

## CHAPTER 10

## NATAL AFRIKANER WOMEN AND THE ANGLO-BOER WAR

The role and plight of the Republican Afrikaner women have always formed an integral, and sometimes even central part of the historiography of the Anglo-Boer War. The emphasis in the large number of academic and popular works and published memoirs invariably falls on the suffering of Afrikaner women and children in the concentration camps. Despite this volume of work, Helen Bradford<sup>1</sup> maintains that one of the seminal questions faced by the historiography of the Anglo-Boer War is the neglect of the unique war experiences of women.

One group previously neglected was Natal Afrikaner women who formed a stratified and diverse group. Some, like MJ Zietsman of Snelster near Estcourt, whose daughter, the widow Wallace had been to England and who kept thoroughbred Pointers, were wealthy and sophisticated.<sup>2</sup> Another, like ME Kock, read Tennyson and Shakespeare,<sup>3</sup> while Emily Pieters owned 20 bound music books for playing the piano and harmonium.<sup>4</sup> On the other end of the social scale were women like Annie Katrina Slabbert of Dundee who sewed and took in laundry to survive.<sup>5</sup> These class differences were underpinned by the patriarchal system in which the women functioned. Married women had the least power and received little support or recognition from the authorities. In contrast widows wielded much more economic and political power and were also able to generate letters and other documents.<sup>6</sup> However, regardless of their educational, social, economic or marital status, most Natal Afrikaner women suffered, in one way or another, during the war.

### 10.1 Military related involvement in the Anglo-Boer War by Natal Afrikaner women

One of the lasting controversies surrounding the Anglo-Boer War relates to the military role played by Boer women in the conflict. Historian Fransjohan Pretorius managed to demythologise claims by American journalist Howard C Hillegas and other authors that “scores of Boer women” fought on the side of the commandos.<sup>7</sup> A photograph of 15 women and seven children, dressed up in their Sunday best, posing with rifles and bandoliers in front of the Newcastle Town Hall, links Natal Afrikaner women to this myth. This photograph appears in *A few months with the Boers* by Sophia Izedinova with a caption stating that these women from Newcastle, thus Natal Afrikaner women, took up

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1. H Bradford, Gentleman and Boers. Afrikaner Nationalism, Gender, and Colonial Warfare in the South African War, in G Cuthbertson, A Grundlingh, and M-L Suttie (eds.), *Writing a wider war. Rethinking gender, race, and identity in the South African War, 1899-1902*, pp.37-67.

2. PAR, CSO 2911: Invasion Losses Enquiry Commission: Claim by MP Wallace, 6.4.1900.

3. PAR, CSO 2888: Invasion Losses Enquiry Commission: Claim by ME Kock, 24.10.1902.

4. PAR, CSO 2899: Invasion Losses Enquiry Commission: Claim by E Pieters, 18.4.1901.

5. PAR, CSO 2905: Invasion Losses Enquiry Commission: Claim by AK Slabbert, 6.12.1900.

6. The experiences of Natal Afrikaner women in the concentration camp system were dealt with in Chapter 9.

7. F Pretorius, *Kommandolewe tydens die Anglo-Boereoorlog 1899-1902*, pp.347-350; P Marais, *Die vrou in die Anglo-Boereoorlog 1899-1902*, pp.162-167, is generally a summary of the work done by Pretorius.

arms.<sup>8</sup> The original photograph, titled “Dutch Amazons at Newcastle Natal” was taken by RE Gell on 16 December 1899,<sup>9</sup> possibly during commemorations of Dingaan’s Day. This would serve to explain the elaborate dress and posed nature of the photograph.<sup>10</sup> In fact it must have been a festive weekend in Newcastle since President Paul Kruger had declared Sunday 17 December 1899 a day of thanksgiving for the Boer victories at Stormberg, Colenso and Magersfontein. The main religious service in Newcastle was conducted by Reverend Prozesky who preached from Exodus 15: 9-13, with the key text being: “It is God who humbles the proud.”<sup>11</sup>

How then did Natal Afrikaner women really feel about the war? During the visit of General Piet Joubert to Helpmekaar on 13 December 1899, the 22 Natal Afrikaner women listed in Table 10.1 presented the following address to him:

Highly respected General, on this occasion of your visit to the laager of the Natal Burghers here, we, the undersigned, female members of the families of these burghers, heartily welcome your Honour to Helpmekaar. We gloty (*sic*) in your material genius again proved in this war and heartily congratulate you on the brilliant victories gained by our people under your direction and with the arms blessed by the Almighty. We pray God’s blessing to continue with us and that He may continue to grant you the wisdom and strength to bring under His higher assistance this difficult war to a prosperous conclusion, and that you may be in a position to speedily return to your home as victor, covered with the thanks of the whole Africander people, and we hope that then also will be fulfilled the desire of all true Africanders, namely unison of the different states of South Africa into a united South Africa under the Boer flag, so that the ground shamefully robbed from our ancestors shall once more belong to the Africanders. This your obedient servants hope, pray and beseech.<sup>12</sup>

The address, carelessly left behind by the retreating Boer forces, was discovered by the British military in Pretoria. The Natal authorities, and especially Charles and Frank Tatham, made much of the document especially the part they had underlined and which they regarded as conclusive proof that a conspiracy existed to oust the British from South Africa and that the Transvaal Government “acquiesced in the sentiment expressed.”

**Table 10. 1: List of Natal Afrikaner women who signed the address of welcome to**

8. S Izedinova, *A few months with the Boers*, p.186.

9. PAR, C 1482: Photograph of Afrikaner women taken in front of the Newcastle Town Hall, by RE Gell, 16.12.1899.

10. The women in question were not the only Natalians who had their picture taken in front of the Newcastle Town Hall at the time. GH Shorter who were commandeered by the Boers also posed armed in front of the town hall. PAR, AGO I/7/5: Regina vs GH Shorter, pp.121-124; *Natal Witness*, 2.11.1900.

11. OE Prozesky private collection, Diary of JJA Prozesky: Diary entry, 17.12.1899, p.107.

12. PRO, CO 179/213: Address of welcome to Commandant-General PJ Joubert as well as related correspondence, 23.9.1900-25.9.1900.

**Commandant-General PJ Joubert on 13 February 1900<sup>13</sup>**

DA Kemp	S Kemp	CF Vermaak	H Nel
A Vermaak	AM de Villiers	VA Vermaak	M Venter
M Mcw Meyer	DA de Villiers	CG Vermaak	J Labuschagne
M Maher	SM de Villiers	E Hambridge	J Dekker
SJ Potgieter	JM de Villiers	MM Badenhorst	
A Webb	DA de Villiers	BJJ Laatz	

In reality the Tathams were reading far too much into the document and were confusing sympathy for the plight of the Republics with military support. Of the 22 women who signed the document the Vermaaks, Hambridges and Kemps were related, while Mrs Webb's husband was a sharecropper working for the Vermaaks. In all likelihood the five De Villiers women were also related to each other, meaning that the petition came from a few extended families of "true Afrianders" and not from Natal Afrikaners at large. Sixty two men signed a similar petition. This was 34 signatures less than the number of Natal Afrikaner men who petitioned the ZAR authorities about concerns they had serving in the Republican forces.<sup>14</sup> It would therefore be true to say that the vast majority of Natal Afrikaner women shared the sentiments of their menfolk about direct physical involvement in the war and were as reluctant in supporting the Republican war effort as their sons, fathers and husbands. Substantial proof exists to support this reluctance.<sup>15</sup>

The Boers commandeered the youngest son of Mrs ME de Waal of Carolina, Dundee, in November 1899 against his and her will. Three weeks later she wrote to him asking him to come home. Only "after considerable trouble" did he manage to get an order from Louis Botha which gave him permission to return to his mother. Young De Waal handed back his rifle and despite being commandeered on six subsequent occasions, refused to go.<sup>16</sup> Similarly the sister of the loyal Strydom brothers, Johanna de Jager who was married to Fritz de Jager, stated that she had tried to convince her husband not to join the Boers. He did not listen to her or her brothers.<sup>17</sup> Also a young Afrikaner of Weenen only identified by his Zulu name, Bensela, wanted to join the Boers but his

13. PRO, CO 179/213: Address of welcome to Commandant-General PJ Joubert as well as related correspondence, 23.9.1900-25.9.1900.

14. NAR, KG 819: Letter to General JJ Ferreira signed by 96 Natal Afrikaners, 8.1.1900.

15. For a comprehensive account of Afrikaner women in a later rebellion, that of 1914, see: SS Swart, *The rebels of 1914: Masculinity, republicanism and the social forces that shaped the Boer Rebellion*, August 1997, MA-thesis, UND, pp.130-143.

16. PAR, CSO 2874: Invasion Losses Enquiry Commission: Claim by ME de Waal, 27.2.1902.

17. PAR, AGO I/8/74: Correspondence regarding the looting of property belonging to J de Jager, 4.10.1899-5.1.1901.

mother forbid him,<sup>18</sup> while the wife of JJ Kemp became hysterical when she was told that the Boers had commandeered her husband.<sup>19</sup>

MMCW Kemp of Kempenveldt near Dundee possibly, in referring to her sons, best sums up the views of the majority of Natal Afrikaner women about involvement in the war:

I spoke to them when there was rumour of war and after war broke out about not joining the Boers. This was about Nov 1899 and January 1900 and on other occasions whenever I had the opportunity. My sons joined the enemy between December 1899 and February 1900. In the month of January 1900 I visited my son Johannes at his house and pleaded with him not to join the Boers and he promised he would not do so but the pressure was too great and he eventually joined the Boers during the month of January 1900. Several times before the commandeering before they had gone to the laager I did my utmost to keep my sons back also after they had gone to the laager ....<sup>20</sup>

In the light of the above attitude, and in the historical context of the war, direct military involvement by Natal Afrikaner women was highly unlikely. They did not possess the same rabid patriotism as the Republican women because their country was not under threat. Despite this, the military regarded Natal Afrikaner women as the most disloyal inhabitants of the Colony;<sup>21</sup> a view possibly shaped by Kitchener's statement that the women were more bitter than the men.<sup>22</sup> The closest any Natal Afrikaner woman came to possible military participation in the war was Miss L Meyer of Weenen who was captured at Newcastle together with a large number of Natal rebels.<sup>23</sup> It is not known what became of her. Except for one occasion no Natal women were charged with high treason. Annie Catherina Gowthorpe of Newcastle was accused of sheltering, harbouring and supplying food to the enemy; joining the Boers and accompanying them to Volksrust. Numerous members of the local community, however, testified in her favour. WM Rogers stated that she had given him £50 to flee to Delagoa Bay and H Dunn testified that she had nursed a wounded Hussar. All charges against her were eventually dropped.<sup>24</sup>

In an incident unconfirmed by official sources, JH Labuschagne, who was imprisoned in Pietermaritzburg, declared: "Hier is ook een vrouw ingebring, zij is gevonniss ver een maand en twee hondert pont boete wegens hoog veraad zij heef vande boere kos gegeef die by haar gekomen was, twee was haar eigen zoons, dat is hard om gestraf te worde voor u eigen kinders, zij is een Mevrouw

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18. PAR, SNA I/7/40: Report of native intelligence officer No. 1, 14.12.1899.

