

TELLING TELEGRAMS: ANOTHER DIMENSION TO PAUL KRUGER?

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Over the past century the type casting of President SJP Kruger has remained largely unchanged. Generally, he is portrayed as a kind of people's (*volks*) hero whilst on the other hand he is depicted as an ignorant Boer tyrant. Consequently, it can be argued that his character has crystallised around a dualistic representation where the "common" Kruger is perceived in primarily positive or negative terms. This representation is particularly apparent in the period before and during the Anglo-Boer South African War of 1899-1902 as Kruger represented the epitome of Boer Republican independence. Nevertheless, this general stereotypical representation of Kruger consequently resulted in the downplaying of some of his other characteristics. An analysis of a selection of Kruger's wartime telegraphic correspondence from May 1900 to September 1900 – Kruger's so-called crisis period – demonstrated the need to challenge this general representation. Not only do Kruger's war telegrams point to a more "humane" side of the President but they also emphasize the value of the war telegram as a historical source. This article therefore firstly endeavours to demonstrate how Kruger has been depicted in a selection of works written by both contemporary and twentieth century (and later) authors. In addition, it seeks to investigate the character of the "wartime Kruger" as is reflected in his war telegrams.

Keywords: SJP Kruger; South African War; telegram; Paul Kruger; 1900; literature; character; Anglo-Boer War; WJ Leyds Archive; biography

Treffende telegramme: 'n Ander dimensie van Paul Kruger?

Die tipering van president SJP Kruger het in die laaste eeu tot 'n groot mate onveranderd gebly. Oor die algemeen is hy voorgestel as 'n tipe volksheld terwyl hy aan die ander kant voorgestel is as 'n onkundige Boere despoot. Gevolglik kan daar aangevoer word dat sy karakter gekristaliseer het rondom 'n tweeledige tipering waar die "algemene" Kruger voorgestel word in hoofsaaklik positiewe en negatiewe terme. Hierdie voorstelling is veral opvallend in die periode voor en tydens die Anglo-Boere Suid-Afrikaanse Oorlog van 1899-1902, terwyl Kruger as die verpersoonliking van Republikeinse

onafhanklikheid gestaan het. Nietemin, lei hierdie stereotipiese voorstelling van Kruger daartoe dat ander aspekte van sy karakter gevolglik onderspeel word. 'n Analise van 'n keur van Kruger se telegrafiese oorlogskorrespondensie van Mei 1900 tot September 1900 – Kruger se sogenaamde “krisis periode”- het getoon dat daar 'n behoefte is om die algemene uitbeelding van Kruger uit te daag. Kruger se oorlogstelegramme ontbloom nie slegs 'n meer menslike sy van die President nie, maar beklemtoon ook die waarde van die oorlogstelegram as 'n historiese bron. Hierdie artikel poog eerstens om aan te dui hoe Kruger voorgestel is in 'n verskeidenheid van publikasies wat geskryf is deur beide kontemporêre en twintigste-eeuse (en latere) skrywers. Daarbenewens, word gepoog om die karakter van die “Oorlogstydse Kruger” te ondersoek soos weerspieël in sy oorlogstelegramme.

Slutelwoorde: SJP Kruger; Suid-Afrikaanse Oorlog; telegram; Paul Kruger; 1900; literatuur; karakter; Anglo-Boereoorlog; WJ Leyds Argief; biografie

Introduction

Praised as a People's (*volks*) leader and a defender of Boer Republican independence, but also labelled as a stubborn and retrogressive despot – these descriptions are synonymous with Paul Kruger (henceforth Kruger), the four times elected president of the *Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek* (ZAR). By 1898, when he was inaugurated for the last time, he had been ambiguously depicted as a friend of the Boer and a foe to the *Uitlander*. Historically he had been depicted in a dualistic manner as his politics and person have been placed under much scrutiny. The height of this portrayal falls within the troublesome years just before and during the Anglo-Boer South African War of 1899-1902. Subsequently, representations depict him in distinct stereotypical ways leaving little room to reflect on other aspects of his character. However, after analysing a selection of telegrams sent by Kruger during the winter of 1900 an additional aspect of Kruger's persona is unveiled. This article therefore sets out to illustrate how Kruger's telegrams sent during this War, during the period between May 1900 and August 1900 shed light on his more “humane” character while at the same time points to the value of the telegram as a historical source. The first part of the discussion focuses on this binary depiction of Kruger in a selected range of texts. The second considers the telegrams as a source of information, pointing to both their contributions and drawbacks. The penultimate section will explain how the war telegrams emanating from this period, contribute towards the portrayal of Kruger.

Kruger in literature

Kruger has been presented in positive and negative terms in both contemporary as well as subsequent literature. Many of the British sources, particularly those written at the turn of the previous century, depict Kruger in an extremely negative manner, whilst for the most part Afrikaner Nationalistic historical literature at the opposite extreme, portrays Kruger in principally positive terms. However, the dividing line between the British Imperialist and Afrikaner Nationalist sources is not always clear cut. There are also “grey areas” that represent neither of the prevailing perceptions. The subsequent discussion will indicate how Kruger was perceived by a number of his contemporaries as well as later authors in the abovementioned terms. Many of these depictions may even be a single page or sentence and point to his governance, leadership, legacy and physical attributes.

Negative portrayals of Kruger

Negative criticism has permeated all elements of Kruger’s life and personality. This was especially noticeable when hostilities were mounting between the ZAR and Britain. It is therefore not surprising that references are made to Kruger’s administration in a derogatory manner in particular from pro-British supporters and sympathisers. Already in 1900 the writer and contemporary of Kruger, Samuel M Gluckstein refers to the “malignant despotism of Krugerian rule”,¹ a claim also brought forward by the South African Vigilance Committee, a pro-British propagandistic organization arguably continually criticising the Kruger administration, indicating that his behaviour can only be “expected from a despot”.² In his monograph on the Boer War, the writer and wartime doctor Arthur C Doyle also touched on this subject. To him “[c]ontinued rule for half a generation must turn a man into an autocrat”.³ This negative perception of Kruger is not unforeseen as Doyle mainly supported the British participation in the War. In the *Milner Papers* Kruger is further characterised as “confirmed in his despotism and in his policy of unyielding resistance to innovation and reform”.⁴ On a second occasion a related comment was made by the British High Commissioner, Lord Alfred Milner, to the Colonial Secretary, Mr Joseph Chamberlain: “Kruger

¹ SM Gluckstein, *Queen or president? An indictment of Paul Kruger* (London, 1900), p 176.

² Vigilance Papers, *Paul Kruger and the Transvaal Judiciary: His violations of the Constitution, and his destruction of the independence of the High Court of the Transvaal* (Cape Town, 1900), p 14.

³ AC Doyle, *The Great Boer War* (London, 1900), p 22.

⁴ C Headlam (ed), *The Milner papers. South Africa 1897-1899* (London, 1931), p 212.

has returned to power, more autocratic and reactionary than ever”.⁵ Both responses from Milner and Chamberlain could conceivably be ascribed to their pro-British and imperialistic views, as they saw Kruger as their common “enemy”. The writer and correspondent John A Hobson also construes “Kruger’s power” as that of a “virtual dictator” with a “hold upon the minds of the great majority” thereby emphasizing his autocratic style.⁶ His depiction of Kruger is in a sense “off” as he was considered an anti-imperialist, yet pointing to Kruger as a “virtual” dictator maybe underlines his doubt regarding where exactly to “categorise” Kruger.

