

Our Victory Was Our Defeat:

**Race, Gender and Liberalism in the
Union Defence Force, 1939 – 1945**



Suryakanthie Chetty

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy Degree
in the Programme of Historical Studies,
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Declaration

This study represents original work by the author and has not been submitted in any form to another university. Where use has been made of the work of others it has been duly acknowledged in the text.



Suryakanthie Chetty

October 2006



Dr Marijke du Toit

Supervisor

October 2006



Professor Catherine E. Burns

Supervisor

October 2006

Abstract

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by

Suryakanthie Chetty

Supervised by: Dr Marijke du Toit
Professor Catherine Burns
Department of Historical Studies

The Second World War marked the point at which South Africa stood at a crossroads between the segregation which came before it and apartheid that came after. Over the past twenty years social historians have placed greater focus on this particular period of the Second World War in South Africa's history. This thesis takes this research as its starting point but moves beyond their more specific objectives (evident in the research on the war and medical services) to explore the South African experience of race and gender and, to some extent, class during the war and the immediate post-war era. This thesis has accorded this some importance due to the state's attempts, during and after the war, to control and mediate the war experience of its participants as well as the general public. Propaganda and war experience are thus key themes in this dissertation.

This thesis argues that the war and the upheaval it wrought allowed for a re-imagining of a new post-war South Africa, however tentatively, that departed from the racial and gendered inequality of the past. This thesis traces the way in which the exodus of white men to the frontlines allowed white women to take up new positions in industry and in the auxiliary services. Similarly for the duration of the war black men – and women – were able to take advantage of the relaxation of influx control laws and the new job opportunities opening up to move in greater numbers to the urban areas. As this thesis has shown, black men were able to take advantage of the opportunity to prove their loyalty by enlisting in the various branches of the Non-European Army Services. This allowed them to work alongside white men and was integral in their demands for equal participation which signified equal citizenship.

¹ Quote taken from Herbert Reed. "To a Conscript of 1940" in *The Oxford Book of War Poetry*. Jon Stallworthy, ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993) p183.

The way in which the war has been remembered and commemorated as well as the expectations and silences around the potential for liberation which the war symbolised for many South Africans, has been largely unexplored. This was partly due to the memorialisation of the war taking on a private, personal and hence, hidden aspect. This thesis examines this memorialisation in its broadest sense, particularly as it applies to black men, their families and their communities.

The thesis concludes by arguing that, by 1948, the possibilities for a new South Africa had been closed down and would remain so for almost fifty years. The Second World War was relegated to personal memory and public commemoration as the "last good war", a poignant reminder of a vision of equality which was not to be.

Acknowledgements

This dissertation would not have been possible was it not for the dedication of my supervisors, Dr Marijke du Toit and Professor Catherine Burns. Both have displayed an enthusiasm for my research which often exceeded my own. They have been strong sources of encouragement and inspiration, sacrificing a great deal of their time and always eager to offer assistance. This dissertation is a testimony to their exhaustive efforts.

My great appreciation goes to everyone else at the Programme of Historical Studies – the dedication of Professor Jeff Guy, Professor Keith Breckenridge, Dr Vukile Khumalo and Dr Thembisa Waetjen have been instrumental in expanding my horizons and demonstrating all the positive aspects of academic life. Dr Julie Parle deserves a special mention as a friend and confidante.

My thanks to the archivists at Killie Campbell Africana Library, the Documentation Centre at the Defence Force Archives and the National Film, Video and Sound Archives for their invaluable assistance.

A special note of gratitude to Mrs Betty Addison, Mrs June Borchert, Mr Alfred Jimmy Davis, Mr Godfrey Herbert and Mrs May Kirkman who gave so generously of their time and whose moving stories took the war out of the history books and made them real.

In the words of W.B. Yeats, “Think where man’s glory most begins and ends, and say my glory was I had such friends”. I have truly been blessed in this regard. Nafisa Essop-Sheik, my alter ego, who sees me as I am yet likes me just the same. Stephen Sparks, my friend in music who has given me invaluable assistance in this project and whose patience and good nature are traits to which I can only aspire. Prinisha Badassy who keeps me grounded and pointed in the right direction, and is unfailingly supportive. Vashna Jagarnath, my great defender, whose strength has been an inspiration. And Elaine Binedell who has been with me through it all.

To my bubba, Lameez Khan – the past three years have taught me so much about unconditional love, happiness and laughter. You have improved my life immeasurably.

And last, but not least, to the strong women in my life – the mother who gave birth to me and the mother who sacrificed so much to raise me and give me every opportunity. Your lives and the adversities you have overcome have been an inspiration to me and are responsible for the person I have become. I dedicate all that I have achieved thus far, and all that I hope to achieve, to my parents.

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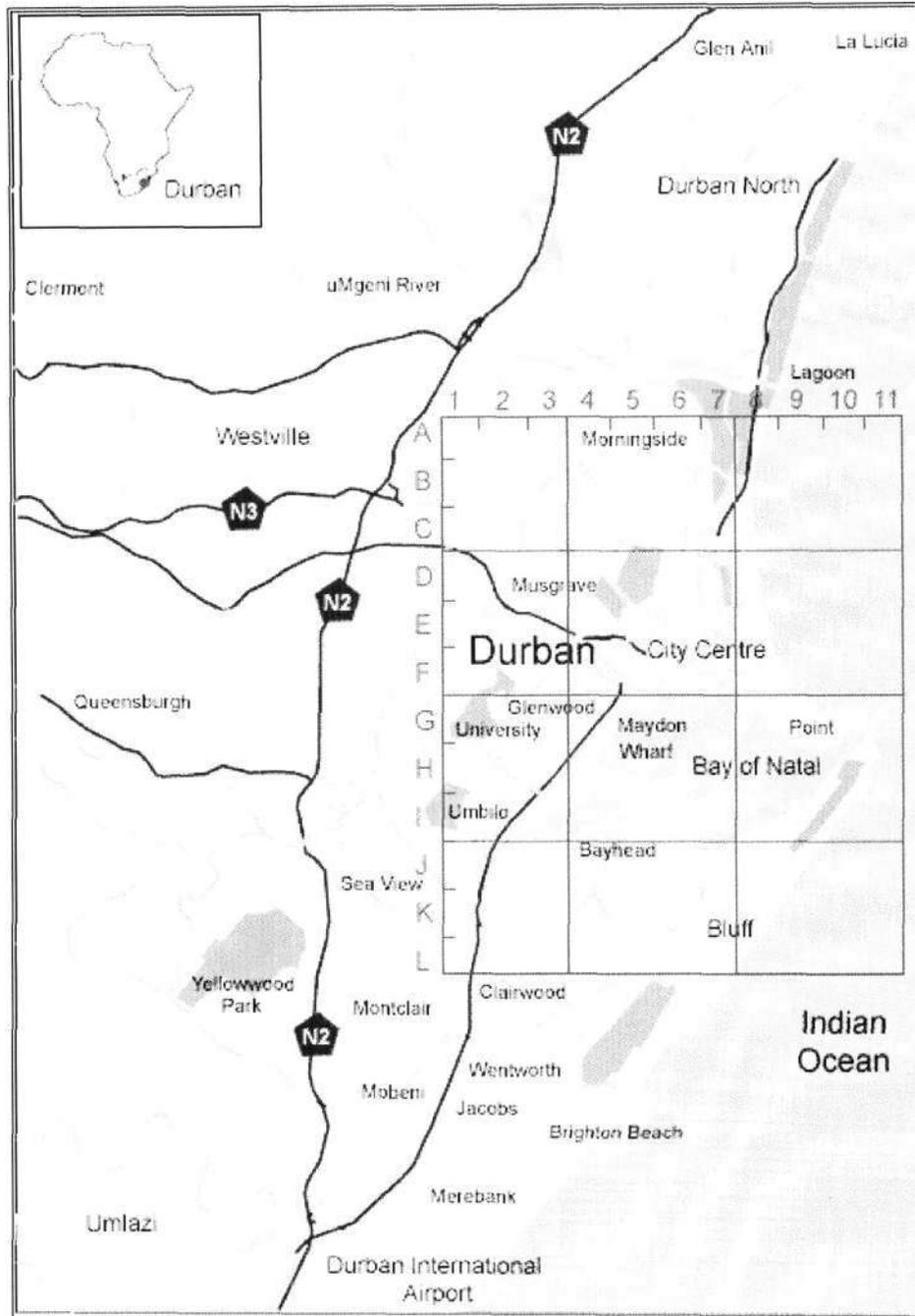
ANC – African National Congress
AES – Army Education Service
ATS – Auxiliary Territorial Service
CC – Cape Corps
CP/CPSA – Communist Party of South Africa
DCM – Distinguished Conduct Medal
FANY – First Aid Nursing Yeomanry
GI – General Infantryman
IMC – Indian and Malay Corps
MK – Umkhonto We Sizwe
MM – Military Medal
NCO – Non-Commissioned Officer
NEAS – Non-European Army Services
NMC – Native Military Corps
OB – Ossewabrandwag
POW – Prisoner of War
RAF – Royal Air Force
RDLI – Royal Durban Light Infantry
SADF – South African Defence Force
SAMNS – South African Military Nursing Service
SAWAS – South African Women’s Auxiliary Services
SEALS – Sea, Air and Land Services
SWANS – South African Women’s Auxiliary Naval Service
UDF – Union Defence Force
VC – Victoria Cross
WAA – Women’s Aviation Association
WAAS – Women’s Auxiliary Army Services
WAAF – Women’s Auxiliary Air Force
WAC – Women’s Auxiliary Corps
WADC – Women’s Auxiliary Defence Corps
WAMPC – Women’s Auxiliary Military Police Corps
WANS – South African Women’s Naval Service
WRENS – Women’s Royal Naval Services

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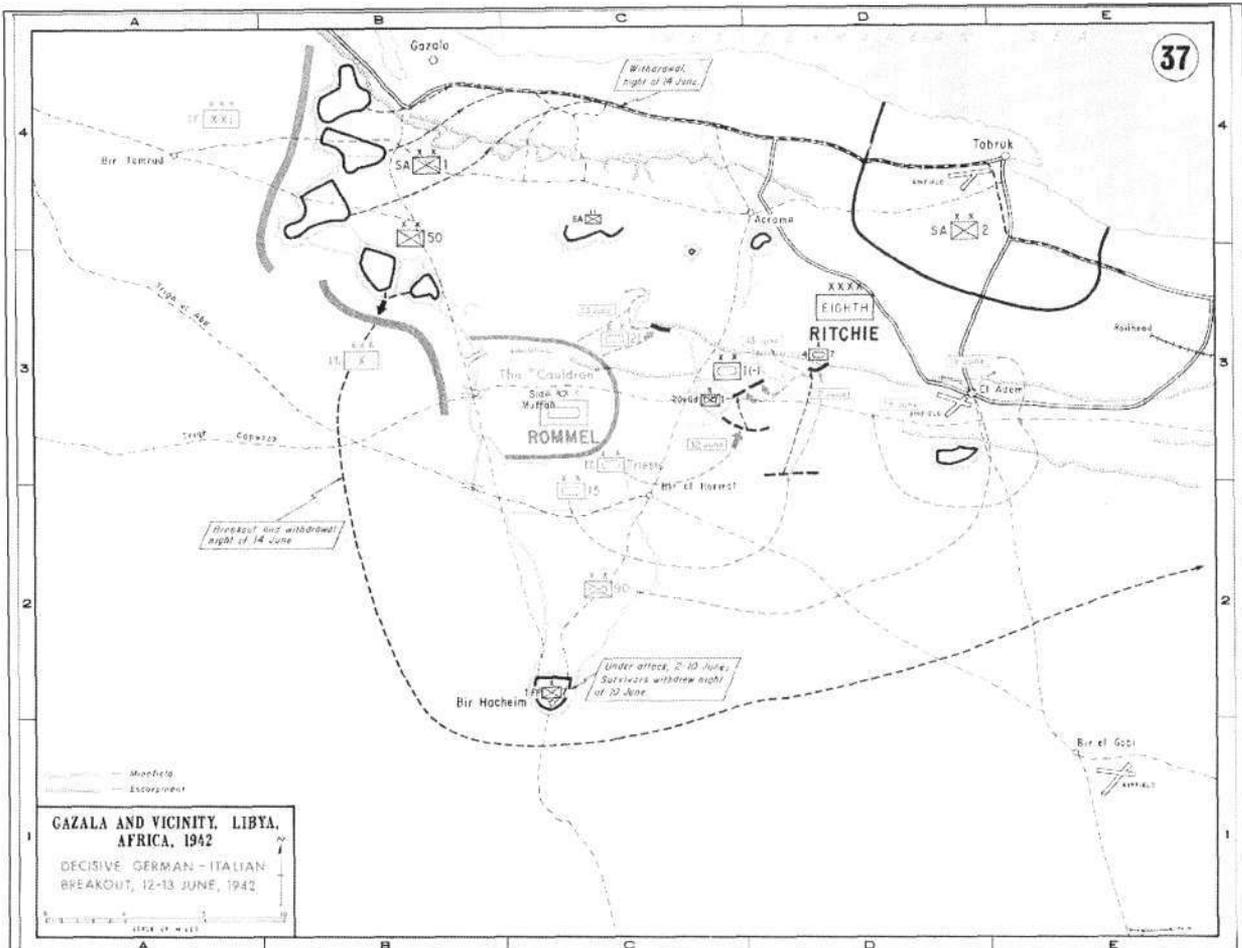
² Durban map taken from <http://www.umich.edu/~snrc492/brian.html>. Accessed April 18, 2006 10:21.

