

Sexual Relations between British Soldiers and Boer Women: A Methodological Approach

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ABSTRACT

A number of sources documenting the varied sexual relations between British soldiers and Boer women are assessed in terms of the traditional historical methodology of empirical evidence and logical inference. On this basis, the facticity of most of these sources is accepted, while two are discounted by virtue of provenance and internal evidence.

Next two further sources that are not amenable to this methodology are interpreted using the postmodern deconstructive rejection of history as an epistemology and Alun Munslow's speculative expressionist history. However, these anti-empirical strategies are ideologically determined and therefore ethically questionable and the resultant relativity vitiates the historian's craft. On this basis, the historical status of these sources is rejected.

KEYWORDS

Anglo-Boer War
Sexual relations
Rape
British soldiers
Boer women
Methodology
Postmodernism
Oral history
Empirical evidence
Anti-empiricism

Introduction

The recent publication of an Afrikaans novel about a young woman who was viciously raped and left for dead by two British officers¹ has excited much attention and pertinently raises the issue of sexual relations between British soldiers and Boer women. In this article the range of such relations from

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¹ Francois Smith, *Kampboer* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 2014).

friendship to abuse will be examined. After considering a number of sources in the light of the traditional historiographical concern for their objectivity and veracity, attention will be given to two further sources that are not amenable to the same treatment. They are deconstructed in terms of anti-epistemological methodologies which foreground subjectivity and significance.

Friendship

In contrast to the dehumanizing portrayal of Boer women by Sir John Gilmour, 2nd Baronet of Lundin and Montgrave – ‘How I hate them, nasty, ugly, spiteful wretches, worse by far than the men, and no womanly ways at all.’² – the war correspondent Arthur Hales could conceive of Boer women as possible objects of desire.³ In the midst of war, people long for normality and so there are soldiers who fall in love with enemy women. This was a transcendent experience for the man, as it lifted him out of the war psychologically, and for the woman, who, accustomed to a circumscribed country life with its simple, rural values, was offered a glimpse of a wider, more sophisticated world out there.⁴ Barely a month after British troops entered Winburg, Margaret Marquard, wife of the local Dutch Reformed Church minister, was clearly taken aback when she called on an acquaintance and found ‘a Soldier of the Queen’ who had come a-courting sitting in the parlour.⁵ In some cases such courtships even culminated in marriage.⁶

Contemporary observers remarked on Boer nurses flirting with English officers and Boer women’s interest in foreign doctors⁷ and a contemporary newspaper noted that ‘Boer maidens, despite the objections of their male relatives, are very much like their English sisters – they dearly love a soldier lad.’⁸ Cornelis Plokhooy, a Dutch volunteer with the Boers, was dismayed at young Boer women flirting with British officers.⁹ According to one observer, such liaisons were a common sight in Wakkerstroom,¹⁰ while another had this to say:

² Patrick Mileham, ed., *‘Clearly my Duty’: The Letters of Sir John Gilmour from the Boer War 1900-1901* (East Lothian: Tuckwell Press, 1996), 6 December 1900, 103.

³ Paula Krebs, *Gender, Race, and the Writing of Empire: Public Discourse and the Boer War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 99.

⁴ Joshua S. Goldstein, *War and Gender: How Gender Shapes the War System and Vice Versa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 312.

⁵ Leo Marquard, ed., *Letters from a Boer Parsonage: Letters of Margaret Marquard during the Boer War* (Cape Town: Purnell, 1967), 19 June 1900, 89.

⁶ John Boje, *An Imperfect Occupation: Enduring the South African War* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2015), viii; Carman Miller, *Painting the Map Red: Canada and the South African War, 1899-1902*, 2nd ed. (Ottawa: Canadian War Museum, 1993), 345; Byron Farwell, *Queen Victoria’s Little Wars* (London: Allen Lane, 1973), 352.

⁷ Alice Bron, *Diary of a Nurse in South Africa: Being a Narrative of Experiences in the Boer and English Hospital Service* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1901), 81; Sophia Izedinova, *A Few Months with the Boers: The War Reminiscences of a Russian Nursing Sister*, (Johannesburg: Perskor, 1977), 30.

⁸ *Weekly Dispatch*, 11 November 1900.

⁹ C. Plokhooy, *Met den Mauser: Persoonlijke Ervaringen in den Zuid Afrikaansche Oorlog*. (Gorinchem: F. Duym, 1901), 60.

¹⁰ National Archives of South Africa, Pretoria (hereafter NASA), A 787: Gustav Preller Collection, 20C: Diary of C.B. Pringle.

Notwithstanding that things were so awful in the [Springfontein] camp, there was nevertheless a section of our people who, unconcerned at the plight of their fellow-Afrikaners, continued living happily and pleasurably. I was astonished to see Afrikaner girls, not from the camps but those who lived nearby, rode about with English officers and having fun with them, quite clearly without the slightest concern for what was happening on their doorstep.¹¹

That is not to say, however, that the erotic interests of camp inmates disappeared with their incarceration. Bloemfontein was full of soldiers and the superintendent of the concentration camp complained about them coming into the camp after women. He was told to isolate 'immoral women' and to put them on half rations, but the problem did not go away.¹² In her reminiscences, Hester Uys tells us: 'My aunt became friendly with one of the Tommies. She stole someone else's skirt and walked with him.'¹³ The army complicated things by removing women of 'bad character' who were giving them trouble in the town to the camp.¹⁴ It is difficult to interpret expressions such as 'immoral' and 'bad character' because it was a censorious age, but Hester Uys says quite bluntly: 'Prostitutes carried on with Tommies and Boers in the [Bloemfontein] camp.'¹⁵

The superintendent of the Winburg camp also had to contend with young officers coming into the camp.¹⁶ One young woman was committed to gaol for twenty-four hours (her father asked that it should be made a month) because a soldier was found standing in the doorway of her tent.¹⁷ When soldiers were forbidden access to the camp,¹⁸ a nearby kloof became a favoured place of assignation.¹⁹ After a church service in the Merebank camp, the clergyman passed on a message from the superintendent to the effect that three women had been sent to Durban for three days' hard labour on account of 'immorality.' A fellow inmate wrote: 'It grieved us from the heart to think that there were such bad folk amongst us who could so give themselves up to Khakies.'²⁰

Fluency in English facilitated socialization. In Pretoria the conduct of Annie Botha, wife of the Commandant General, was remarked upon. 'On one occasion,' H.J. Batts wrote, 'a very pleasant evening was spent at the home of a friend, at

¹¹ Sarah Raal, *The Lady who Fought: A Young Woman's Account of the Anglo-Boer War* ([Cape Town]: Stormberg, 2000), 29.

¹² Free State Provincial Archives (hereafter FSPA), Archives of the Chief Superintendent of Refugee Camps (hereafter SRC) 3.520.

¹³ 'A Boer Girl's Memories of the War: Hester Johanna Maria Uys', (Interviews with Errol Lincoln Uys, 1970, <http://erroluys.com/boerwarchildsstory.htm>, accessed 20 August 2015).

¹⁴ FSPA, SRC 30.10092.

¹⁵ 'A Boer Girl's Memories of the War'.

¹⁶ FSPA, SRC 12.4475.

¹⁷ FSPA, Archives of the Colonial Secretary, Orange River Colony (hereafter CO) 417.350, Report on Burgher Camp at Winburg, 11.

¹⁸ FSPA, SRC 12.4475, with attached Lines of Communication Order (of Lt-Gen. C Tucker) No. 296. For a similar state of affairs in the Bloemfontein camp, see A.W.G. Raath and R.M. Louw, *Die Konsentrasiekamp te Bloemfontein* (Bloemfontein: Oorlogsmuseum, 1993), 55-57.