19. VTR, JC Vermaak collection, 03/14223: Declaration by JJ Kemp, 22.5.1900.

20. PAR, CSO 2888: Invasion Losses Enquiry Commission: Claim by MMCW Kemp, 6.12.1901.

21. PAR, AGO I/8/79: Application by JJ Kemp to return to his farm, 12.4.1901-24.4.1901.

22. P Warwick, and SB Spies (eds), *The South African War*, p.168.

23. PAR, AGO I/7/46: Lists of Natal rebels capture between 10.5.1900 and 4.6.1900 as well as incriminating documents compiled by Lt-Col AE Sandbach.

24. *Natal Witness*, 17.10.1900.

van Tonder.<sup>25</sup> Apparently the Van Tonder boys, who had joined the Boers, visited their mother Hannie van Tonder at her home near Helpmekaar one night. When they left they were seen by Africans who reported the incident to the military. As a result Mrs van Tonder was arrested and sentenced under Martial Law because she had not reported their visit as was required.<sup>26</sup> The Natal Government was also erroneously under the impression that the wife of NM Dekker of Bloemhof, Dundee, was imprisoned alongside him in Pietermaritzburg. This was, however, denied by the governor of the prison.<sup>27</sup>

A small group of Natal Afrikaner women were nevertheless actively involved in an auxiliary role as go-betweens, providers of food, purveyors of war news, nurses, and agents in the field of intelligence.<sup>28</sup> The widow Jacoba Barrett, née Groenewald, was a loyalist Natal Afrikaner woman who did sterling work for the British authorities and was described by the then attorney-general as "...the only loyal Dutch women I know of..."<sup>29</sup> Barrett was born in Natal but had resided in the Transvaal for a number of years. Shortly before war broke out she and some family members returned to Natal.<sup>30</sup> It seems that during this time she was recruited into the Intelligence Department by a certain Simpson who tasked her to gather information on Afrikaner attitudes in Umvoti county. To enable her to successfully achieve this Barrett managed to move in with a leading Afrikaner, LL (Lang Lewies) Nel, and his family. Two days after her arrival, on 19 October 1899, she submitted her first report informing Simpson and the local magistrate that three people related to the Nels had joined the Boers. The Nel's youngest son was also recalled from school "...so that he could ride around and warn the local Natal Afrikaners when they were to mobilise."

On the same day the eager Barrett submitted a second report notifying the authorities that the local Afrikaners were keeping their wagons back and not using them to despatch wool to the market. The wagons and horses were apparently kept ready for the planned arrival of the commandos in Greytown on 25 October 1899. The plan was to attack Umvoti via Dundee and the Midlands before an assault would be launched on Pietermaritzburg and Durban. This plan, according to Barrett, was underpinned by boastful talk about taking the magazine in Greytown by force; about teaching England a lesson; about God being on their side and how they would not hesitate to kill women and children. A very alert Barrett undertook to warn the authorities immediately if danger arose.

The following day, 20 October, Barrett reported that the Battle of Talana dominated discussions amongst Afrikaners, some of whom were criticising the sluggish Boer commanders for allowing

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25. WM, Dagboek van Johannes Christoffel Buys: Deel 2, 23.9.1901, p.30.

26. OE Prozesky private collection, Diary of JJA Prozesky: Diary entry, 22.9.1901, p.527.

27. PAR, CSO 1648: Passenger account for discharged prisoners, 6.8.1901-29.8.1901.

28. See Marais, pp.167-177, for an overview of the spy activities of Boer women during the war.

29. Not to be confused with Mrs Berrett that is referred to in PHS van Zyl, *Die heldealbum*, p.86.

30. PRO, CO 179/208: Letter Attorney-General H Bale to Prime Minister AH Hime, 11.12.1899.

large numbers of British troops to escape to Ladysmith. The envisaged Boer invasion of Umvoti remained very much on the cards and she also reported that the local Afrikaners were full of passion and excitement while they waited for the sign of the Boer invasion of Umvoti, the cutting of the telegraph wires. In preparation for the invasion they were stocking up on rusks and ammunition. War talk, however, only took place when the local Englishmen and loyal Afrikaners such as Tony Keyter and “Old Laatz” were absent.

Barrett’s overeagerness, and the fact that she was an outsider, seemed to hamper her for in her report dated 21 October it became clear that her hosts distrusted her. Much of the conversation was now taking place in bedrooms where Barrett could not overhear them. She was also informed by Mrs Nel that the local magistrate, Henry Koch, had warned Nel and his sons to be careful, for if they rebelled their property would be confiscated. Barrett managed to get her report out by sending it with John Ogle, the local post cart driver. On the third day of her mission, Barrett perceived a change in the attitudes of the local Afrikaners. The passion of the previous days made way for silence. This was brought about by the Boer losses at Talana and the lack of success around Ladysmith. Now the talk was about a desperate attempt to take Ladysmith. If this failed, an attack on Pietermaritzburg would be attempted. By now Barrett had also engaged her brothers-in-law, the Brownings, in espionage and they reported that a meeting was to be held at the house of Lang Lewies Nel.

Barrett’s mission ended on 22 October, four days after her arrival. She had failed to infiltrate the close knit Afrikaner community of Umvoti. In her last report she stated: “I dare not send a wire for the Dutch Boys (messengers) let the news out - they know all the magistrate knows, or how do they find it out.”<sup>31</sup> It seems that she immediately left the Nels to go and reside in Pietermaritzburg.

Jacoba Barrett must have felt that very little had come of her efforts and attempted to convince the authorities of her worth as a source of information. She found a sympathetic ear in Attorney-General Bale. Barrett generally repeated the same information she had despatched earlier to Simpson, but also added some known facts, rumours, half-truths, and gossip. She reported the Boers said that they would never allow England to rule the Transvaal; that England had the habit “of taking countries because they could make money out of them”; that the Natal Afrikaners were only prevented from a general rebellion because they were afraid that they would lose their properties; that dynamite was laid down at Pretoria to blow up the town should the British be victorious; and that five months before the war she had seen the son of Gert Maritz wearing the colours of the Transvaal under his clothes. Barrett even offered Bale the services of her son “who knows the Transvaal well.”<sup>32</sup>

The encounter with Bale prolonged interest in Barrett’s reports for a few days. Her earlier report

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31. PAR, AGO I/7/40: Statements by Jacoba Barrett before SO Samuelson, 22.12.1899.

32. PRO, CO 179/208: Letter Attorney-General H Bale to Prime Minister AH Hime, 11.12.1899.

were dug up and she had to confirm their authenticity by signing each of them. Governor Hely-Hutchinson then forwarded the reports to the colonial office where they were filed.<sup>33</sup> In May 1900, Charles Tatham showed some interest in the work done by Barrett but not enough to revive her career.<sup>34</sup>

If Allan Hershensohn, a Natal Afrikaner and intelligence officer for the civil intelligence department is to be believed, Mrs Eksteen of Ingogo, who stayed at Pieter Keytel's home<sup>35</sup> in Pietermaritzburg, was actively involved in the Boer intelligence department. Hershensohn claimed that Eksteen received information from Keytel about the undefended areas along the railway line and an indication that Boer forces might succeed in raiding the line near Ingogo. When Eksteen returned to her farm she forwarded this information, possibly by using an African runner, to the Boer forces. Eksteen was furthermore accused of taking a letter to a certain Pretorius in the Tin Town POW Camp when stopping in Ladysmith on her way home.<sup>36</sup> Understandably the military did not act on these tales.

Natal Afrikaner women also became involved in the Anglo-Boer War by giving logistical and humanitarian support. Mrs Meyer provided logistical support by working in Handleys store in Dundee when it was taken over by the Boer commissariat,<sup>37</sup> while Mrs Arnold Boers of the Klip River district, who lost a son in the war, baked 14 loaves of bread per week for three weeks for the Boer hospital north of the Tugela River. The hospital authorities supplied the flour and she was allowed to retain a small portion for her services. According to Mrs Boers, who at this stage was cut-off from Ladysmith, the arrangement was their saving grace. Without it her children would only have had mealie-porridge to eat. Boers also received medicine for her services. Her sister-in-law, Mrs Gert Boers, also baked bread for the Boer hospital under the same arrangement,<sup>38</sup> while Mrs CM Vermaak, whose husband was an active rebel, rendered comparable support around Dundee.<sup>39</sup> Similarly SJ Laas of Paardeberg, Dundee, who had four sons and two sons-in-law convicted as rebels, also baked bread for the Boers. The response of the Natal Government to these actions was to declare that "the baking (of) bread for the enemy appears to be active assistance."<sup>40</sup> None of these women were, however, charged with high treason.

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33. PAR, AGO I/7/40: Statements by Jacoba Barrett before SO Samuelson, 22.12.1899.

34. PAR, AGO I/7/42: Letter C Tatham to Attorney-General H Bale, 14.5.1900.

35. The house of the Keytel's seems to have been a hotbed of pro-Boer activities. Mrs Keytel apparently helped Felix Coetzee, a burgher sentenced to seven years imprisonment with hard labour for executing a joiner, once he had escaped from the Pietermaritzburg Prison to make it to the Boer lines. Coetzee was arrested ten days later by Africans in Zululand. VTR, JC Vermaak collection, 03/2553/1: Memoirs of JC Vermaak, pp.4-5, 1941.

36. PAR, MJPW 117: Report by civilian intelligence officer A Hershensohn, 25.5.1901.

37. PAR, CSO 2914: Invasion Losses Enquiry Commission: Claim by LLA Zietsman, 18.3.1901.

38. *Natal Witness*, 9.6.1900.

39. PAR, CSO 2910: Invasion Losses Enquiry Commission: Claim by CM Vermaak, 6.10.1900.

40. PAR, CSO 2888: Invasion Losses Enquiry Commission: Claim by SJ Laas, 11.12.1901.

Several Natal Afrikaner women took to nursing the casualties of war be it on opposite sides. Nurse SMG Otto, a Natal volunteer nurse and member of a very pro-British family, did sterling work at Intombi Hospital during the Siege of Ladysmith. Lt-Col Hyslop had no “...hesitation in saying, that but for their devotion to duty, and their untiring care of the patients placed under their charge, our death roll would have been much heavier than it is.”<sup>41</sup> As a result he recommended her for the Royal Red Cross. Like Otto, Mrs MC (Gert) de Haas also worked as a nurse during the siege. The difference was that she only nursed Boer POWs for a brief period before she and her family were removed to the Intombi Camp.<sup>42</sup> Likewise CM Vermaak of Rooifontein, Dundee, provided medical assistance by nursing an invalid Boer from Pretoria for eight days.<sup>43</sup>

Nursing was also done by Lucy Lydia Bester, the sister-in-law of Ds HF Schoon, and one of the sixteen children of WAC (William) Bester of Fourieskraal, Ladysmith. Lucy left for the Paarl shortly before war broke out to study organ music. When large numbers of Boer POWs started arriving in Cape Town, Bester abandoned her studies and volunteered to be a nurse in the Simon’s Town POW Camp. In a letter written in English to her sister, Mary Schoon, she reflected on her work: “... I have lost 4 patients: oh Mary, the one I shall never forget, he was too sweet a boy about 16 or 17. His eyes looked me full in the face till the end and after his death such a Heavenly Smile...I can never tell you how pleased I am that I have come to nurse them.”<sup>44</sup> Her working conditions were made even more difficult by the animosity which existed towards her, forcing her to decline an invitation to lunch extended to all the nurses by the commanding officer, Lieut-Col TF Brinckman. Her reason for not attending was that as an “...Africander and especially this time when politics are always discussed...” she would not feel welcome. Her perception on how she, as an Afrikaner, was viewed was confirmed during an encounter with Harry Tatham, a member of a prominent Natal English family. Tatham saw Bester at a lunch and later called on her. As she was on night duty, she could not meet with him. He than asked Mrs Vince, the manager’s wife, to give Bester his compliments and intended to leave his card. When he was told that Bester was nursing Boer prisoners Tatham became so disgusted that he put the card back in his pocket and left. Bester eventually took ill with typhoid in mid-June 1900,<sup>45</sup> but managed to survive. It is uncertain if she resumed her nursing career.<sup>46</sup>

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41. PAR, PM 90: Recommendation by Lt-Col Hyslop, 3.5.1901; Nurse Kate Driver (JJ Boyd) *Experience of a Siege* (a Nurse looks back at Ladysmith. Ladysmith Historical Society, 1978.)