Map of South Africa³



³ South Africa map taken from <http://www.nationalgeographic.com/xpeditions/atlas/index.html?Parent=africa&Rootmap=safric&Mode=d>. Accessed April 18, 2006 10:03.

Map of Tobruk Campaign, June 1942⁴



⁴ Tobruk map taken from <http://www.dean.usma.edu/history/web03/atlas/ww2%20europe/ww2%20europe%20pages/ww2%20europe%20map%2037.htm>. Accessed April 12, 2006 10:17.

Introduction

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Alfred Jimmy Davis is in his mid-eighties. He lives in a small flat in Wentworth, an area in south Durban, historically designated "coloured" in terms of apartheid legislation, which he has shared with his son, daughter-in-law and two grandsons since the death of his wife a few years ago. Across the road and highly visible from his balcony is the oil refinery which looks like a post-apocalyptic industrial nightmare.

Mr Davis is a humorous, pleasant man who, speaking from his favourite chair in the lounge, is surrounded by framed images of the things that matter most to him. Most evident are photographs of his family – in particular a portrait of his wife – his career in the church, significant of his deep religious conviction, and a studio portrait of him as a young soldier. Somewhat incongruously he also shows a photograph of himself as a teenager astride a motorbike emphasising youthful masculinity, with a wry smile on his face. These photographs form an integral part of the way in which Mr Davis remembers and tells his story. As he describes his enlistment and his training, he takes out a small photo album from the crowded display cabinet on his right and leafs through, stopping at images of himself in uniform or of his wife or grandchildren, using them to remember and to illustrate his experiences. Yet he is aware too of the photographs as a fixed window on the past, divorced from time, a symbol of his youth and his mortality. When asked about a photograph taken of him in military uniform, age 22, he laughs and says, "When I look at it I think, I think it's not me, I've gone old, hey, I was about 22 there, full of energy hey."<sup>1</sup> His photographs are a poignant reminder of the passage of time.

As Mr Davis speaks of his war-time service his mild-mannered reminiscences are prompted by his daughter-in-law Shirley who has heard these stories so many times before that she now remembers for him. His words are punctuated by laughter and exchanges with Shirley, adding a vibrant depth to the spoken word. Yet there exists too some confusion, hesitation and forgetfulness brought about by his advanced years which both the photographs and Shirley work to overcome. Evident in his recollections, albeit tempered by his personality, is a strong sense of

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<sup>1</sup> Interview with Alfred Jimmy Davis conducted by Marijke du Toit and Suryakanthie Chetty. March 3, 2005.

injustice as he points in the direction of Montclair where he believed housing would be reserved for him and his colleagues at the end of the war but which instead became a "white" area given to men who never served. His return home was punctuated by a sense of disillusionment due to unemployment and the refusal of the army to give him skills training, leading him to sell his medals and badges to white souvenir seekers soon after. Yet Mr Davis embodies that moving contradiction – the years after 1945 only served to dishearten him but he is nonetheless proud of his contribution in defending his country and playing a small role in a significant historical moment. Shirley Davis' ability to remember for him suggests that he had told his war stories so many times that his family knew them as well as he did – his war service was a key event in his life to which he returned time and time again. His pride in the part he played is evident in his insistence in taking part in public commemorations along with other black veterans whose names do not appear on the memorials where they pay their respects.

His disillusionment was rendered concrete by the rise of the apartheid state and, as Mr Davis speaks, Shirley Davis produces an old scrapbook containing dozens of newspaper articles painstakingly put together by Mr Davis with the earliest articles more than fifty years old. These yellowed articles are the means by which Mr Davis connects himself to the larger historical narrative, for his war service has given him some small connection to the events of the war and the post-war era. Prime Minister Jan Smuts features prominently here and Mr Davis believes that Smuts' death in 1950 marked the point at which South Africa took a turn away from the freedom and democracy envisaged during the war to a country that failed to live up to its war-time promises and entrenched racial equality. His citing of 1950 and the death of Smuts as marking the watershed highlights the way in which individual memory works, not necessarily in sync with the official history, but no less real, powerful and meaningful. For Mr Davis, Smuts embodied the potential for a new South Africa of social and racial equality and, as he remembers it, Smuts' death marked the death knell of his hopes and the setting in of his disillusionment. The rise of the apartheid state and the death of Smuts a short while later became one and the same in Mr Davis' memory, a powerful indication of the way in which memory operates.

Alfred Jimmy Davis lived an ordinary life – he married, raised a family, is a devout Christian and experienced first-hand the inequalities of the apartheid state. For me, he represents the everyman – patriotic enlistment and service in the war, the desire to be a combatant, the disenchantment with the rise of the apartheid state, his pride in his actions and his respect for

those who had made the ultimate sacrifice. His story highlights the tragedy of South Africa after 1945.

South Africa in the 1940s was entering an era filled with the potential for shifts and dramatic recasting of race, regional, gender and class patterns and expectations. This potential found its mirror in global change with the ending of colonialism – the granting of independence to the jewel in the British Crown, India, the struggles culminating in the ending of colonial rule in much of the rest of the world and the movements for equality which would play out increasingly over the twentieth century – civil rights, feminism. Yet, even as this happened, South Africa went a different route – marked by the failure of liberalism, the entrenchment of conservatism, a return to a pre-war status quo in terms of gender roles and an intensified subjugation of black South Africans which would last another fifty years. In 1945 white South Africans had a choice to create a new South Africa and ultimately they chose not to do so.

This thesis is an attempt to understand why these choices were made. Looking at the experiences of the servicemen and women of the Second World War – those who had most at stake and those who made the greatest sacrifices in the name of patriotism – allow for an understanding of the inherent weaknesses, contradictions and ultimate failure of liberalism in South Africa embodied in men like Smuts. They allow for some understanding too of the inability of black South Africans to mount an effective resistance to the rise of the apartheid state and the entrenchment of inequality. These experiences are given form through visual, oral and written sources where official ideas of the appropriate roles, behaviour and expectations of the men and women participating in the war worked along with, as well as stood in opposition to, how individuals perceived their war efforts. Ultimately, by examining the racial and gendered identity of the war's participants, this thesis attempts to understand why South Africa made the transition from fighting a war for democracy to the entrenching of right wing nationalism and racial inequality with the tacit complicity of many, both in South Africa and internationally, holding true to the adage, "The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing"<sup>2</sup> – or to actively contribute to the system of apartheid.

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<sup>2</sup> Quote attributed to Edmund Burke. Taken from *Collins Dictionary of Quotations*. (Glasgow: HarperCollins Publishers, 1998) p121.

## Literature Review

The most recent attempt to comprehensively address some of the crucial social, economic and political issues in the 1940s is the compilation *South Africa's 1940s: Worlds of Possibilities*, drawing on the papers presented at a conference in Kingston, Canada in 2003<sup>3</sup>. Saul Dubow's "Introduction: South Africa's 1940s" is particularly relevant for this dissertation as he suggests that the rise of apartheid was not an inevitable outcome, identifying three possible strands or paths for South Africa post-1945.<sup>4</sup> Two of the paths available to post-war South Africa were African nationalism and Afrikaner nationalism. It was the latter which was eventually to hold sway. However this dissertation is concerned with the third alternative discussed by the author – and its ultimate failure:

The third [world of possibility], which may be characterised as liberal or social-democratic South Africanism, resists easy definition, not least because it occupied an uncertain, shifting middle ground and overlapped to an extent with African as well as Afrikaner nationalism. Inspired by liberal and left-wing internationalist thought, and championed by opponents of fascism and supporters of the war effort, its leading adherents included intellectuals, reform-minded politicians and administrators, and servicemen and women.<sup>5</sup>

Dubow considers the way in which the Second World War had an effect on those involved and includes the attempts that were made to "encourage [soldiers and civilians] to make connections between the struggle for freedom in Europe and the need for social change at home", evident in numerous publications as well as the creation of the Army Education Service (AES).<sup>6</sup> Yet, simultaneously, Dubow suggests that there was not necessarily a genuine desire to commit to social change in South Africa and that this was evident in the contradictory persona of Prime Minister Jan Smuts. Smuts was most keen to adopt liberal values and consider concessions regarding racial segregation when support for the war was at its ebb, marked by the defeat at Tobruk in 1942. This willingness waned when the war once again swung in favour of the Allies a year later where "the government became less enamoured of liberal reforming impulses from 1943 and did little to sustain the hopes and policies which it had earlier encouraged".<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> "South Africa in the 1940s: Worlds of Possibilities", Kingston, Canada, September, 2003.

<sup>4</sup> Saul Dubow "Introduction: South Africa's 1940s" in *South Africa's 1940s: Worlds of Possibilities*. Saul Dubow and Alan Jeeves, eds. (Cape Town: Double Storey Books, 2005) p1-3.

<sup>5</sup> Dubow. "Introduction: South Africa's 1940s". p2-3.

<sup>6</sup> Dubow. "Introduction: South Africa's 1940s". p8.

<sup>7</sup> Dubow. "Introduction: South Africa's 1940s". p12.

The contradictions embodied in the figure of Smuts are highlighted in Shula Marks' contribution to the book. She describes the failure of liberalism as being due to a "failure of leadership" not only on the part of Smuts but also resulting from the inability of both Finance Minister J.H. Hofmeyr and Leo Marquard to formulate an effective liberal alternative.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless the book fails to address the actual experiences and expectations of the ordinary men and women involved in the war, particularly in military service. Ultimately the 1948 Malan government was voted into power and this stemmed partly from the disillusionment of ex-servicemen and women and their own ambivalence towards implementing the democracy and liberalism for which they had fought in South Africa. This was evident in the failure of ex-servicemen's organisations such as the Torch Commando to mount an effective opposition to the apartheid state. In fact if this ambivalence was evident in their own testimonies and in their memories of the war, it was also clear in the official publications, both written and visual, where, if the ideals for which the war was fought were evident, their meanings were often contradictory. Here, the visual representation of the war and of its participants – which I address in Chapter One – is integral to understanding the way in which the state worked. This visual representation served to contain the possibilities for social change brought about by the war and an intensive examination of this visual representation is a significant area overlooked by *South Africa's 1940s* that this dissertation seeks to redress.

Two groups, considered auxiliaries, but nevertheless integral to the war effort have been largely omitted – black men and white women. Robert Edgar's contribution focuses on African nationalism in the form of the radical ANC Youth League during the 1940s<sup>9</sup> while Parvathi Raman's piece on Yusuf Dadoo looks at the activism of the communist freedom fighter who was vehemently opposed to black men participating in the war:

'You are being asked to support a war for freedom, justice and democracy. Do you enjoy the fruits of freedom, justice and democracy? What you enjoy are the pass and poll tax laws, segregation, and white labour policy. Low wages, high rents, poverty, unemployment and vicious colour bars.'<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Shula Marks. "Afterword: Worlds of Impossibilities?" in *South Africa's 1940s: Worlds of Possibilities*. Saul Dubow and Alan Jeeves, eds. (Cape Town: Double Storey Books, 2005) p273-275.

<sup>9</sup> Robert Edgar. "Changing the Old Guard: A.P. Mda and the ANC Youth League, 1944-1949" in *South Africa's 1940s: Worlds of Possibilities*. Saul Dubow and Alan Jeeves, eds. (Cape Town: Double Storey Books, 2005)

<sup>10</sup> Parvathi Raman. "Yusuf Dadoo: A Son of South Africa" in *South Africa's 1940s: Worlds of Possibilities*. Saul Dubow and Alan Jeeves, eds. (Cape Town: Double Storey Books, 2005) p233.

Dadoo's subsequent arrest and his adversity towards participation in the war were highlighted in a letter to *Ilanga Lase Natal*, which I discuss in Chapter Three, highlighting the ambivalent support held by black South Africans for the war. Significant here too are the experiences of black men not committed to left-wing radicalism who contributed to the war in the Non-European Army Services. The reasons for their participation were linked not only to their masculinity but to their expectations of citizenship. A sore point here was the important distinction of combat which served as a means of exclusion. The relationship between combat and citizenship is an important theme in this dissertation as it relates to the war service of black men and the limitations placed upon this service by the South African state and much of white South Africa in general.

Key to the Second World War in international literature was the way in which women were mobilised to take part in war work in the wartime industries as well as the auxiliary services. This is an aspect given little consideration in *South Africa's 1940s*, particularly as it related to the role of white women in this period of change. White women's participation in the First World War had been integrally linked to their subsequent enfranchisement in many countries in the 1920s. With the Second World War the new roles of women in industry and the military also suggested new possibilities at the end of the war. Linked to this was the way in which women constructed themselves as citizens and upholders of the social status quo or were in fact radicalized by their experiences. The important roles played by women such as Janie Malherbe – the editor of *Complex Country* – who addressed both the expectations placed on women as workers, war auxiliaries and mothers as well as her vision for a post-war South Africa cannot be underestimated in terms of the prospect held by liberal white South Africa regarding the impact of war on gender and race. The opening up of opportunities for white women during the war is a significant aspect of war-time society, emblematic of the possibilities for change and empowerment that *South Africa's 1940s* fails to adequately address due to the scant attention paid to white women in the compilation.