¹⁹ FSPA, CO 417.350: Report on Burgher Camp at Winburg, 11.

²⁰ A.M. van den Berg, 'Journal of the War', in Emily Hobhouse, *War without Glamour: Women's War Experiences written by themselves 1899-1902* (Bloemfontein: Nasionale Pers, [preface 1924]), 20 October 1900, 35.

which Mrs Botha was present. All our conversation was in English and Mrs Botha sang a number of English songs and accompanied the officers as they sang.²¹ Bessie Collins added her criticism:

I do feel so disgusted and ashamed of our women because of the way they carry on with these Khakies. Of the poorer class I don't speak – we expected them to do it, but that the better class should do it and many of their husbands and brothers are still fighting. Now there is a woman like Mrs L. Botha. She always has a lot of officers about her. It does show such bad taste, to say the least. As for the young girls it is disgusting how they lay themselves out to attract these officers.²²

Such meetings were not confined to the towns. At a delightful soirée on the farm of C.J. Bornman in the Vredefort district, a British officer reports, the host's daughter and 'our Captain of Yeomanry' sang and played.²³

On the other hand, a lack of understanding of English might, on occasion, have led to misunderstanding. Two soldiers from a British encampment on Mrs J.J. Muller's farm visited her on the evening of 27 January 1902. They tried to strike up a conversation, but she left the room, whereupon one returned to camp. The other followed her and asked her to come back to the parlour but she refused, whereupon he also left. Her conclusion, that 'he intended to rape me if he had the opportunity',²⁴ might just be no more than an opinion.

It is not unknown in times of war for women to befriend members of an army of occupation in order to obtain material benefits. P.J. Marx, a Boer participant in the war tells how he benefited from the jam, cigarettes and other provisions his sisters got from soldiers who visited them. These suitors were careless with their ammunition, which they left lying around, or they would have the girls join in shooting birds with them, and secreted cartridges usefully augmented the Boers' meagre store.²⁵ Another author refers to the benefits of such liaisons as tea, sugar, jam – and information,²⁶ for in many wars such friendships are also a channel for espionage.

Of course, this could also work the other way round. The Boer nurse Betty Wessels agonized about her friendship with a prisoner, Dr J.G. Willis, whom the Boers suspected of being a spy. The tension between sociability and patriotic duty is palpable in her account: 'He says they treat him like a criminal he is guarded and has no one to talk to, what could I do, I should very much like to

²¹ H.J. Batts, *Pretoria from Within during the War 1899-1902* (London: Shaw, s.a.), 208.

²² Bridget Theron (ed.), *Dear Sue: The Letters of Bessie Collins from Pretoria during the Anglo-Boer War* (Pretoria: Protea Book House, 2000), 28 September 1900, 63. See also Francis de Souza, *A Question of Treason*, (Hillcrest: Kiat Creations, 2004), 162.

²³ J.G.B. Clayton, The untitled Boer War Journal of Lt James George Bulwer Clayton. Typescript in private ownership, 147-8. Bornman, a former member of the Volksraad, was a member of the Kroonstad Peace Committee.

²⁴ A.W.G. Raath and R.M. Louw, *Vrouleed: Die Lotgevalle van Vroue en Kinders buite die Konsentrasiekampe 1899-1902* (Bloemfontein: Oorlogsmuseum, 1993), 105.

²⁵ FSPA, A 119: Renier Collection, 1060: P.J. Marx, 'Vryheidsoorlog Herinneringe', [57-9].

²⁶ C. Miller, *Painting the Map Red*, 345.

help him, but how[?] I won't do any harm to my country.'²⁷ It is in the context of such sociability, heightened by the sexual dynamics of gallantry and flirtatiousness, that we must locate a voluntary disclosure of information. In his diary entry for 23 September 1900, Major Edward Pine-Coffin, the British commandant at Ventersburg Road, remarks: 'Went out to tea with some Boer ladies.'²⁸ How interesting then to come across a statement from the same officer in the Free State Provincial Archives to the effect that Eleanor Daniels 'gave us information of great value.'²⁹

Sometimes a wartime relationship entered into for gain includes non-coercive sex. Sexual liaisons of this nature were very common in Europe after the D-Day landings³⁰ and it has been claimed that Boer women too 'offered sexual favours to soldiers in return for money, medicine or other goods, or to prevent soldiers commandeering their livestock' and that there was a consequent increase in venereal disease.³¹ Both the arch-imperialist Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and the anti-war propagandist W.T. Stead admitted the Boer woman's potential agency in this regard, but Doyle rebuked Stead for implying that a British soldier could have 'used famine as a pander to lust'³² and looked to the soldiers' sense of honour to keep Boer women from such moral degradation.³³

Prurient behaviour

The liaisons referred to above may be described as equal or consensual relations. British soldiers, however, enjoyed the advantage of an exploitive dominance relationship with Boer civilians and in the course of their visits to the farms made themselves known and feared by the exercise of power. This took the form of looting, arbitrary vandalism and violent destruction in pursuance of the scorched-earth policy. With terrorized civilians at their mercy, their behaviour could take on an arrogant sexual edge. Women carried off into captivity were on occasion denied the opportunity to change out of their nightdresses.³⁴ 'Lieutenant Jarvis, Colonel North's subordinate,' one deposition reads, '... lay down on my sister's bed and behaved himself in a most indecent and unbecoming manner, notwithstanding the presence of the ladies.'³⁵ We are not told the nature of Jarvis's improper behaviour but Mrs Stiar of the Harrismith district was asked if a baby was hers and was then invited by a soldier to join him in making another.³⁶

²⁷ University of the Free State, Africana Stockdale Collection, 'Diary of Betty Wessels, Winburg 8th May 1900 to Lourenco Marques 19th October 1900'; typescript [s.l., s.a. (1901?)], 29 July 1900, 42.

²⁸ Susan Pine-Coffin (ed.), *One Man's War: The Diary of John Edward Pine-Coffin* (Bideford, Devon: Edward Gaskell, 1999), 23 September 1900, 138.

²⁹ NASA, Archives of the Central Judicial Commission (hereafter CJC) 639.195.

³⁰ Goldstein, *War and Gender*, 338-9.

³¹ Karen Jochelson, *The Colour of Disease: Syphilis and Racism in South Africa, 1880-1950*, Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), 17.

³² A. Conan Doyle, *The War in South Africa: Its Cause and Conduct*. New ed. (London: Smith, Elder, 1902), 81.

³³ Paula M. Krebs, *Gender, Race, and the Writing of Empire: Public Discourse and the Boer War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 88.

³⁴ Pine-Coffin, *One Man's War*, 26 November 1900, 174.

³⁵ NASA, CJC 705.485.

³⁶ FSPA, A 69.

Although he did her no physical harm, his crude propositioning was experienced as highly offensive.

In the Merebank camp a British soldier was caught in a tent at night after allegedly visiting two or three other tents. His intentions were unknown, but he frightened the women and he was driven out by a crowd of them, who pinched him, poked him and beat him with shoes.³⁷ Three doctors at the Bethulie camp were apparently dismissed for offences of a sexual nature. At least two of them were found to be sleeping with the Boer nursing probationers. Dr John Barrett claimed to be in love with Johanna Louw,³⁸ but even if their relationship was of a consensual nature, it was still professionally improper.

