this based on Hobhouse’s English translation rather than the considerably longer Taal original (Rothman 1939).<sup>1</sup> Secondly, the testimonies that eventually appeared in Mrs. Neethling’s Mag Ons Vergeet? (1938) were originally written in letter form, in either Dutch or Taal, and sent to

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<sup>1</sup> M.E. Rothman was a South African journalist and writer. She was a keen nationalist and especially concerned with the so-called ‘poor white’ problem. According to Giliomee, “For Rothman the survival of the Afrikaner *volk* depended on its working class becoming consciously white and consciously Afrikaner” (Giliomee 2003: 344).

the journalist Horak. These were then selected, edited and translated into ‘proper’ Dutch by Mrs. Neethling for publication in her Vergeten? (1917); but then with a later translation from Dutch to Afrikaans being made for Mag Ons Vergeet?, which was carried out by Mrs. Neethling’s daughter, Ella Neethling (Gregory 1999: 6). And thirdly, Johanna Brandt-Van Warmelo’s Het concentratie-kamp van Irene (1905) is a Dutch translation of an English manuscript, which purports to be an original diary but which is evidently a re/worked version of some earlier text, with both the manuscript diary and the published version likely to have been produced concurrently. Also, Brandt-Van Warmelo’s later Die Kappie Kommando was actually originally written in English and published as The Petticoat Commando, with the Dutch version in fact initially appearing as a magazine series of short pieces before it was then reworked into book form (1913a, 1913b, 1913c).

Something ‘similar but with differences’ exists concerning the later published Boer women’s testimonies as well. Thus it is apparent from their form as statements sworn before magistrates, that the testimonies in M.M. Postma’s Stemme Uit Die Vrouekampe (Postma 1925) were translated from a spoken to a written form, and these were then later translated from the original Taal to a later standardised form of Afrikaans in Stemme Uit Die Verlede (Postma 1939). More recently, the ‘diary’ of Henrietta Armstrong has been translated by Thariza Van Rensburg from notes written in rough, uneven English infused with Taal (A1819 (3)) into a published ‘diary’ written in polished, standard English (Van Rensburg 1980). In addition, Sarah Raal’s Afrikaans Met Die Boere in die Veld (1938) appeared during the South African War centenary in English translation as The Lady Who Fought (Raal 2000), with some subtle but highly consequential changes in how words and phrases with immense 1930s nationalist (and racist) resonance have been sanitised in the new English version. Finally, it is also worth pointing out that all those testimonies and letters quoted throughout this thesis that have not been previously published in English,

have been translated by me, and a consideration of my own role as a translator forms part of the discussion later in this chapter.

Translation theorists have argued cogently in recent years that translation is a politically loaded process always heavily influenced by the cultural context in which it takes place.<sup>2</sup> It is therefore essential that the ways in which Boer women's war and/or camp testimonies have been translated are analysed, including "by taking into account both the process of creating it [the translation] and its function in a given context" (Bassnett 2002: 19). This is important in itself and throws considerable light on the role of (proto-) nationalist and other cultural entrepreneurs in the 'making of memory' about the concentration camps and the part this played in 'the history' of the Afrikaner people being constructed across this period. It is also important because I have come to the conclusion that translation in the broad sense I am using it is fundamental to the development of post/memory: I shall be arguing in this chapter that post/memory and translation are symbiotically related, and indeed that the production of post/memory depends upon translation to make the meaning required.

In what follows, I examine the politics of translation in Boer women's testimonies around an understanding of translation as a process of 'making meaning', not simply in the sense of finding words in another language with the 'same' meaning, but more importantly in the sense that the process of translation itself often attaches particular emphasis, significance or meaning to certain texts or parts of texts as in some way key to their overall meaning. Translation, in other words, is a form of interpretation in which the function of the translation and the location of the translator play crucial and influential roles. The translation practices of the key cultural entrepreneurs who worked to solicit, collect, translate, edit and publish their own or other women's testimonies will be explored

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<sup>2</sup> I have found the following useful in thinking about translation matters here: Bassnett 2002, Bassnett and Lefevere 1995, 1998, Bell 1991, Godard 1995, Howland 2003, Overing 1987, Simon 1996, Spivak 1992, Temple 1999, 2002, Temple and Edwards 2002, and Venuti 1995, 2004.

here, tracing out how their translation strategies made meaning of women's testimonies in accordance with their ideological convictions and the cultural and political context in which their work was carried out.

In the first section of this chapter, I discuss some of the key theoretical debates and developments in translation studies that have informed my understanding of translation as 'making meaning' and of translators as "cultural brokers" (Temple 2002: 844) who interpret and re/work texts in order to make them accessible and meaningful to a particular audience. In the South African case, the role of translator as 'cultural broker' took shape around a small group of key cultural entrepreneurs and their work in soliciting and producing women's testimonies as part of the development of (proto-) nationalism. Therefore the second section of the chapter focuses in detail on Emily Hobhouse's work as a translator of women's testimonies, and how this related to her wider role as a cultural entrepreneur. The presentation of my own translation of an individual Boer women's testimony, together with a comparison against the translation Hobhouse made of the same testimony, enables me to reflect on my own translation practices and the context in which these have been made. The third section of the chapter then examines Mrs. Neethling's translation practices and choices and indicates some of the ways in which her wider 'making of meaning' in texts meshed with her very different intentions as a cultural entrepreneur. The fourth section then considers Johanna Brant-Van Warmelo's language politics which influenced her in the translation and re/working of Het Concentratie-kamp van Irene (1905), through which she attempted to produce particular meanings that corresponded with her political objectives. The interrelated issues surrounding language choice and translation are exemplified in the case of Brandt-Van Warmelo and are of significance to the politics of translating Boer women's testimonies more generally. Finally, the English translation of Sarah Raal's book is examined as a recent example of

the function of the translation impacting markedly on how the text has been translated (Raal 2000). I conclude by standing back a little from these substantive examples, to consider the connections between translation and post/memory, and to draw out some of the indirect, mediated and motivated aspects of both.

### **Translation Studies in Context**

Since the 1970s, there has been a dramatic shift in the field of translation studies. As Bassnett and Lefevere point out, twenty years ago ‘translation studies’ meant “training translators”, whereas now the field is concerned with a wide range of interpretational issues and questions that relate to translation and meaning (Bassnett and Lefevere 1998: 1). Underlying many of these developments in translation studies has been a rejection of the idea of translation as “a weak and degraded form of authorship” (Simon 1996: 39), and an increasing recognition that translation is a creative and productive process, “a translingual act of transcoding cultural material - a complex act of communication” (Howland 2003), and not simply a matter of converting words from one language into another. Influenced by the ‘cultural turn’ that stresses the constructed, unstable nature of language, with its constantly shifting meaning(s) located in the contexts of use, “translation studies has begun the process of examining the ways in which translation is nourished by – and contributes to – the dynamics of cultural representation” (Simon 1996: 137). As Spivak has influentially proposed, “the politics of translation takes on a massive life of its own if you see language as the process of meaning construction” (Spivak 1992: 177).

The standpoint that there is no single meaning to be made of any text has led some translation theorists to the conclusion that “a foreign text is the site of many different semantic possibilities that are fixed only provisionally in any one translation, on the basis of varying cultural assumptions and interpretive choices, in specific social situations, in

different historical periods. Meaning is a plural and contingent relation, not an unchanging unified essence” (Venuti 1995: 18). In other words, a translation is the interpretive meaning that one person has made of a text, rather than the definitive translation. In this respect, translations are no different from any other texts or genres – all texts can be analysed for their multiple meanings, and cannot be divorced from the contexts in which they are written and read. In addition, as Overing points out, “no language is magically set forever” (Overing 1987: 72), and so the way in which texts are translated and read changes over time as languages shift and develop in a variety of ways.<sup>3</sup>

Another shift that has taken place in translation studies is the move away from the concept of equivalence. Previously the mark of a ‘good’ translation was its supposed exact faithfulness to the original text, with each word and sentence seen in terms of precise equivalence. However, many translation theorists have abandoned the notion of equivalence, because “Even apparent synonymy does not yield full equivalence” (Bassnett 1980: 22). While in the past translators strove for the ‘perfect’ translation of a given text, the belief in the possibility of one single absolutely valid translation of a text has been replaced by an acceptance that the pursuit of ‘total meaning’ is impossible (and even undesirable) and that instead “specific translators decide on the specific degree of equivalence they can realistically aim for in a specific text” (Bassnett and Lefevere 1998: 2). Moreover, some theorists have proposed that, in order to maintain the distinctive identity of an original text, translations should be ‘foreignised’ and standardised English, for instance, should not be used to flatten out the distinctiveness and particular grammatical patterns or expressiveness of other languages. In other words, translations from different languages, for example from German into English should sound and read

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<sup>3</sup> The significance of the evolution of language is of particular relevance to the translation of Boer women’s testimonies in a context where Afrikaans was being developed as a standardised language, with meaning, grammar, spelling and so on in a state of flux and change until the mid 1920s, and continuing in a somewhat less marked way thereafter through the 1930s and ‘40s.

differently from ‘actual English’ texts, and in this way “[t]he privileged position of the receiving language or culture is denied, and the alterity of the source text ... [is] preserved” (Bassnett and Lefevere 1998: 8).<sup>4</sup> While Venuti believes this preservation of the linguistic and cultural difference of the text to be flawed, in that this can only be “perceived in the translation by a limited readership, an educated elite” (1995: 101), Spivak argues in contrast that treating translation simply as “a matter of synonym, syntax and local colour” is still insufficient and that in order to produce a meaningful and “ethical” translation, the translator must engage fully with what she calls the “rhetoricity of the original” (Spivak 1992: 179).

As part of the growing awareness of the importance of the translator and the cultural context in shaping translation, the role of the translator has been significantly reconceptualised in recent years. Some theorists, again drawing on notions of language as culturally constructed and relative, have suggested that: “all communicators are translators. All communicators, as receivers ... face essentially the same problem; they receive signals (in speech and in writing) containing messages encoded in a communication system which is not, by definition, identical with their own” (Bell 1991: 14). However, such a view diminishes the specific problems of translation from one language to another, in which the role of the ‘professional’ translator plays such a crucial, yet largely under-theorised role. In this regard, Temple points out that the role of translators (and interpreters) in research is frequently ignored: “researchers are [seen as] neutral transmitters of messages and, by extending this stance, translators pass on such messages in an unproblematic way” (Temple 2002: 845). In the past the translator has often been regarded as a transparent or

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<sup>4</sup> The view that the ‘target’ or receiving language is by definition ‘privileged’, and that “every step in the translation process ... is mediated by the diverse cultural values that circulate in the target language” (Venuti 1995), is considerably problematised in the translation of Boer women’s testimonies, where translation tends to be dominated by the cultural values of the original, rather than the ‘target’ language.

shadowy figure whose work is (or should be) invisible; and concerning this ‘invisibility’ of the translator, Venuti has commented that:

“A translated text, whether prose or poetry, fiction or nonfiction, is judged acceptable by most publishers, reviewers, and readers when it reads fluently, when the absence of any linguistic or stylistic peculiarities makes it seem transparent, giving the appearance that it reflects the foreign writer’s personality or intention or the essential meaning of the foreign text – the appearance, in other words, that the translation is not in fact a translation, but the ‘original’” (Venuti 1995: 1)

The implication of this line of thinking is that a good translator is an invisible one and Venuti calls this a “weird self-annihilation” (Venuti 1995: 8). In support of this general line of argument, Temple comments that the perspective of the translator is central to the construction of meaning in the translated text, calling the process whereby translators “use their own interpretive frameworks to translate from one language to another” as “translating with attitude” (Temple 1999: 53).

Recognising that translators are “active producers of research” (Temple 2002: 845) and active makers of meaning, and that “translation wields enormous power in the construction of national identities”, Venuti accordingly insists that the translator should be made visible and accountable in the text (Venuti 1995: 19). Feminist thinking too has called for the translator to take responsibility for the translated text by making explicit her translation strategies and practices,<sup>5</sup> with Godard arguing that “a feminist translator should ‘flaunt’ the signs of her manipulation of a text, her ‘woman-handling’ strategies” (Godard 1995: 25). One of the ways in which translators can be held accountable for their work is through the use of prefacing and footnoting (Simon 1996: 14), with another being to provide the reader with access, where possible, to both the original and the translated texts. Overall, making evident how the translation process has interpreted and ‘marked’ a text, and by “trying to make the interpreter [or translator] as well as the researcher visible”,

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<sup>5</sup> See here, for example, Spivak’s account of her methods as a feminist and postcolonial translator in Spivak 1992.

means that “the tensions in asking anyone to represent other people’s views” are highlighted (Temple and Edwards 2002). Translation, then, is a ‘creative process’ (Overing 1987).

Simon argues that, historically, translation has afforded women in particular opportunities otherwise denied them to “enter the world of letters, to promote political causes and to engage in stimulating writing relationships” (Simon 1996: 39). Simon stresses that, while translation has traditionally been deemed an inferior form of authorship, the acknowledgment that translation involves the production of a separate and distinctive text allows us to recognise that “women have used translation to open new axes of communication, to create new subject positions and to contribute to the intellectual and political life of their times” (Simon 1996: 39). At the back of this argument is the view that a translated text is distinct and separate from (although clearly related to) the ‘original’ text, with Paz commenting that:

“Every text is unique and, at the same time, it is the translation of another text. No text is entirely original because language itself, in its essence, is already a translation: firstly, of the non-verbal world and secondly, since every sign and every phrase is the translation of another sign and another phrase. However, this argument can be turned around without losing any of its validity: all texts are original because every translation is distinctive. Every translation, up to a certain point, is an invention and as such it constitutes a unique text” (Paz 1971: 9, translated and quoted in Bassnett 2002: 44)

On this basis, Simon contends that, through translation, “writers are [able] to exploit the resources of foreign literatures in order to invigorate and redirect their own national forms” with new texts, new forms and next ideas (Simon 1996: 65).

In the South African instance, this process outlined by Simon was one which took shape around producing, translating and exploiting local writings (and oral statements) in order to pioneer and propagate a national form, rather than redirecting foreign ones. As I have indicated in previous chapters, women were central to this process in their roles as

cultural entrepreneurs and cultural workers; and in this chapter I shall look at the particular influence of translation on these processes. I now turn to a discussion of the translation practices engaged in by Emily Hobhouse, examining how these relate to the meaning she made of the texts she translated, and how this is likely to have been influenced by her intentions as a cultural entrepreneur and the associated functions of the translations themselves.

**“I fear many inaccuracies are over-looked”<sup>6</sup>: Hobhouse and the translation of Boer women’s testimonies**

Emily Hobhouse’s work in collecting, translating, editing and publishing Boer women’s testimonies illustrates many of the complexities relating to the politics of translation and the key role of the translator in mediating these complexities. I shall discuss Hobhouse’s translation and production of Tant’ Alie of the Transvaal (1923b) primarily by drawing on her letters to Mrs. Steyn written in the months preceding the publication of the book, which indicate various of the ways in which the book’s translation context was likely to have affected the translation process itself, and also the ways in which the book was subsequently read.<sup>7</sup> These letters show that questions relating to the book’s translation were intensely politicised, and were central to its production, sale and reception. I then turn to the testimonies in War Without Glamour (1927) and consider in detail the translation practises adopted by Hobhouse, here by making an in depth comparison between an original Taal manuscript of a woman’s testimony, my own translation of it, and Hobhouse’s published translation. I do so to show how Hobhouse’s intentions in

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<sup>6</sup> A156 1/1/12. The quote is from a letter by Hobhouse to Mrs. Steyn dated 3 June 1923, and refers to the difficulties she experienced in correcting proofs.

<sup>7</sup> Rachel Isabella (Tibbie) Steyn (1865-1955), wife of ex-Free State President, Martinus Theunis Steyn. Mrs. Steyn was a prominent figure in nationalist women’s circles. She was Honorary Chairwoman of the S.A.V.F from 1909 until her death in 1955, and was one of the main organisers behind the construction of the Vrouemonument and did much of the fundraising work connected with this. The Dictionary of South African Biography notes that, although she was of Scottish parentage, “She gradually identified herself completely with the Boer nation” (Dictionary of South African Biography Vol. III: 757).

publishing these testimonies influenced the meaning-making in her translations, and how my own different objectives and context of writing have resulted in a different translation. I then briefly examine the significance of some of the modifications Hobhouse made to the proofs of War Without Glamour immediately prior to publication, modifications which strengthen meaning as intended by the editor rather than the original writer (or teller) of the tale.

Hobhouse's motivation for publishing the Aletta Badenhorst diary was primarily to further the ideals of pacifism and humanitarianism in which she so strongly believed. Thus in the Preface she refers to the book as "a powerful Peace Document" and states that "I send forth this little book, earnestly hoping it will do its bit to help strip war of the fine words which historians have too long bedecked it" (Hobhouse 1923b: 8, 7). Her decision to publish Tant' Alie (and the War Without Glamour testimonies) in English related not only to her desire that the pacifist message of the book should reach the widest possible audience, but also to her specific wish for it to be read in Britain to raise awareness about the real suffering caused by the war and what she viewed as Britain's aggressive provocation and conduct of it. However, this choice to translate the book into English had significant political ramifications in South Africa, because made at a time when the Second Language movement was encouraging the widespread use of Afrikaans in both spoken and written forms. Thus in response to what was apparently an expression of regret by Mrs. Steyn that Tant' Alie was to be published in English, Hobhouse wrote back that: "It is no good minding that 'Tant Alie' is not in Dutch – it would hardly be worth while – It is worthy of a world-wide public; and is of historic value. It is open to the Badenhorsts to publish the original whenever they like" (EH to RIS, 27 May 1923, A156 1/1/12).<sup>8</sup> 'Dutch' here could refer to 'South African Dutch' or to Taal, which at this time was in the process

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<sup>8</sup> Throughout the references to their correspondence, 'EH' refers to Emily Hobhouse and 'RIS' to Rachel Isabella Steyn.

of being standardised and was in 1925 formally to become Afrikaans, or more likely to a combination of both. Hobhouse herself had experienced considerable translating difficulties, precisely because of the non-standardised, inconsistent nature of Taal and its changes over time: “I daresay you [Mrs. Steyn] will find lots of mistakes in the Dutch spelling of names &c, but really that changes so ^frequently^ I do not know whom to follow” (EH to RIS, 20 May 1923, A156 1/1/12).