My interest in gender and war was piqued by Jean Bethke Elshtain's *Women and War*.<sup>11</sup> Elshtain looked at the way in which the roles played by men and women in war were inextricably linked where there were greater similarities in the expectations placed upon them than differences. This

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<sup>11</sup> Jean Bethke Elshtain. *Women and War*. (New York: Basic Books Inc Publishers, 1987)

was particularly evident in the case of soldiers and mothers and their role in the nation. Cherryl Walker's work on the suffrage movement in South Africa added a local perspective.<sup>12</sup> Walker demonstrates the collusion between white women and the South African state from the mid-1920s where women's rights were subordinated to the maintenance of the racial hierarchy. Both authors place women within a nationalist framework, creating an effective critique of the nineteenth century bourgeois construction of women confined to the private sphere, the guardians of morality, which still remained iconographic during the Second World War.

Unlike the international literature focusing on women in the Second World War, little has been written regarding their South African counterparts.<sup>13</sup> Jacklyn Cock therefore, while focusing on the second half of the twentieth century, is important in looking at South African women and war in different military contexts. Cock's work *Colonels and Cadres: War and Gender in South Africa* has been influential for this thesis in its demonstration of the way in which there was an inherent conservatism with regards to the role of women in the South African Defence Force. This was also the case in *Umkhonto we Sizwe* (MK) where women and men trained together, yet the armed wing of the ANC was portrayed as a largely masculine enterprise and militarization was a hallmark of this masculinity. The SADF perceived themselves to be protecting the home and country and MK to be fighting for the freedom of it.<sup>14</sup> Focussing on the latter thirty years of the twentieth century in a South Africa apparently very different to the one addressed here, Cock nevertheless demonstrates the way in which the conventional, gendered portrayal of women in war was ubiquitous. White women were confined to the domestic front or within the constraints of femininity, and the military was portrayed as the sole preserve of men – and, in the case of the SADF, white men.

Part of the focus of this dissertation is a comparative study of notions of gender and race as it relates to war internationally and their significance for the South African context. As such, Leo

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<sup>12</sup> Cherryl Walker. "The women's suffrage movement: The politics of gender, race and class" in *Women and Gender in Southern Africa to 1945*. Cherryl Walker, ed., (Claremont: David Philip Publishers, 1990)

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Elshtain. *Women and War*; M. Dabakis. "Gendered Labor: Norman Rockwell's *Rosie the Riveter* and the Discourses of Wartime Womanhood" in *Gender and American History Since 1890*. Barbara Melosh, ed. (London: Routledge, 1993); C. Lang. *Keep Smiling Through: Women in the Second World War*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); S. Rose. "Sex, Citizenship, and the Nation in World War II Britain" in *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 103, No. 4, Oct., 1998; G. Bock. "Equality and Difference in National Socialist Racism" in *Feminism and History*. Scott, J. W. ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); R. Adam. *A Woman's Place: 1910-1975*. (London: Chatto and Windus, 1975)

<sup>14</sup> Jacklyn Cock. *Colonels and Cadres: War and Gender in South Africa*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991)

Braudy's work on the way in which masculinity has been constructed historically in the context of war helped me frame questions in this dissertation about heroism, honour and duty – common catchphrases during the Second World War.<sup>15</sup> Steve Attridge's work on nationalism in military and civilian late Victorian Britain adds a greater specificity as it looks at the British army, considering class and the role of the military as a disciplinary institution.<sup>16</sup> It acknowledges too the role of propaganda efforts in the South African War as shaping public opinion towards British military efforts as well as the enemy "other". Working with a similar time frame, but more locally situated, is Robert Morrell's *From Boys to Gentlemen: Settler Masculinity in Colonial Natal, 1880-1920* which is a landmark work in South African historiography focussing on the way in which white masculinity was constructed in Natal.<sup>17</sup> There are noteworthy parallels between settler Natal and middle class Britain and North America particularly in terms of military regiments, the public school system and most noteworthy, sport, which is a considerable theme in this dissertation.

Michael C.C. Adams has discussed the origins of the importance of sport as being an important feature of the British – and United States – public school system, helping in the creation of the ideal soldier.<sup>18</sup> For middle class boys in British and American private schools as well as military academies, masculinity was constructed in terms of military values – honour, duty and self-sacrifice as well as the placing of emphasis on the group above "selfish" individual material pursuits. These schools stressed unquestioning obedience as well as "fitting in".<sup>19</sup> In addition they gave preference to physical activities over intellectual pursuits as the former emphasised both the group and an acquiescence to higher authority whereas the latter was often viewed with suspicion and "clever men' [were] seen as outsiders who 'because of their cleverness are probably dishonourable and possibly cowardly.'"<sup>20</sup> To raise a generation of soldiers the schooling system preferred that men be little given to introspection which would make them inefficient killers and question authority.

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<sup>15</sup> Leo Braudy. *From Chivalry to Terrorism: War and the Changing Nature of Masculinity*. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003)

<sup>16</sup> Steve Attridge. *Nationalism, Imperialism and Identity in Late Victorian Culture: Civil and Military Worlds*. (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003)

<sup>17</sup> Robert Morrell. *From Boys to Gentlemen: Settler Masculinity in Colonial Natal, 1880-1920*. (Pretoria: UNISA Press, 2001)

<sup>18</sup> Suryakanthie Chetty. Suryakanthie Chetty. "Gender Under Fire: Interrogating War in South Africa, 1939-1945." (University of Natal Durban: Unpublished MA dissertation, 2001) p13-14.

<sup>19</sup> Michael C.C. Adams. *The Great Adventure: Male Desire and the Coming of World War I*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990.) p29.

<sup>20</sup> Adams. *The Great Adventure*. p29.

The conjunction of sport, military service and nationalism was a powerful theme in the British Empire in the early twentieth century - Britain, Australia and South Africa. The importance of sport was emphasized in Richard Holt's history of sport in Britain which is particularly relevant for its demonstration of the interaction between the various dominions within the empire and the way in which sport symbolized, not only masculinity, but became the ground on which national differences were played out.<sup>21</sup> This is emphasized in John Nauright's *Sport, Cultures and Identities in South Africa* where he demonstrates that sport and, in particular rugby, was symbolic not only of an assertion of a South African but of a particularly white identity, serving both as a process of inclusion and exclusion.<sup>22</sup> Yet, according to Nauright, rugby exerted a powerful hold on the aspirations of black, particularly coloured men, due to it being invested with ideas of citizenship and masculinity. The significance of the term "Springbok" both as the name for the national rugby team as well as a moniker for the men serving in the Union Defence Force was emblematic of this as, for much of the twentieth century, black players were not allowed to become Springboks. This was symbolic of their exclusion from equal participation in the war and in the South African state.

Black participation in the three major military conflicts in which South Africa participated – the South African War, the First World War and the Second World War – remains under-researched. Peter Warwick has written a significant account of the role of black people in the South African War.<sup>23</sup> Sol Plaatje's diary dealing with the Siege of Mafeking is invaluable in that it allows for an understanding of the role of black men in the South African War as being more than just the pawns of Boer and British forces.<sup>24</sup> Louis Grundlingh's unpublished PhD dissertation concentrates on the role of African men in the Second World War.<sup>25</sup> Grundlingh traces the impact of the war on these men from its outbreak where reactions ranged from a belief that they would be liberated by the Axis forces to a desire to participate in the war in order that they may win concessions at the end of it. His dissertation has some parallels with this work in terms of its focus on the issue of arming black men, recruiting efforts and the role of traditional leaders in

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<sup>21</sup> Richard Holt. *Sport and the British: A Modern History*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990)

<sup>22</sup> John Nauright. *Sport, Cultures and Identities in South Africa*. (Claremont: David Philip Publishers, 1998)

<sup>23</sup> Peter Warwick. *Black People and the South African War, 1899-1902*. (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1983)

<sup>24</sup> Sol T. Plaatje. *Mafeking Diary: A Black Man's View of a White Man's War*. Comaoff, J., Willan, B. and Reed, A., eds. (Cambridge: Meridor Books, 1990) p20.

<sup>25</sup> Louis Willem Frederick Grundlingh. "The Participation of South African Blacks in the Second World War". (Rand Afrikaans University, Johannesburg: Unpublished PhD dissertation, 1986)

this as well as their actual roles played in the war. However, although he briefly mentions concerns regarding the interaction of black men and white women, there is an insufficient focus on the gender dynamics of participation in the war with particular reference to the way in which masculinity and, specifically, white masculinity was constructed in relation to as well as in opposition to black masculinity. As with much of this work there yet remains a dearth of direct accounts penned by black men regarding their participation in war.

The work of Norman Clothier and Albert Grundlingh, while concentrating on the First World War, raises important issues about black participation in warfare. These are as relevant in the Second World War where white South Africans were also vehemently opposed to the use of black men in any combative capacity whatsoever. In fact, according to some white men, any uniformed service at all was to be avoided, as evident in the words of J.B. Wessels, an MP in March 1917: "Did they realise that the coloured man when he donned uniform, said to the white man: I am now your equal, the equal of your wives and children."<sup>26</sup> The suggestion was that service in military was to an extent equated with citizenship – the service of women during the First World War led to their almost universal enfranchisement, validating the connection between military service and citizenship. Many white South Africans believed that allowing black South Africans the opportunity to serve in the First World War would open a door that could not be closed – the demand of black servicemen to be granted citizenship status or, at the very least, be granted some concessions on the part of the state.<sup>27</sup>

This, of course, was the very reason that many of the elite black South Africans wanted to join the war effort once the government had allowed them to participate in the war in a limited non-combative capacity, "as drivers, leaders (of oxen) and general labourers".<sup>28</sup> In a refrain that echoed the South African War and was to be continued two decades later, many black leaders such as those of the South African Native National Congress believed that by, "...identifying themselves with the white ruling class in a common cause and openly proclaiming allegiance to the British Crown, they expected...to be rewarded for their loyalty." In addition to that, by not proclaiming their loyalty to the South African government as well as the British Crown, they

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<sup>26</sup> Norman Clothier. *Black Valour: The South African Native Labour Contingent, 1916-1918 and the Sinking of the 'Mendi'*. (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1987) p17. The quote originally appeared in the *Cape Times*, March 21, 1917.

<sup>27</sup> Clothier. *Black Valour*. p17-18.

<sup>28</sup> Clothier. *Black Valour*. p11.

risked distancing those upon whom they depended to win political and legal concessions.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, as this dissertation shows, combat was linked to masculinity as well – facing the baptism of fire was the means by which white men could prove themselves men. White combatants were portrayed as the key participants of the war and this was another compelling reason for the desire of black men – and white women – to participate on an equal footing.

Ian Gleeson's *The Forgotten Force*, while being a popular account with little critical analysis, nevertheless contains significant information on the role of South African black men in the Second World War in particular, detailing acts of bravery and heroism, in some instances excerpts of first-hand testimony which are invaluable, as well as incidents of dissent.<sup>30</sup> It formed a stepping stone from which I was able to take some of my arguments further.

The book *The War in American Culture: Society and Consciousness During World War II*, is a useful entry point into my dissertation topic as there are parallels between the themes raised by the Second World War in the United States and South Africa.<sup>31</sup> This is particularly evident in terms of the need by the government to draw together all segments of society, even those previously alienated, to unite for a common war effort. This also highlights the intrinsic tensions evident in this nation-building process. Important here was the way in which state propaganda operated in order to paper over gender and race differences, suggesting the possibilities of empowerment for women and black minority groups. However propaganda contained limitations as well.

The work of Ross Poole is significant here particularly his notion of the nation as providing a sense of belonging, evident through its reproduction of culture:

The nation is a specific cultural object. It exists in and through the language we speak, the public symbols we acknowledge, the history and literature we were taught at school, the music we listen to, the currency we use, the sporting activities we enjoy, and the news bulletins on the television.<sup>32</sup>

In this way the nation can also function as a process of exclusion by privileging a dominant ideology of racial exclusion and, with it, the sense of belonging, particularly evident in South

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<sup>29</sup> Albert Grundlingh. *Fighting Their Own War: South African Blacks and the First World War*. (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1987) p13-14.

<sup>30</sup> Ian Gleeson. *The Unknown Force – Black, Indian and Coloured Soldiers Through Two World Wars*. (Rivonia: Ashanti Publishing, 1994)

<sup>31</sup> *The War in American Culture: Society and Consciousness During World War II*. Erenberg, L.A. and Hirsch, S.E., eds. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996)

<sup>32</sup> Ross Poole. *Nation and Identity*. (London, Routledge, 1999) p14.

Africa. Yet, according to Poole, the nation paradoxically also has within it the potential to mobilise different groups within its geographical borders when faced with a common enemy. This goes some way to understanding the way in which black men volunteered in huge numbers at the outbreak of war as an attempt, not only to demonstrate their loyalty and hence their suitability for citizenship, but based also on patriotism and a desire to defend their country. This illustrated the way in which the nation was able to make use of different discourses, rather than those merely of exclusion.

Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* also provides a means for considering this almost paradoxical situation in South Africa during the Second World War where black men wished to don the uniform for a state which did not extend to them equal rights. Anderson writes of the romanticism of dying or sacrificing oneself for the nation to which one belongs. *Imagined Communities* is useful therefore in explaining both black determination to engage in combat as well as equal white vehemence in keeping them out.<sup>33</sup> Here Anderson makes a distinction between nationalism and racism arguing that whereas "nationalism thinks in terms of historical destinies", racism is seen as being "outside history". This fails to explain the way in which nationalism in white South Africa was constructed in terms of race and in terms of a process of inclusion and exclusion.<sup>34</sup>

The concept of the nation operates not only in terms of race but of gender as well and *Gender Ironies of Nationalism: Sexing the Nation* makes a compelling argument for the differences and inequalities apparent in the nation where "internal hierarchies often occur along lines of gender, race, class and sexuality despite the national discourse of internal unity".<sup>35</sup> This was evident in the propaganda disseminated in South Africa during the Second World War where there was an overall middle class emphasis. The work of black men – where acknowledged – was often laced with patronisation. Moreover, the representation of the role of white women in the auxiliary services was almost inherently conservative, reproducing the ideology of women as mothers and "re-producers of the nation".<sup>36</sup> *Gender Ironies of Nationalism* also helps account for the way in which white men were given the status of being the key players in the war, the combatants, and

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<sup>33</sup> Benedict Anderson. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. (London: Verso, 1991) p144.

<sup>34</sup> Anderson. *Imagined Communities*. p149.

<sup>35</sup> Tamar Mayer. "Gender Ironies of Nationalism: setting the stage" in *Gender Ironies of Nationalism: Sexing the Nation*. Tamar Mayer, ed. (London: Routledge, 2000) p7.

<sup>36</sup> Mayer. "Gender Ironies of Nationalism". p7.

the figures around which the work of the auxiliaries revolved. In this instance, white men and the nation were almost synonymous.<sup>37</sup> Although her work speaks to a specific regional context in the late twentieth century, Thembisa Waetjen's study of Zulu nationalism is important for this thesis by demonstrating the way in which nationalism took on a racial and particular gendered cast in a local context. She highlights the major failing in much of the work of nationalism, including that of Benedict Anderson, which takes the masculine nature of nationalism as being self-evident:

Nationalism's concern with men and manhood has always been implicit in political theory, even if not critically investigated. When, for example, Benedict Anderson recounts the revealing phenomenon of the Unknown Soldier, that cenotaph 'void...of identifiable remains...but nevertheless saturated with ghostly national imaginings,' he does not ponder the particular impact such monuments derive from an immortal masculinity that figures into the imagery of combat and sacrifice on behalf of the nation.<sup>38</sup>

As scholars such as Waetjen have shown, no nationalism is an homogeneous masculine entity. Although men are accorded a certain status based on their gender, there nevertheless exist important social distinctions of "class, age and [race]" that create inequalities and friction within nationalism and ideas of masculinity.<sup>39</sup> In this dissertation I argue that this friction was played out at the crucial historical moment of the Second World War where state pleas for support based on patriotism highlighted distinctions between white and black men as well as white women, creating opportunities both for social change and a conservative backlash as black men's demands for citizenship went unheeded.

### *Photographs and Film*

In South Africa the use of visual sources in the form of films and photographs as the basis for historical analysis is a burgeoning area of research.<sup>40</sup> Despite this, unlike their overseas counterparts, there has been insufficient work on war photography and film and this area of neglect includes the Second World War. My research has failed to turn up any secondary sources dealing with the Second World War in the South African context as it relates to photography and

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<sup>37</sup> Mayer. "Gender Ironies of Nationalism". p7.

<sup>38</sup> Thembisa Waetjen. *Workers and Warriors: Masculinity and the Struggle for Nation in South Africa*. (Chicago: University of Illinois, 2004) p127.

<sup>39</sup> Waetjen. *Workers and Warriors*. p128.

<sup>40</sup> A noteworthy example of this is a special edition of the journal *Kronos*, Issue 27, 2001, that focussed solely on photography and history. It included articles that also appeared in *The Colonising Camera* viz. Patricia Hayes "Vision and Violence: Photographs of War in Southern Angola and Northern Namibia" as well as Casper W. Erichsen "'Shoot to Kill': Photographic Images in the Namibian Liberation/Bush War".

film. Prior research concentrating on South Africa during the war has largely been social or military histories or autobiographical in nature. There has been some work done on black soldiers during the Second World War, notably by Ian Gleeson as I have discussed above, but they have also not been focussed on the visual. Where images have been used, they have been mainly descriptive:

Historians often regard the photograph as a mere 'illustration' to a more important textual reference, and treat it like a quotation. Quotation itself is often seen as self-evident, and not conceived as a 'language' which seeks to persuade, or which constitutes a discourse with its own structures of meaning.<sup>41</sup>

I have analysed a number of films created by the South African state and military for the purposes of propaganda and have also drawn parallels with the way in which film was used internationally to create or sustain support for the war as part of this analysis. Clayton Koppes and Gregory Black's work on the way in which Hollywood worked with the American state in the production of films for the Second World War is significant as it considers the way in which the First World War was re-envisioned during the Second World War. This is evident in *Sergeant York* which emphasised glory and individual heroism rather than the poignant disillusionment that was evident in the writings of the war poets such as Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon after 1918.<sup>42</sup> This re-envisioning of the war was important in raising support for the 1939 conflict and Hollywood films with their portrayal of white male combatants, black soldiers and women in the service, helped propagate a certain norm in military service which was reinforced every time troops and civilians all over the allied world watched them. This helped create an understanding of military service replete with both empowerment and limitations and is useful for understanding its impact on South African soldiers and civilians alike.

*Propaganda, Politics and Film, 1918-45* is useful in understanding the effectiveness of propaganda that is disseminated through film and this is only enhanced by the work of Jowett and O'Donnell in *Propaganda and Persuasion*. They address the way in which the very set-up of film with its self-contained or closed nature leaves little room for interpretation. The ability of film to strike some sort of chord with the audience and elicit an emotional response make it a valuable means of

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<sup>41</sup> Patricia Hayes, Jeremy Silvester and Wolfram Hartmann. "Photography, history and memory" in *The Colonising Camera*. W. Hartmann, J. Silvester and P. Hayes, eds. (Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press, 2001) p2.

<sup>42</sup> Clayton R. Koppes and Gregory D. Black. *Hollywood Goes to War: How Politics, Profits, and Propaganda Shaped World War II Movies*. (New York: The Free Press, 1987) p37.

propaganda.<sup>43</sup> As Jowett and O'Donnell have shown, for a piece of state propaganda to be judged effective, eliciting the emotional and perhaps unquestioning response required, the propagandist needs to consider both the informative and persuasive aspects. Propaganda that is informative combines the need to be informed, evident in the war-time success of news reels with the “promot[ion] [of] a specific ideology”, and persuasion addresses too the needs and concerns of the audience at which it is aimed so as not to alienate the viewer.<sup>44</sup> This is significant in demonstrating that propaganda could not simply be imposed from above but had to strike an existing chord within its audiences in order to be effective and powerful. The potential and limitations of propaganda to an extent thus mirrored that of South African society. Whereas both documentary and fictional film in a sense tended to be a significant factor in propagandistic efforts, it was by no means the only form of propaganda used and photographs too used the power of visual imagery to propagate a particular ideology.

Perhaps the theorist most widely engaged with in relation to photography criticism is Roland Barthes.<sup>45</sup> According to Barthes every image has some relation to reality and truth by virtue of an object having existed at a particular point in time in order to be photographed. I am nonetheless more compelled by the argument made by John Tagg in which he argues against Barthes' point by demonstrating the way in which even the choice of object photographed is a cultural construct.<sup>46</sup> This is an important point of entry into my dissertation as Tagg is useful in deconstructing the truth value of photographs to provide the context for their production. In other words photographs may be used as a means of gaining an understanding of society. This is particularly relevant during a period of war where society is in a tremendous state of flux.

There has been parallel work done on war photography in the Namibian conflict, particularly the collection of essays in *The Colonial Camera: Photography in the Making of Namibian History*, as well as colonial and social documentary photography.<sup>47</sup> *The Colonial Camera* highlighted photography as it relates to the depiction of race and colonial power. It is particularly relevant due to its analysis of hunting and the parallels between the camera and the gun, both working as

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<sup>43</sup> Garth S. Jowett and Victoria O'Donnell. *Propaganda and Persuasion*. (California: Sage Publications, 1999) p113.

<sup>44</sup> Jowett and O'Donnell. *Propaganda and Persuasion*. p26-27.

<sup>45</sup> Roland Barthes. *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. (London: Fontana, 1984)

<sup>46</sup> John Tagg. *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories*. (London: Macmillan, 1988)

<sup>47</sup> *The Colonising Camera: Photographs in the Making of Namibian History*. Hartmann, J., Silvester, J. and Hayes, P., eds., (Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press, 1998)

instruments of violence and white power.<sup>48</sup> Moreover the book addresses white settler masculinity in southern Africa and many of the images have parallels with personal photographs taken by soldiers in East Africa during the Second World War.

In terms of the personal images, which form such a significant part of personal testimony of the Second World War, Nancy West's discussion of the Kodak advertising campaign in the early twentieth century shows the way in which the company re-invented the kinds of snapshots taken.<sup>49</sup> This was done by creating preconceptions of the way in which life was expected to be represented through the camera – the emphasis was placed on the positive, the aesthetic and a refusal to acknowledge painful memories. War itself became part of this realm of the positive family narrative – idealised images proliferated showing soldiers with family members or soldiers on the front gazing at family pictures. It is important to consider here the way in which albums compiled by soldiers incorporate this notion of "domesticating" the war, denying difficult war experiences to create an idealised, wholly positive perception of military service during the war.

Caroline Brothers' work on the Spanish Civil War gives a useful understanding not only about the way in which photographs can be analysed by a historian but is useful too for an understanding of the way in which visual propaganda operates.<sup>50</sup> Brothers claims that these images are more useful in what they reveal about the societies in which these photographs are produced than in terms of what the images actually attempt to show. As Gillian Rose demonstrated the photograph functions too as a site of interpretation:

A photograph is a cultural text like an other: 'a place of work, a structured and structuring space within which the reader deploys, and is deployed by, what codes he or she is familiar with in order to make sense... Thus these photographs are not privileged images of reality; rather, they are sites of interpretations.<sup>51</sup>

This argument is further emphasized by Elizabeth Edwards with her description of the photographs as "historical" which is in stark contrast to its ostensible appearance as an unmediated representation of reality. For Edwards, the photograph combines two features in its interpretation – the first is the "cultural context" of its production which influenced what was

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<sup>48</sup> P.S. Landau. "Hunting with Gun and Camera: A Commentary" in *The Colonising Camera: Photographs in the Making of Namibian History*. Hartmann, J., Silvester, J. and Hayes, P., eds., (Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press, 1998)

<sup>49</sup> Nancy West. *Kodak and the Lens of Nostalgia*. (Virginia: The University Press of Virginia, 2000)

<sup>50</sup> Caroline Brothers. *War and Photography – A cultural history*. (New York: Routledge, 1997)

<sup>51</sup> Gillian Rose. "Engendering the Slum: Photography in East London in the 1930s" in *Gender, Place and Culture*, Vol 4, No 3, 1997. p277.

permissible to photograph, and the other is the individual "personal circumstance, vision and intention" of the photographer.<sup>52</sup> The third influence is the position of the viewer. This is an insightful explanation for the way in which propagandistic images operated – having a particular goal based on state and military requirements yet drawing on societal conventions of what was permissible to photograph as well as cultural expectations in order to strike a chord with the viewer, making these images powerful tools of persuasion.

While visual theorists have considered the way in which photographs mirror relations of dominance and power, this is given added dimension by Rose's work which looks at the way in which gender is inscribed in the photograph. Through her discussion of the way in which working class women in London's East End were captured by largely male – and, in some instances, female – photographers in the 1930s, Rose draws attention to the way in which women were pictured in line with the middle class idealization of the women's role as wife and mother and, more significantly, as containing social disruption. Women are portrayed as maintaining the status quo, "...women are figured as living, as reproducing life, as embodying the bounds of the social".<sup>53</sup> This portrayal of women was evident in the Second World War in South Africa. By portraying women within already existing visual, social and gendered conventions, propaganda was thus largely able to restrict the empowerment for women brought about by the Second World War. This was evident in the return of many of these women to a pre-war existence as wives and mothers.

Another significant aspect of the social function of photographs is the role they have played in memory and memorialisation. Barthes makes an important point in relation to photographs being a form of death, figuratively in terms of capturing and fixing a moment in the past which can never be repeated and, more literally, as capturing the image of a person who may have since died.<sup>54</sup> This becomes particularly important and emotive when considering war photography – images of men leaving for war, portraits of groups of soldiers who may have later died in battle. Important here too is Linda Rugg's discussion of cenotaphs which form a kind of social memory extending beyond the lifetime of the individual. In this instance photographs themselves become memorials to the dead. Paradoxically, while both photographs and memorials are

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<sup>52</sup> Elizabeth Edwards. "Introduction" in *Anthropology and Photography, 1860-1920*. E. Edwards, ed. (London: Royal Anthropological Institute, 1997) p7.