Sexual violence

In the wake of the ethnic cleansing in the former Yugoslavia in 1992-95, military rape has leapt to public and scholarly prominence. Since then numerous attempts have been made to develop an integrated and cohesive theoretical framework to explain wartime rape. Feminist scholars have taken the lead in articulating sociocultural explanations of rape as a 'weapon of war' the violent means of maintaining patriarchy and the subjugation of women.³⁹

What is most striking in the examination of reported rapes in the South African War that follows, however, is the relative absence of the typical elements of the phenomenon of wartime rape that has engaged their attention: its centrality and pervasiveness, appalling savagery and systematic organization.⁴⁰ Even allowing for under-reporting, in this war rape was not a common occurrence; instances of savagery are associated with reports of doubtful authenticity; and the only suggestion of organization that was encountered was a threat on the part of Col. T.D. Pilcher that if any harm came to eighteen black scouts captured by Com. J.J. Koen, he would not be able to protect Boer women against the anger of the other blacks under his command.⁴¹

A tentative explanation for this striking difference may be that the development of standing armies with professional codes of behaviour, held in common by both sides and enforced by hierarchical discipline, in the 17th and 18th centuries

³⁷ Mrs Viljoen, 'An Account of Eight Months spent in a Concentration Camp', in Hobhouse, *War without Glamour*, 65.

³⁸ Elizabeth van Heyningen, 'Women and Gender in the South African War 1899-1902', in Nomboniso Gasa, ed., *Women in South African History: They Remove Boulders and Cross Rivers*, (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2007), 100. The other was presumably Dr Augustus Dickenson; see Engela Pretorius and Daleen Krige, 'Die Dagboek van 'n Boeremeisie in Diens van die Vyand – Siekte en Sorg in die Bethulie Kamp', *Journal for Contemporary History*, 36, 2 (2011), 80.

³⁹ Inger Skjelsbæk, 'Sexual Violence and War: Mapping Out a Complex Relationship,' *European Journal of International Relations*, 7, 2 (2001), 212; Claudia Card, 'Rape as a Weapon of War', *Hyperion*, 11, 4 (1996), 7.

⁴⁰ Paul Kirby, 'How is Rape a Weapon of War? Feminist International Relations, Modes of Critical Explanation and the Study of Wartime Sexual Violence' *European Journal of International Relations*, 19, 4 (2012), 798, 807, 809; Skjelsbæk, 'Sexual Violence and War,' 213; Jonathan Gottschall, 'Explaining Wartime Rape', *The Journal of Sex Research*, 41, 2 (2016), 130-1.

⁴¹ FSPA, A69, Havenga Collection, 26 February 1902; D. Kestell, *Met die Boere-Kommando's*, 202.

created a brief and geographically limited ethos, a set of rules that clearly distinguished between soldiers and civilians.⁴² One reason, Ruth Seifert says, why Western leaders were reluctant to intervene in Bosnia was that it meant confronting opponents who did not play by the rules.⁴³ The ritualized patterns of warfare, which became blurred during the AngloSouth African War, finally collapsed during the First World War, thus inaugurating what Eric Hobsbawm called 'our age of catastrophe.'⁴⁴

In the public debate between W.T. Stead and Conan Doyle, Stead constructs soldiers as natural men whose primitive, violent instincts need to be restrained.⁴⁵ This pressure-cooker theory is shared in a different form by many feminists for whom the pressure is misogynistic rather than libidinal.⁴⁶ They contend that rape is integral to patriarchy and that all men are potentially rapists but are constrained by law.⁴⁷ In propagandistic discourse the inherent tendency to rape may be genetically determined and typical of Germans in the 1st World War⁴⁸ – or of British in the South African War, as a result of which their soldiers were monsters of 'insatiable lust.'⁴⁹

The major feminist contribution to the aetiology of rape has been its identification as a means of exercising power.⁵⁰ Seen in this light, rape is central to war, not merely peripheral.⁵¹ As a 'weapon of war', it is a highly effective means of terrorizing women into subservience,⁵² for rape is a sexual manifestation of aggression, not an aggressive form of sexuality.⁵³ Indeed, Ruth Seifert goes so far as to say that rape 'has nothing to do with sexuality but with the exercise of sexual violence against women'⁵⁴ and Susan Brownmiller declares it to be biological only in an accidental sense.⁵⁵

⁴² Roland Littlewood, 'Military Rape,' *Anthropology Today*, 13, 2 (1997), 10.

⁴³ Ruth Seifert, 'War and Rape. Analytical Approaches I,' www.genderandsecurity.org/sites/default/files/seifert_war-and-rape_.pdf, Thesis 1, accessed 24 March 2016.

⁴⁴ Eric Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes: The Short 20th Century 1914-1991* (London: Michael Joseph, 1994), quoted in Littlewood, 'Military Rape', 16.

⁴⁵ See Doyle, *The War in South Africa*, 119.

⁴⁶ Gottschall, 'Explaining Wartime Rape', 130.

⁴⁷ Skjelsbæk, 'Sexual Violence and War', 218; Nigel Penn, *Murderers, Miscreants and Mutineers: Early Colonial Cape Lives* (Auckland Park: Jacana, 2015), 46.

⁴⁸ Philippa Read, 'Rape in First World War France and Belgium: Nuanced Perspectives', [www.academia.edu/7579661/Rape in First World War France and Belgium Nuanced Perspectives](http://www.academia.edu/7579661/Rape_in_First_World_War_France_and_Belgium_Nuanced_Perspectives), accessed 21 September 2015, 2.

⁴⁹ Willem Boshoff, 'War Rape – Insatiable Lust accompanies Torture and Murder', www.unbannedbiblepublications.com/index_files/Page4210.htm, accessed 3 September 2015.

⁵⁰ Card, 'Rape as a Weapon of War', 217; Gottschall, 'Explaining Wartime Rape', 130.

⁵¹ Ruth Seifert, 'The Second Front: The Logic of Sexual Violence in Wars', *Women's Study International Forum*, 19, 1/2 (1996), 36; Kirby, 'How is Rape a Weapon of War?' 807.

⁵² Skjelsbæk, 'Sexual Violence and War', 212.; Kirby, 'How is Rape a Weapon of War?' 812.

⁵³ Carol Staunton, 'Contextualizing the 'Other': Parliamentary Discourses on Genocide and Race in the Late Nineteenth and Late Twentieth Century in Britain', MA dissertation, National University of Ireland, Galway, 2013, 42.

⁵⁴ Seifert, 'The Second Front', 36.

⁵⁵ Susan Brownmiller, *Against Our Will: Men, Women, Rape* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1975), 13-15, quoted in Gottschall, 'Explaining Wartime Rape', 133.

Gender insecurity produces an excess of male aggression.⁵⁶ During the final decades of the nineteenth century, social changes dramatically affected the status of women in Britain. They were allowed to participate in school boards; married women were accorded control over their own earnings, savings and legacies; they were admitted to the University of London for the first time; they were enabled to sue for maintenance; and they started agitating for the right to vote.⁵⁷ Their increasingly public identity produced a crisis in masculinity. This was characterised by a 'flight from domesticity'⁵⁸ in a construct of 'manliness' learnt in homosocial groups (boys' schools, all-male clubs and the army) and acted out in homosocial groups in appropriate behaviour as evaluated by other members of such groups.⁵⁹ Success, aggression and ruthlessness were the measure of this manliness.⁶⁰ This was clearly the hallmark of British operations in the war and in his encounters with Boer women, the Tommy behaved aggressively to 'maintain his sense of domineering self.'⁶¹ Aggression was expressed in all the violent intrusions into female space, the breaking down of doors, smashing of furniture, slaughtering of domestic animals and burning down of homes and farm buildings. The orgiastic element in these activities is captured in a letter home from a soldier:

We were only there for a few minutes but we did do a little damage in a short time. I put the butt of my rifle through a large looking glass over the mantelpiece and put my foot through a sideboard with glass doors. One of the others smashed up a piano and an organ. The women didn't half scream. I thought they would go for us, but it was an awful sight. I should not have thought that I could have done such a thing, but when you get in with the regular soldiers and have a good gallop we get a bit excited and don't care what comes next.⁶²

The writer was a volunteer; the 'regular soldiers' were members of the British army who had been socialized not just into manliness but into military manliness⁶³ to prepare them for war, in which 'grotesque alienation from peacetime' the killing of one's fellow human beings is but the first abrogation of societal norms⁶⁴ and where opportunity, anonymity and impunity⁶⁵ provide the

⁵⁶ Dara Cohen, 'Explaining Rape during Civil War: Cross-National Evidence (1980-2009)', *American Political Science Review*, 107, 3 (2013), 463; Seifert, 'The Second Front', 41.