In answer to Mrs. Steyn’s concern that few Boer women were able to read English and would thus not buy the book, Hobhouse responded that “I quite realize the language drawback, but it is incidental to the position. To be of any real use to the general world, as I wished, it could only be published in English. And, I know that most young folk know English now. Her own son, Wessels Badenhorst, writes to me in English” (EH to RIS, 17 June 1923, A156 1/1/12, original emphases). Thus, her translation points up a tension between Hobhouse’s wish for the book’s peace-promoting message to reach as wide an audience possible, which for her view necessitated it being published in English, and the political agenda reflected by Mrs. Steyn’s wish that it appear in ‘Dutch’ to enable as many Boer women as possible to read it, and also to support the objectives of the Second Language Movement to promote language unity and pride as part of (proto-) nationalism. In spite of this difference of opinion about language matters, Hobhouse was nevertheless eager that Boer women in South Africa should buy and read Tant’ Alie, and, as I shall show, she worked through nationalist women’s organisational structures to enable this.

So keenly did Hobhouse believe in the importance and potential power of Tant’ Alie that she personally funded its publication and ended up making a financial loss on the 1500 copies of the book that were sold.<sup>9</sup> In her correspondence with Mrs. Steyn, she explained the difficulties she had securing a publishing contract and the motivation behind

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<sup>9</sup> Hobhouse was willing to fund the book’s publication and take the related financial risks partly because this enabled her retain sole copyright (1 April 1923, A156 1/1/12).

her decision to fund the publication herself: “The publishers fear they will not make a profit because the subject is no longer a burning one. I, of course, do not care about the profit side – I regard it as a piece of history having its own value as all history has” (EH to RIS, 28 January 1923, A156 1/1/12, original emphasis). Then in a later letter she added, “But all think the book extremely valuable and that it ought to be published. So I am content, even if I lose all my money” (EH to RIS, 20 May 1923, A156 1/1/12, original emphasis). While Hobhouse felt the book was ‘worthy of a world wide audience’, she also felt passionately that it should be read by Boer women specifically. Therefore she arranged through Mrs. Steyn for the book to be bought in advance by women in rural areas and small towns in the Free State and Transvaal through local organisers, who could order the book directly from Hobhouse at the publisher’s price, thus circumventing bookseller’s mark-ups in South Africa.<sup>10</sup> Hobhouse explained her proposal to Mrs. Steyn:

“Publishers all tell me (as indeed I know) that the South African reading public is small and of course confined to the big towns which would neither be attracted by the subject or by my name as translator ... There remains the country districts & the farms – chiefly of the Free State & Transvaal. There would be the people whom the book would most nearly touch & upon whose shelves it should surely stand ... I do not think it can be done only through the town book sellers & for two reasons. So few of the real country folk come into the big towns of Bftn [Bloemfontein] & Pretoria and secondly I am warned that the South African booksellers ~~ask~~ insist on 33<sup>1/3</sup>% as their commission besides putting a little more on to the English retail price. My publisher proposes therefore printing a circular to offer it post free at say 8/- or 8/6 as the case may be, if the money be sent with the order. This is simple, but I doubt if many Boer women would by a P.O. [postal order] and send off in the dark; But it did strike me that such a course might be pursued by a leading woman in each little country town – and I wondered if it would be organized by the Vrouewen Vereeniging [S.A.V.F.]?” (EH to RIS, 25 March 1923, A156 1/1/12, original emphases)

Hobhouse’s suggestion was taken up by Mrs. Steyn, Honorary Chairwoman of the S.A.V.F, and by the beginning of July 1923 the S.A.V.F. had agreed to buy 250 copies of the book in bulk (EH to RIS, 1 July 1923, A156 1/1/12). There is evidence that the

<sup>10</sup> This was also to ensure that Hobhouse did not make too drastic a financial loss on the book. While she said neither wanted nor expected to make a profit, she did “want to get back what I spend on it” (25 March 1923, A156 1/1/12).

A.C.V.V. promoted the book too, with its secretary Mrs. G.G. Cillié putting in a bulk order of copies for members to buy through their local branches. The A.C.V.V. newsletter of September 1923, which was published in *Die Huisgenoot* magazine, instructed: “The Branches must immediately let Mrs. Dr. Cillié know how many they will take, and the money must be collected shortly thereafter, because it must go with the order” (Cillié 1923: 245).<sup>11</sup> The appeal then gives some information about the book which appears to take its wording from Hobhouse’s letters to Mrs. Steyn, indicating that it was Mrs. Steyn who involved both the S.A.V.F. and the A.C.V.V. as the key nationalist women’s organisations in pre-ordering copies of the book. As part of working through these nationalist women’s networks, Hobhouse realised that Mrs. Steyn herself could exert her considerable personal influence to publicise the book:

“You might say you have heard the book the *Diary of a Transvaal woman 1870-1908* is being issued and it can be got cheapest by post if either 1 vol is ordered or several together & would leading women propose to get out a parcel for those in their parish who care to have it – translated by me with a preface. Say it is considered the best – far away – presentation of the Transvaal in the world and accurate & historical while so human & alive ... Unfortunately it comes very shortly after the translation of “*The Brunt of the War*” but still it is in English – that is a mere record, this is living story which carries you on” (EH to RIS, 25 March 1923, A156 1/1/12, original emphasis)<sup>12</sup>

Hobhouse’s role as translator of *Tant’ Alie* clearly extended far beyond merely converting the text from Taal into English, and these wider activities point up her status as a key cultural entrepreneur. She was centrally involved in publishing, publicising and distributing the book in accordance with her interpretation of the book’s meaning and significance – as accurate historical record and a peace document – an interpretation which inevitably shaped her translation practises too. The whereabouts of the original manuscript are now unknown, and so it is impossible to determine the precise and detailed ways in

<sup>11</sup> “Die Takke moet dadelik aan mevr. Dr. Cillié laat weet hoeveel hulle sal neem, en die geld moet meteens ingevorder word, want dit moet saamgaan met die bestelling.”

<sup>12</sup> This refers to the 1923 translation of *The Brunt of the War* by N.J. Van der Merwe (Hobhouse 1923a)

which this influence might have shaped the translation of the manuscript into the published text; however, there are a number of clues about the translation process itself. The translation of Alie Badenhorst's diary was initially begun by either Frank or Deneys Reitz<sup>13</sup>, although it is unclear how the manuscript originally procured by Hobhouse in 1903 came to be in the Reitzs' possession. However, in a 1912 letter to Isie Smuts<sup>14</sup> about the Badenhorst manuscript and the testimonies that later appeared in War Without Glamour, Hobhouse expressed her disapproval of what Reitz had written:

“It is curious you should write about it just now when I had been thinking I should write and ask you to send me the whole pile I left with you of various women's accounts of their experiences in Dutch and English – I fancy I might now do the mental work of editing and publishing them. Of course Mrs. Badenhorst's is the one of surpassing interest, but (please don't tell Mr. Reitz) to fit it for publication I must re-write his translation” (23 November 1912, quoted in Balme 1994: 536)

Hobhouse expressed clear ideas about how the diary ought to be translated, so as to retain the simple expressiveness of Badenhorst's original rather than homogenising this in polished, standardised English (or Dutch/Afrikaans). Thus in the Preface to Tant' Alie she wrote, “In translating from the Taal of the back-veld, I have tried, as far as possible to use an English as simple as the original. Had I written in our Cornish dialect it would have been closer”, adding that “the manuscript was not easy to decipher or translate” (Hobhouse 1923b: 7, 8). Then in a letter to Mrs. Steyn she minimised her own interventions as a

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<sup>13</sup> Frank Reitz (1844-1934), a former President of the Orange Free State, was an important political and literary figure. His son Deneys Reitz (1882-1944) was a nationalist political figure, an M.P. in the Union government, and also the author of Commando: A Boer Journal of the Boer War (1929). It is by no means clear precisely which of the Reitzs were involved in the early work on the Badenhorst manuscript. While Hobhouse's preface to the published book acknowledges the assistance of Deneys Reitz, her letter of 1912 quoted above may well have referred to his father Frank. Both men might have been involved in aspects of the early translation work, which Hobhouse felt had to be rewritten. After the book's publication, it seems that Hobhouse gave the manuscript of Tant' Alie to Frank Reitz. In a letter of 10 January 1925 Hobhouse wrote to Mrs. Steyn that “My Mr. Reitz is to take the ms of Tant Alie before it was cut down for publication to Senator Reitz as he said he'd like it” (EH to RIS, 10 January 1925, A156-11/13). Frank Reitz was a Senator in the Union government until 1929 and thus Hobhouse's letter undoubtedly refers to him, as Deneys never acted as a Senator. Frank Reitz may thus have been the back of 1912 text translated by M.E. Rothman.

<sup>14</sup> Isie (Sybella) Smuts (née Krige) (1870-1954) was the wife of General J.C. Smuts. A worker for a wide variety of charitable causes, she was also a leading member of the Women's United Party (Dictionary of South African Biography Vol. IV: 585-586).

translator, explaining: “I changed nothing. Her natural unconscious art is better than anything I could attain to; all I have done is omit a few passages here & there in order to shorten it to a reasonable length – I regretted doing even this, but the unity is not, I think, injured” (EH to RIS, 27 May 1923, A156 1/1/12). It appears, then, that Hobhouse was well aware of the difficulties posed by such a translation, and attentive to the notion that “the problems of decoding a text for a translator involve so much more than language” (Bassnett 1998: 137).

However, in spite of her comment about retaining as much flavour of the original as possible, there are indications that Hobhouse in fact completely rewrote the book, and that her translation drew quite heavily on the earlier incomplete work by Reitz, with her Preface acknowledging that “in particular Mr. Denys Reitz gave me considerable help” (Hobhouse 1923b: 9). Balme states that “About 25, 000 words of the translation had to be cut, and she said she had re-written most of it” (Balme 1994: 574).<sup>15</sup> In this connection, it is clear from looking at examples of Boer women’s writing from the war, such as letters, that Hobhouse must have extensively altered the original to produce the book that appeared in 1923. As indicated in Chapter Four, the book’s temporal peculiarities as well as, for example, the sophisticated use of Frikkie Badenhorst’s letters, create uncertainty about precisely when the book was written and by whom, and the ‘original manuscript’ that Hobhouse translated from was itself the product of several previous layers of translation, possibly including from talk to text. While Hobhouse depicts the book as ‘her journal’, ‘her simple tale’, ‘her unconscious art’ and quotes Olive Schreiner’s remark about it being a ‘human document’,<sup>16</sup> it is clear that Tant’ Alie represented a considerably re/worked

<sup>15</sup> In a footnote, Balme attributes this point about Hobhouse rewriting the book to a family story.

<sup>16</sup> Hobhouse misrepresented Schreiner’s comments about the book somewhat. Hobhouse stated, “It is a sad loss that Olive Schreiner has passed hence before she could fulfil her spontaneous offer to contribute a preface. She wrote: ‘It is a ‘human document’, as the Americans call such a revelation’ – I think it is wonderful” (Hobhouse 1923b: 8). In contrast, Schreiner’s letter to Hobhouse, dated 1923, in which she wrote, “I pity the last part of that journal was not translated in the same splendid simple style the first part was. If it

translation of whatever Alie Badenhorst had originally written or said, that it was translated back and forth across the languages on a number of occasions, involved more than one translator, and the ‘original’ Afrikaans version is actually a translation of Hobhouse’s much shortened and re-written English version.

The context that Hobhouse was working in – her pacifist stance, her sympathy with Boer women, her great admiration for Badenhorst’s diary, and her connections with key nationalist women such as Mrs. Steyn – impacted on the translation of and production of meaning in the book. Depicting her interventions as a translator as minimal and representing Tant’ Alie as Badenhorst’s unspoiled, authentic story revealing “the experiences of non-combatants during the war” and reflecting the true “cruelty of war” (Hobhouse 1923b: 8), Hobhouse gives more weight to the truth-claims of the book and to her own anti-war message than is actually to be found in its pages. By promoting the book in South Africa through nationalist networks as the story of a simple Boer woman and as a valuable and accurate history of the war in the Transvaal, Hobhouse further indicates the effect of context on the book’s translation and production, as well as her own role as a key cultural entrepreneur.

Hobhouse’s work as a cultural entrepreneur can be examined in some detail by scrutinising the translation choices and changes she made with regard to the manuscripts translated for War Without Glamour (1927), a book which presents the testimonies of 31 women published with the same peace-promoting objectives as Tant’ Alie: “In these Boer records”, wrote Hobhouse in the Preface, “we have a body of evidence of utmost value not only to South Africa but to the world at large of how war acts upon non-combatants and a graphic picture of the misery it inflicts upon those most innocent of its cause” (Hobhouse

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were, I would be glad to write a little preface to it & I’m sure some English publisher would be glad to take it simply as a ‘Human Document’ as the Americans call {sic} such a revelation of human nature. I think it wonderful” (Olive Schreiner to Emily Hobhouse, 3 October 1908, Hobhouse Trust Collection). Given the 1908 date, the translation here presumably refers to Reitz’s work.

1927: 6). A number of the original handwritten manuscript of testimonies that appear in War Without Glamour are now archived, together with the proofs for the book corrected in Hobhouse's own handwriting. It is thus possible to make direct comparisons between some of the original accounts, what appears in the corrected proofs, and the final published version. On the matter of translation, Hobhouse notes in the Preface that "Nearly half the records herein collected were written in Afrikaans and have been translated by me, the others written in English have undergone some grammatical changes. Otherwise they stand as set down by the writers" (Hobhouse 1927: 5). As in Tant' Alie, Hobhouse plays down her role as translator and instead emphasises the testimonies as unmediated, 'as set down by the writers'. A comparison between my translation of a women's testimony with the translated text that Hobhouse published in War Without Glamour will serve to illustrate in greater detail the problems raised by the translation and editing process and its dependence on context, and the location and intentions of the translator.

The archived original of Ellie Naude's testimony consists of three handwritten pages in Taal, with a covering sheet on which her name and address appear. I present here three versions of this text – a verbatim transcription of Ellie Naude's account, Hobhouse's translation, and finally my own translation of this text:

Bohoek Haenertsberg Dist Z P Berg  
 op de 30ste ^1901^ kwam de Engelse en Kaffers – commando op myne Plaats. ik in myn overleeden man en twee kinderjes ware allen luidend aan de koerst. toen de commando van troepe en Kaffers op ons af komen was myn man om trent 60 trede van myn Huis. ja alles wat my ontnam op de 30ste April zee dat ik geen voedsel of kleuring niet gehandten het. toen moet ik daar 12 van de troepe ge biete myn man te gaan toe-p ik ga toen d idelyk het was laat omtrent 6 uur in den avond. ek nacht het ik en het Haut pas moes deur bring. de ander dag middag om trent 4 uur het ik hem ge kryg ja zaa Honger en ziek en bleek dat hy byna neef lope kan ik zeg aan hem ik is gestuur daar van de Commando troepe u te haal. ek werd gedryg met rewelvur azig gaan op de aagen blits en bring jou man; ik moes geduldig my twee blesie zuikel linge op de arm neem en gaan haal myn man toen aa ons aan kom stap ons langs mekaar met een zag ik de vrede kaffers schoot myn liewe man neerens my dood ja zonder een word met my te kan sprecke hoe bitter moes ik dat stroom van bloed aan zien [2] daar hy geen wapens by hem had als aleenlyk myn knip-mes. ik wert ook gedryg van de Kaffers gedood te wert met asigaai en byl toe wert ik van

daar ge druen met de twee kinderjies een van 2 jaar en een van 13 maande ik ware ook nog ziek met de 2 kleine dan moet ik eers de een een end geweg bring en dan de andere een de eerste mei de Nacht het ik en een kaffer stal ge slaap zonder een kombars of water voedsel met meedelydend zeg een kaffer vrouw maar neem die kombars en maak u kinders toe toen ware ik al van de 30ste April al af zonder voedsel tot de 2de Mei om trent 4 uur kom de Engelse ofisier by my toen van daar met een oop muil wagen weg ge bring tot op Krooneburg daar drie dagen ge blyf op het ope veld vandaar na Pietersburg daar het it rand soene ontvang en een kombars. drie maande ware ik en Pietersburg Camp en een ronde tentje zeess ver vande water die moes ik zelfs draag ook de mis om vuur te maak. daar hade myn kinderjies ook de masels. toen ik daar drie maande was kryg ik wat klcure van Ds Kriel toen kan ik myn en myn kinders schoon maak nit heel maar ge deeltelyk vaan daar na Howick Camp Natal [3] daar ook en een ronde tentje ook zeer ver dande Water lang moes ik myn water uit de rivier draag ook daar gaan was myn vuur maak Hout moes ik aan draag n Somtyds zuur ver myn randsoene ook zelfs gaan haal somtyds moet ik twee dage naar de Commissariat het vande morgen tot de avond en reegen of son of wunt staan om wat kos te kryg. van daar na Wentworth Camp Durban van daar na wrede weer na Pietersburg Camp van daar na myn ge weesende verwoeste woning 4 dage van Pietersburg op de ope muil wagen daar kom ik en vind niets als net alleenlyk een paar zink plate. arm geen geld om iets te begin ook geen man ja en eenzame weduwee zat ik daar het ik nog maals het verlies te tetreuse en armoed. Elinde en dwaas trane ware myne spyse en drank dat alles moest ik draag en dan tied van den smare stryt

Met achting

Ellie Naude (A155 176/1)

Hobhouse's translation as this appears in War Without Glamour is as follows:

Mrs. Ellie Naude, Boshoeck, P.O. Haenertsberg, District Zoutpansberg, Transvaal/ (Translation).