<sup>53</sup> Rose. "Engendering the Slum". p287, 283.

<sup>54</sup> Roland Barthes. *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. London: Fontana, 1984.

associated with death, their extension beyond the life of any one individual and their role in the creation of social memory, gives them a kind of immortality.<sup>55</sup>

My work on memorialisation has been influenced by the work of David W. Lloyd and Jay Winter, and in particular, the former's discussion of the development of the Tomb of the Unknown Warrior in England after the First World War and its subsequent emulation internationally.<sup>56</sup> The Unknown Warrior is significant to ideas of nationalism, a theme picked up by Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities*, emblematic of sacrifice in service of the nation and, on a more personal level, representing all those killed in war to their families.<sup>57</sup> Important too in the discussion of memorialisation, is the Christian imagery evident in the construction of memorials with its emphasis on sacrifice as well as the creation of cemeteries for war dead which served and continue to serve as sites of pilgrimage allowing ex-soldiers to pay their respects to their fallen comrades and to remember. They also served as sites where divisions were played out, symbolising the exclusion of those that were excluded from the nation and subsequently paying a disservice to their participation in war.

### Sources and Methodology

This thesis makes use of conventional historical primary sources in the shape of archival documents taking the form of memoranda, speeches, letters, various military and civilian magazines and newspaper articles. Yet, with the exception of articles appearing in publications such as *Ilanga Lase Natal* and *Indian Views* which were published for a particular disenfranchised readership, these sources confirm a dominant ideology, that of the state and military apparatus which already exerted a strict control over civilian publications for the duration of the war, “...the more personal, local, and unofficial a document the less likely it was to survive. The very power structure worked as a great recording machine shaping the past in its own image.”<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> L.H. Rugg. *Picturing Ourselves: Photography and Autobiography*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997.

<sup>56</sup> D.W. Lloyd. *Battlefield Tourism – Pilgrimage and the Commemoration of the Great War in Britain, Australia, and Canada, 1919-1939*. (Oxford: Berg, 1998); J. Winter. *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning – The Great War in European Cultural History*. (Cambridge: University Press, 1998)

<sup>57</sup> Anderson. *Imagined Communities*. p9.

<sup>58</sup> Paul Thompson. “The Voice of the Past: Oral History” in *The Oral History Reader*. Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson, eds. (London: Routledge, 1998) p22.

To counter the largely official perspective of the war are personal testimonies in the form of autobiography, diaries and letters written by ex-servicemen and women. Autobiographies take the form of unpublished memoirs evident in the archive as well as the published form and have the advantage of giving personal testimony of those involved, melding the personal experiences with the larger historical event. Yet, here too, autobiographies demonstrate two significant biases – one is the motivation for them being written which will influence what appears in the text and related to this is that their perspective is inevitably an exclusive one:

...writing a lengthy script calls for a perspective on writing and books which is most common in the upper and some of the middle classes: it is they, who through occupying more of the elite positions, are self-confident enough to assume that their life is of public interest, or feel the need to account for their custodianship.<sup>59</sup>

Unsurprisingly, the autobiographies employed in this thesis are of politically prominent figures, characters which played a significant role in South African history be it as major figures in the state or those resisting apartheid and military figures who were inevitably white officers. Where, in this instance, black voices appeared they were mediated by white writers or appeared indirectly as in the case of Don Mattera's *Uncle Willie*.<sup>60</sup>

Moreover autobiographies are mediated by time – many appearing at least twenty years after the events they recount, taking on a more reflective tone as memory plays an increasingly important role. The relationship between autobiography and memory is evident in the title of Rusty Bernstein's autobiography *Memory Against Forgetting* where memory in the form of the written recollection stands between the writer and the darkness of historical obscurity.<sup>61</sup> Through the lens of time the autobiography is defined as a way of imposing regulation on lived experience, not only for the reader but for the writer/protagonist:

Autobiography exemplifies 'the vital impulse to order' which has always underlain creativity. Or it offers the possibility of alleviating the dangers and anxieties of fragmentation: 'Autobiography...requires a man to take a distance with regard to himself in order to constitute himself in the focus of his special unity and identity across time.'<sup>62</sup>

Yet the autobiography does not have any singular access to "truth", by transforming the complexity of lived experience to a coherent narrative the contradictions, ambiguities, intricacies

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<sup>59</sup> Trevor Lummis. *Listening to History – The Authenticity of Oral Evidence*. (London: Century Hutchison Ltd, 1987) p84.

<sup>60</sup> Don Mattera. *Gone With the Twilight – A Story of Sophiatown*. (London: Zed Books Ltd., 1987)

<sup>61</sup> Rusty Bernstein. *Memory Against Forgetting – Memoirs from a Life in South African Politics, 1938-1964*. (London: Viking, 1999)

<sup>62</sup> Linda Anderson. *Autobiography*. (London: Routledge, 2001) p5.

are subordinated to demand of the story. Moreover, the authority of the author is itself under question, "I can also raise problems about privilege and exclusion, and create anxieties not only about who is speaking and who by implication is not, but also about where 'I' am speaking from and for whom."<sup>63</sup> Nowhere is this more evident than in Major Blamey's description of the war experiences of the black auxiliary David evident in Chapter Four which is saturated with patronisation.

Autobiography took on an elitist cast in the Victorian era as being the sole prerogative of "people of 'lofty reputation' or people who have something of 'historical importance' to say".<sup>64</sup> This juxtaposed the form with the more conventional, prosaic activities of diary or journal-keeping. Yet keeping a diary was also a means of "self-reflection" sans the intervention of time – it is the place where the writer could voice the uncertainties and ambivalences of their character without the fear of public censure, "The journal was the private repository for those errant selves which proved inconsistent with the public character, and which must be labelled 'out of character' in order to maintain the 'truth' of the public self."<sup>65</sup>

Greater immediacy occurs in the form of diaries and letters in contrast to the autobiography yet these two forms are as different from each other. Diaries on the one hand are the most unmediated form of written experience and are an attempt to capture the writer's thoughts, emotions and to make sense of their circumstances. As such, they are often powerful and moving, yet their utility as a source is counterbalanced by their rarity. Letters are written for an external audience, be it a spouse, family member or friend and necessarily involve some form of self-censorship as well as the more official kind where certain kinds of information were not allowed to be divulged to the home front for security reasons.

Yet documentary or written evidence can only be enhanced with the use of alternative sources such as oral evidence which adds strengths and weaknesses of its own:

...one form of evidence can be eloquent and informative where the other is silent; documentary and oral evidence are more frequently complementary than contradictory. For this reason documents cannot be privileged simply because they are contemporaneous with events. It would be as shortsighted to write a historical account from contemporary documents alone where oral evidence is available as it would do to

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<sup>63</sup> Anderson. *Autobiography*. p123.

<sup>64</sup> Anderson. *Autobiography*. p8.

<sup>65</sup> Anderson. *Autobiography*. p37.

write it solely from the oral – or for either to ignore visual representations of the period or material remains.<sup>66</sup>

With archival evidence largely favouring the dominant ideology, oral testimony has the potential to represent other voices which might otherwise be lost, allowing both the voices of the dominant and the less privileged to give a whole or more coherent picture of the past.<sup>67</sup> The importance of oral history is that it is an interactive process, not only between the researcher and participant, but between the participant and memory, giving their personal experience in a way that is lacking from official documents:

Oral sources tell us not just what people did, but what they wanted to do, what they believed they were doing, and what they now think they did...Subjectivity is as much the business of history as are the more visible 'facts'. What informants believe is indeed a historical *fact* (that is, the fact that they believe it), as much as what really happened.<sup>68</sup>

For this thesis I conducted interviews which were free-flowing, allowing participants to recount their experiences of the war as they chose to remember them. Once their account had been given I then asked follow-up questions to clarify certain themes. These interviews were recorded and subsequently transcribed which in a sense detracted from their richness as an oral source as the written word displays little of the inflections and nuances of the spoken word.<sup>69</sup>

Both oral evidence as well as written autobiographical sources rely on memory:

Memory is the raw material of much oral testimony and is therefore important to have some understanding of how memory works and the kind of information it produces. Far from being a computer-like act of 'automatic recall', memory is a creative process. All memory, whether short- or long-term, is stored through a process of selection and interpretation. The process of ordering, discarding, selecting and combining means that memory is always a combination of the objective and subjective, and of facts, interpretation and opinion.<sup>70</sup>

A visual aid to memory evident in the interviews were photographs. Participants during the course of an interview inevitably brought out personal photo albums or photographs to lend substance to their testimony or to emphasise a point. These images also helped to recall certain events or figures from the past. In some instances the images themselves served as the focal

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<sup>66</sup> Lummis. *Listening to History*. p82.

<sup>67</sup> Thompson. *The Voice of the Past*. p24-25.

<sup>68</sup> Alessandro Portelli. "What Makes Oral History Different" in *The Oral History Reader*. Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson, eds. (London: Routledge, 1998) p67.

<sup>69</sup> Portelli. "What Makes Oral History Different". p67.

<sup>70</sup> Hugo Slim and Paul Thompson. *Listening for a Change – Oral Testimony and Development*. (London: Panos Publications Ltd., 1993) p140.

point for anecdotes such as Godfrey Herbert's account of the Italian man who risked his life to aid the escape of POWs.

These personal photographs form an interesting counterpoint to the official photographs as well as the official films of the war which are additional sources I utilise. At the heart of the war effort in South Africa and around the world were the use of images, both still and moving, to inform, recruit and propagandize. While there are limitations to the extent to which I was able to use these images, particularly in the case of the official films, the use of these sources in conjunction with archival sources detailing the work of the state agents of propaganda in South Africa, particularly that of E.G. Malherbe, the Director of Military Intelligence, allowed for an understanding of the way in which these images used as well as the expectations of their effects on the part of the state.

As a historical source the photograph has been, until recently, largely neglected, "In general, visuality is subordinated to textuality which itself is grounded and empirically validated by reference to documents and sources from the privileged site of the archive."<sup>71</sup> The meaning of a photograph may be inscribed in two important ways – the first is the meaning held by the image for the photographer and the other is what the viewer brings to the image, based on her unique position in time and space.<sup>72</sup> Theoretically this suggests that the photograph may be viewed as an "open-ended" source where the interpretations are endless, like mirrors reflecting off each other into infinity. Yet, what is imaginable is limited by what the image actually is, as well as the historical context of its production. To return to Rose, as quoted in Edwards, photographs may be sites of interpretation but these interpretations are limited by the actual photograph:

...photographs are not totally passive. They suggest meaning through the way in which they are structured, for representational form makes an image accessible and comprehensible to the mind, informing and informed by a whole hidden corpus of knowledge that is called on through the signifiers in the image.<sup>73</sup>

The photographs used in this dissertation are thus used in conjunction with other sources – oral and written – in order to strengthen this historical context. The official photographs derived from military and state sources contain within them the possibilities for empowerment as well as the limitations of military service. They are thus a useful source for historians seeking to

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<sup>71</sup> Hayes, Silvester and Hartmann. "Photography, history and memory". p2.

<sup>72</sup> Elizabeth Edwards. "Introduction". p8.

<sup>73</sup> Edwards. "Introduction". p8.

understand how the state sought to control the way in which South Africans participated in the war and their expectations from this participation. Personal images provide another – and often more poignant – aspect to the personal accounts of the experiences of the men and women in war. They also allow for a means of understanding the way in which people made sense of their own war service – which was not necessarily in harmony with the identities disseminated by state propaganda.

The final visual source used is that of entertainment films, particularly those of American origin as these films were shown in conjunction with official information films both to civilian audiences and in makeshift cinemas for troops serving overseas. These entertainment films, while works of fiction, nevertheless were made in conjunction with strong state propaganda influence, and introduce a wider allied perspective of the war and the way in which its varied participants were perceived.

Ultimately these sources serve to complement each other – the weaknesses of one are the strengths of the other – and together they allow a multiplicity of voices and experiences of the Second World War.

These voices drawn from various sources apparent in this thesis represent different facets of South African society. They signify ideas and ideologies of wartime experience that may have been in harmony at various points and contradictory in others, but are necessary for a coherent understanding of South African identity at this key historical juncture. I have used the historical designation of race – white, African, coloured and Indian – and I use the term “black” to apply collectively to African, coloured and Indian participants. As a concession to their constructed nature, “white”, “black” and “coloured” are not written as proper nouns.

## Chapters

The declaration of war on Germany on September 3, 1939 had a mixed reception in the South African parliament. Prime Minister J.B.M. Hertzog desired neutrality arguing before the Cabinet that Hitler was simply acting against the harsh conditions imposed by the Treaty of Versailles.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> W.K. Hancock. *Smuts: The Fields of Force, 1919-1950*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968) p319.