John X Merriman, Cape Colony politician and a member of parliament characterized Kruger as a “takhaar” or a backveld Boer.⁷ Merriman’s portrayal of Kruger is more probable as he was known to be an enlightened man and the ZAR arguably proved to him to be in need of reform. Likewise Milner on another occasion saw Kruger as a “snuffy, mendacious savage”.⁸ Whilst the Canadian journalist Frederick A Mckenzie, referred to Kruger as “primitive” and “comical” describing him as follows:⁹

He makes an easy subject for ridicule. His uncouth appearance, his odd attempts at state and show of dignity, his old-fashioned dress, his strange prejudices, are the subjects of many a laugh throughout South Africa.

Kruger has also been depicted as being a man out of touch with time, old and backward. Both Mckenzie and Hobson identified with this description. Mckenzie argues:¹⁰

If we can fancy a patriarch of the days of Abraham planted down amongst us, he would find himself less out of touch with the ways and manners of our time than is this Boer ruler.

Hobson also describes Kruger as an “old seventeenth-century countryman” who had governed with “belated politics and stern Old Testament direction”.¹¹ On occasion, the State Attorney, Dr Eduard JP Jorissen, likened Kruger to a “sixteenth-century Protestant”¹² thus implying serious limitations in terms of Kruger’s outlook on the

⁵ C Headlam (ed), *The Milner papers ...*, p 221.

⁶ JA Hobson, *The war in South Africa. Its causes and effects* (London, 1900), p 31.

⁷ H Giliomee, *Die Afrikaners: ’n Biografie* (Kaapstad, 2004), p 188; According to HC Hillegas, a “takhaar” refers to the rural and uncivilized Boer characterized as the “modern type of the old Voortrekker Boer...”; See HC Hillegas, *With the Boer forces* (London, 1900), pp 69-71.

⁸ H Giliomee, *Die Afrikaners: ’n Biografie*, p 204.

⁹ FA Mckenzie, *Paul Kruger: His life story* (London, 1899), p 18.

¹⁰ FA Mckenzie, *Paul Kruger: ...*, p 7.

¹¹ JA Hobson, *The war in South Africa ...*, p 25.

¹² EJP Jorissen, *Transvaalsche herinneringen 1876-1896* (Amsterdam, 1897), pp 16-17.

world. To educated and sometimes progressive European men like Milner, Hobson, Mckenzie and Jorissen, Kruger must have proven to be an “ancient” figure not only because he was not educated but also because their world views could perceivably not be aligned. These views of Kruger were better categorised by later historians who had the advantage of hindsight, different schools of interpretation and an array of sources available to their disposal to, in some cases, provide relevant and additional context. Consequently, in the twentieth century, both historians Johannes S Marais and Robert Ross pointed to Kruger as an “anachronism”.¹³ This explains, at least in part, the amount of critique associated with Kruger. Ross conveys a clear picture of how Kruger was perceived as “misplaced” in time: “To prejudiced, progressive Britons in the late nineteenth century and since, Kruger looked and sounded like a living fossil”.¹⁴ A similar observation is made by Sandra Swart relating to Kruger’s portrayal in the British press and to some extent by *Land en Volk*:¹⁵

The ‘Oom Paul’ of the popular imagination was a dour intransigent old man, against progress qua progress and intent on dragging his fiefdom back into the eighteenth century ... He is imagined, even in recent historiography, as the leader of a kleptocratic, backward government...

Over a century after Kruger’s death and also consequently benefitting from retrospection, the historian Bill Nasson was able to question this stereotypical and prevalent negative view of Kruger. He argues that Kruger was depicted in a brutally pessimistic way as part of the propagandistic war machine. Nasson labels this pessimism as the “demonization” of Kruger as he was sketched “as a kind of Victorian ogre, an obdurate and anti-modern autocrat, both stubborn and stupid”¹⁶ in the popular mind.

Positive portrayals of Kruger

Kruger was also depicted in an exclusively positive fashion, especially by those who supported his “fiefdom” or who saw in Kruger hopeful and inspiring qualities. This phenomenon must be understood within the historical context of pending war as Hobson and later on Mckenzie illustrates:¹⁷

¹³ JS Marais, *The fall of Kruger’s republic* (Oxford, 1961), p 7.

¹⁴ R Ross, *A concise history of South Africa* (Cambridge, 1999), p 68.

¹⁵ S Swart, ‘An irritating pebble in Kruger’s shoe’ – Eugène Marais and “*Land en Volk*” in the ZAR, 1891-1896, *Historia* 48(2), 2003, p 73.

¹⁶ B Nasson, *The war for South Africa. The Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902* (Cape Town, 2010), p 19.

¹⁷ JA Hobson, *The war in South Africa ...*, pp 30-31.

There is no strong man in or out of the Raad who could really stand up against the President or could rally a powerful party against him in a national emergency.

This “blind” trust in the President he explains as:¹⁸

... the half-conscious recognition by the people that he is the true repository of the ancient Boer spirit and traditions, and that he will fight with all his mind and all his might for the independence of his country.

Mckenzie consequently makes the following assertion:¹⁹

For it is an article of faith among the rural Boers of to-day that the safety of their State is bound up with Paul Kruger.

The notion of Kruger “fighting for” the interests of his people is central to his positive portrayal. As a result, he has been associated with qualities such as patriotism, loyalty and utter persistence. One of the leading historians of the ZAR and contemporary of Kruger, Johan F van Oordt, illustrates both Hobson and Mckenzie’s view. Van Oordt portrays Kruger in a positive manner by referring to him in patriotic terms: “[s]trijden zal die Leeuw; zich verdedigen tot aan zijn laatsten druppel bloed zal hij” (the lion will fight and defend until the last drop of blood is spilt).²⁰ As quoted above, Hobson and Mckenzie both describe Kruger in more favourable terms, different to their previous negative portrayals. This observation can arguably point to them “striving” towards a more objective view of Kruger. Their opinions were nonetheless based on perspectives and sources written during the war itself which to a large extent are already emotionally charged and biased. Van Oordt however as state historian and who had the opportunity to personally interview Kruger, could possibly form a more genuine impression of the President. He was nonetheless still a ZAR sympathiser and his patriotic portrayal is thus more comprehensible.

The veteran and Boer War correspondent Howard C Hillegas also interestingly points to a comment made by the British politician and Prime Minister William E Gladstone, who similarly referred to Kruger as the “shrewdest politician on the continent of Africa”.²¹ Hillegas’s choice to incorporate this particular opinion of Kruger by a prominent figure in his publication points to his positive perception of Kruger which is also expected from pro-Boer sympathiser. Francis J Dormer, editor

¹⁸ JA Hobson, *The war in South Africa ...*, p 31.

¹⁹ FA Mckenzie, *Paul Kruger...*, p 11.

²⁰ JF van Oordt, *Paul Kruger en de opkomst der Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek* (Amsterdam, 1898), p 815.

²¹ HC Hillegas, *Oom Paul’s people. A narrative of the British-Boer troubles in South Africa, with a history of the Boers, the country, and its institutions* (New York, 1899), p 134.

of the *Cape Argus* and the *Star* is of much the same opinion in terms of Kruger's patriotism and the safety of the State. A sense of cynicism is also noticed from him as is probable from a moderate imperialist and more refined contemporary of Kruger. In 1901 he writes:²²

Mr. Kruger as a domestic tyrant was not much to be dreaded; he was at all times perilously near the end of his tether. But Mr. Kruger as the champion of Republican independence and Afrikaner nationality was, in the circumstances, scarcely less formidable than a first-class European Power.