⁵⁷ Angela Holdsworth, *Out of the Doll's House: The Story of Women in the Twentieth Century* (London: BBC Books, 1988), 12-13.

⁵⁸ John Tosh, 'Domesticity and Manliness in the Victorian Middle Class', in Michael Roper and John Tosh, eds, *Manful Assertions: Masculine Identities in Britain since 1800* (London: Routledge, 1991), 65-8.

⁵⁹ S.J. Bannerman, 'Manliness and the English Soldier in the Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902: The more things change, the more they stay the same', M.A. dissertation, University of Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada, 2005, 5.

⁶⁰ Bannerman, 'Manliness', 7. David Newsome, *Godliness and Good Learning: Four Studies on a Victorian Ideal* (London: Cassell, 1961), 238, adds arrogance.

⁶¹ Read, 'Rape in the First World War', 4.

⁶² Quoted in Tabitha Jackson, *The Boer War* (London: Macmillan, 1999), 131.

⁶³ Skjelsbæk, 'Sexual Violence and War', 21.

⁶⁴ Nicola Henry, Tony Ward and Matt Hirschberg, 'A Multifactorial Model of Wartime Rape', *Aggression and Violent Behavior* 9 (2004), 548.

⁶⁵ Henry *et al.*, 'A Multifactorial Model', 548, 553;

setting for the release of misogynistic pressures carried over from civil society.⁶⁶ As Capt. March Phillipps, an officer himself involved in the war, put it: 'Soldiers as a class are men who have discarded the civil standard of morality altogether.'⁶⁷

One weakness of these formulations is the underlying determinism, which has the effect of exculpating actions that are genetically or culturally determined.⁶⁸ The fact of the matter is that not all men rape and rape is not pervasive in every conflict.⁶⁹ There are individual variables that explain the former qualification⁷⁰ and situational variables that have a bearing on the latter.⁷¹ Applied to the Stead-Conan Doyle controversy we may say that the truth lies somewhere in between. Some men have the proclivity to rape⁷² and in the South African War the sociocultural and situational factors⁷³ that are conducive to sexual violence were muted or entirely absent. Thus a high degree of violence was not characteristic of British society and the conflict was not exacerbated by religious ideology.

For Conan Doyle, the British soldier was chivalrous by nature and therefore incapable of offences against women,⁷⁴ an ingenuous view bordering on fantasy. Needless to say, this view was shared by the British authorities. General Redvers Buller knew of no incidents of rape by British soldiers,⁷⁵ and Chamberlain asserted that there was no occurrence of a British soldier being justly accused of this outrage.⁷⁶ More surprisingly, Conan Doyle's sanguine appraisal received local support from Rev. H.S. Bosman, who wrote:

Not a single instance of criminal assault or rape by non-commissioned officers or men of the British army on Boer women has come to my knowledge ... There have certainly been cases of immoral conduct, but in no single instance, as far as I know, has force been used. They only go where they are invited and where they are welcome.⁷⁷

Many cases of rape would have gone unreported because the Boer woman's culture precluded her speaking of such things.⁷⁸ There was nobody in authority to whom she could turn for redress other than enemy males. If she did

⁶⁶ Kirby, 'How is Rape a Weapon of War?' 811; Skjelsbæk, 'Sexual Violence and War', 217; Seifert, 'Second Front', 38

⁶⁷ L. March Phillipps, *With Rimington* (London: Arnold, 1902), 130.

⁶⁸ Littlewood, 'Military Rape', 13

⁶⁹ Gottschall, 'Explaining Wartime Rape', 134.

⁷⁰ Henry *et al.*, 'A Multifactorial Model', 536

⁷¹ Skjelsbæk, 'Sexual Violence and War', 218.

⁷² Cohen, 'Explaining Rape', 465; Henry *et al.*, 'A Multifactorial Model', 537-43.

⁷³ Henry *et al.*, 'A Multifactorial Model', 543-7 and 547-56.

⁷⁴ Cf. Paula M. Krebs, *Gender, Race, and the Writing of Empire*, 81 onwards.

⁷⁵ Quoted by Stead in *How Not to Make Peace* (London: Review of Reviews, 1900), 71.

⁷⁶ Staunton, 'Contextualizing the "Other"', 156

⁷⁷ H.S. Bosman to the Military Governor of Pretoria, quoted in E.P. Lowry, *With the Guards' Brigade: From Bloemfontein to Koomati Poort and Back* (London: Marshall, 1902), 140.

⁷⁸ Pets Marais, *Die Vron in die Anglo-Boereoorlog, 1899-1902* (Pretoria: J.P. van der Walt, 1999), 39.

she would be made to bear the blame for attempting to dishonour a man (just as her sisters in England were thus constrained).⁷⁹ She would be subjected to the pain and embarrassment of having to identify the perpetrator. Private Tucker tells of two Boer women walking down the ranks of his regiment, looking hard at every man but unable to identify their assailant.⁸⁰ When Commandant General Louis Botha reported the rape of a Boer woman by two soldiers, Roberts responded that he would investigate the 'allegation', but the woman would have to travel to Pretoria to identify the perpetrators.⁸¹ 'When our people complain,' Bessie Collins commented, 'Lord Roberts always says bring the soldier who is guilty and I will punish him, but who is to point out the right man amongst thousands of Khakies who all look alike.'⁸²

Even if the perpetrator was identified, it is the woman whose integrity and reputation would be put on trial⁸³ by a military authority reluctant to convict and she would bear the subsequent shame and stigma.⁸⁴ The media projected a positive picture of the army, and soldiers' crimes were concealed from the public.⁸⁵ Stead pointed to some of the absurd stratagems employed in some courts martial that he investigated, for example the suggestion that soldiers who forced their way at gunpoint into the home of Mrs Jacobs of the Rustenburg district and then jumped into a bed occupied by the daughters of the house were merely tired and in need of somewhere to sleep. Mrs Van Rooyen of the Pretoria district testified that Mr E___n, an intelligence officer, had removed her from her home in a cart and threatened to shoot her if she did not submit to his demands. Although her clothes were torn, she managed to elude him. Such ruffianly behaviour, the court decided, could not have been perpetrated by a British officer. It must have been some unknown passing vagabond. Mrs Gouws of the Pretoria district was throttled by her assailant, whose demands she resisted, but was pressed to admit that she did not know of any sexual misbehaviour on the part of a British soldier.⁸⁶ Small wonder then that in the entire course of the war only fourteen cases of rape, attempted rape or aiding and abetting rape were brought to trial by the military authorities in both the Free State and the Transvaal and nine acquittals ensued.⁸⁷

Towards the end of the war, some fifty Boer women availed themselves of the opportunity to record sworn statements before designated Boer officials.