Hertzog believed that joining the war on the side of the Allies would divide South Africans as it would suggest that some South Africans had greater loyalty for Britain than for their own country and this would, in turn, "destroy South African unity".<sup>75</sup> Hertzog was supported in his advocacy of neutrality by D.F. Malan.<sup>76</sup> Smuts, on the other hand, made a claim for South Africa entering the war in support of Britain, arguing that Hitler could not be appeased and that, when he turned his attention to regaining South West Africa in the foreseeable future, he would present a real threat to South Africa. South Africa could only counter this threat if she had Allied support.<sup>77</sup> Ultimately it was the Smuts' coalition that held sway with a narrow victory, marking South Africa's entry into the war.<sup>78</sup>

The main portion of the fighting force was drawn from the almost 200 000 White men who volunteered for active duty. This was in addition to the Permanent Force of 3 350, the Active Citizen Force of 14 600 and the Seaward Defence Force of approximately 970. Furthermore, 120 000 South Africans from the other racial groups volunteered.<sup>79</sup> The first group of black men recruited for the war were the coloureds, as part of the re-established Cape Corps (CC), which had been in operation during the First World War. These men were initially trained as drivers for transport sections of the Defence Force. Training began in 1940 in centres at Bultfontein and later, Ladysmith. Ex-soldiers who had served with the Cape Corps during the First World War were employed to train the new generation of men.<sup>80</sup> Following the successful recruitment of Coloured men, a similar process was initiated for the recruitment of Indian and Malay men under the auspices of the Indian and Malay Corps (IMC).<sup>81</sup>

Fears of the shortage of labour, which may have resulted – particularly in mining - should Africans have been recruited, led to a delay in the creation of an African corps within the Defence Force. Four battalions were created allowing African soldiers to take on security duty within South Africa, hence freeing white men to take up combat roles overseas. The Native

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<sup>75</sup> Hancock. *Smuts*. p321.

<sup>76</sup> Hancock. *Smuts*. p320.

<sup>77</sup> Hancock. *Smuts*. p322.

<sup>78</sup> Hancock. *Smuts*. p319.

<sup>79</sup> *South Africa's Yesterdays*. p302.

<sup>80</sup> Ian Gleeson. *The Unknown Force – Black, Indian and Coloured Soldiers Through Two World Wars*. (Rivonia: Ashanti Publishing, 1994) p104-105.

<sup>81</sup> Gleeson. *The Unknown Force*. p106.

Military Corps (NMC) was created to extend the scope of the activities of these African servicemen and they were trained in a similar manner to their coloured and Indian counterparts for roles ranging from drivers to stretcher-bearers and cooks. The eagerness of these African men to serve was evident in the initial number of thirty thousand volunteers by the end of the first years – a figure that practically tripled by the end of the war.<sup>82</sup> Simultaneously with the creation of the NMC came the creation of a directorate within the Union Defence Force which was named the Non-European Army Services (NEAS) and which bore the responsibility for overseeing aspects of the various black corps.<sup>83</sup>

The initial enthusiasm for the war effort on the part of Allied supporters changed by 1942 and this is reflected in much of the primary sources used here. This was marked by a decline in recruiting and a subsequent effort on the part of the state to change their recruiting efforts – which I discuss in greater detail in the first and second chapters. A contributing factor to this fall in recruitment in the period termed “war weariness” by *The Women’s Auxiliary* was the military setback at Tobruk in North Africa. In June of 1942 Allied forces were defeated by Rommel and 32 000 Allied soldiers were taken prisoner, a third of them were South African.<sup>84</sup> This marked a watershed period for the country – the event was used by the state to rally support for South African troops, by the opposition to argue against South Africa’s involvement in the war and by black soldiers to call for greater participation. This change in state attempts at recruitment initiated in 1942 remained stable until the tide of war had turned in favour of the Allies and victory seemed assured. Propaganda efforts then worked to close down the possibilities of empowerment and social change brought about by the war, a shift evident in official military publications.

The opening chapter of this dissertation focuses on the role of visual propaganda by looking at three forms which it took during the Second World War. I have allocated great importance to propaganda here due to the ambiguous support given to the war effort by a racially and ethnically divided South African society. This ultimately gave propaganda an important role to play in the construction of a unified nation. The Second World War internationally – and locally

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<sup>82</sup> Gleeson. *The Unknown Force*. p111.

<sup>83</sup> Gleeson. *The Unknown Force*. p112.

<sup>84</sup> Hancock. *Smuts*. p375.

– marked the first conflict where photographs and film were employed to such an extent. Particularly, in the case of the governments involved in the war and taking a leaf from the Nazi propaganda machine, images were the means by which the government portrayed the war to its citizens, provided disinformation to its enemies and drew support for the war effort, overcoming barriers of illiteracy and multilingualism. These images were important, not only for what they showed, but for their silences – the aspects of war left out in their effort to promote a particular image of the war. Yet an analysis of visual sources of the Second World War has been largely ignored in the South African historiography – a gap that this chapter attempts to fill. The new form of propaganda discussed here is that of official information films disseminated by the South African state and military. I argue here that these films served as more than mere information. Their portrayals of the groups involved in war work – white men, white women and black men – are revealing of the attitudes adopted by the state regarding the possibilities as well as limitations of empowerment and potential for social change brought about by the war and war work. Through moments of great stress for South African society, such as the fall of Tobruk, these films are particularly relevant for the kinds of identities they advocate, the way in which they attempt to construct an imagined nation and, in particular, the silences and omissions evident in this nation-building project. Ultimately what they demonstrate is a highly ambiguous attitude towards the work of white women and black men, stressing the temporary nature of their war work. This was placed within a domestic framework in the case of the former and, with regards to the latter, the tendency to render their contributions invisible or correspond to conventional, racialised divisions of labour. For white men, the stereotype of the glorious hero is perpetuated and the war itself is sanitised.

The characteristics of information films are similarly evident in still photographs which bring with them the added glamorisation of both white men and women in uniform taking on hallmarks of the Hollywood film star portrait. The influence of Hollywood and international films cannot be underestimated and is thus the reason that the third section of this chapter deals with three specific films and the role of the American film industry in the war effort. In South Africa of the 1940s, as in most parts of the world, cinema going was an important civilian pastime and simultaneously numerous mobile cinemas were set up in the theatres of war in order to cater for troops and enjoying, by all accounts, tremendous popularity. In this chapter I demonstrate that these films reveal similar omissions and silences particularly with regards to the war work of black men and a tension in the portrayal of white women in uniform where their

war efforts sat uneasily with a tendency to place them within a feminine framework. These international films, ostensibly created for light-hearted entertainment, and the official films of the state were thus not as distinct as one might imagine and, in most cases, the two were often shown together at the same screening.

In Chapter Two I look at the way in which gendered and racial identities for the men and women of the Union Defence Force were constructed via two official military sources aimed largely at servicemen and women, *The Women's Auxiliary* and Janie Malherbe's compilation *Complex Country*. Whereas the audience for the former was imagined to be largely the women serving in the various branches of the auxiliary services, this monthly magazine nevertheless made reference to the white and black men serving. This allows the historian to gauge the official perceptions of these two groups as well as the expectations placed upon them. The book *Complex Country*, on the other hand, was aimed at visiting international troops, and I suggest that it was thus a means by which the South African state represented a certain image of the country to the rest of the world – and to South Africans as well.

From my reading of *The Women's Auxiliary*, three periods are evident where there were shifts in the way in which women in the military were depicted, as well as the recruiting tactics used to attract women to the war effort. What this chapter shows is that the state tailored the way in which it made its appeals to women over the course of the war, taking into account the status of recruiting and, to an extent, the needs of women. The first period, lasting roughly until 1942, was defined by a strong sense of ambiguity regarding the role of women in the auxiliary services. I demonstrate here that representations of women in military uniform and engaging in war work outside the home, was placed uneasily within a domestic and feminine framework. This indicated a tension between the necessity of having women engage in war work and a similarly strong desire to retain the ideal of women in the home. It suggests also a fear of the possible masculinisation of women working in what was previously a wholly male sphere. Following this period and in response to a shortfall in recruitment, the articles of *The Women's Auxiliary* portrayed military service for women as a glamorous occupation, allowing them to experience adventure and excitement. This ultimately suggested that the conventionally used motivations of duty and support of their men folk was insufficient when faced with a war which would last longer than predicted. Hence incentives tailored to the individual needs of young women were the hallmarks of recruiting during this time. The final stage occurred towards the end of the war

where, in anticipation of its end and a subsequent return to the status quo, I show that there was a strong sense of conservatism. Appeals were made to women to not "rock the boat", to forego the independence and empowerment brought about by their work in the war and to provide instead a safe haven for returning men who had made the greater sacrifice and who desired above all else a return to stability and normality.

The last months of the war in *The Women's Auxiliary* revealed to women something of the experiences of white men in the war, coming as something of a shock as it was a far cry from preceding articles portraying combat and war as an ennobling exercise which had served only to increase the distance between the actual experiences of men and women's understanding of them. In addition, whereas white men were rendered heroic albeit distant figures, black men on the other hand – where acknowledged at all – were depicted as little more than child-like or treated in a patronising or condescending manner. This was a perception which was extended to black women as well, the latter invariably presented as working under the tutelage and guidance of white women. Despite this however there was a recognition – albeit a small one – of the role played by these marginalised groups and the sense that all South Africans were united in working towards a common goal, that of victory.

*Complex Country* dealt with issues of race in a similarly hazy manner, holding fast to stereotypes and the notion of separate but equal while simultaneously acknowledging the role made by black men in the conflict and suggesting tantalising possibilities for a new more egalitarian post-war society. This was in line with the stance taken by the Army Education Services, the unit responsible for the compilation and publication of the booklet. However the booklet also reflects the fears of white South African society of being "swamped" by Africans and Indians, using the imagery of a tiny white minority amidst a "sea of blackness" thus treading a line between a vision of a new South Africa and existing conservatism. This chapter demonstrates that although there existed a possibility for change, there was an equal desire to hold on to a pre-war status quo, making liberalism a blunt-edged sword. Ultimately however, race is subordinate to the interaction between English and Afrikaans-speaking white South Africans in *Complex Country*, largely as a product of the hostility towards the war effort maintained by right wing Afrikaner organisations such as the Ossewabrandwag. Here, the latter are portrayed as an extremist minority and not at all representative of Afrikaners as a whole. In the spirit of reconciling English and Afrikaner, significant events in history evoking enmity between the two

such as the Slagtersnek Rebellion or the Great Trek were re-written with a more conciliatory tone, placing the blame for the hostility on government rather than individuals. These two sources therefore are a wealth of information showing the way in which the South African military mediated differences in race, gender and ethnicity while attempting to drum up support for the war, a complicated matter in such a divisive society.

In Chapter Three I look at kinds of identities propagated by print media largely in the form of newspapers as well as the photo magazine *Libertas* published for the duration of the war. I argue that these sources are different from those tailored to a largely military audience as, to an extent, they form the point at which the official and the civilian media meet. The high level of wartime censorship meant that articles necessarily had to be tailored in favour of the war yet, simultaneously, some account was taken of individual perceptions and attitudes towards the war evident in opinion pieces. Additionally, specific newspapers aimed at specific audiences, allow me to interrogate the way in which the needs and concerns of specific groups of South Africans, particularly black South Africans, had to be addressed with regards to the war and their position in it.

*Libertas* however did not pay significant attention to the black men involved in the various branches of the Non-European Army Services. Instead, taking on a similar tone to *Complex Country*, the magazine emphasised a liberal Afrikaner perspective in the vein of Smuts' United Party. It stressed unity between English and Afrikaners in the face of the great threat to world freedom presented by Germany. Within this overall narrative several themes stand out regarding the service of white men and women in the military. In the case of the former sport, hunting and physical fitness were a hallmark of military training in general as well as a reaction to the "poor whiteism" of the 1930s. White men in the military were also glamourised drawing parallels with Hollywood publicity images of heroic male stars. This glamour was a continuing theme in the case of women who worked in war work in industry as well as in the auxiliary services. This corresponded to the tone adopted during the period of "war weariness", discussed previously, to address a recruiting shortfall. Furthermore, in what I see as an interesting response to the more conservative image of the Afrikaner "volksmoeder" perpetuated by the right wing Afrikaner nationalist organisation, the *Ossewabrandwag*, *Libertas* suggested that the idealised Afrikaner woman was not at odds with war work and conflated to an extent the Afrikaner nationalist mythology with the patriotic activities of women in the auxiliary services.

*Libertas* portrayed black men within a framework of a glorious heroic warrior past which drew parallels with their non-combative auxiliary roles. While I acknowledge this as a positive image of African men, I also show that this functioned as a means of curtailing their empowerment and was in line with contemporary portrayals of African men in other forms of media. *Libertas* was aimed at a white readership and I argue that a reading of newspaper sources aimed at black audiences such as *Ilanga Lase Natal*, reveals a far more nuanced view of the attitudes of black men towards the war, which was not necessarily in line with their white counterparts. Important here is the sense of ambiguity felt by these men over supporting a state in a fight for democracy when similar rights were not extended to them on the home front, as well as their limited roles in the military which were symbolic of this racial discrimination. Parallels were evident with white soldiers in terms of the emphasis on sport, perfect drill and discipline. Articles by various African leaders also called on black men to sign up, drawing on notions of a warrior past as well as appealing to loyalty to the British crown and the great threat to black aspirations of equality presented by Nazism. For South African Indian newspapers such as *Indian Views* a strong theme was that of looking continually to India to help shape their responses to the war and the uncertainty of coming to Britain's aid, whilst simultaneously criticising British colonialism in India. In what I found to be a surprising twist, Japan's success against the Allies prompted some support from Indians angered about their own exclusion from combat, as Japan had (so it was argued) demonstrated the efficacy of an Asian nation in war. In spite of their own misgivings about the South African state, these newspapers concurred that Nazism presented, at that moment, the greatest threat to their freedom which led to their support of the war.