In his monograph on *The Boer in peace and war* Arthur M Mann, also a contemporary of Kruger, reiterates a similar view. In his work he aims to construe the Boers in a more contextual fashion and seemingly through this process he develops a sense of admiration for Kruger's patriotism. To him Kruger is "at once a man of action" as soon as the independence of the ZAR is threatened.²³ Over a century later the historian Hermann Giliomee in his biography on the Afrikaners refers to Kruger's ability to outwit even European statesmen as his knowledge and experience was unique: "Hy kon die staatsmanne van Europa uitoorlê omdat sy geleerdheid nie op boeke berus het nie, maar op wysheid versamel in 'n veelbewoë lewe" (He could outwit the statesmen of Europe because his education did not depend on books, but was wisdom gathered from a challenging life).²⁴ Similarly to the other twentieth century (or later) writers, and as mentioned previously, these authors' opinions of Kruger are based on different historical sources as well as the advantage of hindsight, as Kruger's personality could be observed against the backdrop of an array of perspectives and information. Consequently, his perspective of Kruger is more realistic rather than pure praise however this does not discount the fact that his heritage as an Afrikaner could have played a role in his view.

The literature that was published after Kruger's death in 1904 portrayed Kruger in positive terms with a particular focus on his legacy. In D'Arbez's biography²⁵ Kruger is sketched as "an important man, a kind person and a true Christian".²⁶ Another work generated on Kruger within this time was written by the pro-Boer journalist Frans V Engelenburg. To him Kruger represents our "Hamlet" in the South African "historical

²² FJ Dormer, *Vengeance as a policy in Afrikanerland: A plea for a new departure* (London, 1901), Preface, pp xxii-xxiii.

²³ AM Mann, *The Boer in peace and war* (London, 1900), p 24.

²⁴ H Giliomee, *Die Afrikaners: 'n Biografie*, p 188.

²⁵ This edition was published in 1916 and was the third revised edition. D'Arbez is also the alias used by the novelist JF van Oordt.

²⁶ D'Arbez (pseudo.), *Van Schaapwachter tot President. Het Leven van Paul Kruger* (Amsterdam, 1916), p 5. The original text is in Dutch and was therefore translated.

drama". In his opinion, Kruger stood out above the rest of his contemporaries in such a manner that he totally overshadowed the parts played by the other "characters".²⁷ Engelenburg's acclamation could be ascribed to his being a Boer sympathiser but also being a personal acquaintance of Kruger. Similar positive and heroic depictions are reiterated almost four decades later by historian Marais: "the dauntless courage, iron will, and keen intelligence" and "a devout believer, with a childlike faith".²⁸ However the significance of Kruger's attributes lies in the fact that he was able to identify with his people as Marais implies: "they recognized him as one of themselves" and consequently he was perceived as "the greatest Afrikaner of them all".²⁹ Kruger's characterization as the "true" Afrikaner is also apparent in the historian Daniël W Kruger's monograph as he saw him as the "embodiment of Afrikaner aspirations."³⁰ Cecil T Gordon portrays a congruent picture in this regard:³¹

In one thing certainly, Kruger was entirely inflexible, and that was in his determination to preserve the Afrikaner and republican character of the State, and in his opposition to all that threatened to weaken or undermine this he was indeed 'unbending in the highest degree'. Preservation of the independence of the State he regarded as a sacred duty, neglect of which would bring down upon him the curse of God.

Marais, Krüger and Gordon's representations of Kruger appear to be more genuine and were increasingly based on extensive scientific research however it is nonetheless plausible that their opinions of Kruger could be influenced by their own heritage and context.

In historian Floris A van Jaarsveld's 1982 publication, *Paul Kruger: Die simbool van 'n volk*, it becomes evident that for his time Kruger was described as the Republic's "Garibaldi", "Nimrod", "Moses", "Cromwell" and "Stonewall Jackson", to list but a few.³² Van Jaarsveld's selection and inclusion of these quotes taken from newspapers and articles stresses the fact that he felt compelled at least in part to portray this positive view of Kruger. Moreover as he was seen as an "Afrikaner" historian,

²⁷ FA Engelenburg, *'n Onbekende Paul Kruger, sy bedrywigheid as: Boerende boer, briewe-skrywer, gelowige, finacier, veldkornet, jagter, commandant, koors-lyer, staats-burger* (Pretoria, 1925), p 3.

²⁸ JS Marais, *The fall of Kruger's republic* (Oxford, 1961), pp 6-7.

²⁹ JS Marais, *The fall of Kruger's republic*, p 6.

³⁰ DW Krüger, *Paul Kruger, staatsman. 'n Lewenskets van President SJP Kruger* (Kaapstad, 1971), pp 90-91.

³¹ CT Gordon, *The growth of Boer opposition to Kruger, 1890-1895* (Cape Town, 1970), p 21. See in this source footnote 76 on p 176 for original source: *Press*, 7-12-1892. See also F Postma, *Paul Kruger. Die Christen- volksman en -staatsman* (Stellenbosch, 1944), pp 29-31.

³² FA van Jaarsveld, *Paul Kruger: Simbool van 'n volk* (Roodepoort, 1982), Preface, pp 41-43, 62-63.

his inclusion of these depictions are all the more plausible. This honourable view of Kruger also links with the comment made by Kruger's contemporary C Louis Leipoldt an Afrikaans poet and doctor. He construed Kruger as a "gentleman with an innate courtesy and sonorous, powerful voice, and rich and forceful vocabulary".³³ To the Johannesburg lawyer, writer and contemporary of Kruger, Manfred Nathan, Kruger was also a notable man, which he construed in a favourable manner. This could possibly be because he was exposed to Kruger's dealings and the ZAR context first-hand and thus better understood his nature than authors "judging" Kruger from afar. The vision that abides of Kruger is:³⁴

... that of a rough, rugged, resolute, daring, dominant figure, like Ajax defying the lightning. He may be compared to a giant crag, with its base rooted in the ancient rock, its sides scarred and weathered by many a storm, yet rearing its head to the skies through the ages to come.

Kruger's heroic qualities are central to his positive portrayal with specific reference to the independence of the ZAR and the liberation of the Afrikaner people. In addition, emphasis is placed on his "immortality", as he is perceived, in the work of Nathan, as the as the "essence" of the Afrikaners as a people.

The ambiguous Kruger

Although Kruger has been predominantly portrayed in a binary fashion, either negative or positive, he mainly continues to be an "ambiguous" figure. Hobson for example points to the "inscrutability" of Kruger's character; this "ambiguity" is clearly portrayed in the following assertion:³⁵

Can Kruger be perceived as a 'pious patriot, soldier, hunter, [and] farmer, driven by sheer circumstances into high politics'? Who utilized his 'natural bucolic cunning to the purposes of diplomacy in the defence of his country'? Or can he be labelled as a 'scheming old hypocrite' who thrives on dishonesty and consequently 'employs every trick of evasion and falsehood in defence of his monopoly of the public power and purse'?

Moreover, according to Hobson even the closest of acquaintances of the President "differ widely in their estimate of his nature and his political power".³⁶ It is

³³ H Giliomee, *Die Afrikaners: 'n Biografie*, p 188.

³⁴ M Nathan, *Paul Kruger: His life and times* (Durban, 1941), p 490.

³⁵ JA Hobson, *The war in South Africa ...*, pp 22-23.