⁷⁹ Shani D'Cruze, *Crimes of Outrage: Sex, Violence and Working Women in Victorian England* (London: UCL Press, 1998), 158.

⁸⁰ Pamela Todd and David Fordham, eds, *Private Tucker's Boer War Diary: The Transvaal War of 1899, 1900, 1901 and 1902 with the Natal Field Forces* (London: Elm Tree Books, 1980), quoted in Pets Marais, *Die Vron*, 39.

⁸¹ Quoted in S. Miller, 'Duty or Crime', 322.

⁸² See Theron, ed., *Dear Sue*, 27 June 1900, 58.

⁸³ D'Cruze, *Crimes of Outrage*, 1.

⁸⁴ Cohen, 'Explaining Rape', 462; Kimberly Theidon, 'Gender in Transition: Common Sense, Women and War', *Journal of Human Rights*, 6, 4 (2007), 468.

⁸⁵ Staunton, 'Contextualizing the 'Other'', 156-7.

⁸⁶ Stead, *The War in South Africa 1899-1900: Methods of Barbarism* (London: Mowbray House, 1901), 85, 79, 86.

⁸⁷ S. Miller, 'Duty or Crime', 322.

These archival records,⁸⁸ known as the Havenga Collection, were embargoed for close on a hundred years. They contain searing accounts of physical violence against women. There are some fifty statements covering a range of offences including ill treatment, deportation, damage to property, house burning and destruction of crops, which the military regarded as legitimate operations. Some relate to assaults, including rape, by blacks in the service of the British army, but these are excluded from consideration for the purposes of this article. There remain about fifteen claims of rape or attempted rape by soldiers.

It is significant that the sexual abuses recorded here were all perpetrated late in the war. During the conventional phase of the war, the troops had little contact with the civilian population, discipline was stricter and easier to implement, but as the war went on, military necessity was used to justify harsh treatment of civilians and soldiers acted against them with increasing impunity. Once the war was carried to the Boer home front, there was increasing close contact between British soldiers and Boer women. Guerrilla warfare called for the use of smaller army units in the field. These units under inexperienced junior officers were often ill disciplined and after June 1900 discipline was even more difficult to maintain in the many volunteer units, which often had only rudimentary training.⁸⁹ And Australian troops, we are told, were excused from most discipline and protected from the consequences of their actions.⁹⁰

The cases of rape and attempted rape in the Havenga Collection commend themselves as historically reliable for three reasons. They were all sworn to in 1901 and 1902 and their contemporaneity therefore sets them apart from the problematic provenance of the proto-nationalist testimonies of the post-war period.⁹¹ Secondly, the courage of the women in making their shame known to family and friends witnesses to their facticity. As Michel Foucault said, such a confession is 'a ritual in which the truth is corroborated by the obstacles and resistances it has had to overcome in order to be formulated.'⁹² Thirdly, the voice of the women comes across vividly in their statements. Thus in the case of Johanna Nel, the bizarre outcome provides a self-authenticating touch. The soldier who was importuning her with ever-decreasing self-assurance was at last so disconcerted by the inconsolable crying of her children that he went into the room where her baby was, kissed the child and went away.⁹³

⁸⁸ FSPA, A 69.

⁸⁹ S. Miller, 'Duty or Crime', 317; Krebs, *Gender, Race and the Writing of Empire*, 81-2.

⁹⁰ C Wilcox, *Australia's Boer War: The War in South Africa, 1899-1902* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2002), 3-4.

⁹¹ See for example, Liz Stanley and Helen Dampier, 'Cultural Entrepreneurs, Proto-Nationalism and Women's Testimony Writing: From the South African War to 1940', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 33, 3 (2007), 501-13; Stanley and Dampier, 'Simulacrum Diaries: Time, the 'Moment of Writing' and the Diaries of Johanna Brandt-Van Warmelo', *Life Writing*, 3, 2 (2006), 25-52.

⁹² Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, Vol. 1 (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), 62.

⁹³ FSPA, A 69.

Many of the testimonies speak of assailants not 'achieving their purpose' or not 'fully achieving their purpose,' sometimes because the woman was able to frighten them with threats (Marie du Toit); sometimes because she could fight them off or managed to flee (Johanna Erwing and two daughters, Anna van Loggerenberg, Aletta Reeve and Magdalena Venter); sometimes because her cries for help attracted attention (Anna van Loggerenberg and Martha Pietersen); and sometimes because of the fortuitous arrival of a third party (Goudina Brits and Johanna van der Merwe). There is the further possibility that the formulaic phrase may indicate a shying away from a full disclosure of a traumatic reality.⁹⁴

Just how traumatic that reality could be is evident from the testimony of Johanna Geldenhuys:

My 10-year old daughter, Talita Lootz, and I were alone at the farm on 22 January 1902 when Rimington's patrol arrived. Two British soldiers seized me and dragged me to a room, while a third soldier ripped off Talita's clothes. When she was naked, he sexually abused her. I could not bear to see what they were doing to my young child. The two soldiers who were holding me then kicked and beat me. I ended up lying on the floor. The soldier who had abused Talita pushed her away and grabbed me. He raped me in that room, in front of my daughter. And the two other soldiers stood watching us through the window.⁹⁵

This is the only instance in the collection of the plaintiff stating unambiguously that she was raped by a soldier. Another, from a different source, is provided by a Mrs Botha of Middelkraal. A soldier broke into her home, demanded that she go to the bedroom, grabbed her by the arm, struck her in the face, causing her to fall down, throttled her, dragged her by the legs, manhandled her onto the bed, and finally, after a fierce struggle, succeeded in raping her.⁹⁶

It would be easier for a third party to mention the occurrence of sexual violence on the part of soldiers,⁹⁷ and scattered reports of this nature are to be found. The case of the two women plaintiffs related by Private Tucker has been referred to above. Margaret Marquard mentions 'a miserable story' of violence done to Catherine van Deventer by a Colonial, but does not elaborate.⁹⁸ Lodi Krause records the sight of a shamefaced Tommy being berated by a Boer woman he had tried to rape a few days earlier.⁹⁹ On the last night of their long journey to internment, Johanna Rossouw of Reitz heard Catharina van Vuuren calling for help. 'Next morning she told me that a Khaki had thrice that night pushed under the tent of her wagon to molest her but fled when she called for

⁹⁴ FSPA A 69; Raath, *Vrouneled*, 61-110; Owen Coetzer, *Fire in the Sky: The Destruction of the Orange Free State 1899-1902* (Weltevreden Park: Covos-Day, 2000), 227-9.

⁹⁵ Jan van der Merwe, 'The Havenga Report on Rapes', in Bill Nasson and Albert Grundlingh, eds, *The War at Home: Women and Families in the Anglo-Boer War* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 2013), 52-3; translated.

⁹⁶ Stead, *The War in South Africa: Methods of Barbarism*, 89.

⁹⁷ See Theidon, 'Gender in Transition', 458.

⁹⁸ Marquard, *Letters*, 18 July 1900, 97.