42. PAR, HF Schoon collection, A 72: Dairy entry, 28.10.1899, p.35.

43. PAR, CSO 2910: Invasion Losses Enquiry Commission: Claim by CM Vermaak, 6.10.1900.

44. In total 81 Boer POWs died at the Simon’s Town POW Camp.

45. PAR, HF Schoon collection, A 72: Dairy entry, 16.6.1900, p.371.

46. A Davey, Lucy Bester and the nursing of Boer prisoners at Simon’s Town, 1900, *Simon’s Town Historical Society Bulletin*, Vol XIX, No. 1, January 1996. In time Bester followed two of her sisters to the USA where they eventually settled.

Two of Lucy Bester's sisters, Maggie and Mrs Mandy, also took up nursing during the war. Maggie Bester and her family arrived in the Harrismith area in the wake of the retreating Boers in March 1900. She initially resided on their farm near Elands River Bridge Harrismith before joining her sister in town where the pair nursed for two and a half months.<sup>47</sup>

## **10.2 Natal Afrikaner women in the shadow of the war - psychological and physical treatment**

The general war experience of Natal Afrikaner women in the areas occupied by the Boers, apart from the above outlined involvement, meant psychological or physical harassment at the hands of either Boers or British soldiers. One of the first encounters between Natal Afrikaner women and British soldiers proved extremely traumatic for the women involved. Reverend Prozesky noted in his diary that British soldiers violated women in Northern Natal from the start of the war. The first mentioned case took place on 14 October 1899 when African women were shamefully treated near Dundee and Ladysmith.<sup>48</sup> Soon afterwards a family of Natal Afrikaners experienced similar treatment. According to three unrelated sources the 17<sup>th</sup> Lancers visited the De Waal's farm near Ladysmith in early November 1899. The whole family was accused of being spies and were arrested. Mrs de Waal and her two daughters were then raped. On arrival in Ladysmith Jan de Waal was imprisoned as a spy while his wife, two daughters, one of them 15-years-old, and an African servant were kept in military confinement. Here they were continuously raped, one daughter claiming that she was raped by ten "young officers" in one night.<sup>49</sup> The two girls and their African servant eventually managed to escape to the Boer lines. In the meantime their mother had died as a result of the "outrage and exposure perpetuated on her by Lancers." The two De Waal girls were then sent to Pretoria by the Boers for medical treatment. This incident raised emotions and the Boers made it clear that Lancers should not expect any mercy from them.<sup>50</sup>

Fears of sexual harassment were also expressed by a Mrs van Niekerk whose husband was in the lunatic asylum in Pietermaritzburg where he later died. She lived with her children at Lennoxton near Newcastle and complained that an African had behaved insolently and in a forward manner towards her. As a result she asked Magistrate Jackson for protection. He subsequently ordered the arrest of the African in question. Several nights later four drunken soldiers arrived at her house and made "shameful suggestions" to her and her daughters, aged 12 and 15. The women had to keep them at bay all night. Mrs van Niekerk again complained to the magistrate, who this time would not accept the charge. His reason, according to Mrs van Niekerk, was that the soldiers would be

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47. PAR, HF Schoon collection A 72: My experiences during the Anglo-Boer War by Maggie Bester, 26.9.1900.

48. OE Prozesky private collection, Diary of JJA Prozesky: Diary entries, 14.10.1899 and 14.11.1899, p.26 and pp.84-86.

49. OE Prozesky private collection, Diary of JJA Prozesky: Diary entries, 14.11.1899 and 18.11.1899, pp.84-92; ES Leversage, *Christiaan de Wet Annale, No.10*, pp.135-136.

50. NAR, A 739 Vol 5 Book 2: Telegram Roos to Reuter, 15.11.1899.

punished too severely. At the same time he released the African in question.<sup>51</sup>

Natal Afrikaner women also suffered during the first month of the war because of the actions taken by the British army against their husbands. A point in case was the arrest of PC Cronjé of the farm Rest in the Dundee area by the Natal Carbineers in October 1899. Three months later, in a letter written on her behalf and signed by her, Mrs EM Cronjé asked the colonial authorities about the whereabouts of her husband. PC Cronjé had in the meantime been released on parole on 6 February 1900 with strict instructions to reside in Pietermaritzburg. It is unclear when Mrs Cronjé received this information because letters addressed to areas under Boer occupation were kept back until liberation took place.<sup>52</sup>

Harsh treatment of Natal Afrikaner women by Boers was almost exclusively reserved for the female family members of loyalists. The treatment of Mrs Liebenberg of Dundee, whose husband Barend remained loyal, was such an example. Liebenberg and her children were given a passport to cross into the British-held territory via Pomeroy and Greytown by wagon. When the family group reached Helpmekaar they were stopped and kept prisoners in the laager for three days. Guards surrounded the wagon and the Liebenbergs were told that they would be shot should they try to escape. The family was returned to Dundee where the eldest Liebenberg boy was imprisoned, apparently because he was a British subject. On 2 January 1900 Mrs Liebenberg and the rest of her family were banned to Pretoria from where they were eventually allowed to proceed to Durban via Lourenco Marques.<sup>53</sup>

A similar fate befell the widow Emily Pieters, owner of the farm Maxwelton, and her two young sons in May 1900. When the British attack on the Boer positions on the Biggarsberg commenced she and her children attempted to get to her loyalist uncle Adrian (AL) Jansen. They were, however, stopped by two Boers who became angry when she told them she was going to the farm of a loyalist. She was subsequently ordered to Dundee under guard. Here her request to proceed to the farm of her father, WS Naude, was denied. Pieters was then sent to Johannesburg by rail and later to Lydenburg where she stayed with an aunt. Eventually, in September 1900, she received permission to go to Lourenco Marques.<sup>54</sup> Pieters and her sons could not make their way back to Natal since the military prohibited the British consul-general from issuing permits to people wishing to travel to Durban because of the overcrowded state of the city. She did, however, manage to inform her father by telegram of their predicament. Naude acted immediately and when the military commander stationed at Dundee did not act fast enough, he and his brother-in-law Adrian Jansen, wrote to the editor of the *Natal Afrikaner*, Joshua Hershensohn, and the Dundee magistrate respectively. Hershensohn was

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51. OE Prozesky private collection, Diary of JJA Prozesky: Diary entry, 13.9.1900, p.298.

52. PAR, CSO 1640: Correspondence regarding the whereabouts of PC Cronjé, 23.1.1900-19.2.1900.

53. PRO, CO 179/211: Letter Mrs B Liebenberg to PUS C Bird, 24.4.1900.

54. PAR, CSO 2899: Invasion Losses Enquiry Commission: Claim by E Pieters, 18.4.1901.

the first to react and in a letter to the colonial secretary explained the circumstances under which Emilie Pieters ended up in Lourenco Marques. In the meantime the magistrate obtained a testimonial for Pieters from the lawyers, Tatham and Tandy. Armed with these documents, and wanting to please loyalist Afrikaners, Governor Hely-Hutchinson telegraphed the consul-general instructing him to supply Pieters with a permit enabling her to proceed to Durban. A short while later she and her sons joined Adrian Jansen.<sup>55</sup>

Frequent contact between British soldiers and Natal Afrikaner women in the war zone resumed after the Siege of Ladysmith ended. The first Afrikaner woman to experience the wrath of the British was Mrs SM (Sannie) Colling of the farm Georgina near Ladysmith. Shortly after the Boers had retreated, her cart horses were confiscated by an Englishman named Allison. Her husband Fred Colling, who was commandeered by the Boers as a small-pox guard, arrived home after the event but immediately left to visit his ill father. On 15 March 1900, four Natal Policemen, amongst them Trooper Nicholson, arrived at Colling's farm. Some Boers and Natal Afrikaners hiding in the vicinity of the farm house fired on them killing Nicholson's horse from under him, resulting in his and an African policeman's capture. During this skirmish the heavily pregnant Colling fled into the house.<sup>56</sup> Not long afterwards a group of policeman arrived and proceeded to kill all her poultry and damage the property. They guarded Colling for a while before arresting her and removing her and her two children to the farm Fourieskraal on the outskirts of Ladysmith. They remained there as prisoners only receiving porridge for food. After persistent requests Colling was allowed to proceed to Ladysmith where her youngest child was born.<sup>57</sup>

The military's attitude towards Colling was expressed by Lt-Col AE Sandbach who stated that no consideration was to be shown to her because her husband was a rebel. Instead she and her family were to be sent to Pietermaritzburg before the end of April 1900, without expense to the military authorities. Since the Natal Government refused to maintain people deported to Pietermaritzburg by the military, Colling's livestock was sold to pay for her keep in Ladysmith and Pietermaritzburg. The balance was left in credit with the director of supplies.<sup>58</sup> When her newborn child was 10-days-old she was deported to Pietermaritzburg. Shortly after her arrival the commandant informed her that there was no more money and that she had to see to her own needs.<sup>59</sup> She consequently spent some time on Afrikaner farms between Durban and Pietermaritzburg and near Greytown.<sup>60</sup>

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55. PAR, CSO, 1659: Documents relating to the daughter of WS Naude in Lourenco Marques, 1.10.1900-11.10.1900.

56. OE Prozesky private collection: Diary of JJA Prozesky: Attached statements, p.438.

57. PAR, HF Schoon collection A 72: Diary entries, 6-7 May 1900, pp.311-312; PRO, CO 179/213: Statement by Trooper ATS Boyle to Sub-Inspector Hellett, 24.3.1900.

58. PAR, AGO I/7/42: Letter Lt-Col AE Sandbach to provost marshal, 26.4.1900.

59. PAR, HF Schoon collection A 72: Diary entries, 6-7 May 1900, pp.311-312; PRO, CO 179/213: Statement by Trooper ATS Boyle to Sub-Inspector Hellett, 24.3.1900.