³⁶ JA Hobson, *The war in South Africa ...*, p 23.

plausible that as War progressed, his sympathies towards the Boers grew and as an anti-imperialist, he endeavoured to unpack the Kruger persona but only to realize that Kruger was more than the mere summation of the opinions he had gathered. Nathan argues that Kruger was “the product of his age and his environment” and generalisations, when it comes to Kruger, are mostly “fundamentally wrong”.³⁷ Both Nathan and Gordon point to Kruger being depicted, quite commonly, as “anti-progressive” or “resistant to change”. Nathan argues that Kruger was the exact opposite as he “showed remarkable ability” to address the “many new and perplexing problems” associated with the influx of foreigners.³⁸ Likewise, according to Gordon he “used his influence on the side of moderation and of concession to the reasonable demands of the *Uitlanders* (foreigners) and the needs of progress”.³⁹ Hobson made a similar contention a century ago: “Even Mr. Kruger has not been the stolid stumbling-block that he has been represented”.⁴⁰ Marais agrees and refers to Kruger’s policies as “the response of an ingenious and experienced improvisator”.⁴¹

Recent historiography has pointed to the need for “...some modification of the still current picture of Kruger as a granite Cromwellian patriarch...”⁴² The historian Charles van Onselen is of the opinion that there is a need for the reassessment of the Kruger administration. Despite Kruger not being depicted as “antediluvian”, he asserts that “the supposed inability of the ZAR administration to address adequately the demands of a modern mining economy and a society composed of immigrants remains largely intact”.⁴³ The ambiguousness of his character is underlined by later historians like Marais, Gordon and Van Onselen not only because they had a much wider range of historical sources at their disposal but also because their publications tend to challenge the *status quo* or what is seen as “conventional”. It is therefore not surprising that they would challenge the generally held perceptions of Kruger and in the same vein emphasise his “ambiguousness”. Kruger has been inadequately represented and much of the old news have been kept in place. From a historiographical perspective it can be claimed that he is illusive to any form of “stereotyping”. The true motivations behind the authors’ opinions and perceptions of Kruger whether negative, positive or

³⁷ M Nathan, *Paul Kruger: ...*, p 478.

³⁸ M Nathan, *Paul Kruger: ...*, p 479.

³⁹ CT Gordon, *The growth of Boer opposition to Kruger*, p 21.

⁴⁰ JA Hobson, *The war in South Africa ...*, p 17.

⁴¹ JS Marais, *The fall of Kruger’s republic*, p 8.

⁴² CT Gordon, *The growth of Boer opposition to Kruger*, p 278.

⁴³ C van Onselen, The Modernization of the Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek: FET Krause, JC Smuts, and the struggle for the Johannesburg Public Prosecutor’s Office, 1898-1899, *Law and History Review* 21(3), 2003, p 487.

both, can only be speculated upon. The significance of these varying perceptions is that they reflect or form part of the prevailing views of Kruger.

Background, War and Kruger

Telegraphic technology

The “idea of using magnetism and electricity for a signalling system” was identified by the middle of the 18th century.⁴⁴ Although various devices were tested, the first noteworthy signalling system was apparently developed in France and was utilised for communication purposes during the French Revolution (1789). The semaphore enabled civilians and armies alike to “act all over the vastness of France with one mind”.⁴⁵ The pre-electric telegraph set in motion a global “communication craze” and within a few years was replaced by the first electrical telegraph. The first practicable electrical telegraph was developed by Samuel B Morse and by 1837 the “Morse” telegraph and code were in the process of being patented. The device was revolutionary. The sender transmitted impulses (codes) by means of “notched sticks” being “pulled across” the electrical contact area. Consequently, the impulse travels via wire and reaches the device at the receiving end. Here the electrical current deflects the marker of the device and makes a mark (a dot and/or line) on a slim piece of paper. The dots and lines are known as Morse code and can be interpreted as letters and numbers.⁴⁶ In May 1844 the first “Morse message” was sent via “railway wire” from Washington to Baltimore and the message ironically read: “What hath God wrought”.⁴⁷

The global implementation of the electrical telegraph can largely be contributed to its adaptability as communications took place along any path the wire could travel. Applied more broadly, the telegraph altered business and social relations as face-to-face communication became unnecessary. In addition, the telegraph brought about a change in literary styles. The communication theorist James W Carey argues that the implementation of the telegraph as a tool to distribute news resulted in generating a new literary style “stripped of the local, the regional and colloquial” in order to create a universal representation which became standardised.⁴⁸ Moreover, the utilisation

⁴⁴ B Winston, *Media technology and society. A history: From the telegraph to the Internet* (London, 1998), p 21.

⁴⁵ B Winston, *Media technology and society ...*, p 21.

⁴⁶ B Winston, *Media technology and society ...*, p 26.

⁴⁷ B Winston, *Media technology and society ...*, p 24.

⁴⁸ JW Carey, Technology and ideology: The case of the telegraph, p 11 in JW Carey, *Communication as culture: Essays on media and society* (New York, 2009). Accessed online at <http://faculty.georgetown.edu/irvinem/theory/Carey-TechnologyandIdeology.pdf>, May 2014, pp 3-4; 8.

of the telegraph was expensive. As the correspondent was not able to transmit the message himself, his literary craft had to be exceptionally clear, to the point, short and well thought through.⁴⁹

The use of the telegraph was also extended to warfare from the 19th century onwards and was thus central to communications during the Anglo-Boer South African War of 1899-1902, as the telegraph enabled instant communications between the “capitals, headquarters, and different fronts”.⁵⁰ To further facilitate communications via the wire, initially the Boer laagers were also established close to existing telegraph offices or field telegraph “offices”.⁵¹ It is estimated that by 1899, 215 telegraph offices were established in the two respective Republics.⁵² This strategic move consequently enabled the Boers to communicate in a timeous manner. This method of communication was also utilised by Kruger to easily and regularly communicate his advice and commands across the fronts. Moreover, after the fall of Bloemfontein and Pretoria, the telegram became increasingly necessary as the dissemination of information became progressively challenging in the face of the rapid British advance as State newspapers and publishing was made almost impossible and the delivering of written notes too risky. To keep the telegraphic information communicated more secure, in certain cases the messages were also communicated in code as the intercepting of messages was done regularly.⁵³ In addition, the Boers also made use of wire fences and vibrators to communicate over long distances when cables were not available.⁵⁴

For the purposes of this study however, the importance, but mainly also the uniqueness, of the war telegram as a source, provides information into the persona of the compiler. The author Tom Wheeler has pointed to the utilization of the telegram in this regard in his monograph written on President Lincoln entitled, *Mr. Lincoln's T-Mails. How Abraham Lincoln used the telegraph to win the Civil War*. To Wheeler its value as a “telling” source is described as follows:⁵⁵

...It is this almost instantaneous reaction, as opposed to well thought out, stand-alone set pieces, that provide the most up close and personal insight into Abraham Lincoln... They record the unstructured Lincoln, reacting with

⁴⁹ JW Carey, Technology and ideology: The case of the telegraph, p 8.

⁵⁰ TD Potgieter, Nineteenth century technological development and its influence on the Anglo-Boer War, 1899-1902, *Journal for Contemporary History*, 25(1), June 2000, p 122.

⁵¹ F Pretorius, *The A-Z of the Anglo-Boer War* (Lanham, 2010), p 97.

⁵² TD Potgieter, Nineteenth century technological development..., 1902, *Journal for Contemporary History* 25(1), June 2000, p 122.

⁵³ J Picard (red), *Op kommando met Steyn en De Wet* (Pretoria, 2000), p 97.

⁵⁴ For more information on the use of telegraph technology during the War see J Picard (red), *Op Kommando met Steyn en De Wet*, pp 45, 64, 71, 86, 87, 93 and 97.