⁹⁹ Jerold Taitz, ed., *The War Memoirs of Commandant Ludwig Krause, 1899-1900* (Cape Town: Van Riebeeck Society, 1996), 129.

help.¹⁰⁰ At Ermelo, a Canadian officer, Col. Agar Adamson, responded to a girl's frantic appeal and rescued her sisters from attempted rape by two of his men.¹⁰¹

Yet one is struck by the paucity of such reports, even in the highly polemical post-war testimonies. Indeed, *Mag ons vergeet?* and *Stemme uit die Verlede* record the reminiscences of more than seventy informants and not once is sexual misconduct by a British soldier alleged.¹⁰² In *The Brunt of the War* Emily Hobhouse quotes the memorandum sent to the congress held at Worcester on 6 December 1900 by women laagered at Krugersdorp. Here two incidents of a sexual nature are alleged. One is of a woman whose neck was so twisted in an attack on her that it would never come right again. Furthermore, when her daughter rushed to her assistance, the assailant drew his sabre and cut open the child's breast.¹⁰³ Here the brutality of the attack provides a 'threshold of authenticity',¹⁰⁴ in striking contrast to the circumstantial but clearly unvarnished narrative of Mrs van Loggerenberg (referred to above), for example. The other story does not appear to have involved any physical force but what it lacks in substance it makes up for in rhetoric.¹⁰⁵

Two young girls ... were in danger of being violated, but managed to take shelter with a neighbour. The soldiers followed in pursuit, but the girls refused to open the door. They were in great danger, but the saving hand of God protected them, and they escaped this ignominy; one of the girls made her escape, and walked a distance of six hours' ride. The sufferings of these women must have been excruciating: words are failing us to describe them.

The dramatic excess in one story and the stylistic excess in the other, taken in conjunction with the lack of specific authorship and the propagandistic purpose which the narratives serve, point in the direction of mythology. Emily Hobhouse makes no other reference to rape or attempted rape in this book or in *War without Glamour*.

Empirical and anti-empirical historiography

The discussion up to now has presupposed the conventional historiographical faith in the epistemological integrity of empiricism, the scrupulous examination of the available evidence and the use of rational inference to arrive at the probable objective truth of what happened in the past.¹⁰⁶ This reconstructionist interpretation held undisputed sway until the 1970s when Hayden White

¹⁰⁰ War Museum of the Boer Republics, Bloemfontein (hereafter WMBR) 155/176/1: Testimony of Mrs Johanna Rossouw of Reitz, dated 15 September 1903.

¹⁰¹ C. Miller, *Painting the Map Red*, 322.

¹⁰² M. Neethling, compiler, *Mag ons vergeet?* (Cape Town: Nasionale Pers, 1938); M.M. Postma, ed., *Stemme uit die Verlede* (Johannesburg: Voortrekkerpers, 1939).

¹⁰³ Emily Hobhouse, *The Brunt of the War and Where it Fell* (London: Methuen, 1902), 220.

¹⁰⁴ Staunton, 'Contextualizing the "Other"', 45.

¹⁰⁵ Hobhouse, *The Brunt of the War*, 219-20.

¹⁰⁶ Alun Munslow, *Deconstructing History* (London: Routledge, 1997), 36-7.

pioneered the postmodern deconstructive rejection of the notion of historical truth, referentiality and objectivity – and therefore of history as an epistemology.¹⁰⁷ The insights of White and his successors will have an important bearing on the two sources that will be discussed in the rest of this article.

An oral history

In 2010, P.A.H. Labuschagne and C.J. van Vuuren published an article¹⁰⁸ in which it is alleged that Elizabeth Human of the farm Landdrostmoeite in the Winburg district was so plagued by the advances of a British officer that she shot him and then called on a trusted farm worker to bury the body. Elizabeth Human first communicated this narrative of an event that took place in 1901 or 1902 to various family members in 1936 and it was first published in 2002.¹⁰⁹ Its survival was therefore dependent on oral tradition over more than a century.

Most oral historians are emphatic that oral sources must be subjected to the same canons of practice as written sources. They must be checked, documentation must be sought and the evidence must be carefully weighed. Furthermore, the informant should be subjected to rigorous cross-examination to obtain details, eliminate inconsistencies and probe contradictions between ideology, myth and reality.¹¹⁰ In this case, however, there was no fieldwork, familial piety precluded any possibility of interrogation of the informant and the factual content of the narrative appears to be unverifiable. The article comprises 67 paragraphs, only two of which are about the visits of the British officer and his death and burial. Besides much extraneous matter, we have no name of the unwelcome visitor, no regiment, no date, no witnesses and no body. The farm worker Johannes Seseane, we are told, remained tightlipped.¹¹¹ The witnesses called by the authors can testify to the existence of the story, but not to its facticity. In the circumstances, the authors' concession that in undocumented events 'it is often cumbersome to differentiate between probable fact and untruth and sensation and authenticity'¹¹² highlights the impossibility of sustaining a traditional approach.

A deconstructionist methodology offers a more acceptable interpretation of this narrative. What makes oral history different in Alessandro Portelli's view is its privileging of form over content, meaning over events, the informant's subjectivity over 'facts'. 'What informants believe,' he says, 'is indeed a historical *fact* (that is,

¹⁰⁷ Munslow, *Deconstructing History*, 166.

¹⁰⁸ P.A.H. Labuschagne and C.J. van Vuuren, 'The Destiny of the Human Family and Johannes Seseane in the Winburg District during the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902)', *South African Journal of Cultural History*, 24, 1 (2010), 35-57.

¹⁰⁹ A.W.G. Raath, *Die Boerevrou, 1899-1902, deel I: Moederleed* (Nylstroom: Volkskomitee vir die Herdenking van die Tweede Vryheidsoorlog, 2002), 72.

¹¹⁰ Ronald J. Grele, 'Movement without Aim: Methodological and Theoretical Problems in Oral History', in Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson, eds, *The Oral History Reader* (London: Routledge, 1998), 41, 47-8; Peter Friedlander, 'Theory, Method and Oral History', in Perks and Thomson, *Oral History Reader*, 318.

¹¹¹ Labuschagne and Van Vuuren, 'The Destiny of the Human Family', 50.

¹¹² Labuschagne and Van Vuuren, 'The Destiny of the Human Family', 39.

the fact that they believe it), as much as what really happened.¹¹³ History, in this interpretation is a truth-making rather than a truth-finding discourse¹¹⁴ and if Elizabeth Human's story is not *the* truth, it is still *her* truth, derived from the memory bank that constituted her identity.

Individual memory and collective memory interpenetrate, as was demonstrated by Alistair Thomson's classic study of Anzac veterans.¹¹⁵ Collective memory is not simply an aggregate of individual memories, for in return for the security of belonging to a group or nation,¹¹⁶ the individual unconsciously accommodates his or her experiences of the past to the prevailing meaning system.¹¹⁷ Elizabeth Human's memory must therefore be contextualized culturally. The time of its articulation in the 1930s is significant, as this was a period of heightened Afrikaner nationalism, when heroic war reminiscences were solicited from a generation that was thinning out.¹¹⁸

The rise of Afrikaner nationalism brought an unexpected level of inauthenticity. The cult of the hero imposed pressure on people to reconstruct their past actions, and the concomitant suppression of information about the darker side of the war made it much easier for them to do so. A famous World War I recruiting poster has a little girl asking her uncomfortable father, 'Daddy, what did you do in the Great War?' This is a question that is inevitably asked and the parent is under pressure to meet the expectations of the questioner with the truth, half truths or elaborations of the truth. This is not to suggest deception so much as self-deception. When we speak about people 're-inventing' themselves, we are acknowledging in common parlance the widely held understanding of identity as variable. Who we are is not something fixed or stable; it is constructed at the juncture between self and society.¹¹⁹ It is not only our children who interrogate us, but society at large and, as we interact with those around us, we constantly re-work our memories to make them accord with the expectations of others, constructing an identity that makes us feel better about ourselves. Such reinvention was by no means uncommon in the wake of the South African War.¹²⁰

¹¹³ Alessandro Portelli, 'What makes Oral History different', in Perks and Thomson, *Oral History Reader*, 67.