Upon the 30<sup>th</sup> April, 1901, the English and Kaffir Commando came to my farm. My late husband and I and two children were all suffering from fever. When the Commando of troops and Kaffirs came up to the house my husband who tried to hide had only gone about 600 paces from the door.

Everything was taken from me that 30<sup>th</sup> of April, so that I had neither food nor clothing left. Then two of the soldiers ordered me to go and call my husband. I went at once; it was late, about six o'clock in the evening. I had to pass that night in the bush; the next day about 4 o'clock in the afternoon I found him, hungry and white and so sick he could hardly walk. I told him I was sent by the Commando of troops to fetch him. They threatened me with revolvers, saying, "Go this instant and bring your husband," and I had to go, patiently carrying my two babies in my arms to fetch my husband. When we came we stayed long together: – all at once I saw the cruel Kaffirs shoot my dear husband – shoot him dead beside me, without his being able to say one last word to me. Ah! how bitter to watch that stream of blood! He had no weapons with him only my pocket knife. The Kaffirs threatened to kill me too with assegais and axe. Then they drove me from there with the two children, one of two years and the other of 13 months. I too, was still sick, as well as the little ones, and was obliged to carry one a little way and then go back for the

other. The night of the first of May, I slept in a Kaffir kraal, with no blanket or food. With much sympathy a Kaffir woman said to me: "Take this blanket and wrap your children in it." I was without food from April 30<sup>th</sup> to May 2<sup>nd</sup>. That day at about 4 o'clock an English Officer came and took me away from there in an open mule-wagon as far as Krooneberg where we remained three days on the open veld; thence to Pietersburg where I was given rations and a blanket. I was three months in a round tent in Pietersburg Camp, a long way from water which I had to carry myself as well as gather 'mis' to make fire. There also my children had the measles. At the end of three months I got some clothing from Ds. Kriel and was able to make myself and my children tidy; not wholly, but in part.

From there I was sent to Howick Camp in Natal also to a bell-tent, also far from the water. I had to fetch it a long way from the river and also carry my wood for firing. I had to fetch my rations myself and sometimes had to go two days running to the Commissariat and from the morning to the evening in rain or sun or wind stand waiting to get some food. From there I was sent to Wentworth Camp near Durban, and after Peace from there again to Pietersburg Camp and then back to my former dwelling, now laid waste.

After four days' journey from Pietersburg in an open mule-wagon I arrived and found nothing but a few zinc sheets. Poor, with no money or anything to begin – no husband – just a lonely widow I say there to bewail his loss in poverty. Miserable and oppressed, tears were my meat and drink. But I must bear all and fight through this hour of hardship.

Ellie Naude (Naude in Hobhouse 1927: 13-14)

My translation of Ellie Naude's account, made from her archived handwritten Taal testimony is as follows:

On the 30<sup>th</sup> ^1901^ the English- and Kaffer-commando came to my farm. Myself and my late husband and two children were all suffering from fever. When the commando of troops and Kaffers reached us my husband was about 60 paces from my house. Yes everything was taken from me on the 30<sup>th</sup> April, so that we had no food or clothing. Then I met there 12 of the troops who told me to call my husband I went immediately it was late about 6 o'clock in the evening. That night I had to spend in the bush. The next day about 4 o'clock in the afternoon I found him so hungry and sick and pale that he could almost not walk. I said to him I was sent there by the commando troops to fetch you. I was threatened with revolvers to go immediately and fetch your husband; I had to patiently carry my two babies and fetch my husband. When we approached we walked alongside each other and I saw the cruel Kaffers shoot my dear husband dead beside me without being able to speak one word to me how bitter I was to see that stream of blood because he had no weapons with him only my pocket knife. I was also threatened by the kaffers to be killed with assegais and axe. Then I was driven from there with the two children one of 2 years and one of 13 months. I was also still sick with the 2 little ones I first carried the one a little way then the other one the night of the first of May I slept in a kaffir stall without one blanket or water or food with sympathy one kaffer woman said take this blanket and wrap your children up. I was already from the 30<sup>th</sup> April without food until the 2<sup>nd</sup> May. About 4 o'clock the English officer came to me and

took me away from there in an open mule wagon as far as Krooneburg where we stayed for three days on the open veld and from there to Pietersburg there I received rations and one blanket. three months was I in Pietersburg camp in a round tent far from water this I had to carry myself and the 'mis'<sup>17</sup> to make a fire. there my children had the measles. After I was there for three months I got some clothes from Dr Kriel then I could make myself and my children clean not entirely but partly. from there to Howick Camp Natal there also in one round tent and also far from the water I had to carry my water far from the river and also wash there. my fire wood I had to carry. Sometimes I had to fetch my rations myself Sometimes I had to go two days to the Commissariat and from the morning to the evening in rain or sun or wind stand to get some food. From there to Wentworth camp Durban from there after peace again to Pietersburg camp from there to my devastated former dwelling 4 days from Pietersburg on an open mule wagon I arrived and found nothing other than only a few zinc sheets. poor no money to begin anything no husband just one lonely widow I sat there I once again lamented the loss and poverty. Misery and foolish tears were my food and drink this all I had to bear and battle this time of hardship

With regard  
Ellie Naude

There are several notable differences between the translation that Hobhouse produced and published in War Without Glamour and the one I have presented here. Although both were made from the same original text, Ellie Naude's original account has been translated into English in dissimilar ways. Naude's original account bears signs of being written by someone unaccustomed to writing, and is slightly incoherent in places. Her use of punctuation is at best erratic and her writing reads much like the spoken word – there is nothing literary or 'writerley' about her testimony; it is 'functionally literate', but it does convey events and emotions with immediacy and impact. Part of the difficulty with accounts written during or in the years immediately after the war is that at this time there was "a gap which separated the spoken and written language of Dutch Afrikaners. The latter was a type of High Dutch, the former ... was 'Afrikaans'" (Hofmeyr 1987: 104). While some Boer women's war and/or camp accounts might have been written in (or translated into) High Dutch, what predominates in the archival sources are accounts like Naude's, in which the spoken form was written down in a phonetic and non-standardised

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<sup>17</sup> Dry animal dung used for lighting fires. Hobhouse must have regarded this as an untranslatable word, as she provided no English equivalent.

way, as a version of Taal.<sup>18</sup> Naude's original used very few punctuation marks of any kind and only made sporadic use of capital letters. Hobhouse has inserted commas, colons, full stops, capital letters and paragraph breaks to structure the text, and has converted some of the reported speech in the original into direct speech framed by inverted commas. Naude's original narrative consists of many run-on sentences that do not always make immediate or obvious coherent sense. By adding in explanatory linking words and punctuation and restructuring the account, Hobhouse has imposed a chronology and cohesiveness on the text which is not present in the original.

This 'tidying up' process has also involved some specific changes to Naude's original. For instance, in the first section where she describes her husband being about 60 paces from the house, she does not make it clear that he was trying to hide from the troops – Hobhouse inserted this explanation and also changed the 60 to 600 paces, presumably supposing this is what Naude had meant or thinking it a more likely and 'accurate' distance. Hobhouse supplied the phrase "I was obliged" in the part where Naude comments on carrying her children on the journey: no equivalent of this phrase is present in the original and its insertion implies a coercion not present in the original. Naude's sentence that starts "Yes, everything was taken from me" towards the beginning of her testimony implies an oral, conversational style of delivery which Hobhouse changes by omitting the word 'yes' and turning the sentence into a standard written statement "Everything was taken from me". Hobhouse also removed the "with regard" at the end of Naude's account, as this indicated that it had been written in the form of a letter to Hobhouse herself, and was not a spontaneous testimony of Naude's experiences. However, the most substantive of the changes that Hobhouse has made is that of entirely omitting Naude's mention of washing in the river at Howick Camp. Much of the controversy about what caused the high

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<sup>18</sup> It is also possible in this case and others that the testimony-speaker was illiterate, and that her oral account was written down by a more literate third person.

death rates in the camps centred on the degree to which unhygienic habits on the part of Boer women had contributed to the spread of disease. The Ladies Commission Report, for example, severely criticised camps where residents were permitted to bathe or wash clothes in water used for drinking. Hobhouse excluded Ellie Naude's statement "I had to carry my water far from the river and also wash there" (my emphasis) because including it might have damaged her well-publicised contentions in her 1901 Report and 1902 The Brunt of the War that the deaths in the camps were the fault of incompetent administrators and 'the system', with Boer women themselves having no responsibility for this.

Hobhouse's translation of Naude's account in my view has in many ways stripped the original of its distinctive character. The relatively polished, fluent version that appears in War Without Glamour is quite unlike Naude's original, which reads as the partially or functionally literate account of a poor, rural Boer woman and very close to the spoken word. Bassnett persuasively argues for "expressive identity" between the source language and target language texts (Bassnett 2002: 32); and I have therefore attempted to 'foreignise' my translation by preserving some of the grammatical and expressive idiosyncrasies of the original text, because these best convey an impression of the author and her social context. The disparities between my translation and Hobhouse's bear out two crucial points about translation I made above – that there is never a single, definitive translation of a text, and that all translation is strongly shaped by the circumstances in which it is made and including the intentions of the translator. Hobhouse's translating practices more widely regarding the War Without Glamour testimonies are reflected in the exemplar of Ellie Naude's testimony and indicate her view of these as a 'body of evidence' which could 'prove' the ill-effects of war on civilian populations and the complete lack of responsibility and culpability of the latter for what happened to them.

The ways in which Hobhouse refined and sharpened the sometimes rambling or imprecise testimonies she was presented with are congruent with her efforts to make these accounts as accurate, specific and coherent as possible, thus giving them the flavour of quasi-legal accurate and objective ‘evidence’ attesting to the iniquities of war. Also and relatedly, some of the alterations Hobhouse made in editing while translating suggest that she strove to present Boer women in the most favourable light. Thus by neutralising any ‘ambiguities’ in the original accounts, such as Naude’s mention of washing in the drinking water source, Hobhouse was able to present the strongest case for Boer women having been the innocent, wronged victims of an inhumane war. In addition, Hobhouse removed from the originals any traces that she had in fact solicited many of these accounts, and that several were addressed to her and written in the form of letters – thus for instance, the words “Dear Miss Hobhouse” appear crossed out in the corrected manuscript at the beginning of Ellie De Kock’s account (A155 176/1). The subtitle of the resultant book is Women’s War Experiences Written By Themselves, and Hobhouse was keen to stress that these were personal accounts written spontaneously by Boer women themselves, with minimal intervention on her part. However, in reality her translation generates meanings not always present in the originals, severs these from the circumstances in which they were solicited and written, and positions them in an anti-war discourse that few of the original authors would have been likely to have subscribed to.

My own translation of Naude’s testimony is one I find difficult to extricate from Hobhouse’s, because I had read her published version long before I encountered and read the original Taal manuscript. Thus, my later reading and translation of Naude’s original has been inevitably coloured by a prior knowledge of the broad meaning Hobhouse had made of it. Nevertheless, in approaching translating the original, I read in detail and translated the text as literally as possible and resisted the temptation to simply capture the

‘essence’ of what she said and reframe it in ‘proper’ English. Taking Spivak’s advice, I attempted to “overcome what I was taught in school: the highest mark for the most accurate collection of synonyms, strung together in the most proximate syntax” (Spivak 1992: 178). Because part of my intention is to show the ways in which previous translations have altered and reshaped these testimonies, I consciously set out to alter as little as possible of the structure, punctuation or tone of the testimony, in spite of the strong inclination to impose ‘correct’ sense and order. Conversely, I attempted to retain as much as possible the idiomatic sense of the original and not to render the translation in a standard version of English. And certainly I neither aimed for nor have been able to achieve precise linguistic ‘equivalence’, because I had in my ‘mind’s eye’, not contemporary or present-day English texts, but rather the many scores of other Boer women’s letters and testimonies also in the same pre-Afrikaans version of Taal that I have become so familiar with and which form a very strong part of my own context of working and translating. Put another way: after translating into English, I have retranslated back into Taal and re-formulated the English until it translates into something with as close a meaning to the original as possible.

What results is a translation, like all others, which is a representation and not an exact or direct reflection of the original, and doubtless does not convey Ellie Naude’s full range of intended meanings. In this particular case, the difficulties attendant on finding equivalence of meaning between languages are further increased by the passing of time, and the passing of a way of life which is no more. While I was schooled and am fluent in the written and spoken Afrikaans of present-day South Africa, the Taal of 1903 and earlier no longer exists as a language, nor does the mind-set and cultural frame of those who spoke it; thus deciding upon an approximate, let alone the ‘true’, meaning of such testimonies is difficult and problematic. Moreover, my translation is influenced by current

translation practices, which have only been developed in the last twenty years and which differ considerably from standard practice in the 1920s when Hobhouse went about producing her book.

The changes which Hobhouse made to the manuscript of War Without Glamour are an extension of the translation process, signs of her searching for the most appropriate meanings as she translated these texts from unpublished to published form. The very first change she marked on the manuscript occurs in the Preface and confirms that Hobhouse wished to minimise the appearance of her role as translator and editor: “~~The majority~~ Nearly half the records herein collected were written in Afrikaans and have been translated by me, the others written in English have ~~been corrected~~ ^undergone some^ grammatically ~~to some extent~~ ^changes^” (Hobhouse 1927: 5).<sup>19</sup> The change to ‘nearly half’ of the testimonies requiring translation from Afrikaans, as opposed to ‘the majority’, lessens the significance and impact of the translation process. By deleting the words ‘been corrected’ and inserting ‘undergone some grammatical changes’, Hobhouse also removed the negative association that the originals were in some way defective or required change or improvement, and the changed choice of words also plays down her involvement in making such ‘corrections’. In fact, some of the Boer women contributors specifically encouraged Hobhouse to alter their texts as she wished. Thus Johanna Rousseau attached a note to Hobhouse with her testimony, writing: “Trusting you will excuse and correct all that sounds amiss: for I do not profess to be English at all” (A155 176/1, Letter dated 3 October 1903 from Johanna Rousseau to Emily Hobhouse).<sup>20</sup>

The large majority of the changes to the manuscript proofs show Hobhouse trying to make the women’s accounts as clear, specific and chronological as possible. A selection

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<sup>19</sup> All page numbers refer to the published book, but the corrections indicated appear only in the archived proofs.

<sup>20</sup> Rousseau’s claim ‘not to be English at all’ was not strictly true; her account was written in English and shows her to be more than proficient in that language, and her daughter Lottie wrote letters in English during the war, as discussed in Chapter Four.

of these changes is listed below, to demonstrate this point, and these include additions as well as omissions and changes in emphasis:

- p.12 to pay for our own meat [emphasis added]
- p.15 ~~The~~ Our Government provided each
- p.29 were still ^waiting &^ prepared
- p.58 During this time the ~~place~~ village
- p.80 I said ^to myself^, so run the scum of the earth
- p.82 in a spoonful of ^cold^ water
- p.97 ~~It~~ There were 334 ^deaths^ for the month
- p.103 We had to lie down as we were [emphasis added]
- p.104 After ~~arriving at~~ bringing him to the mission station
- p.123 situated outside the wire, and by [emphasis added]
- p.129 admitted that ^I was too delicate to stand^ such a rough life
- p.130 sent me to the ~~concentration~~ prison camp<sup>21</sup>

These changes make the claims in the different contributions in War Without Glamour more precise and definite, or add explanation or emphasis to certain things that Hobhouse deemed particularly significant. Because Hobhouse wished to show how war had deleteriously affected the lives of entirely innocent Boer women, she had to ensure that their testimonies could withstand the scrutiny and criticism of those who were less sympathetic to her – and their – cause.

One of the most interesting changes made by Hobhouse to the manuscript of War Without Glamour concerns the testimony of Mrs. A.M.E. Van Den Berg. Mrs. Van Den Berg's account of her train journey to Pietermaritzburg camp contains the following description: "The worst for us was to hear the Kaffirs shouting at us and their provocation at all the stations. We had no way of defending ourselves. We heard the Kaffirs say: 'Boers, that is good enough for you!'" (Van den Berg in Hobhouse 1927: 31). The manuscript proofs contain the word "whores", which is crossed through in pencil and the word "Boers" substituted in Hobhouse's writing. Mrs. Van den Berg's apparent claim that black people called the passing Boer women 'whores' evokes the so-called 'black peril',

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<sup>21</sup> Amendments from A211, all page numbers refer to the published text.

the (largely imagined) sexual threat posed by black men towards white women which became a significant factor in the 1902 deliberations leading to the peace talks and Treaty of Vereenigen, as well as in the rise of nationalism subsequently (Kestell and Van Velden 1912, Cory MS 14.847). Hobhouse presumably chose here to substitute the more neutral ‘Boers’ for ‘whores’, because the inclusions of the word ‘whores’ and its associated assumptions about ‘race’ could have made for a less sympathetic depiction of Boer women as innocent civilians affected by the war, because alluding to the negative reports that had circulated about the dubious racial politics of Boer people. Oddly, and fascinatingly, both the manuscript and the final published text depart, albeit in different ways, from what Mrs. Van Den Berg originally wrote in her original manuscript testimony. The corresponding sentence in her handwritten original reads, “*Wy hooren de Kaffers zeggen: Hoera het is goed voor jullie*” (A155 176/1: 23). My translation of this sentence is, “We heard the Kaffers say: Hurray it is good for you.” How the word was transmuted from the jeering, celebratory ‘hurray’ to the sexually-loaded ‘whores’ to the more neutral ‘Boers’ is now impossible to determine, but is possibly linked to Hobhouse’s unfamiliarity with ‘hoera’ and this phonetically sounding like ‘whore’.<sup>22</sup> However this discrepancy confirms there is no absolutely certain translation of a text and that behind a ‘finished’ translation lie a range of abandoned possible meanings and a labyrinth of choices, modifications and re/workings.