⁵⁵ T Wheeler, *Mr. Lincoln's T-Mails. How Abraham Lincoln used the telegraph to win the Civil War* (New York, 2006), p xx.

what was in front of his mind. It is in these messages that the distant historical figure of Abraham Lincoln comes to life.

Similarly to Lincoln's telegrams, Kruger's war telegrams are also unique. His formulation of a reply is different to that of for example him writing or dictating a letter. Although one would be able to communicate similar information with either, the war necessitated the use of the telegraph because of its instantaneous delivery, which assisted the war "urgency factor" as well as overcoming the lack of a postal service and other forms of communications. As a result, the unique wartime environment creates a peculiar and unchangeable written source, reflecting what the writer thought or instructed at a particular time or even moment. The telegram is valuable as it projects Kruger from a wartime perspective and provides an interesting lens through which Kruger can be observed. In fact, the central role the telegrams played as part of Kruger's wartime responsibilities is apparent in his memoirs:⁵⁶

I had a different work before me, which kept me employed day and night. All looked to me for advice, hints and consolation. Daily I sent off telegrams to all the commandos... These labours fully occupied the mornings... and the evenings... In the later stage of the war... my sleep was interrupted regularly three times every night, ... in order that I might deal with the telegrams without delay.

Consequently, it is the contention of this study that Kruger's war telegrams are able to shed a different light on the Kruger persona in a hitherto untapped manner. Given the extensive volume of Kruger's telegraphic correspondence, the war telegrams utilized for this article come from the Leyds Archive⁵⁷ and the telegrams have been quoted in "translated English".⁵⁸ A kind of postmodern literary "analysis [is applied] in which the immediate or 'surface' meaning is set aside in favour of the less obvious".⁵⁹ Applying this approach to the telegrams reveals a new dimension of interpretation

⁵⁶ SJP Kruger, *The memoirs of Paul Kruger: Two volumes published as one* (Johannesburg, 1896), p 192.

⁵⁷ This archive is regarded as one of the most comprehensive and representative collections on President Kruger. Dr Willem Johannes Leyds (1859-1940) the compiler of this archive was a former state attorney (1884-1888), state secretary (1888-1898) and also an envoy of the ZAR in Europe during the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902). As the trustee of all official documentation (of the ZAR) from the war period and before, he endeavoured to compile an archive of these documents so as to preserve them for posterity. Consequently, the WJ Leyds Archive was completed in 1925 and donated to the Union Government in 1930; EC Papenfus, *Inventaris van Die Leyds-Argief* (Pretoria, 1994), pp v-vi.

⁵⁸ The original telegrams were written in Dutch. In order to make the content of these telegrams available to a wider readership, the telegrams have been translated by J Picard and S Mills. The Kruger telegrams are also currently being translated for further publication.

⁵⁹ J Tosh, *The pursuit of History* (Britain, 2010), p 196.

of, and information on Kruger. Before turning to Kruger's war telegrams, a brief explanation of Kruger's so-called war "crisis period" is necessary. Thereafter the relevant selection of war telegrams will be discussed.

The crisis: May-September 1900

The year 1900 was a particularly challenging year as the Boers started experiencing crushing defeats at the hands of the British on various fronts. This is also true of the President himself. Apart from other difficulties earlier in the year, the months from May 1900 to September 1900 were especially challenging. It is the contention of this article that this period can be seen as both a personal and war-related "period of crisis" due to various hardships experienced on the part of Kruger and the ZAR.

After the British had annexed Bloemfontein and pushed on towards Kroonstad and the Vaal River in pursuit of the ZAR forces, the urgency to defend and possibly flee rose dramatically. Moreover, the necessary preparations were also to be made in case the British reached Johannesburg and Pretoria. Soon the British crossed the Vaal River at a drift that was left unoccupied by the Boers and they entered into ZAR territory on the 27th of May 1900.⁶⁰ As the Commanding Officer, Lord Roberts forced his way into Johannesburg, the ZAR government was in the process of evacuating Pretoria so as to safeguard monies, gold and government property. During this time, round about the 29th of May 1900, Kruger departed with the government to establish the seat at Machadodorp.⁶¹ Considering his age, he had to bid Pretoria, his wife and family farewell in the knowledge that they would never see each other again. Roberts was on the tail of the ZAR forces and occupied Johannesburg and thereafter Pretoria on the 5th of June 1900.⁶²

During this time the President was also informed that many ZAR generals were considering the possibility of peace – a proposal that reached him by the 1st of June 1900.⁶³ This must have been a hard blow for Kruger who represented the epitome of Republican patriotism. Old, ailing and possibly demoralized, he considered their proposal, but after a Council of War was held in the beginning of June 1900, the Boers

⁶⁰ P Trew, *The Boer War generals* (Johannesburg, 1999), p 72.

⁶¹ See for example DW Krüger, *Paul Kruger 'n Biografie* (Praag, 2009), p 546; Kruger was also later on moved to Waterval-Onder in the Eastern Transvaal due to the warmer climate there for his deteriorating health.

⁶² WS Churchill, *The Boer War: London to Ladysmith via Pretoria and Ian Hamilton's march* (London, 2013), p 323; J Taitz, K Gillings & A Davey, *The war memoirs of Commandant Ludwig Krause, 1899-1900* (South Africa, 1996), p 81.

⁶³ JH Breytenbach, *Die geskiedenis van die Tweede Vryheidsoorlog in Suid-Afrika, 1899-1902*, V (Pretoria, 1983), p 538.

decided to fervently continue their campaign against the invading British force. As the battles continued throughout June, July and August 1900 and closed in on Kruger, it was decided that the President would not be safe when stationary.⁶⁴ Consequently, it was decided to send Kruger overseas in the hope of securing international intervention.⁶⁵ Thereafter Kruger moved with the government to Nelspruit; however, from here he departed for the border at Komatipoort on the 11th of September 1900,⁶⁶ his destination being Lourenço Marques, where he was offered asylum under the Portuguese regime before travelling to Europe. It is thus clear that the months of May to September 1900 were filled with many difficulties and setbacks for Kruger and can be labelled as a “crisis period”.

Another dimension of Kruger

As indicated, Kruger is mainly construed along the lines of a patriotic “vader des volks” or as an archaic despot. However, a selection of his outgoing telegrams sent within the “crisis period” sheds light on a gentler and considerate President. In terms of content, his telegrams firstly take on an almost overbearing religious tone. This is not surprising as Kruger was a very pious man. One can argue, more importantly, his religion formed an integral part of his life and thus his reasoning. Also, these “religious” telegrams seem to point in the direction of encouragement rather than “preaching from the pulpit”. It is probable that he wanted to share his faith with the burghers (ZAR citizens), hoping that his encouraging spiritual words would help them persist in the battle. In his monograph, entitled *The great Anglo-Boer War*, the military historian Byron E Farwell confirms this contention. He writes: “Kruger sent a telegram, which was read aloud, adjuring them to fight on in the name of the Lord.”⁶⁷ In another work by the state archivist and historian Johan H Breytenbach, Farwell’s observation is reiterated. According to Breytenbach, Kruger often sent telegrams of encouragement with a religious overtone, to the Commandant-Generals during the war.⁶⁸ Moreover, as a considerable percentage of the burghers on commando were

⁶⁴ The battle of Bergendal took place near Machadodorp between the 21st and 27th of August 1900; OJO Ferreira, Paul Kruger in Mosambiek, September – Oktober 1900, *Historia* 50(2), 2005, p 86.