Chapter Four focuses on personal identities, using first-hand testimony evident in newspaper articles, autobiographies, diaries, letters, interviews and photographs in order to understand the way in which white men and women and black men responded to the call to war and actually participated in what many viewed as a seminal moment in their lives. Although first-hand, these sources differ in a variety of ways. Newspaper articles interviewed ex-servicemen and women at important anniversaries of significant war events. Their testimony was thus influenced both by portraying their experiences in light of the spirit of commemoration as well as the passing of time which inevitably coloured their memories, allowing for a period of reflection as well as giving significance to some events over others. This was a process which was evident in the case of autobiographies as well as the oral interviews. The diaries function as the most unmediated

representation of war experience, containing the private thoughts and concerns of the writer during the war. Whereas letters home were also written during the war itself, they were nevertheless censored both on the part of the writer and by the official censors as well. Finally, personal photographs functioned as an aid to memory and were given context by the written and oral accounts. This chapter demonstrates that personal photographs too reflected the silences evident in the official written sources, published autobiographies as well as the personal letters. This was compounded by notions of what was considered proper to photograph, ultimately rendering death invisible and sanitising the experiences of war.

I show that the sources reveal that the factors motivating white men to enlist were patriotism, the desire to defend freedom against the ravages of Nazism, and, on a more personal level, the glamour of being in uniform and the way this would be viewed by women as well as the sense of adventure propagated in some part by the schooling system. On a more negative note, there was a feeling of criticism if one did not join the war effort. This complexity stood in contrast to the state vision of the hero simply motivated by honour, duty and defending the home. For those who enlisted, the strongest memories and the ones they were most likely to speak of, were feelings of camaraderie brought about by their common experiences of training and participation in the war itself. For many of these men, the war also presented them with the first opportunity of travelling to other parts of the world and of being exposed to cultures different from those at home. For the men who were stationed in Egypt, there was a strong tendency to represent that country and its people in terms of a glorious past which had degenerated in the contemporary era. These men, in many cases, demonstrated an overt racism evident in their vivid descriptions.

In terms of the war itself, the reaction of the white male combatants was varied – most evident were the silences in their descriptions of combat and its subsequent effects on their psyche. I contend that these silences were mirrored in official sources as well, demonstrating in the case of these men not only what was appropriate to show but the inability to relate their experiences to those who had not experienced the same. Reactions to combat ranged from detachment to hysteria, yet even when the actual messiness of war experience contradicted the expectations of these men, in many instances they were judged both by their peers and by themselves in terms of their ability to remain stoic and duty-bound in the face of horrendous circumstances. What I found fascinating in their accounts was the way in which the war itself became mundane and descriptions of death and destruction went hand-in-hand with that of daily living conditions.

This pragmatic approach to the war was particularly evident in the case of South Africans taken prisoner where, in spite of highly adverse conditions, they felt compelled to keep up their morale by playing games of rugby against other allied prisoners. I demonstrate that these games as well as their numerous escape attempts were also a means of asserting their masculinity and of playing a positive role in the war.

This chapter shows that the exigencies of war allowed these men some leeway – the chaos of the frontlines inevitably blurred the boundaries between combatant and non-combatant so that hierarchies could not always be maintained. Black men were recognised for bravery stemming from the spirit of self-sacrifice and those taken prisoner felt as compelled as their white counterparts to initiate acts of sabotage as well as carry out escape attempts. Furthermore, although their interaction with white servicemen was characterised by subservience and patronisation, there nevertheless existed strong bonds of loyalty which mediated these relationships. For black men, confined to non-combatant limited roles in the military, the war brought forth the ambiguity of them showing their loyalty to a state which did not extend equal rights to them. I argue that military service on an equal basis was inextricably linked to notions of citizenship and masculinity and their limited roles were thus symbolic of their status in South African society.

For the other significant non-combatant, auxiliary group, white women, this chapter establishes that their motivation to join the war effort was in many ways similar to that of white men – peer influence and the desire to take part in the “great adventure”. Yet there existed stricter controls for women in the military. They were subject to strict curfews, and in a sense the military regulated the lives of these women as their families were expected to do when they were home. I argue that this was partly due to their interaction with white men. Although the interaction between the two was portrayed both by the state and by those involved as a idealistic vision of two groups working together for the common good, there existed some tension where women faced abuse from soldiers. Furthermore women in uniform tended to be perceived both by these soldiers and by the home front as being promiscuous, subjecting them to mild and more extreme forms of harassment.

Using similar sources to that of Chapter Four in terms of autobiographies and interviews, this final chapter looks at the period following the war beginning with demobilisation and the

subsequent role of ex-servicemen and women's organisations to resist the rise of the apartheid state. During the war, the Army Education Scheme with its emphasis on democracy and the possible vision for a more egalitarian post-war society, made feasible the notion of a far different South African society than that which would come into existence. This vision was continued and strengthened by the activities of the Springbok Legion and the Torch Commando. However, their ultimate failure was due to the inability of these organisations to commit to social change which, I demonstrate, was a failure of liberalism itself. The AES, while propagating an image of a new post-war society, still kept intact existing racial divisions, its main aim being to maintain support for the war effort amongst white troops. The Torch Commando was in a similarly ambiguous position. By refusing to allow black ex-servicemen into its ranks and mobilising on the basis of what was perceived to be an attack on the South African constitution rather than any genuine commitment to equality between the races, this meant that it was unable to put up effective resistance to the apartheid state. The most revolutionary of these three groups, the Springbok Legion, was doomed by its very zeal, alienating its white members who desired nothing more than a return to the status quo after the upheaval of war.

For the individual men and women returning home their experiences on the front lines affected them in a variety of ways. This chapter shows the poignant disillusionment of black men with the state's failure to live up to the promises made during the war, finding their status in South African society little changed from pre-1939 and in fact the inequalities becoming more entrenched with the coming to power of the apartheid state in 1948. White men, experiencing similar disillusionment with the government, were more readily able to express their disapproval with Smuts by supporting Malan in the following election. In the new climate of explicitly racialised Afrikaner nationalism, troops who had fought during the war found themselves stigmatised. For some of the white women who had experienced life in the auxiliary services, some stationed overseas, their military service and exposure to new ideas helped radicalise them to, in some cases, engage in a lifelong struggle against the apartheid state. Yet for others – the majority – the war was viewed as a temporary aberration with the resumption of their roles as wives and mothers upon its end. Ultimately however the legacy of these ex-servicemen and women was enshrined in the *Living Memorial*, a public health project designed to help address the social and economic inequities brought about by unequal access to health care and nutrition. Yet this too was ultimately brought to an end by the apartheid state.

The memory of the war was more concretely enshrined in the cenotaphs and memorials erected in South Africa as well as around the world to symbolise the sacrifice made by men in combat. As an expression of public appreciation and grief for the losses of war, they serve as points at which ex-servicemen gather to pay their respects as well as sites of recollection and were defined by their portrayal of war as poignant, yet the sacrifice of these men as noble. The actual troops during the Second World War took photographs of earlier memorials and graves linking those men with the generation following in their footsteps. Yet for some the neat rows of graves marking the fallen served also as a site of forgetting the chaotic and messy nature of war, sanitising it. In the apartheid and post-apartheid era I suggest that the neglect and vandalism of these memorials, particularly those erected acknowledging the service and sacrifice of black servicemen, was perceived as an irreverent desecration and lack of remembrance to the living and the dead.

Looking back at later twentieth century South Africa, the military has been a negative force in society, viewed with hatred, suspicion and fear as an instrument of oppression and the maintenance of apartheid: "Today's army is lions. They hate a person. If one of the police or army come towards you, you are so scared. You know that the first thing they may do is beat you up and then shoot you".<sup>85</sup> Opposing the South African Defence Force was the ANC's armed wing, *Umkhonto We Sizwe*, forced to carry out guerrilla warfare and attacks that inevitably took a civilian toll as well.<sup>86</sup> Young boys too, barely out of their teens, confronted the weapons of the South African military machine and were referred to as "young lions".<sup>87</sup> The violence, the killing and the atrocities that characterised the 1970s and 1980s in South Africa belied the noble idea for which the men and women of the Second World War fought. It is hardly surprising then that the Second World War retains a haze of nostalgia, remaining in South Africa and internationally as the most unambiguous in popular culture and memory as the "last good war".

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<sup>85</sup> Cock. *Colonels and Cadres*. p9.

<sup>86</sup> Cock. *Colonels and Cadres*. p161.

<sup>87</sup> Cock. *Colonels and Cadres*. p225.

*Dramatis Personae*

**Government and Military Figures**

**Jan Smuts** served as South African Prime Minister for the duration of the Second World War. A precocious student and military leader he played prominent roles in the South Africa War and later the First World War. He later was involved in the formation of the League of Nations, the precursor to the United Nations. After the Second World War split the South African cabinet Smuts became Prime Minister, ousting JBM Hertzog. He played a significant role in the Allied military leadership and was made field marshal of the British Army. A contradictory man, his waxing and waning liberalism in the 1940s was unable to provide an effective enough vision for a post-war South Africa and he was defeated in the 1948 election by the National Party under the leadership of D.F. Malan and subsequently died in 1950.<sup>88</sup> Smuts' war efforts and political philosophy are derived from primary sources in the form of film footage, archival documents in the form of *The Women's Auxiliary*, Hancock's biography *Smuts 2: The Fields of Force*, as well secondary sources.

**J.H. Hofmeyr** was a gifted student and politician becoming Principal of the University of Witwatersrand at the age of 25 and a Cabinet Minister before he turned 40. As a member of the South African Party under Jan Smuts he was later Minister of Finance and Education, Deputy Prime Minister, and acted as Prime Minister on a number of education. As a politician however his views on race alienated him from his liberal colleagues as being entirely too radical. He died prematurely in 1948.<sup>89</sup> His story is derived from archival documents in the form of *The Women's Auxiliary*, Alan Paton's biography *Hofmeyr* – where he is idealised as having the potential to bring about a positive change in South Africa – as well as secondary sources.

**Bertha Solomon** was the first woman MP of Jeppe, a supporter of Smuts, "and for many years the only practising woman barrister in the Transvaal".<sup>90</sup> As a strong advocate for women's rights she was a significant figure in the implementation of the Matrimonial Affairs Act (1953) which

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<sup>88</sup> <http://www.sahistory.org.za/pages/people/smutts-j.htm>. Accessed March 3, 2006, 09:33.

<sup>89</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jan\\_Hofmeyr](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jan_Hofmeyr). Accessed March 3, 2006, 08:53.

<sup>90</sup> <http://www.dispatch.co.za/1999/07/23/editoria/CHIEL.htm>. Accessed March 3, 2006, 10:50.

gave white women greater economic equality within marriage.<sup>91</sup> During the war she lamented the unequal post-war benefits given to white women as those given to white men saying that "the country is only half as grateful to the women volunteers as it is to the men".<sup>92</sup> Her recruiting efforts are derived from archival sources in the form of *The Women's Auxiliary*.

**E.G. Malherbe**, born in 1896, studied as a teacher at Stellenbosch University and later obtained his MA and Phd from the University of Columbia in New York. Heavily involved in education he played a prominent part in the National Commission of Education and was the leading figure of the Report on Poor Whites for the Carnegie Commission between 1928 and 1939. Upon the outbreak of war he was Director of Military Intelligence and important member in the Army Education Scheme and thus a strong proponent of liberalism. From 1943 he served as the Rector for the University of Natal for more than twenty years.<sup>93</sup> His war experiences are derived from archival documents in the form of letters, speeches, memoranda, as well as his autobiography *Never a Dull Moment*.

**Janie Malherbe** was born in 1897 to an Afrikaans father and an English mother and her father's support of Smuts' policy of reconciliation between English and Afrikaner at the conclusion of the South African War was to shape her own ideas during the Second World. After graduating with a BA from Victoria College she worked as a teacher in her home town and, along with her husband, E.G. Malherbe, developed a strong interest in education, and the "poor white" problem. She subsequently worked as a freelance journalist. Upon the outbreak of the Second World War she enlisted as a private in the Women's Auxiliary Army Services, working as a transport driver but her journalist career stood her in good stead when she was transferred to the I.c. section of Military Intelligence – a department of which her husband was head. Her numerous attempts at recruiting women demonstrate Janie Malherbe's position regarding the role of women in the war. Here she emphasised the domesticity of women's work and their subordinate position to white combatants in war.<sup>94</sup> Her story is derived from archival sources in the form of documents – letters, speeches, self-penned articles, photographs – as well as two publications, *Complex Country* which she edited and an article which she penned for the magazine

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<sup>91</sup> [http://www.genealogy.co.za/HowTo/learn\\_marriage\\_divorce.aspx](http://www.genealogy.co.za/HowTo/learn_marriage_divorce.aspx) Accessed March 3, 2006, 10:59.