60. OE Prozesky private collection, Diary of JJA Prozesky: Attached statements, p.438.

The physical and psychological trauma suffered by Colling took its toll and she fell very ill after the birth of her child.<sup>61</sup> Initially she lost her speech but in time her health improved.<sup>62</sup> On 17 August 1900 she could return to Ladysmith to visit her imprisoned husband.<sup>63</sup> A week later she was allowed to return to the farm of her mother Mrs Cronjé.<sup>64</sup> Colling's experiences at the hands of the British caused much bitterness in the area. As a result she and her mother were suspected of readily providing accommodation to six members of the party who had attacked the Wasbank Station in October 1900.<sup>65</sup>

When Buller's Army advanced north other Natal Afrikaner women suffered experiences similar to that of Colling. According to RC Billington, a muleteer with the advancing force of General Buller, they encountered their first three Natal Afrikaner women on 12 May 1900 on the farm Vermaakskraal. These women were immediately arrested and sent, under escort, to Ladysmith. The same happened a short distance away at the farm of the Kemp's where two more Afrikaner women were taken prisoner.<sup>66</sup> Reverend Prozesky, without providing details, claimed that the wife of PR Vermaak was cruelly and disgracefully treated in the process.<sup>67</sup> Approximately one month later, on 9 June 1900, three women captured at Vermaakskraal namely, the wives of PR and Coenraad Vermaak, and P van Breda, arrived in Pietermaritzburg telling tales of horror, destruction, and looting of livestock by the military. The wife of Coenraad immediately left for her parents, the Odendaals, at Noodsberg.<sup>68</sup> The others in all probability remained in Pietermaritzburg becoming, along with Sannie Colling, the first of hundreds of Natal Afrikaner women to be removed from their homes to the capital. The experiences of the above-mentioned groups of women were repeated in one form or another at almost every single Afrikaner farm in Northern Natal as can be gleaned from the cases discussed below.<sup>69</sup>

MC Cronjé of Camelot, JS van Niekerk and LP Adendorff of Welgedacht and JJ Smit's husbands were commandeered by the ZAR when they occupied Northern Natal. With the arrival of the British

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61. PAR, HF Schoon collection, A 72: Dairy entry, 29.5.1900, p.338.

62. PAR, HF Schoon collection, A 72: Dairy entry, 23.6.1900, p.378.

63. PAR, HF Schoon collection, A 72: Dairy entry, 17.8.1900, p.423

64. PAR, HF Schoon collection, A 72: Dairy entry, 25.8.1900, pp.430-431.

65. PAR, 1/LDS 3/3/14: Correspondence regarding the request by HB Cronjé to be allowed to visit his mother, 31.10.1900-7.11.1900.

66. RC Billington, *A mule-driver at the Natal front. Transport experiences in Natal*, pp.53-56.

67. OE Prozesky private collection, Diary of JJA Prozesky: Attached statements, p.438.

68. PAR, HF Schoon collection A 72: Dairy entry, 9.6.1900, p.354. No amount of research could reveal where the women were kept when imprisoned in Ladysmith and Pietermaritzburg.

69. PAR, CSO 2869: Invasion Losses Enquiry Commission: Claim by AF Byloo, 28.9.1900; PAR, HF Schoon collection A 72: Dairy entry, 16-17.10. 1900 and 22.10.1900, pp.489-490 and p.493; PAR, CSO 2864: Invasion Losses Enquiry Commission: Claim by JBS Adendorff, 8.10.1902; PAR, 1/LDS 3/1/17: Letter magistrate Klip River district to LW Meyer, 24.4.1901.

forces in Newcastle they adhered to the proclamation of Buller and surrendered. The men were subsequently arrested and imprisoned in Pietermaritzburg or on the *Catalonia* in the Durban harbour. On 30 May 1900, some days after the surrender of their husbands, two European members of the Natal Police arrived on the respective farms. They took all Cronjé's cattle and horses as well as a spider and wagon, leaving her with only three cows and calves. On the same day they took all the livestock belonging to Van Niekerk, Smit and Adendorff, leaving the latter without means and a baby and blind brother to care for.<sup>70</sup> Also near Newcastle, Mrs Boshoff, whose husband was arrested as a suspected rebel and who owned more than 1 300 head of sheep and goats and 80 head of cattle, lost all of it to the military except for five goats. These the family had to slaughter to survive and with nothing left she came into town to ask the commandant for food for her and her children.<sup>71</sup>

Similar events happened around Dundee. Mrs PC Cronjé of Rest near Helpmekaar complained, in an letter to the magistrate of Dundee, that soldiers of the Imperial Light Horse had taken seven horses, 1 330 sheep and 550 goats, her spider and the harness for her oxen. She appealed to the magistrate to tell her what documentation she should send him to obtain an order to stop the looting of her remaining livestock.<sup>72</sup>

Natal Afrikaners not only lost the livestock they had to take care of but at times were even turned out of their homes. FAJ van Niekerk, AMJ Cronjé and JC Hattingh, imprisoned rebels, asked that their wives be removed from the farm Loskop near Newcastle to the Pietermaritzburg Concentration Camp because they were being intimidated by Africans. Mrs Cronjé and her three children were turned out of her house on the farm Applebloom by an African who took clothes and featherbeds. She joined the other two women on the farm Loskop where they were also intimidated by Africans one night. The government, however, refused to heed the call of the husbands and suggested that they be allowed to reside in a town by the military.<sup>73</sup>

The psychological trauma experienced by Natal Afrikaner women as described above serves to illuminate the circumstances surrounding the death of the 45-year-old Mrs Renier Dannhauser of Newcastle. During July 1900 she visited her farmhouse. Some damage had been done by the retreating Boers but this could not be compared with what it looked like after the British soldiers had passed through. The latter had even ripped up the steps in search of weapons and loot.<sup>74</sup> The shock caused by the devastation of their property was followed by the arrest of her husband, a local justice

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70. PAR, PM 18: Request for assistance from the Natal Government in securing cattle removed by members of the Natal Police, 19.7.1900-15.8.1900.

71. OE Prozesky private collection, Diary of JJA Prozesky: Diary entry, 9.9.1900, p.292.

72. PAR, 1/DUN 3/1/8: Letter Mrs PC Cronjé to magistrate Dundee, 21.5.1900.

73. PAR, CSO 1688: Application by FAJ van Niekerk, AMJ Cronjé and JC Hatting for their wives to be removed to the Pietermaritzburg Concentration Camp, 21.10.1901-30.10.1901.

74. OE Prozesky private collection, Diary of Caroline Prozesky: Diary entry, 19.7.1900, p.420.

of the peace, on charges of high treason which later proved to be unfounded. The impact of these two events caused her health to deteriorate. Despite this, Mrs Dannhauser attempted to continue her husband's business duties while also running errands for other rebel prisoners. Her health took a turn for the worse in the beginning of August 1900, a fact she blamed on the sadness and sorrow brought on by the war.<sup>75</sup> When her health deteriorated further several calls were made to have her husband released on bail. This failed and as a result their daughter, Hettie Dannhauser, sent a telegram to Attorney-General Bale proclaiming: "Mothers life in danger father in agonies in prison for gods sake have pity let him out." This had the desired effect and he was released on bail on condition that he remained in Newcastle.<sup>76</sup>

The release did not have the desired effect and Mrs Dannhauser passed away on 30 August 1900. *De Kerkbode*, mouthpiece of the DRC, reported that the funeral were "...meer dan hartroerend. Er zijn in de buurt van NewCastle geen manspersonen genoeg, op vrije voeten, om een lijkstoet te vormen. Slechts eenige weenende vrouwen en diepverslagene mannen volgden der stoffelijk overschot grafwaarts."<sup>77</sup> Missionary Prozesky provided an even more surreal description of events: "Very close to the cemetery English soldiers were playing football; when the wagon came by, bearing the coffin, they all stood still and took off their caps - but when the first clods fell on the coffin loud cheering was heard from that quarter, a player must have kicked the ball particularly high. It made a sad impression on the mourners."<sup>78</sup> Prozesky was adamant that Dannhauser had died of a broken heart and that her death was tantamount to murder.<sup>79</sup> This view was partially shared by Dr CJ Douglas, who declared that her death was "probably the result of the war."<sup>80</sup>

The circumstances surrounding the death of Mrs Renier Dannhauser served to sour the relations between Little, the commandant of Newcastle, and the daughter of the deceased. On 1 September 1900 Miss Adendorff asked him for a pass for Miss Hettie Dannhauser to reside in Newcastle, so that she could nurse her father. Little said they should come back the following day. The next day Adendorff, accompanied by Hettie Dannhauser, returned. When he was informed of the identify of Dannhauser he flew into a rage and said if it depended on him he would have all rebels "transported." He continued: "You Dutch girls are a lot of deceitful wrenches - go, come back tomorrow."<sup>81</sup> At a subsequent meeting the commandant informed Hettie Dannhauser that once he had obtained better proof against her father, brother and herself, he would send the whole family to Ceylon.<sup>82</sup>

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75. OE Prozesky private collection, Diary of JJA Prozesky: Diary entry, 22.8.1900, p.257.

76. PAR, AGO I/8/73: Application for R Dannhauser to be released on bail, 26.8.1900-31.8.1900.

77. *De Kerkbode*, 11.9.1900 and 27.9.1900.

78. OE Prozesky private collection, Diary of JJA Prozesky: Diary entry, 31.8.1900, p.272.

79. OE Prozesky private collection, Diary of JJA Prozesky: Diary entry, 22.8.1900, p.257.

80. PAR, AGO I/8/78: Letter CJ Douglas to Attorney-General H Bale, 26.3.1901.

81. OE Prozesky private collection: Diary of JJA Prozesky: Diary entry, 3.9.1900, p.278.

82. OE Prozesky private collection: Diary of JJA Prozesky: Diary entry, 10.9.1900, p.295.

Verbal insubordination was often the only way in which Afrikaner women could fight back, especially against the military, and numerous examples of such conduct exist in the literature on the Anglo-Boer War. Natal Afrikaner women were no different. In the Newcastle district Mrs O'Reilly, an Afrikaner woman married to an Irishman, was at the forefront of verbal abuse and belittling of British soldiers. When her husband was arrested by the British she accused the soldiers of being "too cowardly to catch the Boers in the Transvaal for you are too scared, but this you can do, arrest tame people (mak menschen)."<sup>83</sup> Such verbal abuse did not stop the soldiers from searching the houses of Afrikaner women in the area.<sup>84</sup> Annoyed by this, O'Reilly directed a number of soldiers into a dark bedroom, saying there was something under the bed and that they should look for a Boer in it. She meant the chamber-pot which was placed under the bed.<sup>85</sup> O'Reilly did not let up in her private war and on two occasions came into Newcastle without a permit. The first time she was reprimanded but still rebuked the soldiers. On the second occasion she was detained under Martial Law. This apparently did not dampen her spirit or her verbal abuse.<sup>86</sup>

Further south in Ladysmith, Mrs MC de Haas, also ran into trouble because of her utterances.<sup>87</sup> The problems for De Haas started when one of the male residents in her boarding house spat at the picture of General de Wet which she had in her parlour. De Haas rebuked him and said the English would be glad to have someone of that calibre.<sup>88</sup> She was reported, and as a result, in January 1901, under Martial Law, deported to Pietermaritzburg and on her own costs.<sup>89</sup> In an open-hearted letter to Prime Minister Hime, De Haas explained her predicament: "I am a resident of Ladysmith. On the 6<sup>th</sup> Jan. last (1901) on false reports to the commandant of Ladysmith I was reported by some men who were living in my house as boarders, men of no reputation and who has (*sic*) bitter feeling and prejudice (*sic*) against the Dutch nation. I being Dutch my self was cruelly taunted and provoked several times from the men living in my house. I admit I spoke indiscreetly several times of their insolent taints and disgraceful language."

Unfortunately for De Haas she did not know the names of the men, presumably because she ran an establishment that offered short-term boarding. What made her situation even more unfair was that she never had the opportunity to defend herself against the various accusations, inter alia that she

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83. OE Prozesky private collection, Diary of JJA Prozesky: Diary entry, 6.7.1900, p.238.

84. PAR, HF Schoon collection, A 72: Dairy entry, 11.1.1902, p.758.

85. OE Prozesky private collection, Diary of Caroline Prozesky: Diary entry, 25.7.1900, p.423.

86. OE Prozesky private collection, Diary of JJA Prozesky: Diary entry, 13.7.1900, p.420.

87. PAR, HF Schoon collection, A 72: Dairy entry, 4.1.1901, pp.556-557. MC de Haas was the sister of Otto Krogman the leader of Ladysmith Commando and daughter of the feisty Annie Krogman. PAR, CSO 2873: Invasion Losses Enquiry Commission: Claim by MC de Haas, 12.9.1900.