⁶⁵ This Resolution was made on the 28th of August 1900; F Pretorius, *Die Anglo-Boereoorlog, 1899-1902* (Kapaastad, 1998), p 28.

⁶⁶ OJO Ferreira, Paul Kruger in Mosambiek, September – Oktober 1900, *Historia* 50(2), 2005, p 94; B Nasson, *The war for South Africa ...*, p 209.

⁶⁷ BE Farwell, *The great Boer War* (United Kingdom, 1999), p 289.

⁶⁸ JH Breytenbach, *Die geskiedenis van die Tweede Vryheidsoorlog...*, p 536.

Christians, Kruger's messages would have found resonance and provided them with a renewed sense of determination and justification.⁶⁹

The mere observation that Kruger sent messages of encouragement – be this religious or not – unveils a “gentler” more empathetic side of his character. His concern for and support given by means of these messages underlines his humaneness and also endorses the portrayal of Kruger as the “father of the nation” who both encourages and advises. This contradicts the literature that generally portrays him as rather more obdurate, dictatorial and impersonal. From a sceptic's view Kruger's messages of encouragement might appear rather desperate and strategic given their current situation of facing an increased number of deserting burghers. Nonetheless, the contention of a more concerned Kruger is also plausible.

On the 20th of May 1900, almost a week before Kruger and the ZAR government left Pretoria, Kruger sent a telegram of encouragement to General Koos de la Rey, who was one of the war's most renowned and hardiest of generals.⁷⁰ One can argue that this gesture on the part of Kruger could signify that the Boer offensive was in trouble, nonetheless he encourages as follows:⁷¹

... read my address to the Volksraad out to the burghers and officers... so that they can hear and see how just our cause is and how unfairly England deals with us... you will see how the Beast⁷² has procured the power to persecute the Christians... we can become humble and each one for himself confesses his sins... As soon as this humiliation... occurs the Lord will say up [sic] so far and no further and peace will be there. I stand firm in this belief...

Similar telegrams were sent by Kruger on the 1st and 2nd of June 1900 to Christiaan E Fourie and General Chris Botha respectively. In order to keep up the fighting spirit

⁶⁹ According to JS Marais, Kruger made use of the Bible not only as part of his “statecraft” but also to influence or “move” both burgher and the Volksraad. See JS Marais, *The fall of Kruger's republic* (Oxford, 1961), p 8.

⁷⁰ F Pretorius points out that the renowned Scottish writer AC Doyle had sketched the General in quite flattering terms and saw him as “a bold fighter and master tactician, who... usually fell like a thunderbolt on the moving British columns and scored signal successes, but who, after a victory, was the soul of chivalry towards his defeated opponents”. Quoted from J Meintjies, De la Rey: Lion of the West, in F Pretorius, *Historical dictionary of the Anglo-Boer War* (Lanham, 2009), p 116.

⁷¹ South African National Archive (Pretoria), (SANA), Transvaal Archive Depot (hereafter TAD): W.J. Leyds Archief, 578(5), pp 1329-32; 725(C), No 144, n.p.: SJP Kruger – Generaal JH de la Rey, 1900-05-20.

⁷² As Kruger believed that his people were God's chosen people, he consequently perceived the enemy, thus Britain, to be the “Beast” who was persecuting the “Christians”. By referring to the two opponents in this manner and making use of these religious concepts, he in a way “claims” God's grace and support for the ZAR. In this sense, the War is almost religiously sanctified. Kruger's rationale is questionable but his religious beliefs and convictions are more apparent.

of the Boers, Kruger's encouragement in this period proved to be essential.⁷³ The telegram of the 1st reads as follows:⁷⁴

I say to you again... the Lord's blessing rests on obedience... Have you not seen how through obedience... the enemy are defeated by a small number of our people? But if there is discord amongst... our people then they still flee before the enemy. Do not weaken in the faith but fight in the name of the Lord... Those who remain obedient... to them God will say 'up to here and no further'. I firmly believe that the time of mercy is not far off. Read this out to your fellow officers...

In a shorter telegram to General Chris Botha sent on the 2nd of June 1900, Kruger's empathy and encouragement is also evident:⁷⁵

Brothers, do keep up your courage (our) entire country is arising and leaving their families behind as was done in the Orange Free State. And these burghers are full of courage to fight for our country to the end. These reports I am receiving from everywhere. God will aid us.

Even President Marthinus T Steyn from the Free State was encouraged by Kruger from time to time. He received a telegram along similar lines on the 1st of July 1900:⁷⁶

Let us remark the government of the Lord that he still blesses our weapons... Where ten fall on our side, hundred die on their side... there can be no doubt that the Lord is with us... It is clear that the enemy is being destroyed in the words of David as raked by the fire... We have no reason to grumble that the Lord is punishing us in order to purify us. Nothing can happen without His will. He is our Commander in Chief...

In some cases, Kruger's encouragement also includes a form of reproach when he refers to the need for the "confessing of sins" and also to not "grumble" in the face of adversity as God is forever testing his people. To Kruger there seems to be a direct correlation between faith and victory and gratitude and blessings. Nonetheless, his

⁷³ The importance and necessity of his encouragement is also clearly illustrated in Kruger's telegram sent to Commandant-General L Botha wherein he requested to have "sufficient copies thereof (made) for the other officers so that the burghers under their command be also acquainted with the contents thereof". SANA, TAD: WJ Leyds Archief, 579(4), p 873: SJP Kruger – Commandant-General L Botha, 1900-06-20.

⁷⁴ SANA, TAD: WJ Leyds Archief, 579(2), pp 275-281: SJP Kruger – CE Fourie, 1900-06-01.

⁷⁵ SANA, TAD: WJ Leyds Archief, 726(D), n.p.: 579(2), p 303: SJP Kruger – Generaal C Botha, 1900-06-02.

⁷⁶ SANA, TAD: WJ Leyds Archief, 728(A), n.p.: SJP Kruger – MT Steyn, 1900-07-01.

encouragement underlines a considerate yet firm character and reflects strongly on his humane side. This in turn signifies a more personal relationship with his burghers than is generally shown.

Apart from encouragement, his gentle demeanour is witnessed with regard to the abuse of alcohol, as is apparent in his telegrams (almost identical), sent to Landdrost⁷⁷ Kroep and General Sarel P du Toit on the 21st of May 1900. In these telegrams Kruger reprimanded them for their drunkenness but does so in a surprisingly restrained fashion. As a Christian and a Dopper [nick name for a member of the Gereformeerde Kerk that is Calvinist Reformed in orientation], Kruger himself did not drink and believed drinking to be associated with all wickedness. In summary, Kruger equates drunkenness with “eternal damnation”. However, instead of making his case against drinking in the war circumstances he opts to rather remind them of their faith and reproached them in a more moderate and religious manner. He possibly does this so as not to alienate them.

To Landdrost Kroep he confidentially sent the following on the 21st of May 1900:⁷⁸

Brother, it has come to my ears that you have taken to drink... The Lord... says that He is a jealous God and will visit the iniquity of the fathers on the children, even to the third generation... It is better to obey the Lord because... if he falls by the sword his soul will be preserved but if he is disobedient... his soul and body will be destroyed. Fall down before the Lord so that transgression does not overtake you...