¹¹⁴ Alun Munslow, *The Routledge Companion to Historical Studies* (London: Routledge, 2000), 9.

¹¹⁵ A. Thomson, *Anzac Memories: Living with the Legend* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

¹¹⁶ Jenny de Reuck, 'A Politics of Blood: The 'White Tribe' of Africa and the Recombinant Nationalism of a Colonizing Indigene', *Critical Arts*, 10, 2 (1996), 144.

¹¹⁷ The political use of memory by means of which identity is constructed that is articulated here is based on an inquiry into the nature of collective memory by the French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs and is a concept that has gained general recognition in recent decades. See Paul Antze and Michael Lambek, *Tense Past: Cultural Essays in Trauma and Memory* (New York: Routledge, 1996), xxi.

¹¹⁸ See C.N. van der Merwe, 'Verhale oor die Anglo-Boereoorlog', *Literator*, 19, 3 (1998), 86-8.

¹¹⁹ See, in this regard, Ena Jansen's excellent analysis of *Ons Japie* – "'Ons samelewing sal nog ingewikkelder gemaak word.' Twee vertelmomente van Anna Barry se Boereoorlogdagboek *Ons Japie* (1960)', *Tydskrif vir Nederlands en Afrikaans*, 10, 2 (2003); www.savn.org.za/images/stories/documents/TNA/TNA_20032.pdf, last accessed 1 Jan. 2016.

¹²⁰ J.G. Boje, 'Winburg's War: An Appraisal of the Anglo-Boer War of 1899-1903 as it was Experienced by the People of a Free State District' (Unpublished DPhil thesis, University of Pretoria, 2009), 482-7.

During the war a tendency developed for women to claim the moral high ground of being the true *bittereinders*.¹²¹ In the end the men surrendered, while they remained unconquered. After the war, the steely resolve of their resistance became a trope of women's testimonies. The self-portrayal Sarah Raal and Hendrina Rabie-Van der Merwe is as unconvincing as it is unattractive. The former boasts of saying to a British officer, 'I'd be better off in prison than having to sit here and look at your face any longer,'¹²² while the latter instructs a child to retrieve a blood-stained cap badge from the body of a black policeman to add to her collection of souvenirs.¹²³ The women in the camps are portrayed as rebellious. Most notorious is the widely attested protest in the Brandfort camp. J.C. Otto quotes five references to this occurrence;¹²⁴ to which Liz Stanley and Helen Dampier were able to add six more.¹²⁵ So far from the multiplicity of the sources providing corroboration, the different versions vary widely not only in detail but also in credibility, demonstrating the way a story is elaborated in the telling, to the extent that the rhetorical and mythologised elements obscure the original referent.¹²⁶

It is with this myth that Elizabeth Human identifies, construing herself as strong in resistance, doing the work that women expected of their supposed protectors,¹²⁷ and it is this interpretation of the war that the article under discussion propagates.

An expressionist history

The acclaimed Afrikaans novel referred to in the opening paragraph of this article is based on Nico Moolman's 'true' history of a Boer girl viciously raped by two British officers and left for dead. She survives and many years later is able to take revenge on her assailants.¹²⁸ This narrative is even more resistant to the

¹²¹ Helen Bradford, 'Regendering Afrikanerdom: The 1899-1902 Anglo-Boer War', in I. Blom, K. Hagemann and C. Hall, eds, *Gendered Nations: Nationalisms and Gender Order in the Long Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Berg, 2000), 211; Marijke du Toit, 'The Domesticity of Afrikaner Nationalism: Volksmoeders and the ACVV, 1904-1929', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 29, 1 (2003), 158.

¹²² Sarah Raal, *Met die Boere in die Veld* (Cape Town: Nasionale Pers, 1938), 95; translated.

¹²³ Hendrina Rabie-Van der Merwe, *Onthou! In die Skaduwee van die Galg* (Bloemfontein: Nasionale Pers, 1940), 118.

¹²⁴ J.C. Otto, *Die Konsentrasiekampe* (Cape Town: Nasionale Boekhandel, 1954), 180; Neethling, *Mag Ons Vergeet?* 35 and 45; *Die Transvaler*, 20 September 1938, letter from J.H.C. Potgieter; and *Stemme uit die Verlede*, 24 and 42.

¹²⁵ Stanley and Dampier, 'Aftermaths: Post/memory, Commemoration and the Concentration Camps of the South African War', *European Review of History*, 12, 1 (2005), 112; FSPA, A 248: Dagboek van Bettie Grobbelaar, 52-3; S.L. le Clus, *Lief en Leed: 'n Verhaal van Huis- en Kampele gedurende die Anglo-Boereoorlog van 1899-1902* (Bloemfontein: Nasionale Pers, 1920), 63; FSPA, A119.74; and WMBR, 4128/29: Herinneringe van mev Ras. Rabie-Van der Merwe, *Onthou!* is also mentioned but in this case the reference was not found.

¹²⁶ Stanley and Dampier, 'Aftermaths', 98. See also Elizabeth van Heyningen, *The Concentration Camps of the Anglo-Boer War: A Social History* (Pretoria: Jacana, 2013), 128-9.

¹²⁷ Cf. A. Badenhorst, *Tant Alie van Transvaal: Die Dagboek van Alie Badenhorst* (Cape Town: Nasionale Pers, 1939), 177.

¹²⁸ Nico Moolman, *The Boer Whore: O.H.M.S., Valuable Commodity – Handle with Care* (Vanderbijlpark: The author, 2011).

canons of empirical verification than that of Labuschagne and Van Vuuren. The British officers have fictitious names; the villainous Boer, J.P. Schutte of Heilbron was not an inmate of the Winburg camp but of Vredefort Road;¹²⁹ of the four young women who allegedly shared a tent in the camp – Susan Nell, Joey Cloete, Hester Luwes and Alice Draper – only the last two appear in the camp records;¹³⁰ Susan Nell does not appear to have arrived in Southampton;¹³¹ there is no record of her studying at Leiden University;¹³² and her dramatic role in Thailand is unconvincingly undocumented.

However, the author signals his intention of writing an anti-empirical, counterfactual history by means of two enigmatic statements in the introduction to the book: 'What is factual for George is fiction for Cathy. It all depends how you see it' and 'It is by telling this story that fact and fiction compliment [sic] and contradict one another.'¹³³ In contrast to the fictitious elements, some actual people are mentioned, for example Edward Alexander, Dr. Molesworth and Marie Koopmans de Wet, and many contemporary photographs are used on the *tromp d'oeil* principle for creating a reality effect.¹³⁴

The postmodern view that history is a discourse through which the past-as-history is created results in an emphasis on form rather than content. Its delusory 'scientific' pretensions must be abandoned; it is a literary artifact, an emplotment based on the author's tropic prefiguration. The tropes employed derive from his or her ideological concerns and the writing is directed to an audience that will share those concerns.¹³⁵ It therefore has a moral aspect since it propagates an ideology, in the anticipation that their common ideology will be reinforced in the readership.¹³⁶ From a postmodern perspective, history is, as J.M. Coetzee put it, 'nothing but a certain kind of story that people agree to tell each other.'¹³⁷

Frank Ankersmit defines historical truth as doing justice to the past,¹³⁸ and this would be a good way of describing Moolman's central concern. The core disclosure on which the story is based was also made in the 1930s, the heyday of Afrikaner nationalism, and is focused on the cruelty of the British army and the terrible suffering of Boer women in the concentration camps, which cries out for revenge. This, in the author's view, is a past excess that is simply incapable of domestication. Consequently the launch of the book in Winburg was

¹²⁹ Elizabeth van Heyningen, 'British Concentration Camps of the South African War', <http://www.archivalplatform.org/registry/>, accessed 6 Sept. 2015; NASA, CJC 1500.802.