Hobhouse’s work as a translator and cultural mediator was shaped by two somewhat contradictory forces. The first is that her translation of Boer women’s testimonies into English, corrections of ‘inaccuracies’, and presentation of Boer women in a favourable light, were all influenced by her view of these testimonies as ‘evidence’ that proved the moral wrongness of war and supported a pacifist stance, and thus deserving of a worldwide audience. Many of the changes made in her translations related to fact-claims in

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<sup>22</sup> Indeed, much Taal and then later Afrikaans is based on ‘Afrikanerised’ phonetic English.

the testimonies about the real effects of war on civilians, especially women and children, that lent support to Hobhouse's anti-war stance. The second is that Hobhouse also viewed Boer women's testimonies as important historical documents for South Africa and for other Boer women in particular, and in explaining her translation practices and promoting the testimonies to such women, she minimised her own interventions as a translator and instead emphasised the 'authenticity' of the testimonies as the spontaneously provided stories of 'simple Boer women' telling how it was. Although Hobhouse minimised her role as translator, nevertheless she still reflected on her translation work and made it clear in War Without Glamour which testimonies she had translated and which were originally written in English, with the word 'translated' pencilled at the top of the relevant testimonies in the proofs and then printed in the published version. However, in spite of Hobhouse's overt signals that these are translated texts, her translations have in effect replaced the 'original' texts, most obviously so concerning Tant' Alie in the 1939 translation into Afrikaans (Rothman 1939) but also regarding the many hundreds of quotations from and references to testimonies in War Without Glamour.<sup>23</sup> A significant result is that the mediated and indeed manipulated nature of these translations has been ignored or glossed over in 'the history' of the Afrikaner past.

Thus, for instance, references to Tant' Alie in present-day historiography draw almost exclusively on the 1939 Afrikaans version,<sup>24</sup> itself a translation of previous translation(s), and usually fail to acknowledge the existence of Hobhouse's 1923 translation or indeed that the published book is a translation at all, that it is anything other than Alie Badenhorst's 'actual diary'. The provenance of the book is simply taken for granted. For instance, Ena Jansen proposes that one of Badenhorst's motives for writing

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<sup>23</sup> It is surprising to note that no historians and critics have to date returned to the original manuscripts of these testimonies, relying only on Hobhouse's translations.

<sup>24</sup> Even in her otherwise useful and interesting discussion on the role of women in the growth of post-war Afrikaner nationalism, Bradford refers only to the 1939 Afrikaans version of Tant' Alie and does not take account of the book's origins (Bradford 2000).

was “what is nowadays called dealing with trauma. Alie Badenhorst ... wrote her diary as testimony as well as diversion. ‘In that time of suffering I decided to write this book. Because I could no longer write to Frikkie [her husband – EJ], I had to try to alleviate my mind in this way, to seek diversion for my thoughts’” (Jansen 1999b: 6). Jansen’s quotation references the 1939 Afrikaans version of Tant’ Alie, which she treats as unproblematically ‘the same’ as ‘this book’ that Badenhorst refers to writing, motivated by the need to deal with ‘trauma’. The actually very complex origins of the book and Hobhouse’s central involvement in obtaining, translating, extensively rewriting, promoting, publishing and probably soliciting the manuscript in the first place, are replaced here by it simply and straightforwardly being written by Badenhorst at the time and in response to ‘trauma’. Raath (2002b) not only makes sole reference to the 1939 Afrikaans edition of the book, but uses this as a source of factual information about Klerksdorp camp, although as indicated in Chapter Four, Badenhorst was never an inhabitant of the camp ‘proper’. He too ignores Hobhouse’s involvement in the book’s production and the peace-promoting context in which she worked, and instead uses Tant’ Alie in the service of a very different ‘cause’ – maintaining and strengthening ‘the history’ of this part of the Afrikaner past as it has been developed from the nationalist perspective (Raath 2002b).

The testimonies in War Without Glamour are extensively quoted from and referenced in ‘the history’ but with no recognition of their translated status and no consultation of the original archived manuscript testimonies. Thus, for instance, Marais repeats parts of the War Without Glamour testimony of Johanna Rousseau concerning a woman whose seven children all died in Kroonstad camp, placing this under the heading ‘psychological repercussions’ and treating Rousseau’s claims as entirely referential of this (Marais 1999: 123). Also commenting on War Without Glamour, which “contains a wealth of information about the experiences of the internees”, De Reuck sees these testimonies as

entirely factual and as repositories of ‘information’ (De Reuck 1999: 74). She erroneously gives the publication date of War Without Glamour (1927) as 1924, and quotes several passages from women’s testimonies, claiming that these are “evocative ... for the contemporary reader, familiar with the grainy images of Jews being trucked to Auschwitz” (De Reuck 1999: 74). Across the historiography of the camps, translated published versions have to all intents and purposes become the ‘original’ women’s testimonies, with commentators even up to the present time failing to consider the mediated, indirect and often manipulated nature of these translations or the context in which they were produced.

### **Mrs. Neethling: producing (proto-) nationalism in translation**

Unlike Hobhouse, Mrs. Neethling’s work as a translator and cultural entrepreneur was not concerned with showing the effects of war on civilians and promoting peace, but rather with ‘not forgetting’ and with political axe-grinding for (proto-) nationalist purposes around representing ‘scorched earth’ and the camps as ‘inhuman’ British atrocities against the Eden-like Boer Republics. The title page of Mag Ons Vergeet? states: “Take Note: This book is not for those who want to forget” (Neethling 1938, original emphasis), and in the Foreword Mrs. Neethling makes the (proto-) nationalist dimensions of this explicit: “[I] trust it [the book] will help to make children proud of their ancestors, will increase their love of the nation and build up that which is most honourable in the national character” (Neethling 1938: v).<sup>25</sup> Originally, Mrs. Neethling translated the testimonies that appear in Mag Ons Vergeet? from Taal into a more formal Dutch and these were then published in 1917 as Vergeten? This book was later re-translated into Afrikaans by her daughter, but with this based not on the original Taal manuscripts, but instead on the text of Vergeten?, itself a translation. In what follows, I compare an original Taal manuscript testimony (Els

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<sup>25</sup> “*Let Wel: Hierdie boek is nie vir diegene wat wil vergeet nie.*” “[ek] vertrou dat dit sal help om ons kinders trots te maak oor hulle voorouers, hulle volksliefde sal vermeerder en die edelste in ‘n volkskarakter sal opbou.”

W19) with its published version in Mag Ons Vergeet?, and consider the reasons for the differences between them. Certainly Mag Ons Vergeet? was translated by Ella Neethling. However, it was Mrs. Neethling who carried out major structural changes to the testimonies when she first translated them and prepared them for publication in 1917. The marked differences between the original manuscripts and the published testimonies in Mag Ons Vergeet? are the product of Mrs. Neethling's earlier translations, and are not the result of the relatively minor changes carried out by Ella Neethling in preparing the 1938 book.

The testimonies in Mag Ons Vergeet?, Mrs. Neethling explains in her Foreword, had originally been written by women in 1904 in response to a call by newspaper editor Horak for women to submit their wartime and camp experiences to Die Transvaler. These testimonies were kept by Horak, from which Mrs. Neethling published a relatively small selection, and they are now archived. Amongst these is the original testimony of Maria Els, giving her account of the 'meat protest' in Brandfort camp, although, as I indicated in Chapter Three, this was in fact not one of the testimonies written for Horak, but was written in 1916 directly for Mrs. Neethling herself. This, however, is not indicated in the translated published account in Vergeten? / Mag Ons Vergeet?, because the note from Maria Els to Mrs. Neethling attached to the manuscript testimony which makes it clear it had been actively solicited one – "Forgive me that I could not send you the history earlier. So have my hearty thanks for inclusion" (Els W19)<sup>26</sup> – has been excised. Removing the account from its original context as a letter written to her in 1916, and thereby concealing her agency in producing the account, Mrs. Neethling by implication represents Maria Els' testimony as self-motivated and unprompted. Also, by removing the testimony from its 1916 writing context and implying that, like the others, it was written in 1904, it is afforded the same status as 'truth-telling' based on close temporal proximity to the events

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<sup>26</sup> "*Vergeeft my dat ik u niet eerder het gescheidenis kon zende. Zoo heft mynen harteliken dank voor opnamen.*"

as the Horak-solicited accounts. Thus Mrs. Neethling suggests in her Foreword that “We can just be grateful that Mr. Horak collected these things when everything was still fresh in the memories of the writers” (Neethling 1938: iv).<sup>27</sup> However, her translation of the Els account disguises that this particular testimony was not written when the events were still ‘fresh in the memory of the writer’, but instead fourteen years after the war and in response to a specific personal request.

A comparison between Maria Els’ unpublished handwritten Taal testimony and the published version in Mag Ons Vergeet? reveals some marked and significant differences that reflect Mrs. Neethling’s approach to translation and her related intentions as a cultural entrepreneur. The most striking of the translation changes by Mrs. Neethling is revoicing of Maria Els’ testimony from third to first person. In the original testimony, Maria Els refers to herself throughout in the third person, whereas in the translated testimony Mrs. Neethling has rewritten these statements in the first person, as well as making other notable changes, as demonstrated in the following example:

“the young miss Mimmie Els & mrs. Bellie Vivier were dressed in the Orange free state 4 colour” (Els W19: 2)<sup>28</sup>

“Mrs Bella Vivier and I, Miemie Els, a girl of fifteen years, were dressed in the Free State colours” (Els in Neethling 1938: 36 / 1917: 47)<sup>29</sup>

The translation of Maria Els’ original has not only rewritten ‘the young miss Mimmie Els’ as ‘I, Miemie Els’ and ‘corrected’ the spelling of both women’s names, but has added explanatory detail not present in the original. Mrs. Neethling thereby transmuted Els’

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<sup>27</sup> “*Ons kan maar net dankbaar wees dat mnr. Horak die dinge versamel het toe alles nog vars in die geheue van die skryfsters was*”

<sup>28</sup> “*den jongen mej Mimmie Els & mev. Bellie Vivier telde die in het Oranjevrystaat 4 kleur ware*”

<sup>29</sup> “*Mev. Bella Vivier en ik, Mimie Els, een meisje van 15 jaar, waren in de vrijstaatse kleuren gekleed*” (Els in Neethling 1917: 47). “*Mev. Bella Vivier en ek, Miemie Els, ’n meisie van vyftien jaar, was in die Vrystaatse kleure aangetrek*” (Els in Neethling 1938: 36). The first quotation here is Mrs. Neethling’s Dutch translation that appeared in Vergeeten? and the second is Ella Neethling’s translation of this into Afrikaans for Mag Ons Vergeet? Apart from variations in spelling there is no difference between them and both versions translate into the same sentence in English. This is consistent with the rest of Mag Ons Vergeet?, which differs from Vergeeten? only in its use of ‘Afrikanerised’ spelling, even following throughout the exact paragraph divisions used by Mrs. Neethling in Vergeeten?. As shown above in the comparison, it is Mrs. Neethling’s 1917 translation that made the substantial changes to Els’ original testimony.

simple and functionally literate statement not only into a grammatically and in other ways ‘correct’ one, but has also given it a strong ‘I-witness’ and quasi-legal tone with ‘I, Miemie Els’, a phrase which is multiply repeated in Mrs. Neethling’s translation. In addition, Mrs. Neethling has changed ‘young’ into the much more detailed ‘a girl of fifteen years’ and also ‘corrected’ Els’ conflation of the Transvaal *Vierkleur* (four colour) flag and the Free State (three colour) flag by only mentioning ‘Free State colours’. Els’ reference to the ‘Orange free state 4 colour’ is interesting in its mixing of (proto-) nationalist symbols with the two flags of the old Republics merging into one, although Mrs. Neethling presumably removed this thinking it implied ignorance or uncertain memory on Els’ part, or more strongly that it demonstrated Els’ lack of political and republican knowledge and would have been decidedly at odds with the meaning being assigned to the events at Brandfort.

Mrs. Neethling has also radically reorganised the structure of Maria Els’ account. While Els’ original testimony begins with the morning of the Brandfort protest, midway through her description moves backwards in time to outline some of the reasons for the women’s dissatisfaction, including the story of Mrs. Coetzee’s four dead children, Mrs. Neethling imposed a chronological and linear timeframe on the testimony, moving sections of it so that it starts with the background to the testimony, the women’s dissatisfaction and the tale of Mrs. Coetzee, and only then goes on to describe the events of the protest in sequential order. Her imposition of a linear time-frame relates in part to the differences between oral and written accounts, with Maria Els’ original testimony reading having some elements of an orally told story, including a non-linear time-frame. Thus for example Els’ “oh a whole lot of voices answered” (Els W19: 5)<sup>30</sup> becomes “and a whole group of voices asked” (Els in Neethling 1938: 37),<sup>31</sup> with the conversational ‘oh’ removed and answers becoming questions. In another instance, after a lengthy description of the reasons for the

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<sup>30</sup> “*ach maar een lot stemmen antwoorden*”

<sup>31</sup> “*en ‘n hele spul stemme vra*”

protest, Els writes, “Now enough of that” (Els W19: 4),<sup>32</sup> before moving on to the next part of her story, with this informal, conversational phrase again having been excluded in the translation.

Mrs. Neethling’s translation made further significant substantive changes to Maria Els’ original account. Els headed her account “Women Ladies: protest over hunger, suffering and death, at Brandfort Concentration camp Orange free state 25 Nov. 1901” (Els W19: 1),<sup>33</sup> while the title in *Mag Ons Vergeet?* reads: “Protest Occasioned by Hunger and Mistreatment in the Concentration Camp at Brandfort” (Els in Neethling 1938: 34),<sup>34</sup> thus removing Els ‘suffering and death’ and substituting this with its assumed ‘cause’ – ‘mistreatment’ – as well as formalising and ‘tidying’ the original. Also in Els’ original Mrs. Van Tonder’s address to the superintendent states that “we are dying from 30 to 34 per day” (Els W19: 3),<sup>35</sup> while Mrs. Neethling generalises and rounds up this fairly specific figure to “thirty to forty a day” (Els in Neethling 1938: 36). Finally, Mrs. Neethling’s translation entirely omits one particular sentence from Els’ original, which formed part of her discussion of the military camp in close proximity to the concentration camp at Brandfort: “Women who did not want their children vaccinated, sat them far out of sight near the [border of] the Troop camp” (Els W19: 4).<sup>36</sup> To have included this sentence, which suggests that children in this camp were vaccinated and were thus not always ‘mistreated’ by the authorities, and that many women rejected vaccination against measles or typhoid for their children, would have undermined Mrs. Neethling’s contentions about the camps as places of “incomprehensible and indescribable” misery (Neethling 1938:

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<sup>32</sup> “Nu genoeg van di!”

<sup>33</sup> “Vrouwe Damas: opstand door honger, lydende en sterfven, te Brandfort konsentrasie kamp Oranjevrystad 25 Nov. 1901”

<sup>34</sup> “Opstand Veroorsaak deur Honger en Mishandeling in die Konsentrasiekamp op Brandfort”

<sup>35</sup> “wy sterwen van 30 tot 34 per dag”

<sup>36</sup> “Vrouwen die hun kinders niet wil laten spuit, zit gelle daar verre afwezig, naby die Troep kamp.”

242), and also her sanctification of Boer women and rejection that they had any responsibility for the increase in the death rates; and so her translation simply expunges it.

Mrs. Neethling's intentions as a political and cultural entrepreneur are strongly evinced by her translation practices, as I have shown. In order to fit the explicitly (proto-) nationalist objectives of Vergeten? / Mag One Vergeet?, she used the translation process to strip the testimonies of their origins as letters and produce accounts that read as first-hand, first person I-witness quasi-legal statements written by women shortly after the end of the war, telling of their personal wartime experiences. Thus while Els' testimony took the form of a letter to Mrs. Neethling, many of the 1904 testimonies took the form of letters addressed specifically to Horak, although all traces of this are again erased in Mrs. Neethling's translations. For example, the testimonies of Martha Kriel, Mrs. Greyling, Mrs. M. Ferreira and Anna Botha are all written as letters to Horak, although this epistolary aspect is removed in the translations, with, for instance, Mrs. Ferreira's 14 April 1904 letter to Horak stating, amongst other things: "I have tried to do justice to your friendly request about my personal experiences in the war ... it is not the half of the hardships I had" (Ferreira W19).<sup>37</sup> All such comments are removed from Mrs. Neethling's translations.

In keeping with notions Mrs. Neethling expounded in this book and the earlier Should We Forget? about Boer women as highly 'civilised' and refined, the translation process she engaged in converted rambling, temporally-disordered testimonies characterised by non-standard grammar, spelling and punctuation and an oral-style delivery, all of which hinted at low levels of literacy, into chronologically linear accounts written in a polished writing style and with the careful grammar of the accomplished writer. For example, the original testimony of Anna Botha is characterised by severe

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<sup>37</sup> "*Ik wel probeer te voel doen aan U vriendelyk verzoek om toen myn persoonlyk weder vaare in de oorlog ... dit is niet de helfte van myn zwaar wat ik had.*"

spelling errors and contains almost no punctuation at all, whereas Mrs. Neethling's translation removes all these signs of Anna Botha's literacy levels, converting 'Petoelie' to 'Bethulie' throughout, removing the many crossings out and insertions in the original, placing reported speech in inverted commas as direct speech, and inserting punctuation to structure the account. And in her translation of Aletta de Jager's original testimony, Mrs. Neethling has altered some of the dates referred to in the text, presumably deeming them to be inaccurate. Thus '27 April' and '10 October' in the manuscript (de Jager W19: 8, 12), become '21 April' and '1 October' in *Mag Ons Vergeet?* (de Jager in Neethling 1938: 221, 222).