On the same day Kruger sent another telegram to General Sarel P du Toit regarding his excessive consumption of alcohol⁷⁹ and Du Toit’s apparent refutation thereof. It is yet again evident how skilfully Kruger handled the situation in a firm yet considerate manner. The phrase below where he replied: “Therefore I have reminded you out of love not to fall into that trap” signifies that he was indeed an empathetic person and that he was also involved on a personal level, as mentioned, with the burghers during the

⁷⁷ Landdrost is the Dutch word for a Magistrate. In the South African historical context, a “landdrost” refers to the “chief administrator of a district or a magistrate”. A magistrate in this regard is a “civil officer or lay judge who administers the law”. See for example, *South African concise Oxford dictionary*, edited by the Dictionary Unit for South African English, Oxford University Press (Oxford, 2002), pp 650, 698.

⁷⁸ SANA, TAD: WJ Leyds Archief, 579(1), pp 47-48: SJP Kruger – Landdrost Kroep, 1900-05-21.

⁷⁹ SANA, TAD: WJ Leyds Archief, 579(1), pp 45-46; 725(D), n.p.: SJP Kruger – Generaal SP du Toit, 1900-05-21.

war. His intentions, even in the case of reprimanding, prove to be moderate and where necessary, were done in a humane and diplomatic way. He consequently telegraphed:⁸⁰

... received your telegram in which you express your anger about the remarks I made... I thought you would... be thankful if I hear something to tell you... [so] that you can strengthen yourself... if you are totally innocent you need not take it to heart but merely deny it... An officer cannot be sufficiently vigilant for alcohol since otherwise he tempts... others... as he should punish those who overindulge... I have reminded you out of love not to fall into that trap.

It is also noticeable how Kruger tended to the needs and protection of his people during the war. As the war progressed his role also included the management of women and children, in order to provide them with shelter and supplies. In this regard he requested the Landdrost at Middelburg on the 22nd of July 1900 to:⁸¹

... let the families come directly to Barberton, unless any have family at Belfast and can be accommodated there. An order has already been given that the families of the police should come to Barberton.

In another telegram, Kruger wired to Commandant-General Louis Botha on the 5th of August 1900 suggesting, amongst others, the following:⁸²

Further, if there is still an opportunity, would it not be a good idea to point out to Robberts [sic] that when sending out families they were only allowed to take with them [sufficient], for two to three days while some stated that they had enough still for some months. That this is unfair – to retain the foodstuffs of the families while allowing some to take with them as much as they were able to.

On the 7th of August 1900 Kruger again voiced his concern for the women and children. In this instance it concerned their safety in the Waterberg district as murders had been committed by Linchwe (a Bakgatla chief), apparently upon instruction from the British. The excerpt from his telegram to General Schalk Burger further points to his father-like nature to protect his people as he indicates that the Commandant-General should “protest” in this regard:⁸³

⁸⁰ SANA, TAD: WJ Leyds Archief, 579(1), pp 60-61; 725(D) No 761, n.p.: SJP Kruger – Generaal SP du Toit, 1900-05-21.

⁸¹ SANA, TAD: WJ Leyds Archief, 729(B), n.p.: SJP Kruger – Landdrost Middelburg, 1900-07-22.

⁸² SANA, TAD: WJ Leyds Archief, 730(A), n.p.: SJP Kruger – Kommandant-Generaal L Botha, 1900-08-05.

⁸³ SANA, TAD: WJ Leyds Archief, 730(B), n.p.: SJP Kruger – Generaal S Burger, 1900-08-07.

Please remind Commandant[-]General that he should protest most strongly to [Field Marshall Lord] Roberts against his and his officers' actions. They sent a report to Linchwe telling him to launch an attack against us upon the women and children in Waterberg... women and children have already been murdered.

Apart from accommodating the women and children, Kruger also extended this spirit to the Prisoners-of-War. Although they were seen as a threat to the ZAR, it is nonetheless evident that he treated them with respect and fairness. His caution yet compassion is evident in his granting of monetary support for the prisoners but nonetheless still forbade any direct contact with “outsiders”. Them being a “threat” is thus in contrast to the treatment received by Kruger. In this telegram he indicates:⁸⁴

Be informed that a man named Robbs, bookkeeper to the English Consul, is on his way by rail to deliver £600 to the Commission charged with guarding prisoners of war, to be used for the prisoners of war. This person has been forbidden to cross our borders and he must hand over the money at Komatipoort. If he gets through he must in [sic] under no circumstances be allowed to make contact with the prisoners of war.

Kruger's position in terms of the treatment of civilians and/or prisoners is clearly illustrated in another telegram sent to Commandant-General Louis Botha on the 8th of August 1900. On the one hand, he is refuting rumours of starving Prisoners-of-War in the ZAR by indicating that the treatment and supplies received are the same as that of the burghers, whilst on the other hand, he is making a case against the treatment of Boer civilians at the hand of the British. Moreover, by requesting Louis Botha to make use of Sir Donald Currie⁸⁵ to publish this telegram, he is purposefully devising a strategy to create awareness of the treatment of the Boer civilians as well as the truth regarding the prisoners of war by wishing to make this information public. Arguably, Kruger, similarly to Emily Hobhouse, advocated for the humane and respectful treatment of the Boers. An appeal to the British public at the time was also necessary to alter the perceptions held of the Boers⁸⁶ as this could spark intervention. Considered more

⁸⁴ SANA, TAD: WJ Leyds Archief, 727(1), n.p.: SJP Kruger – “Kommissie Bewaking Krijgevangenes” (Prisoners of War Guarding Commission), 1900-06-30.

⁸⁵ Sir D Currie was a British ship magnate and a previous Boer sympathiser.

⁸⁶ KO Morgan from the University of Oxford underlines the significance of the public domain of the time. London journalists invariably presented the Boers as primitive and backwards, isolated rural people. They were often described in animal terms as “herds” or “flocks”, whose defeat by the superior civilization of the British was inevitable. KO Morgan, *The Boer War and the Media (1899-1902)*, *Twentieth Century British History* 13(1), 2002, p 5.

broadly, the perception of the Boers was also central to the implementation and effect of the concentration camps. The historian Albert Grundlingh is of the opinion that the “issue” of women and children is one of the most controversial facets of the South African War-Anglo-Boer War.⁸⁷ Moreover, as Grundlingh indicates, the concentration camps instilled unity and played a role in Afrikaner nationalism in the 20th century.⁸⁸ Ironically, Kruger’s appeals are directed at those same people who supported the war initially. However, the willingness of Kruger to use all means to assist his people and to prove that the Prisoners-of-War were treated well is of importance. In this sense his caring character is unquestionably apparent. The relevant excerpt reads:⁸⁹

... The allegation that ‘they are starving’ is not true at all... British troops burn houses, even beds, chase women and children away, take food and send them to us without food... it appears that Linchwe is again encouraged to attack our people. In the Rustenburg district... the farm of Jan Lombaard has been attacked and two children killed. The government requested Sir Donald Currie as an honest person... to publish the telegram...

When the question of peace arose towards the end of May 1900, Kruger’s nationalistic and patriotic character takes an interesting turn. Knowing him to be a fervent Republican, his actions, or rather reactions, in this critical period are particularly telling. In this short period of a mere two days, Kruger had a complete turnabout in strategy and had to come to terms with the inevitable. This “turn” is also apparent in his telegraphic correspondence. The telegrams sent by Kruger on the 30th of May 1900, for the most part, reaffirm the notion that he is supporting the war effort with his entire mind and all his might. To President Steyn he telegraphed: “...the situation requires that we move to Machadodorp without delay from which point we intend to fight to the end.”⁹⁰ Another telegram from Kruger to General Petrus L Uys on the same day confirms this notion. The excerpt indicates the following:⁹¹

Re communication [General Sir] Redvers Buller. Do not negotiate with those people. Have fought the enemy with great success and was still busy with them on that side of Elandsfontein yesterday. It has been generally decided to continue the fight wherever it is possible to attack the enemy...