88. OE Prozesky private collection, Diary of JJA Prozesky: Diary entry, 12.5.1901, p.502; OE Prozesky private collection: Letter MC de Haas to JJA Prozesky, 10.7.1901.

89. PAR, AGO I/8/76: Minute paper regarding men to be removed from Ladysmith to Estcourt, 28.12.1900-24.1.1901.

had taken messages to the Boer POWs at Tin Town; that she had put a wire cutter in a plum pudding presumably to be used by the POWs to escape; and that she had held a Boer meeting at her house. When the charges started to surface, De Haas being a real firebrand, went to see the local commandant informing him that the accusations of disloyalty were false as could be proved by her behaviour during the Siege of Ladysmith. Her explanation fell on deaf ears.

Five months after her removal De Haas felt that the period of separation from her husband and children was sufficient punishment for any discretion she might have been guilty of. She therefore requested permission to return to Ladysmith, but her request was denied by the military.<sup>90</sup> This did not keep her down. She opened a boarding house in Boshoff Street in Pietermaritzburg;<sup>91</sup> visited rebel prisoners like the Buys brothers in the local prison taking them pineapples as gifts;<sup>92</sup> and corresponded with Reverend Prozesky in the Eshowe Prison, sending him some dye on one occasion which he used to colour his old overcoat.<sup>93</sup>

Almost all aspects of the family and private lives of Natal Afrikaner women were affected by the psychological trauma and disruptions caused by the war. LLA Zietsman of the Dundee district was to have married a fellow Natal Afrikaner, Daniel Dekker, in October 1899. The outbreak of war put an end to this dream because Dekker was commandeered and then continued to serve with the Vryheid Commando. By March 1901 Zietsman still had not heard from Dekker.<sup>94</sup> The uncertainty about the whereabouts of loved-ones forced at least one Natal Afrikaner woman into a new relationship. Louis Triegaardt from the Umvoti county joined the Boer forces leaving his wife without any financial means. As time passed by and Mrs Triegaardt heard nothing from her husband, she assumed that he was dead. She therefore left Greytown for Durban to marry J Diot. This incensed her father, CJ Vermaak, who believed that his son-in-law was still alive. Vermaak despatched a telegram to both the magistrates of Pietermaritzburg and Durban informing them of his daughter's intentions and the fact that he believed Triegaardt was possibly still alive. The Durban magistrate and former magistrate of Greytown, HC Koch, who knew Vermaak and Triegaardt well, ignored Vermaak's telegram and accepted Mrs Triegaardt's declaration under oath that she believed her husband to be dead. According to Triegaardt the sole reason her family opposed the marriage was because of her pro-British stance. When Vermaak could supply no proof for his point of view, Koch proceeded to marry the couple. This disturbed the attorney-general who demanded an explanation from Koch. His verdict was very pragmatic; in the unlikely event of her first husband

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90. PAR, PM 22: Correspondence regarding the request by MC de Haas to return to Ladysmith, 11.6.1901-24.6.1901.

91. PAR, MJPW 88: Correspondence regarding the application of LJ de Jager to enter the Pietermaritzburg Concentration Camp, 31.10.1901-18.1.1902.

92. WM, Dagboek van Johannes Christoffel Buys: Deel 2, 27.1.1901, p.5.

93. OE Prozesky private collection, Diary of JJA Prozesky: Diary entry, 15.8.1901, p.520.

94. PAR, CSO 2914: Invasion Losses Enquiry Commission: Claim by LLA Zietsman, 18.3.1901.

materialising she would have to bear the consequences.<sup>95</sup>

Uncertainty about the whereabouts of family members and friends during the war was a common occurrence. EM Botha, who went to Rhodesia prior to the war, had no idea what had happened to Gideon Joubert and Coenraad Breytenbach, who had worked on her farm Lekkerwater near Newcastle.<sup>96</sup> Similarly MMCW Kemp of Kempenveldt, Dundee, did not know the whereabouts of some of her sons.<sup>97</sup> Rebel leader Commandant LJ de Jager, arrested by the Natal Carbineers on his farm Doornberg near Vryheid, heard through African informants that his wife and daughters had been removed by the military. He therefore asked his lawyer, TF Carter, to try and determine their whereabouts as his wife was an important witness in his upcoming trial. This proved to be a very difficult task because by late February 1901, the only persons who had been located with the surname De Jager were Mrs L de Jager of Leeuwspruit, Standerton, and Mrs J de Jager of Fraserspruit in the Pietermaritzburg Concentration Camp.<sup>98</sup> In the meantime the real Mrs LJ de Jager was evading capture by moving around in the Vryheid district.<sup>99</sup>

The experiences of Maria CE Prinsloo of the farm Ingagane Ford, near Newcastle, is probably representative of those of many Natal Afrikaner women in the war zone. She had six children, the oldest being 14, and her husband Paul Hans Petrus Prinsloo was imprisoned on charges of treason. All the family's cattle, except three cows and calves, were looted. Initially some assistance was rendered to the Prinsloos by their neighbour, JC Adendorff of Bradford farm, while goods from Greytown for needy Afrikaners also served to alleviate their plight. By 24 October 1900, Maria Prinsloo found surviving on boiled mealies only very difficult and wrote to Magistrate Jackson of Newcastle for material support. Jackson's enquiry about what could be done placed the Natal Government in a quandary as no policy existed to deal with cases such as this. The colonial secretary suggested two alternatives: have the women and children removed to the Pietermaritzburg Concentration Camp or make arrangements to serve rations to the destitute Afrikaners on their farms. The first alternative was immediately labelled as too expensive. This seems to have determined the procedure in this particular case and, rather than remove the Prinsloos, Sergeant RW Bentley of the Natal Police was ordered to investigate the family and to report to his superiors. Bentley disclosed that the Prinsloo's 1 600 acre farm was bought under crown land-regulations which prohibited them from charging rent from the Africans residing on the farm, while only seven buckets of mealies, comprising about four acres, were planted at the end of 1900. Maria Prinsloo could also not rely on the support of any family members because her one brother-in-law resided

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95. PAR, CSO 1703: Documents relating to the marriage of Mrs Triegaardt to J Diot, while her husband was possibly still alive, 14.4.1902-4.5.1902.

96. PAR. CSO 2868: Invasion losses Enquiry Commission: Claim by EM Botha, 19.1.1903.

97. PAR, CSO 2888: Invasion Losses Enquiry Commission: Claim by MMCW Kemp, 6.12.1901.

98. PAR, CSO 1667: Correspondence regarding the whereabouts of Mrs LJ de Jager, 29.1.1901-25.2.1901.

99. Interview conducted with Sarie Mehl, great grand daughter of LJ de Jager, Waterkloof, Pretoria, 6.7.2002.

near Vryheid and the other in the OFS. Furthermore, five of her sisters were resident in the OFS and another, Mrs Blanze, lived near Nongoma in Zululand, while five brothers were resident in the Transvaal. The addresses and whereabouts of all were unknown. Only the location of one brother, Franz A van Niekerk of the farm Langklip near Newcastle, who was in prison in Pietermaritzburg, was known. Despite her hardship Prinsloo made it clear to Sergeant Bentley that although she would appreciate any assistance from the government she “would prefer to remain on the farm under existing conditions rather than be removed to a place where she would be cared for.”

Three months elapsed before the Natal authorities seemed to be satisfied that the Prinsloos were indeed indigent and some effort was made to relieve their plight. Subsequently PUS Bird wrote to the Reverend SS Clarke of Ixopo, a member of the Society of Friends in Natal, asking him if he would be prepared to receive an application on behalf of the Prinsloos. On Clarke’s request Bird forwarded him the report regarding the family. Clarke could, however, only act on the recommendations of the representative of the society in Cape Town and finally on 5 June 1901, received permission to support the family and forwarded £5, received from Joshua Rowntree of Scarborough in Britain, to Bird to assist the Prinsloos. A receipt, obtained from Maria Prinsloo, was forwarded to Clarke on 5 July 1901. Assistance for the Prinsloos finally arrived, more than eight months after they originally requested it.<sup>100</sup>

The tide must have turned further against the Prinsloos because they arrived in the Pietermaritzburg Concentration Camp on 2 August 1901. They were joined a month later by their husband and father, PHP Prinsloo, after his release from prison. On 29 May 1902, two days before the signing of peace they left for the Newcastle townlands, in the care of GT Hesom.<sup>101</sup>

### **10.3 The economic experiences of Natal Afrikaner women during the war**

The psychological and physical hardships imposed on Natal Afrikaner women by the war were amplified by their economic suffering. The large scale arrests and surrender of Natal Afrikaner men in Northern Natal placed the economic burden of farming and dealing with labour on the women. This generally proved to be very difficult and at times virtually impossible as even simple masculine tasks proved to be demanding,<sup>102</sup> as explained by Vonnie Bester: “I have to clean the horses myself, Mag and I grind mealies & and we have to look after the cattle and I do lots of other rough work. It is not any good telling Mama no to go to the cattle, as she wont listen, every morning she stakes that cattle away & at night she & I fetch the cows to milk.”<sup>103</sup>

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100. PAR, CSO 1662: Correspondence regarding the complaint by MCE Prinsloo that they were destitute, 24.10.1900-5.7.1901.

101. NAR, DBC 138: Register residents in the Pietermaritzburg Concentration Camp, Aug 1900-Jun 1900.

102. P Marais, pp.33-35.

103. PAR, HF Schoon collection A 72: Letter Vonnie Bester to Mary Schoon, 11.9.1900.

The women were not only burdened by their new economic roles but also had to deal with the looting and confiscation of property by the military, Natal Police, and Africans.<sup>104</sup> At the same time the men, for example CJ Labuschagne, in a letter from the *Catalonia* to his mother J Laas of Angora Hill, Dannhauser, placed pressure on the women by requesting them not to let the farming slip in their absence.<sup>105</sup>

In this context, the following question posed by Reverend Prozesky cuts to the heart of the matter: “What is to become of these women now when the ploughing season comes? Very few have any oxen, and the kaffirs living on the farms are not likely in most cases to be very obedient to them.”<sup>106</sup>

Many Natal Afrikaner women were unable to deal with these unfamiliar roles and ended up as vulnerable as Prozesky had feared. The economic experiences of the following women are cited as examples. On one day the military and police removed all the livestock belonging to Mesdames van Niekerk, Smit and Adendorff, leaving them without any means. All three women immediately called on their government to intervene and to assist them in the return of their property. The Natal Government could, however, not render any support for when stock was received from the military by the Derelict Stock Fund, the curator bonis Charles Lloyd, was not informed where it originally came from. This lack of record keeping, the hardship it caused families and the trouble it meant to the government, displeased both Attorney-General Bale and Governor Hely-Hutchinson. The governor tried to cover-up the administrative bungling by ordering Bale to inform the three women: “... that if any of your cattle are amongst those recently taken over by the Commissioner of Agriculture, in his capacity of Curator Bonis, you are at liberty, if so advised, to apply to the Supreme Court for the release and delivery of such stock.” The letter dated 15 August 1900 and addressed to JJ Smit, was returned unclaimed.<sup>107</sup>

The attitude of the Natal Government towards the economic suffering endured by Natal Afrikaner women is contextualised by the complaint from Johanna de Jager, the wife of the rebel Fritz de Jager. She explained that as a loyal woman, she and her four children, suffered because of her husband's actions. According to De Jager five bales of wool, three head of cattle and five hundred sheep were looted, her furniture was destroyed or taken, and her piano smashed. All she and her children had left were the clothes they stood in and the farm Kemp's Hoek on which a bond of £250 existed. When that, and the fine of £500 imposed on her husband, was paid no money would be left.