Mrs. Neethling's translations are strongly interpretative and they make stronger political meaning of the women's testimonies she published, for instance in Maria Els' account by reworking 'suffering and death' as 'mistreatment' and also making large generalisation from the specific. Her translation practices stripped many women's testimonies of specific personal details and so reworked the individual character and flavour of these. Thus Anna S. Louw's original testimony was considerably shortened in its *Mag Ons Vergeet?* version, from which, for example, a long and rather convoluted story involving a confiscated horse was cut (Louw W19). For Mrs. Neethling, such stories were personal and by definition 'boring' and detracted from the overall political message she was intent on conveying. On this point, in the Foreword she states that "Some writers will perhaps be disappointed because their experiences have not appeared in full or are not mentioned at all. If I had done that the book would have become too big and expensive, and it would also be boring to repeat the description of camp life a hundred times over" (Neethling 1938: iv).<sup>38</sup> It would appear that for Mrs. Neethling, all women's camp experiences were 'the same' and interchangeable, although this is actually something

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<sup>38</sup> "Party skryfsters sal miskien teleurgesteld wees omdat hulle ervarings nie ten volle of glad nie genome word nie. As ek dit sou doen sou die boek te groot en duur word, en dit sou ook vervelig wees om die beskrywing van kampelewe honderdmaal te herhaal"

produced by the way she has translated their accounts: by removing traces of the personal and the particular as ‘irrelevant’ to the wider political intentions of the book, the testimonies do indeed all become ‘the same’ and in her sense ‘boring’.

Moreover, Mrs. Neethling removed from the women’s testimonies she translated anything which might be perceived to conflict with her overall political message regarding the innocence and rightness of Boer women and the culpability and moral wrongness of the British authorities. In addition to her removal of the sentence in Maria Els’ testimony about mothers preventing their children from being vaccinated, she also erased an opening sentence from Anna S. Louw’s testimony which suggests that her testimony might be humanly deficient, “The Lord help me to write down here the truth however lacking it is” (W: 19).<sup>39</sup> There are further examples of such exclusions from the translation of Martha Kriel’s testimony. At the beginning of her published testimony she describes a group of British soldiers arriving at her home and asking directions to the road, and in her handwritten original Mrs. Kriel has followed this by writing that “this I showed him also, but how afraid I was I need not say” (Kriel W19).<sup>40</sup> However, in the translation Mrs. Neethling omits Mrs. Kriel’s reference to giving the soldier directions to the road and only includes the part about her fearfulness, presumably because Mrs. Kriel assisting a British soldier clashed with Mrs. Neethling’s depiction of all Boer women as steadfastly anti-British and loyally Republican. Mrs. Kriel’s original account ends with: “Therefore [because it is God’s will] we must be contented however difficult the way seems, the end will one day surely be blessed” (Kriel W19).<sup>41</sup> The translation in *Mag Ons Vergeet?* omits this sentence and its intimation that the outcome of the war may in fact be ‘blessed’ in the end, instead ending with Kriel’s penultimate sentence in her original, which is more grimly

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<sup>39</sup> “De Heere help my om de Waarheid hier neder te schryfen Hoe gebrekkig ook”

<sup>40</sup> “die wees ik hom dan ook aan, maar hoe bevrees ik was hoeft ik niet te zeggen”

<sup>41</sup> “Daarom moeten wy tevrede weze hoe moeilik ons de weg ook schyn, het eind zal eenmal zalig zyn.”

resigned: “Our dear Lord decided otherwise [that the Republics should keep their independence], therefore we must be satisfied” (Kriel in Neethling: 6).<sup>42</sup>

Mrs. Neethling’s translations and her wider work as a cultural entrepreneur involve her fitting women’s testimonies within the (proto-) nationalist political project with which she was concerned. Simon’s comment that translation has historically afforded opportunities to “promote political causes” (Simon 1996: 39) seems particularly apt with regard to Mrs. Neethling. In contrast to Hobhouse, she does not acknowledge that the testimonies published in Vergeten? were translated, and in Mag Ons Vergeet? there is a similar silence about the translation process, with Ella Neethling’s contribution to that book unstated and invisible. The overlaying of these translated texts as equivalents both to each other and to the women’s handwritten testimonies from which they derive considerably problematises the binary notion of ‘original’ and translation predicated upon a literary model of texts and translations which appears within translation theory.

There are areas of overlap in the translation methods of Hobhouse and Mrs. Neethling, with the similar ways that they have produced meanings in Boer women’s testimonies pointing to how “translation is ultimately tied up with the context in which it is made” (Bassnett 20002: 18). Both of them sought to elide the passing of time and its attendant problems for referential truth-claims, with Hobhouse stressing that the manuscript testimonies published in War Without Glamour had all been in her possession since 1903, and Mrs. Neethling implying that the testimonies in Vergeten? / Mag Ons Vergeet? were all written for Horak in 1904 while events were still ‘fresh’ in the minds of their writers. Moreover, both Hobhouse’s and Neethling’s translations have played crucial roles in determining and defining what came to constitute ‘a testimony’ of the war and the camps, with Hobhouse’s influence starting with her 1901 Report and 1902 The Brunt of

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<sup>42</sup> “By ons liewe Heer was dit anders besluit, daarom moet ons tevrede wees.”

the War and Neethling's with her very early 1903 Should We Forget?, with many testimonies appearing within these single-authored accounts. In relation to Vergeten? / Mag Ons Vergeet? and War Without Glamour, through obscuring the origins of the testimonies in these as solicited letters, revoicing accounts in the first person, and removing signs of illiteracy and oral influences, both Hobhouse and Mrs. Neethling contributed as cultural entrepreneurs to the construction of women's testimonies as always and entirely spontaneous, self-authored, first person, written and featuring a single 'line' across individual accounts, although with this motivated by very different political objectives. The result is that this narrow view of 'testimony' by definition excluded from consideration the wide variety of attestations discussed in Chapter Five: it could not 'see' their existence and so never had to accommodate them.

**"I am ashamed of every English word I write"<sup>43</sup>: Johanna Brandt-Van Warmelo, Language and the Translation Process**

Johanna Brandt-Van Warmelo's Het Concentratie-kamp van Irene (1905), in spite of its presentation as "my diary, written in the camp itself" (Brandt-Van Warmelo 1905: Foreword),<sup>44</sup> was produced from scratch after the war and then translated into Dutch, with the particular purpose of contributing to the welfare of 'land en volk', as outlined in Chapter Four. The rewriting of an 'original' diary to produce the diary manuscript and its translation by her husband Louis Brandt into Dutch were clearly informed by Johanna Brandt-Van Warmelo's political convictions, which seem to have been shared by her husband.<sup>45</sup> One of the key ways in which these were manifest, which doubtless had

<sup>43</sup> B-VW to 'Mother, sisters and brothers', 27 September 1902, *Korrespondentie* folder 3, AB-VW.

<sup>44</sup> "*mijn dagboek, in het kamp zelf geschreven*", "*hart uit te storten*"

<sup>45</sup> From family letters written at the time, it appears that Louis Brandt shared his wife's political convictions: "in every imaginable way the [Dutch] public is working for the salvation of [our] 'land end volk'. Lou is deep in it all & when I hear so much of what is being done, I feel that England can never stand against such a

implications for her translation practices, concerns Brandt-Van Warmelo's pronounced views on 'the language question' which was later to be so strongly politicised by the Second Language Movement in the 1910s.<sup>46</sup> In what follows, I begin by indicating the ways in which commentators have treated Het Concentratie-kamp unproblematically and uncritically as Brandt-Van Warmelo's 'diary' and as a source of factual information about Irene camp, in spite of the layers of reworking and translation that lie behind this book, and in spite of Brandt-Van Warmelo's overt political agenda in Het Concentratie-kamp. Then, in discussing Brandt-Van Warmelo's treatment of language and translation, I examine letters written to her family in South Africa while she was in Holland in late 1902 and in 1903, during which time she prepared her book. I consider the wider dimensions of the language question, and the ways in which her views prefigured how the choice to speak and write in the emergent Afrikaans later became a crucial expression of political affiliation with the (proto-) nationalist cause. I explore in some detail the complex layers of rewriting and translation at the back of Het Concentratie-kamp, which point up its highly mediated status. I then consider some of the ways in which the impact of 'the language question', as well as of Brandt-Van Warmelo as a politically-situated translator more generally, can be discerned in the text of Het Concentratie-kamp.

In his 1954 Die Konsentrasiekampe, Otto comments about overcrowding in tents in the camps, and cites Het Concentratie-kamp as a source of accurate 'factual' information on this: "The Irene camp was not much better [than Springfontein]. In May 1901 there were also pertinent cases of nineteen and twenty people piled up in a tent", with this footnoted to "Van Warmelo: 'Het Concentratie Kamp Van Irene', p. 21" (Otto 1954: 61).<sup>47</sup>

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vigorous 'tegen-werking' ['working against']" (B-VW to 'Mother, Sister & Brothers', 27 September 1902, *Korrespondensie* folder 3, AB-VW, original emphasis).

<sup>46</sup> As I shall show, 'the language question' refers to the way in which the active choice to speak and write in Dutch, Taal and Afrikaans became a highly politicised rallying point for proto-nationalism.

<sup>47</sup> "Die Irenekamp was daar nie veel beter nie. In Mei 1901 was daar ook pertinente gevalle van negentien en twintig persone wat in een tent opgehoop is", "Van Warmelo: 'Het Concentratie Kamp Van Irene', bl. 21"

Similarly, Pets Marais treats Boer women's testimonies and diaries, including Van Warmelo's, simply as repositories of 'data' about the camps. She uncritically invokes quotes from Het Concentratie-Kamp to illustrate her descriptive, 'true-to-life' account of 'the concentration camps'. She also refers to Van Warmelo as a "voluntary nurse" (Marais 1999: 117),<sup>48</sup> and repeats claims made in the published 'diary' about the unsatisfactory water supply, the poor quality rations and the presence of worms in the rations as unproblematic statements of fact. In a specific instance under her heading of "Rations, food and hunger", Marais writes, "The food in the camps was thoroughly poor and bad. Johanna Brandt's mother took samples of sugar, flour and coffee as 'curiosity. In the sugar was the whole head of a lizard' (Van Warmelo Brandt, *Het Concentratiekamp van Irene*)" (Marais 1999: 102).<sup>49</sup> Raath draws extensively on Het Concentratie-kamp as 'evidence' in his discussion on Irene (2002b). For instance, he comments that "The food provisions in this camp were bad. Johanna Brandt [sic, although she was Van Warmelo at the time], who did service in the camp as a nurse, wrote that at the beginning of May the quality of the meat was so bad that it could not even be used to make soup" (Raath 2002: 121).<sup>50</sup> Raath assumes that Het concentratie-kamp and Van Warmelo's diary are 'the same', as in his comment that "On 14 May Johanna Brandt wrote in her diary about the big sacks of meal that crawled with worms and how the children played with them" (Raath 2002: 121, my emphasis).<sup>51</sup> The endnote referencing this refers to Het concentratie-kamp, rather than the manuscript 'diary'. As a result, the differences between what appears in the manuscript 'diary', and the later rewritten and partial Het Concentratie-kamp, are completely obscured

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<sup>48</sup> "vrywilligerverpleester"

<sup>49</sup> "Rantsoene, kos en hongersnood" "Die kos in die kampe was deurgaans swak en sleg. Johanna Brandt se moeder neem monsters suiker, meel en koffie as 'curiositeit. In de suiker was een geheele kop van een hagedis!" (Van Warmelo Brandt, *Het Concentratiekamp van Irene*).

<sup>50</sup> "Die voedselvoorsiening in hierdie kamp was swak. Johanna Brandt, wat in die kamp as verpleegster diens gedoen het, skryf dat die vleis se gehalte teen die begin van Mei 1901 so swak was dat daar nie eens sop van gekook kon word nie."

<sup>51</sup> "Op 14 Mei skryf Johanna Brandt in haar dagboek van die groot klonte meel wat krioel van die wurms en hoe kinders daarmee speel."

by Raath: for example, he claims that “Johanna Brandt regarded the bad food as the overwhelming cause occasioning the deaths” (Raath 2002: 122).<sup>52</sup> However, while Brandt-Van Warmelo might well make this claim in the published book, in some contrast her manuscript ‘diary’ offers many other explanations for the high death rates, including the cold weather, the extreme nature of the epidemics, the unhygienic habits of the people and their ‘crass ignorance’ of modern medicine, as shown in Chapter Four.

At the time she was rewriting her diary for publication, Johanna Brandt-Van Warmelo hoped it would be published in both English and Dutch, although ultimately it only appeared in Dutch owing to the difficulties she experienced in finding an English publisher. Initially she had thought to go to London and “put it into the hands of Methuen, the publisher”,<sup>53</sup> and then “when Lou has finished the Dutch translation it must come out weekly in “Eigen Haard”” (B-VW to ‘Dearests’, 11 November 1902, *Korrespondensie* folder 3, AB-VW).<sup>54</sup> However, by 31 December 1902 she had realised that “I shall not get a publisher in England who will be willing to take it up. Miss Hobhouse is quite certain I will not succeed, because the public is sick and tired of the subject. Even the Dutch edition must wait, for the people here simply won’t read it now” (B-VW to ‘Best Beloved Relations’, 31 December 1902). So while the translation was completed by October 1903, it was not until 1905 that the book was eventually published in Dutch by the expatriate South African firm of Hollandsch-Afrikaansche Uitgevers-Maatschappij (H.A.U.M.) in Amsterdam.<sup>55</sup> There were, however, other significant reasons behind Brandt-Van Warmelo’s original decision to have the book translated into Dutch.

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<sup>52</sup> “Johanna Brandt het die vernaamste oorsake van die sterwes aan die swak kos gewyt.”

<sup>53</sup> Methuen was Hobhouse’s publisher and it is likely that Brandt-Van Warmelo made her choice on those grounds.

<sup>54</sup> All references to Brandt-Van Warmelo’s letters in this chapter are from *Korrespondensie* folder 3, AB-VW.

<sup>55</sup> The *Dictionary of South African Biography* states that Brandt-Van Warmelo’s book was initially published in English in 1904 as *The Irene Concentration Camp* (*Dictionary of South African Biography* Vol. IV: 55), but no trace of this publication can be found.

In a letter of 27 September 1902, Brandt-Van Warmelo describes to her mother and siblings in South Africa the visit of some of the Boer Generals (including Botha and De La Rey) to Groningen in Holland, near to Niezyl where she and Louis Brandt had been living since their marriage in August 1902. She explains how she and Louis participated in the festivities surrounding their visit and the impression this made on her and others: “I shall never forget yesterday & how proud I was to be one the daughters of the Transvaal. The visit of the generals has made everyone a thousand times more pro-Boer” (B-VW to ‘Mother, Sister & Brothers’, 27 September 1902). Later in the same letter, she also firmly states that “You will receive no more English letters from me. The taal question has been viewed from every point, & has clearly proved to be a vital matter, that I am ashamed of every English word I write to you. My letters will perhaps be less interesting because I express myself with more difficulty, but that will improve with practice” (B-VW to ‘Mother, Sister & Brothers’, 27 September 1902). Clearly as a result of the Generals’ visit, part of their post-war fundraising tour of Europe, Brandt-Van Warmelo had been persuaded of the significance of language as a matter of key political importance and so made an active decision to ‘convert’ to Dutch, although as she herself admitted, as an English-speaker this would inhibit her ability to express herself.

However, this ‘conversion’ to Dutch appears to have come to nothing, for the next extant letter in this collection, dated 11 November 1902, begins:

“While Violet needs so much training<sup>56</sup> I have no time to write letters, so for the next few months you must please be content with the Jingo language. I write so much that I want my home letters to be a recreation to me, not an effort. There are enough occasions on which I am obliged to write Dutch letters, so there is no fear of my not learning that language thoroughly, & it is so easy for me to dash off a few lines to you in English when I am tired and overwrought” (B-VW to ‘Dearests’, 11 November 1902)

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<sup>56</sup> ‘Violet’ was Brandt-Van Warmelo’s code name for her Irene book, and so here she is referring to the amount of work she was doing to prepare it.

While Brandt-Van Warmelo clearly felt strongly about the language question and wanted to adopt Dutch as her ‘first’ language, her letters show that, while politically desirable, this was considerably more difficult in a practical and everyday sense. Indeed, her letter indicates that she found learning and writing in Dutch burdensome, ‘an effort’ and something that did not come easily or naturally to her; it was as a badge of political allegiance that she was attempting to take up Dutch. A few weeks later, she began a letter home by writing in Dutch that “Oh, I was planning to write in the Redneck language, and see here is a Dutch letter. It is becoming a habit to me”,<sup>57</sup> and then after a few sentences she writes in English, after what was evidently a lapse of time, with “Where was I last week?” (B-VW to Family, 26 November 1902). In the letters that follow, Brandt-Van Warmelo continues to write to her family in English, occasionally inserting Dutch words or expressions. However, with all their reversals, slides into English, and sense of being ‘obliged’, her letters reveal that as early as 1902 language choice was being perceived as a form of political expression by people involved in the (proto-) nationalist movement, and this doubtless was a factor in influencing Brandt-Van Warmelo’s decision to rewrite her diary and to publish it in Dutch.

While it was only later through the Second Language Movement that Afrikaans was specifically promoted as the distinctive language of the Afrikaner *volk* (in opposition to English, language of colonial oppressor Britain), this earlier politicisation of the language question is confirmed by Mrs. Roos’ introduction to her testimony, written in 1903:

“I am sorry I had to write these statements in english. I have to do so because I was not well up in dutch. I had my education in the Cape Colony, 1864-70. In those days no dutch was allowed in the schools. The anti-dutch was so keen, that the pupils were strictly forbidden to speak their own language, and if they were found to do so. They were severely punished. To get an education in some way you were

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<sup>57</sup> “*Ach, ik was van plan om in die Rooineek ze taal te skryf en zie hier een Hollansche brief. Dit wordt by my al gewoonte.*” ‘Rednecks’ refers derogatorily to the British.

compelled to obtain it in the English language. I have, individually, nothing against the english, yet I think, that it is no more than fair that any child should be allowed to study their own tongue. (In any case) I am taking ~~taking~~ up dutch and hope to succeed. Will do my best at all events" (Mrs. C.M. Roos, 3 November 1903, WM 4208/20: 1)<sup>58</sup>

Like Brandt-Van Warmelo, Mrs. Roos wanted to adopt Dutch as a statement of her political allegiances, although she too admitted that she was 'not well up in dutch'.