⁸⁷ A Grundlingh, *The Anglo-Boer War in 20th-century Afrikaner consciousness* in F Pretorius (ed), *Scorched earth* (Cape Town, 2001), p 243.

⁸⁸ A Grundlingh, *The Anglo-Boer War ...* in F Pretorius (ed), *Scorched earth*, p 243.

⁸⁹ SANA, TAD: WJ Leyds Archief, 730(C), n.p.: SJP Kruger – Kommandant-Generaal L Botha, 1900-08-08.

⁹⁰ SANA, TAD: WJ Leyds Archief, 579(1), p 179: SJP Kruger – MT Steyn, 1900-05-30.

⁹¹ SANA, TAD: WJ Leyds Archief, 726(C), n.p.: SJP Kruger – Generaal Uys, 1900-05-30.

In a telegram sent to his wife, Gezina Kruger, and State Attorney Jan C Smuts also on the 30th of May 1900, he informed them of his departure to Machadodorp where they “intend fighting to the end”.⁹² It is only during the course of the next day that the sudden change of heart takes place. To President Steyn he confidentially sent the following on the 31st of May 1900:⁹³

Strictly secret it appears... that our burghers, except for a very small portion, are unwilling to continue the struggle... It is therefore urgently necessary that Your Honour come here immediately... Our officers are unanimously of the view that it is hopeless to continue the struggle in this way. At Johannesburg and environs there is an overwhelming force of the enemy present... while the enemy could at any moment advance upon Pretoria...

His avid religious encouragement stands in contrast to his yielding-like character in this instance. His slogans of “fighting in the name of the Lord” and to “stand firm” soon disappears. During this time Kruger seems “indecisive” as his convictions and actions do not line up. The precariousness of his character is further illuminated in another telegram sent to President Steyn on the same day (31st May 1900). It reads:⁹⁴

I have... consulted the officers and instructed them... to immediately hold a council of war... if they decide... to end the struggle... give notice to Roberts... that he should in that case authorise an armistice... in order that we can notify all officers... In this way we will also get time to... draw up our protest. I wish to make it expressly clear... that it is not our view to ask for peace but... have been forced by the overwhelming... forces to voluntarily lay down our arms...

In the telegram above Kruger appears even more ambivalent. On the one hand, he is pushing for peace whilst on the other calling for “protest”. He indicates that even if they lay down their arms voluntarily and ask for an armistice, they will still “protest” against the treatment they received from Britain. Amidst the circumstances, he appears all the more indecisive as he is not quite able to choose between patriotism and compassion. From this telegram, it appears that Kruger not only wanted to secure the best outcome but was also willing to give in to the will of his generals. This inconsistency in character is further underlined in his telegraphic discussion with his generals on the 31st of May 1900. Here follow the relevant excerpts:⁹⁵

⁹² SANA, TAD: WJ Leyds Archief, 579(1), p 180: SJP Kruger – Gezina Kruger and JC Smuts, 1900-05-30.

⁹³ SANA, TAD: WJ Leyds Archief, 579(1), pp 243-247: SJP Kruger – MT Steyn, 1900-05-31.

⁹⁴ SANA, TAD: WJ Leyds Archief, 579(1), pp 250-251: SJP Kruger – MT Steyn, 1900-05-31.

⁹⁵ SANA, TAD: WJ Leyds Archief, 739(1), pp 68-83: SJP Kruger – Generals (Telegraphic discussion), 1900-05-31.

... And as we have agreed with President Steyn to continue the struggle to the end. Therefore, even if we would be forced to abandon Pretoria and retreat to here. Therefore we cannot give up the struggle without consulting President Steyn... it would be treason towards the Free State...

The proposal to Roberts must be as proposed by me to you. If you do not say that you are willing to lay down arms, Roberts will not authorise an armistice. There should be no talk of making peace or negotiations towards peace as we would then lose all our rights... such a proposal cannot be made... before President Steyn has been apprised of it and agreed... Please therefore instruct the telegraph department to arrange for a cable discussion...

Although the question of peace was at this stage still a possibility, it is apparent that Kruger wanted to secure the best terms for the ZAR and that his allegiance with the OFS played a central role in his decision making. Moreover his concern for their allegiance as well as his duty towards his generals and burghers point to Kruger being a very responsible and pragmatic personality. It can be argued that the uncertainty of the circumstance of war appears to penetrate Kruger's strong character and his words often appear indecisive.

After the ZAR Council of War was held on 1st-2nd of June 1900, to Kruger's relief, one assumes, the ZAR generals decided to persist in the struggle. Consequently, Kruger was able to telegraph the good news to President Steyn on the 2nd of June 1900, now with a renewed sense of hope and perseverance. The message he received read:⁹⁶

Your Honour's telegram regarding the decision of your officers not to give up the fight. Your Honour will certainly have received the resolution of the War Council in term[s] of which the entire country has again been called up to resume the battle anew and the decisions to lay down arms has been totally revoked.

From the above quoted telegrams, a different side of Kruger is apparent namely an encouraging, humane and caring but also at times seemingly indecisive and irrational person. These are all attributes of Kruger which are not always as well known or anticipated.

⁹⁶ SANA, TAD: WJ Leyds Archief, 579(2), pp 283; 726(D), n.p.: SJP Kruger – MT Steyn, 1900-06-02.

Conclusion

Certain portrayals of Kruger have persisted as is evident in the various texts discussed. These portrayals and perceptions have also varied over time and due to context. However, from the onset it can be argued that Kruger has been depicted in a dualistic manner that can be attributed to certain ideological or other convictions. These binary depictions in turn lead to the generation and entrenchment of stereotypical representations. Some authors have however pointed to the need for a “re-evaluation” of the Kruger persona and that he is much of an “ambiguous” personality – a claim that not only sparked this investigation but that is also substantiated by Kruger’s war telegrams as source. Consequently, in this analysis of texts and telegrams it became apparent that in some cases the generally perceived portrayals of Kruger are supported by the telegrams, for example his “heroic”, “patriotic”, “pious” and almost “archaic” attributes. On the opposite end – and this is where the importance of the war telegrams lies – the telegrams shed light on a different side of the Kruger persona that has not generally been emphasised. His telegraphic correspondence unmasks him as being an encouraging and empathetic person who frequently made reference to “God’s Word” in difficult times. Kruger’s war telegrams thus subtly or explicitly point to a gentler and caring Kruger. This becomes evident through the telegrams in the way he encourages but also reprimands. In addition, the telegrams also shed light on a humane side where he shows concern for women and children, as well as other people in need. A similar contention can be made of Kruger when addressing the possibility of peace in a critical phase of the war. Not only at times does he appear almost vulnerable and indecisive but he also sympathised with the generals and their situation, where after his nationalistic and patriotic streak suddenly re-emerges much like the historian Gerhardus DJ Duvenage has typified Kruger as “die kampvegter” (champion) of the Afrikaner.⁹⁷ The most important contention is that through the lens of these telegrams a different side of Kruger appears – one that is in contrast to the general portrayal of him as a mere Boer tyrant, cunning and inflexible in his ways. His war telegrams as a historical source, adds another dimension to the Kruger persona but does however, not disqualify any of the already held perceptions of this historical figure.

⁹⁷ GDJ Duvenage, *Imperialisme en nasionalisme. Kerngeskiedenis van Suid-Afrika 1886-1948* (Johannesburg, 1978), p 17.