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104. PAR, 1/DUN 3/1/8: Letter Mrs PC Cronjé to magistrate Dundee, 21.5.1900.

105. JM Wassermann, Controlling intelligence by means of censorship, in JM Wassermann and BT Kearney, (eds.), *A warrior's gateway...*, p.345.

106. OE Prozesky private collection, Diary of JJA Prozesky: Diary entry, 9.9.1900, p.292.

107. PAR, PM 18: Request for assistance from the Natal Government in securing cattle removed by members of the Natal Police, 19.7.1900-15.8.1900. For similar examples of suffering see: OE Prozesky private collection, Diary of JJA Prozesky: Diary entry, 20.5.1900; 26.5.1900 and 31.5.1900, p.194, p.207 and p.214.

As a result she and her children were residing with her brother and mother. De Jager, therefore, asked the government to act on her behalf. Henry Bale made the position of the Natal Government very clear: "The Colonial Government is unable to recognise any obligation to compensate people in respect of the action of forces subject to the control of the Imperial Authorities."<sup>108</sup> This meant that, especially women and children, were sitting ducks that could be exploited at will to end up impoverished and dependant on alms.

Natal Afrikaner women were not only exploited and taken advantage of economically by the military but also by unscrupulous individuals. The magistrate of Klip River district gave Mrs HC Smidt permission to occupy the farm Wesselshoek between Underberg and Van Reenen. She and her neighbour, D Mcfarlane, were intimidated and harassed by H Povall, a former Boer POW onboard the *Catalonia*. In the case of Smidt, Povall burnt down the grazing on her farm in the middle of the winter, while he also grazed his own as well as government sheep on it. The report written by Sergeant Batterbury of the Natal Police elicited immediate reaction from the magistrate who asked the military to remove Povall. This request was instantly adhered to.<sup>109</sup>

Others managed much better and not only exhibited innovation but also economic and political sense beyond what was stereotypically expected of their gender at the time. Mesdames Meyer and Marais, who had lost all their stock, travelled roughly 40 kilometres to Ladysmith with a spider pulled by oxen to visit their imprisoned husbands.<sup>110</sup> Rachel van Reenen, who together with her children was paroled to Durban from Ladysmith, showed entrepreneurial skills when she set up a boarding house in Durban to cater for the 200 Boer POWs on parole in the city and the local concentration camp inhabitants.<sup>111</sup> By late June 1901 she was still in Durban operating this endeavour.<sup>112</sup> A keen economic sense was likewise displayed by Mrs William Bester of Fourieskraal near Platrand just outside Ladysmith. With the war raging and her husband and son imprisoned, General Cronjé of the OFS ordered the family to evacuate their farm on 9 November 1899. The Besters moved to their farm Spitzkop until 1 March 1900 when, in the wake of the retreating Boers, they left for their farm near Elands River Bridge, Harrismith. The Bester women remained in the Harrismith area until the British arrived; thereafter they suffered severe losses. One hundred and five oxen, for which Mrs Bester with much effort managed to get a receipt for £10 a head, were taken. Next 637 head of sheep were confiscated but no receipt was issued. Later another 400 head of sheep were taken, many of which had their throats slit, according to the soldiers: "to spite you Dutch." Mrs Bester unsuccessfully tried to deal with the situation by speaking to Major Cavendish and to ask for a

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108. PAR, AGO I/8/74: Correspondence regarding the looting of property belonging to J de Jager, 4.10.1899-5.1.1901.

109. PAR, 1/LDS: 3/3/14: Correspondence regarding the behaviour of H Povall, 15.7.1901-2.8.1901.

110. PAR, HF Schoon collection A 72: Diary entry, 29.9.1900, p.456.

111. PAR, HF Schoon collection A 72: Diary entry, 17.11.1900, p.511.

112. PAR, HF Schoon collection A 72: Diary entry, 25.6.1901, p.645.

passport to return to Natal. In the meantime soldiers looted the Bester farmhouse at Elands River Bridge. Bester did not take this lying down and went to the camp close by and confronted the officer in charge, Lieutenant Playne. The next day Playne visited the farm and Mrs Bester managed to get a receipt from him for one trap, four horses, 103 bags of mealies and other odds and ends. Her complaints to the superior officer, Colonel Morrison, about the unfair treatment her family had received from Playne, made no difference. Morrison did, however, provide the Bester women with a pass to return to Natal.<sup>113</sup> Mrs Bester and some of her children only arrived back in Ladysmith on 18 September 1900, meeting up with their husband and father William Bester for the first time in 11 months.<sup>114</sup>

Possibly the most economically opportunistic and astute Natal Afrikaner woman was the 74-year-old Annie Charlotte Krogman of Driefontein, Ladysmith. Krogman was forced to leave her farm when it became the scene of hostilities. The Boer forces allowed her to proceed to the farm of her son Andries Krogman in the OFS. Krogman maintained that the seizure of her 500 mixed head of cattle, three spans of oxen, 1 600 sheep, 500 goats, 15 horses and two wagons by the military left her destitute. Closer inspection by the Natal colonial authorities exposed Krogman's claim as not entirely true. The British had only taken 281 head of cattle for which a receipt was issued, while the Boer forces had commandeered the horses, one wagon and the greater part of the sheep and goats. Since Krogman owned 16 000 acres and received £250 for mining rights on one of her farms and was awaiting compensation from the military she was not regarded as destitute. Her daughter, who was married to John de Waal, fully agreed with the Natal Government's decision.<sup>115</sup> This did not break the stride of the elderly Mrs Krogman, who now claimed that five of her oxen were running with the cattle of J van der Westhuizen,<sup>116</sup> and that the Boers had commandeered nine large oxen from her.<sup>117</sup> She was also quick to intervene on behalf of her imprisoned rebel son, Otto, demanding rent from the Africans placed on his farm Margate, by the military.<sup>118</sup>

The sudden elevation to unaccustomed positions of economic authority of many married Afrikaner women also caused strains with African labours and tenants. Ellen Hattingh of Nooitgedacht, Estcourt, whose husband was detained by the military, complained: "I am unfit to cope with unwilling caffirs",<sup>119</sup> while the wife of Izak Meyer, who had to take over the ploughing and stock raising, found the task very demanding since the African labourers did very little in the absence of

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113. PAR, HF Schoon collection A 72: My experiences during the Anglo-Boer War by Maggie Bester, 26.9.1900.

114. PAR, HF Schoon collection A 72: Diary entry, 18.9.1900, p.453.

115. PAR, CSO 1667: Correspondence concerning the complaint of being destitute by AC Krogman, 16.1.1901-19.2.1901

116. PAR, 1/LDS 3/1/17: Letter Magistrate TR Bennett, Klip River district, to Sergeant Reynolds, 7.9.1901.

117. PAR, CSO 2888: Invasion Losses Enquiry Commission: Claim by AC Krogman, 5.4.1901.

118. PAR, 1/NEW 3/1/1/9: Correspondence in the matter of the military placing Africans on the farm Margate, 21.8.1902-1.9.1902.

119. PAR, PM 24: Correspondence to and from E Hattingh regarding the detention of her husband, 25.9.1901-2.10.1901.

her husband.<sup>120</sup> Payments and the rent collection from Africans also proved problematic. Mrs Adrian Marais had a dispute with her African labourers. She wanted to keep all the mealies reaped by them as she thought she was entitled to it while they claimed half,<sup>121</sup> while Mrs GP Kemp of Gowrie, Dundee, had to request the magistrate to act on an earlier complaint of hers to collect rent money owed to her by certain Africans.<sup>122</sup> In turn, Alfred Gasas complained to the Umsinga magistrate that Mrs H Strydom of Uithoek owed him £4.10. for work done. To avoid a quasi-criminal procedure Strydom was advised to pay Gasas if she agreed with his statement.<sup>123</sup> Strydom was later reminded that agreements entered into with Africans prior to the outbreak of war had to be honoured until further notice.<sup>124</sup>

The relations between labourers and Afrikaner women, who as matriarchs were already in control of farming activities from before the war, was generally different than those described above. The labourers of the 73-year-old MMCW Kemp of Kempenveldt, Dundee, remained loyal in their duties.<sup>125</sup> In like manner EEM Meyer of Boschberg, Dundee, maintained the allegiance of her workers.<sup>126</sup>

Married Afrikaner women, especially those whose husbands had been convicted of high treason, also suffered because their claims for war losses were mostly refused. They were ironically disempowered and oppressed by their marital status. The defining decision which illustrates this was the claim by Mrs ME Labuschagne of De Waar, Dundee. Her husband, a convicted rebel, was declared insolvent five months prior to the war. On 14 November 1900, Labuschagne was ordered to Pietermaritzburg by the military. She left all her property on the farm except for the horses which had earlier been taken by the military. Soon after her deportation all her livestock was looted by the British Army. Labuschagne's claim for compensation from the Invasion Losses Enquiry Commission met with the following response:

After full consideration it was decided not to allow damages for property lost by wives and minor children of convicted rebels. It will in some cases mean that innocent persons will suffer thr'o the act of another if compensation is not allowed it would mean that property really belonging to the convicted person would also be claimed for by the wife. In the present case it is clear that the property belong to the claimant but the commission is of opinion that it would be a mistake to break the rule even in this case.<sup>127</sup>

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120. PAR, PM 90: Correspondence regarding the removal of Izak Meyer to Ladysmith by the military, 6.11.1901-22.11.1901.

121. PAR, 1/LDS 3/1/16: Letter Magistrate TR Bennett, Klip River district, to commandant Ladysmith, 26.11.1900.

122. PAR, 1/DUN 3/1/10: Letter Mrs GP Kemp to magistrate Dundee, 16.6.1902.

123. PAR, 1/UMS 38: Letter acting magistrate Umsinga to Mrs H Strydom, 14.12.1900.

124. PAR, 1/UMS 38: Letter acting magistrate Umsinga to Mrs H Strydom, 19.3.1901.

125. PAR, CSO 2888: Invasion Losses Enquiry Commission: Claim by MMCW Kemp, 6.12.1901.

126. PAR, CSO 2894: Invasion Losses Enquiry Commission: Claim by EEM Meyer, 5.4.1901.

127. PAR, CSO 2888: Invasion Losses Enquiry Commission: Claim by ME Labuschagne, 25.10.1901.

In the light of the Labuschagne ruling claims by married women on behalf of their children were also not honoured. As a result Annie Elizabeth Vermaak's claim on behalf of her son, 13-year-old Andries Cornelius Vermaak (jnr), for the cattle which he had received annually since he was a baby,<sup>128</sup> and a claim by MJ Oosthuysen on behalf of her two stepsons, both imbeciles, aged 31 and 33 respectively, were dismissed.<sup>129</sup> All in all only four of the 13 claims for compensation by married Natal Afrikaner women were processed. Of these, two were from areas outside the war zone.<sup>130</sup>

In stark contrast were the experiences of Natal Afrikaner widows for whom the lack of a husband proved to be economically beneficial. Economically empowered before the war, these women were generally much more assertive and successful in dealing with the Invasion Losses Enquiry Commission. A point in case was MMCW Kemp who for many years had managed the farming activities because her husband was bedridden. This continued after he passed away in 1901. Since she held the economic power she was paid £3 735.13.1. in compensation for losses incurred at the hands of the British forces. This happened despite the fact that four of her sons were convicted of treason.<sup>131</sup> An equally economically powerful woman was EEM Meyer who managed the farming activities on her farms Boschberg, Dundee, and one near Newcastle. Her livestock was continually raided by the military and their African supporters. Some of the animals were slaughtered at Elandsplaagte and others taken to the derelict stock yards in Ladysmith and the military stock yards at Pepworth and Reid's farm. A determined Meyer, assisted by her labourers, managed to track some of her livestock down and convinced the military to hand them back to her. Meyer was eventually paid £2 447.15.11. for losses incurred.<sup>132</sup> The largest amount paid in compensation to a Natal Afrikaner woman was the £5 076.17.9. paid to MJ Zietsman of Snelster, Estcourt, who not only lost all her livestock but also had her house completely ruined.<sup>133</sup>

Widowed Afrikaner women of lesser economic means also successfully petitioned for compensation. Anna Katrina Slabbert of Dundee who did sewing and washing and who fled Dundee on 16 October 1899 to escape the advancing Boers, received £1 11.26.9.,<sup>134</sup> while Susanah Pelster of Bergvliet who farmed with mealies, goats and pumpkins was also fully compensated.<sup>135</sup>

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128. PAR, CSO 2910: Invasion Losses Enquiry Commission: Claim by AE Vermaak on behalf of AC Vermaak jnr, 9.10.1900.