As I have already noted, many of the testimonies in War Without Glamour were originally written in English by members of the Boer elite, and while probably many of them were familiar with spoken Taal, these women themselves spoke, wrote and read in English. As Hofmeyr comments, prior to the Second Language Movement, "a propertied 'Dutch' middle class ... probably read the *Illustrated London News*" (Hofmeyr 1987: 98). However, like Johanna Rousseau who did "not profess to be English at all" (A155 176/1), such women also wished to dissociate themselves from the political connotations of being English-speaking. Thus, for example, Mrs. De La Rey's 1903 A Woman's Wanderings and Trials During the Anglo-Boer War was published in both English and Dutch. And while Mrs. Le Clus' unmarried name was Roberts, indicating that she was most likely English-speaking, she chose to write Lief en Leed (1925) in Afrikaans with the stated intention of helping "loyal Afrikaners, to preserve their nationality and to never forget that faithfulness to Fatherland, Church and Language" (Le Clus 1925: 5).<sup>59</sup> The emphasis on 'preservation' of language as explicitly linked to 'faithfulness' to the nation as a political entity was at its peak in South Africa in the mid 1920s when Mrs. Le Clus' book was published. The growth of Afrikaans as the only acceptable language of the *volk*, and as the only politically correct medium of expression for key matters affecting the *volk*, no doubt also contributed

<sup>58</sup> This is the same Mrs. Roos whose testimony appears in War Without Glamour (pp. 110-132). This quote is taken from her extended account, now in the War Museum of the Boer Republics, which is a far longer version of the testimony that appears in War Without Glamour, and has an appendix in which Mrs. Roos related the experiences of other Boer women she had met during the war.

<sup>59</sup> "getroue Afrikaners, hulle nasionaliteit te laat in stand hou in nooit te laat vergeet dat ware getrouheid aan Vaderland, Kerk en Taal"

to the later decisions to translate Hobhouse's The Brunt of the War and Tant' Alie into Afrikaans and their publication by the Nasionale Pers.

There are several indications of the mediated context of production of the translated, published text of Het Concentratie-kamp, in spite of Brandt-Van Warmelo's fairly strenuous attempts to obscure this. In keeping with its presentation as an 'original diary' written at the time, there is no mention at any point in the text that it is a translation and that it was originally written in English. Oddly, even though the concluding chapter is 'By Ds. L.E. Brandt', there is no acknowledgement anywhere that this is the same man who translated the whole book, for presumably by 1905 an admission by Brandt-Van Warmelo that she had written her diary in English would have been politically incongruous. Moreover, the silence about the book's translated and therefore mediated status blurs the original/translation dichotomy, with Het Concentratie-kamp presented as 'the same' as the 'original' diary. However, the 'original' diary was extensively re/written and is itself a translation from an earlier, rougher 'at the time' text, with this strongly evidenced in Brandt-Van Warmelo's letters from Holland in 1902 and 1903 written to her family in South Africa.

As mentioned in Chapter Four, Van Warmelo initially announced her intention to write a book in a letter of 19 July 1902 to her mother: "I am going to write a book, dear friends, on the subject of Irene Camp, & that right soon. Miss Jennie advises me to lose no time and to write as much as possible in diary form, just as I wrote on the spur of the moment at Irene" (VW to Mrs. VW, 19 July 1902). 'Miss Jennie' here refers to Mrs. De La Rey, and it was she who advised Van Warmelo to 'write as much as possible in diary form'. Further letters from Brandt-Van Warmelo to her family indicate the progress of the rewriting and translation process carried out by Brandt-Van Warmelo and her husband:

“You know I am going to write a book & Lou will translate each chapter as I write it, & if it is a success, I mean to devote the money to all sorts of charitable institutions” (VW to ‘Mother, Sister and Brother’, 5 August 1902)

“My diary is nearly finished now” (B-VW to ‘Dearests’, 13 November 1902)

“I have all but done my diary now, only a few pages & then I begin with the Blue Books. Lou has translated about the half of my diary already. Ain’t he clever?” (B-VW to ‘dearest relations’, 3 December 1902)<sup>60</sup>

“Lou and I work hard at my book every evening when baby is asleep. The translation is finished and next week Lou will take the manuscript to the publisher in Haarlem, but say nothing to nobody” (B-VW to Mrs. VW, 29 October 1903)<sup>61</sup>

It is very clear, then, from these letters that ‘my diary’ was written up in ‘diary form’ in late 1902 and then translated in sections by Louis Brandt, and that this was by no means ‘the same as’ what Van Warmelo ‘wrote on the spur of the moment at Irene’. What then was used to produce the manuscript ‘diary’? The material written ‘on the spur of the moment’ is likely to refer to the case workbook which Brandt-Van Warmelo kept as part of her volunteer work, in which she recorded the names of the people she visited, their illnesses, requests for ‘medical comforts’ and so forth. In her letters written to her mother at the time she was in Irene, she refers to this workbook and its importance in helping to keep track of the cases under her care. It is likely that this formed the backbone of the later ‘diary’, providing Brandt-Van Warmelo with a mass of information about the day-to-day details of her camp work and thus giving her ‘diary’ the temporal immediacy it required. Indeed, the diary of Henrietta Armstrong has similar origins, with this too involving a rewriting of her case workbook kept at the time, as commented by its editor (Van Rensburg 1980).

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<sup>60</sup> *Het Concentratie-kamp* contains some extracts from the ‘Blue Books’ together with Brandt-Van Warmelo’s criticisms of these in a chapter entitled “*Blauwe Boeken en Zwarte Leugens*” – ‘Blue Books and Black Lies’ (Brandt-Van Warmelo 1905: 99).

<sup>61</sup> The interruption in the rewriting and translation of the book might have been occasioned by the birth of the Brandt’s first child in August 1903.

In addition, there is a marked similarity between Van Warmelo's letters to her mother written at the time she was in the camp, and parts of the manuscript 'diary'. In some instances the wording across the two is identical, as shown in the two sets of examples below. Her letter to her mother of 12 May 1902 contains the following sentences:

"It is not easy to write in bed but it is the warmest place so you must not mind this dreadful scrawl"

"Tomorrow our small tent will be struck & then we shall be much colder & more cramped"

"Our supper consisted of cold roast beef, peach pickles, bread, jams, 'Stormjagers' [a type of hard biscuit] tea & coffee" (VW to Mrs. VW, 12 May 1901)

The manuscript diary entry for 12 May 1902 contains the following sentences:

"But as I am writing in the warmest place I can find <sup>^</sup>(viz: bed)<sup>^</sup> you may be sure my writing will be something dreadful..." (AB-VW *Dagboek* IV: 2, original emphasis and insertion)

"Miss C. and I are to share a tent, which will be struck tomorrow ... tomorrow night I shall be bitterly cold" (AB-VW *Dagboek* IV: 5)

"Supper consisted of cold roast beef, peach pickle, bread and 'Stormjagers' jam, tea and coffee." (AB-VW *Dagboek* IV: 5)

In a letter of 27 May 1902 Van Warmelo wrote to her mother, "Dr. N is very good to my people ... He has just been into the camp specially to see a sick baby – that is more than any other doctor would do unasked, late at night" (VW to Mrs. VW, 27 May 1901).

The entry in the manuscript 'diary' for the same date reads: "Doctor Dandy is so good to the people – it really touches one's heart. This evening after supper he got up quickly & went to the camp to see a sick baby – something that Dr. G. [Green] would never do unless urgently requested." (AB-VW *Dagboek* IV, 27 May 1901: 81-82, original emphasis).

There are many similar overlaps of this kind, which, combined with the other evidence signalling that the manuscript 'diary' was written from scratch in late 1902, suggests that

Brandt-Van Warmelo used her camp letters as an important source in the writing up of the later 'diary'.

Apart from her camp workbook and her letters to her mother, Brandt-Van Warmelo also drew on other sources and contributions from a range of people in writing up her 'diary'. Thus her letters to her mother and siblings in late 1902 and early 1903 as she was preparing her manuscript 'diary' are filled with requests for her mother to obtain photographs of Irene, as well as documents such as permits and ration tickets, for her to use in the book. In addition, she specifically solicited material and information from Mrs. Armstrong and Dr. Neethling: "Mama must please ask one of our nurses, I think Mrs. Armstrong, what Dr. Neethling's present address is ... tell him what I want & ask him to send everything" (VW to 'Mother, Sister and Brother', 5 August 1902). She rallied her family to send her as much material as possible, writing that "You must collect all the most interesting facts about the war, good people. Nothing must get lost" (VW to 'Mother, Liana & Fritz', 17 August 1902, original emphasis).

Finally, there are other key factors that also probably influenced Brandt-Van Warmelo's decision to write up a 'diary' for publication. Firstly, the publication of Het Concentratie-kamp was not the first time that Brandt-Van Warmelo's account of Irene appeared in print, for a short five page summary of her work experiences as a volunteer and her opinion of Irene camp was published in The Brunt of the War in 1902 (Hobhouse 1902: 182-187). This account is headed: "Another of the Pretoria lady nurses, Miss Van Warmelo, gives a description of Irene camp and her work there" (Hobhouse 1902: 182). Brandt-Van Warmelo read The Brunt in late 1902 and commented on it in a letter to her family: "I have finished with 'The Brunt of the War', and marvel at the accuracy and '*uitvoerigheid*' [thoroughness] of the writer's information" (B-VW to 'dearest relations', 3 December 1902). The impression made on her by The Brunt, as well as the guidance she

received from Hobhouse, undoubtedly impacted on her decision to write and publish her 'diary'. The advice Brandt-Van Warmelo received from both Hobhouse and Mrs. De La Rey shaped her decision to write in 'diary form', as well as her choice of publisher.

A second key factor was the publication of her brother Dietlof's diary, at first in English in 1901 and then in Dutch in 1902. In a letter of 29 July 1902 to her family, Van Warmelo commented thus: "He made me a present of a book 'On Commando' a translation of a certain book of a certain person in whom we are interested. If it is a success Dipopo [Dietlof] will benefit greatly ... I am going to bestow no end of care on my own work & make something very good of it" (VW to 'Mama, Liana & Fritz', 29 July 1902). It is highly unlikely that the publication of her brother's book did not influence Brandt-Van Warmelo's decision to write and publish a book of her own. There are *thus multiple and complex layers of mediation, rewriting and translation at the back of Het Concentratie-kamp which are glossed in the published version, which in effect has become the original, 'the real thing', within 'the history'.* Commentators have largely ignored these layers of rewriting and translation, and have drawn on Het Concentratie-kamp van Irene both as unproblematically Brandt-Van Warmelo's 'actual' diary, and as a source of factual objective information about Irene camp, as I show in the extracts at the start of this section.

In the final part of my examination of Brandt-Van Warmelo's Het Concentratie-kamp, I consider how the rewriting and translation processes associated with the book's production, together with Brandt-Van Warmelo's views on language, might have shaped some of the political aspects of the book. Het Concentratie-kamp's explicitly (proto-) nationalist agenda is evinced by Brandt-Van Warmelo's assertion that it was written "to do my little best for 'land en volk'" (VW to Mrs. VW, 19 July 1902), and by her rallying statement at the end of the book: "O, women of South Africa, write about everything you have suffered at the hands of our mighty oppressors. Nothing may be lost, nothing may be

forgotten. Even if your language is simple, even if your words are poor, write about all your experiences, make them known to children and grandchildren, and do not be afraid, so long as you are with God the Truth will stay before your eyes” (Brandt-Van Warmelo 1905: 123).<sup>62</sup> In spite of these instances of political rhetoric and ‘calls to arms’, in an earlier letter to her family Brandt-Van Warmelo denied that her book was political, presumably in response to an expression of caution and concern on her mother’s part because censorship was still operating: “There is nothing political about it & I cannot see how it is going to harm our cause. No one can get wild with a girl for publishing her diary & I am only giving a lot of facts. I am carefully suppressing every word of bitterness & hate & you will see that my book will appeal to our enemies as well as our friends” (B-VW to Family, 9 January 1903). In fact the ‘suppression’ that Brandt-Van Warmelo refers to had less to do with leaving out passages of ‘bitterness & hate’, and instead focused on representing the text as nothing more than ‘a girl’ publishing her diary, thus innocent of political intent.

Brandt-Van Warmelo’s political allegiance as a (proto-) nationalist influenced not only her choice of language in Het Concentratie-kamp, but also affected the translation of the book overall and the meaning she attempted to convey in it. The way in which her diary was rewritten and translated made meaning of Brandt-Van Warmelo’s experiences by casting her as a proto-nationalist heroine of the suffering *volk*. In addition to the various omissions, insertions and amendments discussed in Chapter Four that evince this, there are specific examples of how the rewriting and translation process produced political meaning in the book, with these involving the expurgation from the ‘original’ manuscript of

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<sup>62</sup> “O, vrouwen van Zuid-Afrika, schrijft op alles wat gij geleden hebt onder de handen van onze verdrukters. Niets mag verloren gaan, niets mag vergeten worden. Al is uw taal eenvoudig, al zijn uw woorden zwak, schrijft op al uwe ondervindingen, maakt ze bekend aan kinderen en kleinkinderen, en vrees niet, zoolang gij den God der Waarheid voor oogen houdt.”

comments by Brandt-Van Warmelo that show her in any light other than that of committed nurse and loyal, stalwart patriot.

For example, in the entry for 16 May 1901 in the manuscript diary, Brandt-Van Warmelo describes assisting at an operation in the camp hospital on a man suffering from an abscessed liver: “The doctor made a large incision & ferreted inside until he came upon the abscess. But ugh! the smell when it was opened! Something terrible. I don’t know how I stood it – I had no eau de cologne so I put a few drops of chloroform on my handkerchief & held it to my nose with one hand, while with the other I held a saturated cloth to his (AB-VW *Dagboek* IV 16 May 1901: 24-25, original emphasis). However, while the published entry for 16 May mentions assisting at an operation, what could be perceived as the insensitive or uncaring detail of the original is omitted, and instead the relevant part of this entry simply states that “the patient, a young man, was in a badly emaciated condition; and afterwards I had to stay with him” (Brandt-Van Warmelo 1905: 23).<sup>63</sup> The result is that in the published account Brandt-Van Warmelo emerges as a kind and caring nurse, rather than an inexperienced, squeamish amateur. There are various instances in the manuscript diary of Brandt-Van Warmelo complaining about the dirt and discomfort of living at Irene, with almost all of these having been excluded from the published book. For example, on 28 May the manuscript entry states, “one does get very dirty here & it is not possible to have a bath every day – as to washing one’s hair I have not done it since my arrival. I am getting so burnt that my own Mammie won’t know me soon” (AB-VW *Dagboek* IV 28 May 1901: 84). Remarks of this kind have been routinely excised from Het Concentratie-kamp, with the emphasis on Brandt-Van Warmelo’s concern for others rather than her own behaviour, appearance or comfort.

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<sup>63</sup> “de patient, een jonge man, in een erg uitgeteerden toestand; en naderhand moest ik bij hem blijven”

The case of Johanna Brandt-Van Warmelo's Het Concentratie-kamp van Irene is interesting and exemplary in several ways. Firstly, there are complex layers of rewriting and translation behind the production of the published book which point to its strongly mediated and reworked status, although these have been effaced in the published book, which is presented and has subsequently been read as 'my diary, written in the camp itself'. Secondly, it illustrates the ways in which language choice and translation meshed as a series of interconnected political concerns around women's testimonies. Brandt-Van Warmelo's pronouncements on the key importance of 'the taal question' directly related to her choice to translate her Irene book into Dutch; and as a way of expressing her political position it also influenced the details of how the translation process was carried out. Brandt-Van Warmelo's proto-nationalism contributed to the 'meaning made' in the translated text, with the book itself presented as the unmediated diary of a young woman written at the time and Brandt-Van Warmelo constructed as a brave, uncomplaining, experienced professional carer and proto-nationalist heroine. As Bassnett has pointed out, "translation can be used so blatantly for ideological manipulation" (Bassnett 1998: 39), and such manipulation is extensively apparent in the translation and rewriting of Het concentratie-kamp van Irene.

### **Translating Sarah Raal: Post/Memory, 'New Nationalism' and Translation**

'Ideological manipulation' is a strong phrase which implies specific intent, of which there is plentiful evidence concerning Brandt-Van Warmelo's role as a translator and cultural entrepreneur. However, as I commented earlier, all translation work is located in a specific social, cultural and political context which impacts on the translation process. In present-day South Africa, the centenary of the South African War has prompted many statements drawing parallels between the experiences of Boer people during this war and

the sufferings of black people subsequently, as outlined in Chapter One. ‘Race’ matters are a considerable concern, then, and present-time translations of Boer women’s testimonies must necessarily grapple to some degree or another with their frequent and largely taken for granted racisms. I discuss this here concerning an English translation published in 2000 of Sarah Raal’s 1938 explicitly nationalist and highly racialised testimony of her wartime experiences.

As part of the 1999-2002 centenary events, Raal’s 1938 Met die Boere in die Veld was reprinted in Afrikaans and also an English translation entitled The Lady Who Fought was published, with both of these new editions bearing a preface written by Anne Emslie. Raal’s book was originally written and published in the context of the Great Trek centenary celebrations of 1938, with her nationalist intentions made explicitly clear in her Foreword, as indicated in Chapter Two.<sup>64</sup> Furthermore, Met die Boere contains many instances of Raal’s problematic treatment of ‘race’ matters (for present-day readers), including her involvement in the shooting of a black man suspected of killing a member of the commando she travelled with.<sup>65</sup> However, in its 2000 incarnation, this book has not only been translated but has also been reinterpreted and re-presented as the story of a brave, unconventional Boer woman who broke free of the traditional gender constraints of her times to participate in a glorious struggle for *volk en vryheid* [nation and freedom], with her problematic treatment of ‘race’ politics for the post-1994 reader simply ignored in both Emslie’s Preface and in the book’s translation and presentation overall.