¹³⁰ FSPA, SRC 90: Winburg Camp Register.

¹³¹ Passenger Lists, <http://search.ancestry.co.uk>, accessed 6 Sept. 2015.

¹³² J.W. Pont, *Het Studiefonds voor Zuid-Afrikaansche Studenten 1885-1935: Overzicht van Zijn Geschiedenis* (Amsterdam: Stichting Studiefonds, 1935).

¹³³ Moolman, *Boer Whore*, 7 and 8.

¹³⁴ Munslow, *Deconstructing History*, 60.

¹³⁵ Munslow, *Deconstructing History*, 9, 82, 181; Munslow, *The Routledge Companion*, 198.

¹³⁶ Munslow, *The Future of History* (Houndmills, Hants: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 187.

¹³⁷ J.M. Coetzee, 'The Novel Today', *Upstream*, 6, 1 (1988), 4.

¹³⁸ Munslow, *The Future of History*, 190.

accompanied by a prayer that God would lift the curse on the town supposedly pronounced by Christiaan de Wet.¹³⁹ Symbolically the rape of Susan Nell represents the rape of the nation, an outrage that can only be assuaged by an apology from the British head of state.¹⁴⁰

Different ideologies give rise to different pasts emplotted in different literary artifacts, whether historical or fictional constructs. In what Munslow terms expressionist history, Moolman's passion to take up the cause of the camp inmates – and all other abused women – results in a radical disjunction between 'facts' and meaning. The past is constituted to reflect his purpose. Whether the events happened or did not happen is irrelevant; the author's creativity is applied to serving the need to communicate and share that passion.¹⁴¹ The outcome is a *simulacrum*, 'a history that has broken its connection with the past but still 'looks like it.'¹⁴² This would appear to be a very fair description of *Boer Whore*, because although Moolman does not lay claim to being an historian, his narrative is presented as historical and has been received as such.

Relativism

In the postmodern paradigm history and historical fiction are both discourses aimed at making sense of the past. A striking example of the latter category is Christoffel Coetzee's novel *Op soek na Generaal Mannetjies Menz*.¹⁴³ This fictitious general, whose name ironically evokes notions of manliness and humanity, is in charge of a commando that captures defectors and forces them to rejoin; if they refuse, they suffer a cruel death by torture. Here a different South African War past is created by and for a different ideological concern.

Like *Boer Whore*, the novel deals with an excess incapable of domestication. As the war became increasingly irregular, it was not only the British but also the Boers who departed from acceptable usages of war. The British records list 235 incidents of unarmed blacks being killed by Boers in the field.¹⁴⁴ And Commandant Sarel Haasbroek reported to De Wet that his Winburgers were shooting armed blacks on a weekly basis.¹⁴⁵ There were other atrocities as well, and it is inevitable that young men saw things and did things that did not leave them unaffected. British commandants on Bermuda noted that there were young Boer prisoners who had become inured to cruelty and violence and Smuts and De la Rey were also concerned about this phenomenon.¹⁴⁶ Such trauma 'defies

¹³⁹ *Volksblad*, 25 June 2011.

¹⁴⁰ See, for example, 'Afrikaners hold out for full Boer War apology', *The Independent*, 22 September 2015.

¹⁴¹ Cf. Munslow, *The Future of History*, 191, 213.

¹⁴² Munslow, *The Future of History*, 219.

¹⁴³ Christoffel Coetzee, *Op Soek na Generaal Mannetjies Menz* (Cape Town: Queillerie, 1998).

¹⁴⁴ Thomas Pakenham, 'Africans in the Boer War', Review of Peter Warwick, *Black People and the South African War, 1899-1902*, *Journal of African History*, 27, 3 (1986), 574-5.

¹⁴⁵ Fransjohan Pretorius, *Life on Commando during the Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902* (Cape Town: Human & Rousseau, 1999), 273.

¹⁴⁶ J. Higginson, 'Hell in Small Places: Agrarian Elites and Collective Violence in the Western Transvaal', *Journal of Social History*, 35, 1 (2001), 107. See also Pretorius, *Life on Commando*, 274.

reason and a sense of order, cripples our ability to maintain a stable sense of reality, challenges our categories of understanding and consequently the model of the world by which we unconsciously operate¹⁴⁷ The wider symbolic context of the novel is the Afrikaner's *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*,¹⁴⁸ his having to cope with the loss of power and the revelations of abuses of the past by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Moolman's book is a fictional history and Coetzee's an historical fiction, but it would be impossible for Moolman to accept Coetzee's imagined past and for Coetzee to accept Moolman's. So Nietzsche's 'perspectivism of knowledge' – the knowing subject as a construct of time, place, discourse and ideology¹⁴⁹ – delivers us into the hands of emotionally engaged expressive historians who constitute the past in order to propagate their own particular world view through their story space.¹⁵⁰

For most academic historians this represents an intolerable outcome. Over the years historians have embraced postmodern insights and incorporated them in their own thinking, acknowledging the constitutive role of language in social reality, the intensified need to interrogate sources, since history is seen to function as a legitimating mechanism for exercising power in society, and the contingent nature of the facts revealed by their sources.¹⁵¹ Most historians reject a facile conflation of representation and reference, but equally they reject the all-or-nothing challenge posed by postmodernism, and they continue to avail themselves of *a priori* knowledge and categories of analysis in processing the available information in order to arrive at a 'best fit,' most probable version of the past.

Conclusion

The South African War was no 'gentleman's war.' Rather it may be described as a total war in which the civilian population suffered all manner of horrors, including rape. It was also, in many respects, a civil war and therefore cordial relations were possible between elements of the British army (including Colonial troops from the Cape and Natal) and the Boer population, despite the fact that Britain and the republics were at war. The war also involved the black population of the republics, many of whom made use of the opportunity to challenge Boer hegemony. Encouraged by the British, they destroyed the Boers' possessions, took their cattle, occupied their farms and harassed their wives. This harassment included rape, the figures for which may well have exceeded the figures for rape

¹⁴⁷ R. Granofsky, *The Trauma Novel: Contemporary Symbolic Depictions of Collective Disaster* (New York: Peter Lang, 1995), 8.

¹⁴⁸ See Pieter Duvenhage, 'The Politics of Memory and Forgetting after Auschwitz and Apartheid', *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, 25, 3 (1999).

¹⁴⁹ Munslow, *Routledge Companion*, 11.

¹⁵⁰ Munslow, *The Future of History*, 213.

¹⁵¹ Albert Grundlingh, 'Some trends in South African academic history: changing contexts and challenges', in Shamil Jeppie, ed., *Toward New Histories for South Africa: On the Place of the Past in our Present* (Lansdowne: Juta Gariep, 2004), 203-4.

by British soldiers. Rape by soldiers also occurred but cannot be quantified. There are few categorical claims of a woman being raped, but some rapes were never reported and some of the reports of attempted rape may well have been of a more serious nature, the statement that the assailant did not achieve his purpose serving as a psychological coping mechanism.

Except in the case of two of the narratives examined by the normal empirical method, the probable truth, i.e. facticity, of the sources seems to be established. In the case of the sources where an anti-empirical methodology was deemed more appropriate, the sources are concerned with meaning rather than truth and the meaning must remain a matter of opinion.