129. PAR, CSO 2897: Invasion Losses Enquiry Commission claim by MT Oosthuysen on behalf of MJ and TJ Oosthuysen, 26.11.1902.

130. See PAR, CSO 2864-2914: Invasion Losses Enquiry Commission claims, *passim*.

131. PAR, CSO 2888: Invasion Losses Enquiry Commission: Claim by MMCW Kemp, 6.12.1901.

132. PAR, CSO 2894: Invasion Losses Enquiry Commission: Claim by EEM Meyer, 5.4.1901.

133. PAR, CSO 2914: Invasion Losses Enquiry Commission: Claim by MJ Zietsman, 29.5.1901.

134. PAR, CSO 2905: Invasion Losses Enquiry Commission: Claim by AK Slabbert, 6.12.1900.

135. PAR, CSO 2898: Invasion Losses Enquiry Commission: Claim by JS Pelster, 13.1.1903.

Only 11 out of 39 claims from widows and unmarried Natal Afrikaner women were not honoured. Of those seven were disallowed because they had followed the Boers into the Republics,<sup>136</sup> while the claim of Mrs JM Pieters of Paddafontein, Dundee, was disallowed because she had attended “nachtsmaal” at the headquarters of the Natal Commando at Helpmekaar,<sup>137</sup> and that of Mrs ME de Waal of Carolina, Dundee, because she had sold oxen to the Irish Brigade.<sup>138</sup>

#### **10.4 Correspondence with men in authority - Natal Afrikaner women pleading for their menfolk**

One of the few measures available to Natal Afrikaner women to voice their opinions, raise issues and confront the authorities within the gender constraints of the time was by means of letter writing. These letters invariably followed the trials and tribulations of their husbands, sons, fathers and other male relatives and friends. In the correspondence the women often tried to convince the Natal authorities of the innocence of their husbands or sons, asked for their release or transfer to a prison closer to home to prevent economic decline and ruin<sup>139</sup> and made other requests to make their lives easier.<sup>140</sup> Such correspondence, mostly subservient in nature, invariably followed the bureaucratic process and under Martial Law very few of the requests met with success. Despite this Natal Afrikaner women persisted with their correspondence simply because that was their only hope of finding favour with the patriarchal government system that existed at the time.

Correspondence with the authorities commenced as soon as the military authorities started to detain suspected rebels. Mrs M Scheepers of Wagon Drift, Estcourt, requested the assistance of PUS Bird in securing the release of her husband NB and his brother B Scheepers when they were arrested and imprisoned in Pietermaritzburg by the military authorities in November 1899. In the absence of the Scheepers men, the family had their horses commandeered, and lost some cattle and sheep. Scheepers's request placed the colonial authorities in a predicament which they were frequently confronted with thereafter. Since the arrest was a military matter they could not interfere. Subtle pressure was, however, placed on the military to speed up the process. This did seem to have paid dividends for the Scheepers brothers were not charged and were released on 5 February 1900.<sup>141</sup>

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136. See for example: PAR, CSO 2899: Invasion Losses Enquiry Commission: Claim by HM Potgieter, 16.4.1901; PAR, CSO 2903: Invasion Losses Enquiry Commission: Claim by JS Schalkwyk, 16.12.1901; PAR, CSO 2097: Invasion Losses Enquiry Commission: Claim by JMM Coke-Smyth, 11.4.1901.

137. PAR, CSO 2899: Invasion Losses Enquiry Commission: Claim by JM Pieters, 18.2.1901.

138. PAR, CSO 2874: Invasion Losses Enquiry Commission: Claim by ME de Waal, 27.2.1902.

139. PAR, PM 24: Correspondence to and from E Hattingh regarding the detention of her husband, 25.9.1901-2.10.1901; PM 90: Letter from BA Bester to HD Winter, 22.11.1901; PM 90: Correspondence regarding the removal of Izak Meyer to Ladysmith by the military, 6.11.1901-22.11.1901.

140. PAR, CSO 1663: Correspondence regarding permission for Hendrik Buys to travel to and from Ladysmith to the farm Rietkuil, 28.11.1900-10.12.1900.

141. PAR, CSO 1638: Correspondence regarding the detention of NB and B Scheepers by the military, 17.1.1900-19.2.1900.

A similar complaint was lodged by Johanna Meyer of Eversholt, Estcourt, in letters dated 12, 16 and 27 July 1900 to the colonial secretary, Charles Smythe. She complained that her husband Izak Johannes Meyer and son John had been wrongfully arrested seven months earlier and were still awaiting trial. All their cattle, as well as their wagon and furniture, were taken by the military. As a result she and her four daughters were left destitute and had to rely on the charity of fellow Afrikaners. Frederick R Moor (MLA) who was also a resident of this constituency pursued the affair and suggested that the "...matter be taken in hand at once as I am informed that the woman and her children are absolutely destitute." The colonial secretary's response was curt: "I do not see how the Government can take this matter in hand, unless you can suggest some practical way of dealing with the case", but Moor had no suggestion. The Natal Police were tasked with investigating the case. They reported that Mrs Meyer had five or six head of cattle and a few sheep while 200 angora goats belonging to a relative were grazing on her property for which she possibly received some income. Apart from this she had little money and struggled to survive. This report failed to generate much sympathy in government circles. Instead, Prime Minister Hime merely pointed out that the Meyers had only been in prison for two months and not seven as claimed. He also questioned their innocence since they were held for looting and carrying arms and ordered that the matter be referred to the military. To make matters worse for Meyer, she was informed by the authorities that the military had no record of receiving livestock or furniture from her farm.<sup>142</sup> No proof was found that Izak Johannes Meyer was ever convicted of treason vindicating Johanna Meyer's claim that her husband was unfairly arrested.

Not only ordinary Natal Afrikaners women like Scheepers and Meyer requested the release of their husbands and complained about their economic plight, but also the wives of more prominent Natal Afrikaner such as ME Labuschagne, the wife of one of the most prominent Natal Afrikaner politicians of the time, CJ Labuschagne. Mrs Labuschagne complained that after her husband was removed as a suspected rebel, and all their horses, livestock and food were taken by the military. Their position subsequently became so dire that she had to borrow some oxen from a neighbour to take her and her two daughters to their family at Chieveley. She claimed that she was promised that her husband would be able to return to his farm from his parole in Durban when the Boers were driven past Colenso. As this had happened in early March 1900 she requested Prime Minister Hime to exercise his authority to have her husband released. Labuschagne's letter posed a predicament for the colonial authorities since there was no military objection to her husband's return but merely a civil question, namely was he a rebel or not?<sup>143</sup> As a result Prime Minister Hime, in a secret despatch to the general officer lines of communication, requested that Labuschagne and another Natal Afrikaner politician, WJ Pretorius, be kept in Durban for a further three weeks to allow the attorney-

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142. PAR, CSO 1654: Correspondence between Johanna Meyer and the colonial authorities, 12.7.1900-4.8.1900.

143. PAR, PM 87: Correspondence relative to the removal of CJ Labuschagne to Durban by the military authorities, 8.3.1900-27.4.1900.

general to finalise evidence against them. The military granted this request.<sup>144</sup> As in the case of IJ Meyer Labuschagne was not charged.

Mrs H Labuschagne of Kopje Alleen near Acton Homes likewise wrote that the menfolk in her family were innocent. She was convinced that her husband had never left their farm while her sons, who trekked with sheep to the OFS, were prevented from returning home by the Boer forces. As a result she requested the authorities to release them from prison, offering their farm as security for bail. Labuschagne was informed that once the preparatory examinations were completed she could apply under Rule 103 of the rules for the Special Court for their release on bail.<sup>145</sup>

Convicted wives and families of rebels also regularly corresponded and requested the transfer of fathers, brothers, sons or husbands to prisons closer to their places of residence. Anna Susanna Hogg originally from Dundee, but residing with her daughter, Mrs TJ Maré,<sup>146</sup> on the farm Welgevonden near Greytown, applied to have her husband Piet (Peter) Hogg, 73-years of age with failing eyesight and suffering from debility, transferred from the Eshowe to the Pietermaritzburg Prison. Mrs Hogg had not seen her husband since his imprisonment ten months earlier as she did not have the means to visit him and undertook “not to trouble the goal officials with frequent visits to my husband” should he be transferred to Pietermaritzburg. Surprisingly her request found favour with the authorities on condition that either Piet Hogg or his wife paid the rail and postcar fare for him and his escort for the transfer to the Pietermaritzburg Prison. Piet Hogg was able to pay because he had £8.1.11. in his possession. The authorities deducted the expenses of £6.11.11. to bring Hogg to Pietermaritzburg from this amount before handing the remaining monies over to his wife.<sup>147</sup>

The success of Anna Susanna Hogg’s dealings with the colonial authorities convinced Annie Vermaak, wife of PR Vermaak of Vermaaks Kraal, Helpmekaar, then residing in Prince Street, Pietermaritzburg, to write a similar letter to that of Hogg. Vermaak even offered to pay for her husband’s transfer. Fearing that they would be inundated by requests from the wives of rebels for transfer to Pietermaritzburg so that they could be close to their families, the prison authorities dug in their heels. To them the case of Piet Hogg was an exception because of his high age and illness. The

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144. PAR, MJPW 116: Correspondence regarding the further detention of CJ Labuschagne and WJ Pretorius, 9.4.1900-17.4.1900.

145. PAR, 1/LDS 3/3/14: Correspondence regarding the release of the family of H Labuschagne, 19.9.1900-5.10.1900.

146. Sarie Maré (Marais?) immortalised in the Afrikaans song *My Sarie Marais*, based on the American ditty “My Sweet Ellie Rhee”, is according to one theory one of the most renowned Natal Afrikaner women. The song were apparently composed to honour Ds Paul Nel, her son, who always told stories about his mother. According to Jac Uys she came from Greytown, Natal and was married to Louis Jacobus Nel. Her grave can be visited on the farm Welgegund on the D479 road 14 km outside of Greytown. *Natal Witness*, 8.3.1993. For a comprehensive analysis of the various theories surrounding the song see: AC van Vollenhoven, Die kenmerke en herkoms van die volkslied, *Sarie Marais*, *South African Journal for Cultural History*, 14 (1), June 2000, pp.92-110.