In this Preface to the English translation, Emslie uncritically eulogises Raal as a proto-feminist heroine, commenting for example that “It is no surprise that Sarah Raal became a heroine among her own people ... As a woman who assumed the right to fight like a man for what she held precious, she defied conventional gender roles” (Raal 2000:

<sup>64</sup> As mentioned in Chapter One, prior to its 1938 publication, Raal’s book was serialised in Saturday editions of *Die Burger* newspaper from 5 December 1936 until 6 February 1937.

<sup>65</sup> See Raal 1938/2000: 57.

1), and “The ‘lady who fought’ is to be much admired for her daring, her courage, her humanity, her heart” (Raal 2000: 4). In this ‘feminist recovery project’ approach to her book, high praise is given to Raal for stepping out of expected gender behaviours, and her actions are presented as completely admirable because she defied the British and is seen as somehow championing the general run of oppressed Boer women. It sees all transgressive behaviour by women as by definition admirable, by implication even when this includes murder, and it ignores any ethical or political assessments of the book’s contents and in particular how ‘race’ matters are presented in it.

However, there are even more troubling aspects of the 2000 recovery and reinvention of Raal concerning how her highly nationalist original Foreword has been translated. My own translation from Afrikaans to English of the last paragraph of the original 1938 Foreword is:

“My hope and expectation is that it will be worth the effort and will contribute to awakening love of fatherland and awareness of nation in our young generation and draw the ties closer that bind us together as an Afrikaner people” (Raal 1938: *Voorwoord* [Foreword])<sup>66</sup>

The 2000 translation of it is:

“My hope and expectation is that the effort will prove worthwhile, and that it will contribute to an awakening sense of patriotism and nationhood in the younger generation, and strengthen the ties which bind us together as an Afrikaner people” (Raal 2000: 5)

In the 2000 English translation the word ‘*vaderlandsliefde*’ has been translated as ‘patriotism’, which removes the 1938 historical connotations of the literal ‘love of fatherland’, which it seems very clear was intended by Raal and was a phrase denoting the strong German influences on more hawkish sections of nationalism at the time. Also, the

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<sup>66</sup> “*My hoop en verwagting is dat die moeite werd sal wees en daartoe sal bydra om die vaderlandsliefde en volksbewussyn by ons jong geslag aan te wakker en die bande nouer te trek wat ons bind as ‘n Afrikanervolk.*”

literal meaning of the word ‘*volksbewussyn*’ is ‘awareness of the nation’ or ‘national consciousness’, which could be translated as equivalent to the present-day meaning of ‘nationhood’, because there was at the time no specific Afrikaans word for nationhood or nationalism. The English word as ‘*nasieskap*’ was later incorporated for ‘nationhood’, but in the 1930s terms such as ‘*volksbewussyn*’ would have been used to convey the more diffuse meaning these political convictions still had at this time. Interestingly in this regard, translator Smalberger has used the formulation “that it will contribute to an awakening sense of patriotism and nationhood in the younger generation” (2000: 5), with ‘patriotism’ considerably diffusing the 1930s Nationalist-Socialist-influenced flavour of Raal’s original, and with ‘nationhood’ over-emphasising the sense of a specific nationalism which was in fact the product of political activity only in the years from 1938 to 1949. Moreover, throughout the English translation of the book the word ‘Kaffers’ that appears so repeatedly in Raal’s original has been translated as ‘Africans’. This obscures, indeed actively disguises, the ‘race’ politics that render Raal’s book so problematic for a post-1994 reader. My conclusion, then, is that Smalberger’s translation vitiates Raal’s treatment of ‘race’ as well as the Germanic and indeed fascist connotations of the original and also dehistoricises the political framework of Raal’s Foreword by using currently more acceptable terms to make her book more ‘palatable’ to a present-day audience, an impact confirmed by Emslie’s rather gushing and unthinking acceptance of Raal as a proto-feminist heroine.

There are signs that the sanitised and ‘politically correct’ version of Raal’s book produced by Smalberger’s translation and Emslie’s Preface has been effective in reinventing the book and its author. A review of the translation printed in the Cape Argus newspaper on 1 May 2000 states: “[T]he truth is *The Lady Who Fought* is not a bitter polemic skewed to ideological purposes, but an engaging, plainly told story of a

courageous, but also fearful young woman's often lonely struggle in a war..." (Morris 2000: 9). And a similarly uncritical review entitled "Gripping Account of Boer Woman at War" appeared the same month in another English-language daily, the Eastern Province Herald (Schoeman 2000). Even before the translation and republication of the book, Van Heyningen had included Raal's "autobiographical account" as a 'woman's voice' from the South African War, commenting contra Emslie's positioning of Raal as a proto-feminist, that, "In the last resort, however courageous and independent she may have been, Raal's place in the Boer commando was constrained by gender ... [it was] her own acceptance of her gender-role which prevented from rejoining the Boer forces" (Van Heyningen 1999: 36-37). Most recently an extended extract of Met Die Boere has appeared in a collection of South African women's life writing, and this presents Raal as an admirable anti-imperialist agent and also entirely overlooks the 'race' politics of her writings (Coullie 2004). The translation and reviewing of Raal's book must be located and understood within the context of the centenary celebrations; and as discussed in Chapter One, one of the strands that emerged from the centenary literature was the development of a 'new nationalist' paradigm which depicted the war as an instance of the 'shared suffering' of Boers and black people at the hands of the British. As Cuthbertson and Jeeves have commented:

"Perhaps a new myth is in the making in which the shared experience of 'atrocities' at the hands of an alien Empire and its ruthless generals and uncaring bureaucrats is pressed into service to promote bi-racial nationalism ... If such an approach requires omission of inconvenient facts, there should be no surprise in that at all" (Cuthbertson and Jeeves 1999: 5)

In the translation of Raal's book, these 'inconvenient facts' concern her treatment of 'race' matters, and so in the book's new presentation these are ignored and glossed over or actually fudged, as for instance in Emslie's comment: "She despised ... the Black upstarts who threw their weight around on the farm where she was a virtual prisoner, yet she reciprocated the loyal devotion of many Black farm labourers and received steadfast

protection from those not intimidated by the occupying forces” (Raal 2000: 4). Here black people are depicted as the ‘natural’ allies of the Boers, with this sometimes reversed, but only because of the ‘intimidating’ and corrupting British influence. Emslie’s re-presentation of Raal, however, largely disregards ‘race’ matters, for to bring these into the foreground and fully interrogate and historicise Raal’s treatment of them would shatter the ‘new nationalist’ paradigm of shared suffering and its accompanying depiction of the ex-Republics as havens of racial harmony disrupted only by British intervention.

The reinvention of Raal in the 2000 translation of her book brings my arguments about post/memory full circle, returning these to my starting point in Chapter One, where I traced the development of ‘the history’ in nationalist terms and indicated how much of the centenary literature has left essential aspects of ‘the history’ unquestioned and intact. The translation of Raal’s 1938 book as the entirely admirable story of ‘the lady who fought’ underlines how little the centenary ‘re-evaluations’ have challenged old interpretations or generated new ones, and it also confirms the arguments I have made here about the translating context as a crucial influence on the translation process and the meaning made of the text. I now turn to consider more directly how the translation processes that produced Boer women’s testimonies relate to my overarching concern with post/memory.

The translation process underlies every aspect of Boer women’s testimonies and the ways in which these have been produced in the public domain, and it lies at the very centre of the construction of post/memory. Indeed, in many respects post/memory is itself a form of translation, with multiple representations in a variety of remembering contexts over time translating ‘memory’ into post/memory, so that “post/memory and ‘memory itself’ overlap and cannot easily be prised apart” (Stanley 2005a, in press), in much the same way that ‘translation’ and ‘original’ cannot always easily be ‘prised apart’ concerning Boer women’s testimonies. In this chapter, I have discussed translation as a process of

mediation by a situated and thus motivated translator, and which results in the production of a text that is both distinctive and ‘in its own right’ and yet inseparable from its originating (con)text. I have indicated that translation removes individual idiosyncrasy, signs of simplistic or semi-literate writing and non-political rebelliousness, and thereby creates coherence, uniformity, and ‘correct’ polished accounts that tow ‘a line’ and are fully political. Translation transmutes the messy real-life accounts of Boer women into ideologically clear-cut testimonies.

Translation, like post/memory, cannot be divorced from its origins and context of production. Through exploring this, it has become clear to me that the notion of ‘the original’ is a flawed and problematic one with regard to Boer women’s testimonies, for even texts that purport to be ‘originals’ are based on other earlier forms of translation, including those from talk to text. Like post/memory, translation is always mediated, motivated and indirect and is produced by “an imaginative investment and creation” (Hirsch 1997: 22). In the same way that “all memory is ‘post-slash-memory’, ‘post/memory’, because almost immediately marked by representational forms and separated by the absolutism of passing time from the originating events” (Stanley 2005a, in press), so too all Boer women’s testimonies are translations, similarly ‘marked’ by the passing of time and by the representational forms they are expressed in and translations between these. Moreover, both translations and post/memory change over time according to the context in which they are read, repeated or interpreted, for as Venuti has commented about translation more widely, “Meaning is a plural and contingent relation, not an unchanging unified essence” (Venuti 1995: 18). However and crucially, it is not just that translation is ‘like’ post/memory, but that cultural entrepreneurs producing post/memory always translated, to produce ‘what was’ as instead ‘how it should be’.

The politicised translations of Boer women's testimonies for publication have subsumed and replaced any 'originals' and are a manifestation of the process whereby post/memory replaces and subsumes 'real' memory. Hirsch has explained that her term 'postmemory' is meant to "convey its temporal and qualitative difference from survivor memory ... its secondary memory quality ... its basis in displacement, its belatedness" (Hirsch 1999: 8). Translation too has its basis in displacement, and is temporally removed from original writings. However, like Stanley's analytical conceptualisation of post/memory, translations are in fact presented as 'the thing itself' – as women's actual, referential testimonies, with their 'secondary quality' rigorously removed from sight. Thus the unchanging and 'time-free' characteristics of post/memory discussed in Chapters Two, Three and Four are produced out of the translating and editorialising activities outlined in this chapter.

Crucially, the retrospectively re/worked aspects of post/memory of the war and the camps as a central component of 'the history' of Afrikanerdom has been strongly informed by the interpretative work of translating Boer women's testimonies, which has sought to make clear-cut political meanings of these in the context of the developing concerns of proto-nationalism and then nationalism in South Africa, with the recent surfacing of 'new nationalism' both concerned with appropriating women's camp testimonies and with adding a new twist to the meanings ascribed to these: "This publication is dedicated to the memory of all the women of South Africa who endured suffering and hardship during the Anglo-Boer War" (Raal 2000: title page dedication).<sup>67</sup> Here Emslie's dedication of Raal's book conflates black and white suffering as 'equal' and represents this as the basis of a shared past upon which 'new nationalism' can be built. Similarly in his comments about women's camp writings as 'vestiges of trauma', Snyman

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<sup>67</sup> This dedication also perpetuates the ongoing emphasis on women's suffering over that of children, of whom the death of more than 22, 000 surely represents 'the brunt of the war'.

writes: “Let us, therefore, learn to listen to the voice of the victim. Somehow Emily Hobhouse’s *War Without Glamour* ... did not find resonance in our society. We have a second chance with the report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, published in 1998” (Snyman 2002: 14). Here not only does Snyman fail to register how very strongly War Without Glamour and all women’s camp testimonies did in fact ‘resonate’ in ‘the history’ of the Afrikaner past, but he then goes on to explicitly equate the sufferings presented in War Without Glamour with those presented in the Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, thereby paralleling black and white suffering. And thirdly, he tacitly associates the ‘failure’ to listen to ‘the voices of the victims’ of the South African War as a direct factor in causing subsequent suffering to victims of apartheid.

This ‘new nationalism’, in which the role of the Afrikaners in apartheid is excused or justified on the basis of past ‘sufferings’, finds considerable expression in Giliomee’s (2003) The Afrikaner’s: Biography of a People, which I discussed briefly in Chapter Three in relation to its failure to fully explore the role of women in the construction of Afrikaner nationalism. Another troubling aspect of the book is its re/creation of a ‘new nationalism’ through an analysis of apartheid which amounts to an exoneration of Afrikaner nationalism and the far right for its role in this. In his highly critical review, Furlong refers to the “controversial perspective on Afrikaner nationalism and apartheid that underpins this book, in which explanation at times becomes defence”, and notes that “It may seem surprising that the author, a noted critic of apartheid, appears to have embraced Afrikaner nationalism of a sort” (Furlong 2003: 207). Giliomee certainly shows marked a reluctance to pin the blame for apartheid on Afrikaner nationalism or the radical hard-right, instead proposing that “the peculiar feature of apartheid as an ideology was its attempt to reconcile the demands for white survival and justice” (Giliomee 2003: 221). This is theme of apartheid as a ‘survival strategy’ is at the heart of ‘new nationalism’,

in which the sufferings of women in the concentration camps, the 'meddling' British influence, and the 'malevolent' activities of black people during and after the war, are seen to vindicate and naturalise what followed as merely a 'defence mechanism', and to speciously and ahistorically conflate black and white suffering as the footing for a new nationhood. The post/memory process continues.

## Conclusion

At the outset of the research for this thesis, I assumed that it would focus on examining women's published and unpublished testimonies, diaries and letters, in order to then explore their understandings and representations of their experiences of the concentration system during the South African War. My M.A. research primarily used women's personal writings and concerned settler women's experiences on the Eastern Cape frontier in nineteenth century South Africa in this way; and so my overall initial interest therefore lay in understanding and interpreting women's historical experiences as inscribed in their personal writings. However, as my research on Boer women's writings unfolded, it became increasingly clear that, apart from letters written at the time of the war, Boer women's camp writings did not primarily concern their personal, individual experiences and interpretations, but were rather strongly politicised, and evidently orchestrated by cultural entrepreneurs as a key part of the Afrikaner (proto-) nationalist project. Succinctly, I came to the view that these were in fact not personal writings in the usual sense of the term.

Certainly the war was a time of extreme hardship for the great majority of Boer women, and the deaths in the concentration camps were terrible and unnecessary and undoubtedly impacted strongly on all those who witnessed and felt the repercussions of these; for instance, there were women who experienced the deaths of several of their children in the matter of a few awful weeks, remembrance of which would not be easily forgotten. However these women were those who, in Hobhouse's term, bore 'the brunt of the war', but with a few exceptions they were not the women who wrote 'Boer women's testimonies', although some of them did write letters at the time, sent to absent men who were on commando or prisoners of war. Only a minority of women whose testimonies appear in the collections by Hobhouse,

Neethling and Postma experienced the death of a child or of another family member.<sup>1</sup> Instead, the testimonies that dominate across the collections (both those published and those unpublished but archived ones) are those that make a political point and ‘fit’ with (proto-) nationalism and ‘the history’ which supports this. Consequently, the thesis that has resulted here is very different from the one I had initially envisaged, and in my rethinking of women’s camp writings and as explained in its opening chapters, I have found the idea of post/memory an extremely useful and effective analytical tool, as I shall shortly discuss in more detail.

Overall this thesis makes three original and distinctive contributions to historicising the concentration camps of the South African War and their representation over time. Firstly, I have made use of and brought together a very much wider range of women’s published camp accounts than are usually referenced in the relevant literature, where a handful of the same texts are repeatedly referred to. Moreover, I have uncovered in archives some 120 unpublished women’s testimonies that have not previously been referenced, and my expanded notion of testimony around the idea of ‘attestation’ has exponentially increased the number of testimonies that now ‘count’. Secondly, while to date ‘the history’ has treated women’s camp testimonies as entirely factual, referential and morally straightforward, I have critically interrogated and historicised these, and closely examined the context in which they were produced. Thirdly, using the tool of post/memory I have theorised women’s testimonies in a new way that has not previously been done, apart from in the work of Stanley, and it to the use of post/memory as an analytical device that I now turn.

In Family Frames, Marianne Hirsch proposed the term ‘postmemory’ in relation to the “indirect and fragmentary nature” of second-generation memories of the children of Holocaust

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<sup>1</sup> See Stanley and Dampier 2005: 102. Women testimony-writers who experienced the death of a child or children in camp number five out of 31 in War Without Glamour (Hobhouse 1927), six out of 29 in Vergeten? (Neethling 1917) and 12 out 39 in Stemme Uit Die Vrouekampe (Postma 1925).

survivors, or “other second-generation memories of cultural or collective traumatic events and experiences”, presenting this as “a powerful and very particular form of memory precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation. This is not to say that memory itself is unmediated, but that it is more directly connected to the past” (Hirsch 1997: 22). In contrast to ‘memory itself’, Hirsch maintains that second-generation postmemory is characterised by “its basis in displacement, its vicariousness and belatedness” (Hirsch 2001: 220). Subsequently, Stanley has questioned Hirsch’s tying of postmemory exclusively to second-generations, and has reconceptualised not only ‘postmemory’ but also ‘memory in general’ as ‘post-slash-memory’, a term which recognises that “people who directly experience traumatic events too are subject to the retrospective re/workings of memory, for almost as soon as something is experienced, post/memory and ‘memory itself’ overlap and cannot easily be prised apart” (Stanley 2005a, in press). Likening the assumed referentiality of photographs with the assumed referentiality or ‘directness’ of ‘memory itself’, Stanley argues that

“it is important to take fully account the ‘mediations’ of memory through the effects of time, to emphasise that ‘now’ has a fundamental impact on remembrance of ‘then’, and to insist on the highly partial ‘camera’s eye’ viewpoint of the remembering subject ... there is a highly fractured and complex link between ‘then’ and ‘now’ – time passing, the vagaries of memory, where the remembering person was situated at the time, the interpretational specifics which trigger particular acts of remembrance, are all involved here” (Stanley 2005a, in press)

In examining the origins, production and reading of Boer women’s testimonies, I have drawn on Stanley’s revised concept of post/memory as an analytical tool which usefully enables women’s camp testimonies to be understood as part of “the successive production of an almost canonical and constantly reworked version of the past” (Stanley 2005a, in press). Exploring the complex relationship between the ‘then’ of the events of the war and the camps and the

‘now’ of women’s remembering and writing, and paying attention to the mediating factors that Stanley outlines above – “time passing, the vagaries of memory, where the remembering person was situated at the time, the interpretational specifics which trigger particular acts of remembrance” – has enabled me to add to the idea of post/memory in ways I address in the remainder of this conclusion.