147. PAR, CSO 1683: Correspondence regarding the removal of Peter (Piet) Hogg from the Eshowe to the Pietermaritzburg Prison, 8.8.1901-25.9.1901.

policy statement issued in response was simple: The principle of allowing rebel prisoners the privilege of moving from one prison to another was wrong. Thus the rebel prisoners and Annie Vermaak were informed that such requests would not be considered in future.<sup>148</sup>

This decision did, however, not prevent other Natal Afrikaner women from applying to have their husbands transferred. Both CM von Benecke and Johanna Jordaan requested that their husbands be transferred from Eshowe to Estcourt to serve the final six months of their sentences closer to home. Von Benecke's reason for this request, namely that her spouse was old and ill, was rejected as insufficient while it was also regarded as inconvenient to have rebel prisoners in Estcourt.<sup>149</sup>

The tough attitude adopted by the prison authorities ended the requests for the transfer of rebel prisoners. Only three and a half months after the war ended requests were again put forward by Natal Afrikaner women for the transfer of prisoners. Attorneys Carter and Robinson, applied on behalf of Mesdames HW Boers and GJ Boers, that their husbands be transferred from the Eshowe to the Ladysmith Prison. As ample accommodation was available in the Ladysmith Prison and the war something of the past it was decided to relocate the two prisoners at no costs to the families. The advantages of their relocation did not last long for they were both released on 17 October 1902 under a remission of sentence ruling.<sup>150</sup>

In an attempt to overcome the refusal of the prison authorities to transfer rebels between prisons, at least one request was received to allow the wife of a convicted rebel to relocate to the town in which her husband was incarcerated.<sup>151</sup> JJ Webb wanted his wife, who had been removed from Dundee to the Pietermaritzburg Concentration Camp by the military and subsequently allowed to reside in Weenen county, to be granted permission to reside in Eshowe which according to him had by "far a healthier climate than Weenen or Maritzburg." The matter was referred to Chief Commissioner Dartnell who deemed it a military matter. The military thought otherwise and referred the case back. The Natal Police subsequently started a full-blown investigation into the economic and family affairs of Mrs Webb. At the conclusion of the investigation which started on 15 December 1900 and ended on 14 February 1901, eleven pages of correspondence were produced, enough evidence to inform Webb, without providing reasons, that his request had been refused.<sup>152</sup> Mrs JJ Webb,

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148. Previously Annie Vermaak had requested permission to see her husband as he passed through Pietermaritzburg to Dundee where he had to appear as a witness. Attorney-General Henry Bale initially entertained the idea but this proved to be impossible since Vermaak left for Eshowe earlier than anticipated. PAR, PM 23: Correspondence regarding the transfer of PR Vermaak from Eshowe to the Pietermaritzburg Prison, 4.9.1901-14.9.1901

149. PAR, PM 25: Correspondence regarding the removal of GE von Benecke and GE Jordaan from the Eshowe to the Estcourt Prison, 20.12.1901-6.1.1902. A similar request by the 76-year-old Mrs AC Krogman for the transfer of her son OW Krogman were also refused. PAR, MJPW 91: Application by Bale and Green on behalf of AC Krogman, 7.1.1902-17.1.1902.

150. PAR, MJPW 96: Correspondence concerning the transfer of HM and GJ Boers from the Eshowe to the Ladysmith Prison, 19.9.1902-22.10.1902.

151. PAR, MJPW 82: Letter minister of lands and works to T Hellett, 6.2.1901.

152. PAR, MJPW 80: Minute paper regarding the correspondence of JJ Webb to have his wife transferred to Eshowe,

however, did not give up and asked that her husband's 18 month sentence be remitted. The governor responded that except in cases of illness no petition for remission or reduction of sentences would be considered as long as the war raged.<sup>153</sup>

The release of convicted rebel prisoners did not necessarily ease the burden on the women, especially since the men were not always allowed to return home. Mrs MMCW Kemp requested that her two sons-in-law, BJ Badenhorst and AJG Meyer, return home after their release to assist with the farming. Her request failed since both men had been convicted of treason.<sup>154</sup> As time went by and the war ended, the attitude towards time-expired rebels softened. As a result BA Bester, on behalf of Mrs JN Scheepers, had no difficulty in convincing the colonial and military authorities to allow her husband and son, on their release, to return to their farm near Estcourt.<sup>155</sup>

Adopting an angry and aggressive tone in the letters was sometimes to the detriment of those whom they wished to help. The husband and son of Nellie Botha, CS (Chris)<sup>156</sup> and Vincent, were arrested on charges of high treason. Vincent, a frail 15-year-old boy, was first sent to the Tin Town POW Camp and then transferred to the Newcastle Prison. The fact that he was an undersized child and that no real evidence existed against him made the state hesitant to prosecute. In an attempt to secure the release of his son, Chris Botha wrote to the colonial secretary explaining that his son was innocent and that prison life and a lack of education was to his detriment. The letter seems to have had the desired effect for Attorney-General Labistour ordered the boy's release. A problem arose when the military refused to sanction his transfer to join his mother at Greytown, mainly because of the tone of a letter written by Nellie Botha to her husband. In this letter she made it very clear that she did not take kindly to the fact that her husband's letters were censored and would consider making it public after the war. Furthermore, well aware that her letters were being read by the British military, she attacked the judges in her husband's upcoming trial. According to Nellie Botha "there were many English gentlemen born, but I think they all died young." She also asked her husband to dispense the following advice to Vincent: "Tell him to look his tormentors straight in the face and to show no signs of fear, no one connected with me must show any signs of fear to an Englishman, whatever happens." After reading the inflamed letter, the military contemplated sending Vincent Botha out of the country, while the civilian authorities could merely comment that as long as such seditious language was used the military would offer little consideration to requests for transfer.

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15.12.1900-14.2.1901.

153. PRO, CO 179/218: Letter Governor HE McCallum to Colonial Secretary J Chamberlain, 14.7.1901.

154. PAR, AGO I/8/80: Correspondence regarding the return of the sons-in-law of Mrs MMCW Kemp, 30.5.1901-10.6.1901.

155. PAR, PM 29: Correspondence regarding the return of GJA Scheepers and son to their farm on their release from prison, 15.5.1902-11.6.1902.

156. Chris Botha was one of the most notorious rebels. For his conviction see p.196.

Possibly in an attempt to pick up the pieces of his wife's outburst, Chris Botha, in a civil manner, requested the Newcastle magistrate to release his son so that he could proceed to Greytown to resume his education.<sup>157</sup> Nellie Botha was not at all accommodating and confronted the civil authorities:

You are doubtless well aware that my husband CS Botha has been confined in the Newcastle Goal since the beginning of November last and my little boy Vincent since the 9<sup>th</sup> of December. The latter, also on a charge of High Treason. And it is in connection with him that I wish to address you. From a letter from my husband I understand that Vincent was discharged by the Magistrate of Newcastle of this charge viz High Treason. This was on the 27<sup>th</sup> of January. Since that date he has remained in the Goal but on what charge I do not know, and my object in writing to you is that I may be informed why he is retained. I feel sure that you will agree with me that this is a lamentable state of affairs under which a lad's future life, may be ruined through being, from no fault or sin of his, precluded from obtaining the necessary tuition, food and suitable surroundings for ripening into manhood. Whilst he remained with his father in one Goal I felt easy about him, but as it is, my husband was removed to the Dundee Goal on the 5<sup>th</sup> inst (5 January) to stand his trial, and he still remains in Newcastle Goal, on learning this my anxiety at once rose which is only natural for any mother to do who has the welfare of her child at heart and it is this that prompts me to write to you.

The tone of Nellie Botha's letter galvanised the colonial authorities into action and two weeks after his release from civil custody, the military was persuaded to let him go. Vincent Botha was released into the care of his uncle IM Botha to be taken to his mother at Greytown.<sup>158</sup>

Nellie Botha did not get off scot free and the Natal Police were instructed to investigate her. Sergeant G Hunnable, on completion of the investigation, notified the criminal investigation officer that Botha was in possession of a considerable number of Transvaal promissory notes commonly known as "Bluebacks" which had apparently been paid to her husband by the Transvaal Government for services rendered. The idea existed that the British Government would redeem these notes at face value at the end of the war, thereby in actual fact rewarding rebels for services rendered to the Republics. The treasury, however, declared that: "this Administration declines to recognise any such liabilities of that Government." This ended the investigation and rendered the "Bluebacks" valueless.<sup>159</sup>

## 10.5 Concluding comments

Natal Afrikaner women were not archetypical *volksmoeders* as embodied by AP van Rensburg,<sup>160</sup> because they did not share the tradition of militarised citizenship as embodied by the Boer Republics in which women were "mirrors to male war".<sup>161</sup> In spite of this, they, like the Boer women in the Republics, suffered

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157. PAR, 1/NEW 3/1/19: Correspondence regarding the release of Vincent Botha, 3.1.1902-14.2.1902.

158. PAR, CSO 1698: Correspondence regarding the release of Vincent Botha, 13.2.1902-18.2.1901.

159. NAR, PMO 38: Correspondence regarding the possession of "Bluebacks" by Mrs CS Botha, 23.3.1902-7.4.1902.

160. AP van Rensburg, *Moeders van ons Volk*, p.26.

161. J Elshtain, *Women and war*, p.58.

much during the war and many a time saw how the most important cog of Afrikaner life, the domestic domain of the farm household, were destroyed.<sup>162</sup> As British subjects, however, they suffered because they were of the same ethnic origin as the invading Boer forces.

The reaction to this was two-fold. Firstly it bred a resentment towards what the English stood for as can be gathered from the following incident: A Mrs Walton who had just returned from Britain wrote to Mary Schoon and her sister-in-law, Nellie Schoon, inviting them to become members of the "Guild for Loyal Women." Nellie Schoon's reply was stinging. She proclaimed that although she knew little of the "Guild for Loyal Women" she remembered the time when the organization was simultaneously involved in the applause for the looter and thief Leander Starr Jameson at the Ladysmith Station and the booing of the representative of the crown, the governor. If this was the loyalty the Guild stood for, she did not think highly of it. Nellie Schoon furthermore pointed out they had received the invitation to join, with surprise, since they had been branded and treated as rebels since the inception of the war despite the fact that they had done nothing to deserve such treatment. In the process the hypocrisy of the English were exposed "and we will despise them for that for the rest of our lives."<sup>163</sup>

Secondly the persecution of Natal Afrikaners galvanised them into the broader nationalist Afrikaner fold. This is best described by Maggie Bester, the sister of Mary Schoon: "How do these people feel who have brought this upon us? Have they any shame? We are staying with relatives and kind Dutch friends, until we have a home to go to. To-day I am proud to be called a dutch girl, and hope no more will take me for an English girl as most of the military did in Harrismith, most of them said But you're not Dutch? Most certainly I am, and proud of it."<sup>164</sup>

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162. B Nasson, *The South African War 1899-1902*, pp.62-63.

163. PAR, HF Schoon collection A 72: Diary entry, 12.2.1901, pp.577-578, containing a copy of the letter of Nellie Schoon,

164. PAR, HF Schoon collection A 72: My experiences during the Anglo-Boer War by Maggie Bester, 26.9.1900.