Throughout the thesis, I have traced and historicised post/memory of the concentration camps of the South African War as something orchestrated and produced to support the formation and development of (proto-) nationalism and ‘the history’ of appropriate facts about the Afrikaner past which legitimated this. I have pointed up the gaps or discrepancies between ‘the events’ and ‘the history’ as represented in women’s testimonies – insofar these can be ‘prised apart’, to use Stanley’s phrase – by paying attention to the temporal context in which women’s testimonies were produced. Post/memory, as I have shown across a number of chapters, emerged almost as soon as ‘the events’ of the war and camps were experienced and represented. While letters written in the present-tense immediacy of the war have a specific purchase on time and space that sets them apart from later forms of writing, even in these there are hints of the mythologised stories – of children punitively denied food or ‘wrenched’ with evil intent from their mother’s arms into hospitals – that were later to be re/told as central elements of the emergent post/memory, as general factual occurrences rather than as individual events interpreted in one particular way. I have emphasised that post/memory emerged as curiously ‘fully formed’ in the immediate aftermath of the war and, equally curiously, shows few signs of change thereafter. By 1905, and following the activities of women involved in the proto-nationalist women’s networks and groupings which were formalised post-war, Mrs. Neethling’s (1903) Should We Forget?, Mrs. De La Rey’s (1903) A

Woman's Wanderings, Johanna Van Helsdingen's (1905) Vroueenleed, as well as Johanna Brandt-Van Warmelo's (1905) Het Concentratie-Kamp van Irene, had all been published. Each of these propounded (in different ways) variants of the proto-nationalist line in which the camp deaths were depicted as the result of deliberate mistreatment by the British or even tantamount to murder, while the Boer people were portrayed universally and without exception as the entirely innocent and morally righteous victims of malicious actions by the British and by black people. These early women's accounts indicate *post/memory* as interposed nearly instantly, almost 'all at once', and this is a point I return to later.

From the start, the events of the war and the camps and their subsequent representation were in the hands of an elite minority of highly politicised women cultural entrepreneurs who monopolised and manipulated these as part of developing proto-nationalism, something not known before and which my research has revealed. Even during the war itself, some of these women were 'marked' by their political allegiances – for instance, the camp register at Pietermaritzburg described Mrs. Neethling as 'dangerous', Johanna Van Warmelo was (correctly) suspected of political motives in her work at Irene, and Rabie-Van der Merwe was recorded as 'a dangerous undesirable'. Post-war, these women then organised themselves around and through the women's parties, congresses and federations; and their ideological convictions, as cultural entrepreneurs and cultural workers involved in producing women's testimonies, were crucial in shaping *post/memory* production. Even though she was by no means a proto-nationalist, or indeed *any* kind of nationalist, Hobhouse too was linked into these networks through her connections with key women such as Mrs. Steyn and also Mrs. Neethling, and it was through these (proto-) nationalist channels that she was primarily able to distribute her books. Moreover, the large majority of women whose testimonies she included

were those by elite Boer women well-placed in republican and then proto-nationalist circles. So while Hobhouse was not explicitly or intentionally promoting (proto-) nationalism in her work on Boer women's accounts – her objectives were firmly pacifist – the net effect in terms of producing post/memory was the same. In demonstrating the importance of women's post/memory work around the orchestration and production of testimonies and their role as cultural entrepreneurs and political agents in the (proto-) nationalist project, and also the strongly politicised content and tone of women's camp testimonies and individual accounts, my research consequently shows that women's role in Afrikaner nationalism needs a radical rethinking. The failure to recognise or analyse women as active agents of nationalism, or the confinement of their role under the *volksmoeder* rubric, now requires considerable redress.

For Stanley, a key factor mediating between the 'then' of events and the 'now' of 'remembering' and writing concerns the "interpretational specifics which trigger particular acts of remembrance" (Stanley 2005a, in press). For the large majority of women's testimonies, this 'trigger' was the active solicitation of 'remembrances' by (proto-) nationalist cultural entrepreneurs, often many years or even decades after the war. While these testimonies were orchestrated and produced after the passing of time, it is the removal of time's passing that my research shows is a central part of the post/memory process. In this, the 'then' of events and the 'now' of remembering are conflated, thus 'taking time out' and making the past 'as it should be' are viewed from the present-tense 'now' of remembering and interpreting. The whole remembering and commemorative project concerning the war and the camps coheres around this seemingly 'time-free' version of the past, around a post/memory which renders 'what was' into 'how it should be'. Thus the camp *Gedenktuine* and *begraafsplase*, as well as women's testimonies, all seek to impose a neat and seamless

interpretation of these events that belies the messy, complex realities beneath the surface of this.<sup>2</sup> How has this been achieved and what are the primary manifestations of the post/memory process at work?

I have emphasised that, like all memory, post/memory always entails 'forgetting'. Post/memory of the war and the camps was produced by cultural entrepreneurs through structured 'forgetting' of those people, experiences or interpretations that clashed with their political ideologies – thus black people, Boer men in the camps, and those women who were British supporters, seen as apolitical or otherwise unsuitable for incorporation into the (proto-) nationalist canon, were 'forgotten'. This 'forgetting' is an ongoing aspect of post/memory that persists even now. Thus as part of 'new nationalism', a related sort of 'forgetting' is currently taking place – the racial (and racist) nature of the Boer Republics pre-war, the many black people who actively chose to support the British during the conflict, the often appalling treatment of black people by Boer commandos – all have been 'forgotten' as part of furthering the project of 'new nationalism' in which the war is re-presented as a heroic anti-colonial struggle by the Boer people, the suffering of Boers and black people in the camps is equated, and this in concert with the employment of black people during the war by the British, is seen to 'cause' and 'explain' and in this sense legitimate apartheid. This new 'forgetting' is a persuasive sign of the power and persistence of post/memory.

The 'forgetting' aspects of post/memory are shown by the almost total absence of 'alternative voices' on the camps – in 'the history', black people, Boer men in the camps and politically 'incorrect' or otherwise unsuitable women all remain silent. Those testimonies in

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<sup>2</sup> On the *Gedenktuine* and *begraafsplase* and their role in post/memory see Stanley 2002b, 2005a, in press. The 'imposing order on disorder' aspects of post/memory are in certain respects mirrored by aspects of apartheid ideology, which too sought to impose 'order' on seeming racial 'disorder'; however, as many commentators have noted, the considerably complex and messy realities of everyday life in South Africa never equated with 'total apartheid'.

the public domain all follow 'the line', emphasising the explicitly solicited, produced and politicised context of these as well as the ruthlessness of this process in excluding 'other' voices. Post/memory determines who can 'speak', what can be said and also the means by which it can be said, with written, published testimonies by politically 'correct' white Boer women dominant. Recognising this, and questioning post/memory's monopolisation on who can testify and in what ways, requires actively seeking out alternative forms of attestation, as well as people and experiences that do not fit the (proto-) nationalist canon. This brings into the foreground women's – and some men's – testimonies and experiences that are in effect 'outside' of post/memory and its processes. In addition, these examples of attestation I have 'recovered' and discussed show people in the camps as active agents – in petitions, testificates, letters of application and so on – and taken together these add up to something which subverts the prevailing post/memory in which it is just a handful of (proto-) nationalist heroines who can lay claim to agency. Expanding testimony as attestation in the way I have done shows agency in a variety of ordinary low-key ways that challenge depictions of women in the camps as helpless, stoically suffering victims, but also of course it challenges 'the facts' as canonised through published Boer women's testimonies.

I have also shown how post/memory was produced by translation in its broad sense, whereby cultural entrepreneurs transmuted 'what was' into instead 'how it should be'. Thus through translation, signs of illiteracy, political indifference, poverty or social and political divisiveness could be effaced, and instead full literacy, political activism, widespread affluence and social and political unity was thereby produced. Post/memory makes simple, neat and tidy what was complicated, messy and uncertain; it makes meanings clear-cut that were not and are still not clear-cut. Unlike postmemory, which is unsure that it remembers

‘correctly’, post/memory has its mind firmly made up about what happened and who was to blame. The uncertainty and open-endedness of the actual ‘present’ of the war and the camps is replaced in post/memory by a certain and closed perspective, reformulated over time and thus subject to ongoing but largely peripheral revision, for the core remains ‘the facts’.

In my view, post/memory is about producing ‘sameness’ and ‘a line’ through rehearsed narratives in which the past is rewritten, reordered and retold according to the demands of the present, but with each retelling evincing some ‘variations on the theme’ around Tonkin’s (1992) rhetorical embellishments of story-telling, as shown in the retelling of the Brandfort protest. Indeed story-telling and myth-making are all closely related to the development and advancement of post/memory. Post/memory too is highly selective, and is marked by an absence of the specific, the personal and the particularised, and is dominated by the generalised and the political. Through the post/memory process, a dramatised, morally dichotomised, clear-cut version of the past is established, in which the low-key, messy ordinary and the routine everyday are ‘forgotten’ and literally overwritten. Post/memory is not about individual everyday experiences, but rather concerns the collective ‘we the *volk*’, and later the state, which subsumes individual experience in favour of politically-acceptable generalisations. The process is a decontextualising and dehistoricising one, and it severs representations from the contexts of their production. It generalises, universalises, totalises and de-particularises, and produces flatness as well as sameness.

While Hirsch maintains that postmemory is distinguished from ‘memory itself’ because based on ‘imaginative investment’ rather than ‘recollection’, Boer women’s testimonies show that all memory is, as Stanley proposes, post/memory, in the sense that all memory is based on or is at least shaped by imaginative investment, even when (or perhaps

particularly when) it is grounded in 'recollection'. As it emerged, post/memory was not only mediated by time intervening between events and 'remembering', but also by other women's testimonies and 'the history' of the war and the camps as propagated in (proto-) nationalist circles – in other words, by what Summerfield (2004) refers to as the 'patina of postscripts and historical rewritings'. Post/memory shows that 'recollection' is quickly overlaid with retelling, myths and stories in a retrospectively re/worked version of the past produced by imaginative investment and thus motivated by the requirements of the remembering present. However, at the same time, post/memory also *always involves truth-claims as well as moral claims, and is* utterly confident of its 'actual memory' status. Thus in Onthou! and Met Die Boere in die Veld, in women's sworn statements and testimonies, and in the retrospectively written camp 'diaries', strong truth claims are made alongside strong claims to total moral righteousness. These claims have seldom if ever been interrogated by 'the history', which has largely affirmed and repeated the claims made in women's testimonies as 'fact', indeed to the extent that post/memory has taken the place of and actually become 'memory itself'. It is only when their contexts of production are attended to that these truth-claims and moral claims are shown to be problematic. And this of course points up the necessity of treating all texts critically and in context, and refuses the assumption that testimonial texts or 'women's voices' are necessarily referential or morally 'good'. Post/memory always involves some 'passing off' aspects; while it is positioned as referential, factual, authentic and morally right, it is actually a selective interpretation presented as fact, produced by imaginative investment and motivated by the requirements of the present-tense of remembering and writing.

Cornelia Brink (2000) has highlighted the ways in which iconic, canonical photographs of the Holocaust have in a sense come to stand for and have thus 'replaced' the events

themselves. In my view, post/memory of the concentration camp deaths plays a similar role in replacing 'the thing itself' with the iconic, the canonical and the mythologised. Post/memory is a highly produced version of the past that re/works originating events in accordance with current interests and concerns. It replaces the spontaneous and 'at the time' with the crafted and the retrospective, while simultaneously presenting itself and being perceived and read as referential of 'memory itself', with the crafted, mediated aspects of this 'unseen' or ignored. Post/memory is a 'take' on the past, but a selective 'take' mediated by the perspective and context of both the moment of writing and of re/reading, as well as by the passing of time, the very passing of time that post/memory attempts to transcend.

The complex temporal dimensions of post/memory are central to grasping its processes. As already indicated, a key device of post/memory is its 'vanishing' of the temporal space between events and their subsequent representation, apparently fusing these into seamless, authentic 'memory'. This evading or effacing of time is clearly demonstrated by the re-written 'diaries' and also by the layers of translation behind what are presented as 'original' women's testimonies. Part of making the temporal gap between 'then' of events and 'now' of representation 'vanish' is to make the political landscape, interests and activities of the war correspond with those of the (proto-) nationalist moment of writing, with the retelling of the Brandfort protest and Onthou! both exemplifying this. Here, post/memory 'freezes' time and makes it static; thus 'we the Boer nation' is conflated in 1905, 1917 or 1938 with 'we the Boer nation' of 1902, with signs of time passing, change and the re/working of the past kept hidden or actively excised, to maintain and entrench this fabricated continuity. However, if temporality is attentively attended to, the slips between now/then and past/present that characterise post/memory can be interestingly discerned, as shown for example in my

discussion of Tant' Alie. I have argued that, concerning the 'words on the page' of the relevant texts, post/memory emerges almost 'all at once' and then remains strangely flat and unchanging. However, the context in which post/memory is re/read, perceived, and re/interpreted does change over time, and markedly so; and this impacts on the temporally-located ways in which post/memory is construed and capitalised on at particular points in time. This helps account for the 'words on the page' same interpretation of the past produced by post/memory as part of Afrikaner (proto-) nationalism being re-used in more or less the same form in 1999-2002, in the context of building a new South African nationhood. Temporality in post/memory is slippery indeed; attempting to pin it down, define its limits or trace its workings according to consecutive stages invariably indicates time in post/memory as complex, multilayered but also 'flat' and intractable, but with the changed context involving significantly different meanings being read onto these texts.

I have stressed throughout that of key importance in making sense of post/memory is attention to its context of production. In keeping with this argument, in the final part of this conclusion I shall briefly reflect on my own context of re-reading and writing, because this adds another layer to post/memory as a reworked version of the past already thick with meaning-making. Broadly, there are two aspects of my present-day context that have had particular bearing on my perception and analysis of Boer women's testimonies, both of which I have alluded to in previous chapters. The first concerns the political, social and intellectual climate of post-1994 South Africa, which is marked by ongoing efforts to historicise and make sense of South Africa's troubled racial past. My examination of Boer women's testimonies is located in this context, and is inevitably shaped by this wider impulse to detail and understand the origins and workings of racism, segregation and apartheid. Recognising that Boer

women's camp testimonies were orchestrated and produced as a key part of the Afrikaner (proto-) nationalist project, and situating their claims to moral right as part of the history of South African 'race' politics, as I have done in this thesis makes it impossible for me as a post-1994 reader to accept the claims made in these testimonies as unproblematically 'true', or to perceive the women who wrote them as morally 'right'. And this is especially so given that many of their claims to persecution are rooted in the notion of a just racial hierarchy and white supremacy thrown into unacceptable disarray by the war.

The second aspect of my present-day re-reading and writing context I want to highlight concerns the 'new nationalism' that has developed around the 1999-2002 centenary of the war. This 'new nationalism' is a repackaging of 'the history' in order to generate and promote an inclusive post-1994 South African nationalism, and my view is that it provides a crafted and partial version of the past for (new) nationalist purposes, in a disconcertingly similar way to the Afrikaner (proto-) nationalists of the 1920s, '30s and '40s. And although some aspects of post/memory of the concentration camp deaths have been reinvented and adapted to fit the requirements of 'new nationalism', nevertheless as an ideologically-shaped and highly produced account of the past severed from its originating events, it remains largely intact, albeit now used as 'equal suffering' of Afrikaners and Africans in the service of the 'new nationalism'. Indeed, two specific substantive components of post/memory – the depiction of the war as a laudable anti-colonial struggle by the Boer people, and the portrayal of the British intervention as the sole source of all subsequent discord and inequality in South Africa – remain almost entirely intact, with black suffering in the camps now hitched to 'the history' of white experiences of and suffering in the camps.

It is the larger context – the wider post-1994 project to historicise and understand South Africa's racial past – that shapes my response to post/memory in its latest incarnation as 'new nationalism'. If there is anything that the post-apartheid moment should engender, it is a scepticism of glib or sanitising explanations of apartheid, such as those propounded by 'new nationalism' in depicting apartheid as a 'defence mechanism' and playing down the history of conflict between white Afrikaners and black people by emphasising their 'shared suffering' in the concentration camps. Moreover, the post-1994 milieu should provoke a healthy suspicion of all nationalist projects, and a wariness of the related idealisations of the past to fit present circumstances and views that typically accompany the development of nationalism. In my view, recycling the post/memory that served and helped propagate a highly racialised Afrikaner nationalism, so as to now serve an all-inclusive South African nationalism, is deeply troubling. It also indicates that a true historicization of the remembering and commemoration project associated with the war and the camps is only just beginning. Alongside this, it seems to me that post/memory's persistence and tenaciousness of life in the shape of 'new nationalism' demonstrates the power of its creation of a mythologised past that is far from 'over and done with' in South Africa. This post/memory still has currency today and continues to exert a strong influence over what are accepted as the facts and 'the history', and my thesis makes a small contribution to understanding its dynamics over time.

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