<sup>92</sup> "Reintegration into society: The Service Corps" in [http://www.idrc.ca/en/ev-68078-201-1-DO\\_Topic.html](http://www.idrc.ca/en/ev-68078-201-1-DO_Topic.html). Accessed March 3, 2006, 10:55.

<sup>93</sup> <http://www.stellenboschwriters.com/malherbeeg.html>. Accessed March 3, 2006, 09:16.

<sup>94</sup> Hazel Dunlevey. "Janie Antonia Malherbe/Mrs E.G. Malherbe, 1897-1945". (Unpublished Honours Dissertation: University of Natal, Durban, 2003).

*Libertas*. I have also used secondary sources in the form of E.G. Malherbe's autobiography as well as an Honours' dissertation written by Hazel Dunlevey.

**G.C.G. Werdmuller** was the Director of Recruiting for the duration of the war and his efforts are evident in primary sources in the form of archival documents as well as articles and speeches which were reprinted in *The Women's Auxiliary*.

**George Brink** was a Major-General in the Union Defence Force and played a significant role in the formation of the 6<sup>th</sup> South African Armoured Division. He was prominent in leading South Africans in combat in North Africa and was a key figure in recruitment campaigns.<sup>95</sup> For this thesis he appears in primary sources in the form of film footage as well as secondary sources.

### **White Liberal Participants**

**Guy Butler** enlisted in the military soon after his graduation from Rhodes University and marriage to Jean Murray Satchwell. After the war he was an English lecturer at the University of the Witwatersrand and later Rhodes University. A prominent poet his early work was war poetry and his liberal perception was that "the encounter of different South African cultures [was] exciting, producing both a symbiosis and tension [and] has always believed in literature's role in the creation of a united nation of distinct and complementary languages and cultures".<sup>96</sup> His story is told in his autobiography *Bursting World*.

**A.E. Blamey** enlisted in the military in 1921 and was stationed in East and North Africa where he was awarded the Military Cross after playing a vital offensive role and was also awarded the Efficiency Decoration for long service in the Union Defence Force, reaching the rank of Major. His portrayal of "David" highlights the patronising attitude as well as the ambivalences of liberal white South Africa. He was initially a sugar farmer, later becoming a dairy farmer.<sup>97</sup> His experiences are derived from his autobiography *A Company Commander Remembers*.

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<sup>95</sup> <http://samilitaryhistory.org/4/d04octne.html>. Accessed March 3, 2006, 08:30.

<sup>96</sup> <http://people.africadatabase.org/en/profile/15834.html>. Accessed March 3, 2006, 08:35.

<sup>97</sup> A.E. Blamey. *A Company Commander Remembers: From El Yibo to El Alamein*. (Pietermaritzburg: The Natal Witness, 1963) Foreword.

**D.W. Geddie**, born in Scotland, was a Major in Union Defence Force and was stationed in East and North Africa. Married to English-born Lorna Alice Geddie his experiences of war are evident in the letters written to his wife. Prior to her death in 1989 she was nursed by my mother for eight years and the letters came into my possession recently.

**Godfrey Herbert's** father was in the Mounted Infantry in the South African War and he was himself in the Active Citizen Force of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of the Royal Durban Light Infantry with two older brothers in the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion and joined the army permanently in 1940. He was taken prisoner at Tobruk and was a prisoner of war in Italy where he subsequently escaped to Switzerland. Most powerful in Herbert's testimony are the accounts of his horrendous experiences as a POW as well as his lack of acknowledgement of the non-combatant black men with whom he had little contact. During demobilisation he worked in the financial assistance section and then worked for Standard Bank. After the war he lived in Kenya until 1973 when he returned to Durban. His testimony comes from an interview as well as his personal photographs.

**"Hugh"** is a character in the monthly magazine issued for the South African Women's Auxiliary Services, *The Women's Auxiliary* – whether he was actually a fictional character is unclear. His war story comes in the form of published monthly letters written to his mother detailing his experiences as a pilot in England from training and combat to recreational activities, ending with him being shot down. These letters fulfil the idealised behaviour and expectations placed upon white men in combat by propaganda.

**A.C. Martin** was a Lieutenant-Colonel in the UDF, second in command of the Second Royal Durban Light Infantry and then went on to command the Second Battalion and was eventually taken prisoner at Tobruk.<sup>98</sup> His account is taken from archival sources in the form of his unpublished memoirs as well as various newspaper articles which he himself penned or for which he was interviewed.

**Allan Ryan** worked in industry in Johannesburg and was considered a "key man" which prevented his enlisting. Eager to participate in the war he eventually applied to the British Army

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<sup>98</sup> Independent Newspapers Archive. A.C. Martin. "Alam Halfa and Alamein", in *The Daily News*, July 20, 1967.

stationed in the Middle East and was subsequently accepted, and ultimately attained the rank of Major.<sup>99</sup> His experiences of war are derived from his autobiography *Thru Times and Places*.

**Quintin Smythe** volunteered for the Natal Carbineers at the age of 23, trained in Kenya and was subsequently sent into action in the Western Desert. As a sergeant he was involved in a skirmish where his platoon leader was badly injured and he himself sustained head injuries. Nevertheless he led his men into action where they managed to capture the enemy, an action for which he was awarded the Victoria Cross. His brave story derives from archival sources in the form of film footage where he was made the subject of a state/military film as well as various newspaper articles.<sup>100</sup> His testimony further demonstrates the silences evident in the way in which these men chose to remember the war.

**Sailor Malan** – "Sailor" Malan was an ace fighter pilot in the Royal Air Force, playing a significant role in the Battle of Britain. At the end of the war and upon his return to South Africa he went on to become a significant leader of the Torch Commando, an organisation composed of ex-servicemen which stood in opposition to the rise of the apartheid state and what was perceived to be their attack on the constitution in the form of striking coloured voters off the voters' roll. His story is derived from Oliver Walker's biography.<sup>101</sup>

**Betty Addison** was recruited into Special Signals Services in the Women's Auxiliary Army Services (WAAS) while at university and served within South Africa. She later transferred to the Aptitude Test Section in Pretoria responsible for the training of pilots. After the war she raised her family and worked as a teacher. Betty Addison's testimony comes in the form of an interview conducted at her home as well as her personal photographs which she chose to share.

**June Borchert** and her twin sister May Kirkman enlisted in the Women's Auxiliary Air Force in the early 1940s at the behest of their older sister Kay and were stationed in Pretoria for the duration. After the war she worked as a clerk for the Royal Air Force for a short period of time and then at Caltex. Upon marriage she resigned to raise her family. Her story is derived from an interview conducted with her and her sister May as well as their personal photographs.

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<sup>99</sup> Allan Ryan. *Thru Times and Places*. (Johannesburg: Creaprint Pty Ltd, 1977)

<sup>100</sup> Independent Newspapers Archive. Terry McElligott and Keith Ross. "Remembering the Declaration of War", September 2, 1989.

<sup>101</sup> Oliver Walker. *Sailor Malan: A Biography*. (London: Cassell and Co Ltd, 1953).

**May Kirkman** and her twin sister June Borchert enlisted in the Women's Auxiliary Air Force in the early 1940s at the behest of their older sister Kay and were stationed in Pretoria for the duration. After the war she worked for six years as a book-keeper for the South African General Investment and Trust Company until she left to raise her family. Her story is derived from an interview conducted with her and her sister June as well as their personal photographs.

**Edith Mary Kimble** worked in the Special Signals Services for the duration of the war and her story is evident from the archival sources in the form of an interview conducted for the Killie Campbell Africana Library.

**Constance Stuart** (later Constance Stuart Larrabee) was born in England and emigrated to South Africa with her parents as a baby. Having a lifelong interest in photography she studied her art in England and Germany and subsequently, upon her return to South Africa, opened a studio. With the outbreak of war in 1939 she was appointed by E.G. Malherbe as the official war photographer for the magazine *Libertas*.<sup>102</sup> Her story is derived from archival sources in the form of her photographs and articles appearing in *Libertas*, E.G. Malherbe's papers and internet sources.

## **Black Leaders**

**Mshiyeni KaDinizulu** served as the Zulu Regent during the Second World War while the successor to the Zulu throne, Cyprian Bhekuzulu, was a minor.<sup>103</sup> During the war he played a significant role in recruiting which did not always win him support amongst his people and threw his support behind the Zulu Society.<sup>104</sup> His recruiting efforts are evident in an article appearing in *Indlovu*.

**Albert Luthuli** received his education in Groutville, Natal where he studied to become a teacher and became a preacher as well. He was subsequently elected chief of Groutville and later joined the African National Congress in 1945, playing a prominent role in the Defiance Campaign in

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<sup>102</sup> Cf. <http://www.sahistory.org.za/pages/people/larrabee.htm>. Accessed August 10, 2004, 09:22;

<http://www.nmafa.si.edu/exhibits/larrabee/larrabee.htm>. Accessed August 10, 2004, 09:18.

<sup>103</sup> [http://www.polity.org.za/html/people/NCABINET/g\\_butheleezi.html](http://www.polity.org.za/html/people/NCABINET/g_butheleezi.html). Accessed March 3, 2006, 09:04.

<sup>104</sup> <http://texts.cdlib.org:8088/xtf/view?docId=ft158004rs&doc.view=content&chunk.id=d0e5409&toc.depth=1&anchor.id=0&brand=ucpress>. Accessed March 3, 2006, 09:00.

1952. Given the choice between his chieftainship and his position in the ANC by the South African government, he chose the latter and later that year became ANC President. He was subsequently banned and arrested and later awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.<sup>105</sup> His recruiting efforts are evident in archival sources in the form of an article appearing in *Indlovu*.

**A.B. Xuma** studied in the United States and went on to become President of the ANC for the duration of the war.<sup>106</sup> A largely liberal politician he was one of the significant figures in the Doctors' Pact along with Monty Naicker and Yusuf Dadoo which forged an alliance between Indian and African activists.<sup>107</sup> During the war the ANC under Xuma opposed recruitment of black men unless black men were allowed to bear arms but this was subsequently changed where the ANC threw the support behind the Smuts government and the war yet nevertheless urged them to "consider the expediency of admitting the African and other non-European races into full citizenship, with all the rights, privileges, duties and responsibilities that went with it", including combat.<sup>108</sup> Xuma's view on the war is derived from archival sources in the form of newspaper articles appearing in *Ilanga Lase Natal*.

### **Enlisted Black Men**

**Martinus Jansen**, a lance corporal, was taken prisoner twice during the war after his ship was sunk in the Mediterranean and imprisoned in an Italian POW camp which was subsequently liberated and then later imprisoned in a Japanese POW camp in the Philippines. Although coloured he acknowledged the bearing of arms in combat situations where being a non-combatant was just not feasible. His testimony is derived from archival sources in the form of newspaper articles.<sup>109</sup>

**Alfred Jimmy Davis** enlisted in the First Battalion Cape Corps Fighting Unit in 1942 and was stationed in South Africa for the duration. He worked as both an interpreter in the army as well as a stock controller. He also guarded German POWs and made surcharges for soldiers,

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<sup>105</sup> <http://africanhistory.about.com/library/biographies/blbio-lutuli.htm>. Accessed March 3, 2006, 09:06.

<sup>106</sup> <http://www.hartford-hwp.com/archives/37/071.html>. Accessed March 3, 2006, 11:26.

<sup>107</sup> <http://scnc.ukzn.ac.za/doc/HIST/dadouxuma/pact.htm>. Accessed March 3, 2006, 11:11.

<sup>108</sup> J.S. Mohlamme. "Soldiers Without Reward: Africans in South Africa's Wars" in *Military History Journal*, Vol 10, No 1. <http://samilitaryhistory.org/vol101jm.html>. Accessed March 3, 2006, 11:32.

<sup>109</sup> Independent Newspapers Archive. Shelagh McLoughlin. "The Forgotten Force – The Way We Were", in *The Natal Witness*, November 19, 1997.

reaching the rank of Sergeant. After the war he was heavily involved in church activities. His story is derived from an interview as well as his personal photographs.

**Lucas Majozi** worked as a stretcher-bearer in the Non-European Army Services, becoming the only black man to win the Distinguished Conduct Medal after carrying wounded men to safety under fire despite being wounded himself at the battle of El Alamein. Majozi's story is derived from secondary sources as well as archival sources in the form of *Libertas*. Moreover he became emblematic of the non-combatant role of black men in the Second World War when his portrait was painted by the official war artist Neville Lewis in 1942 and currently hangs in the South African Museum of Military History.<sup>110</sup>

**Job Maseko** was a Lance-Corporal in the Native Military Corps. Taken POW at Tobruk and forced to work at a North African harbour under the Italians, he became a war hero and was subsequently awarded the Military Medal when he, along with some men from the NMC as well as the Cape Corps sabotaged an enemy ship and subsequently escaped to freedom a few months later.<sup>111</sup> His dramatic story is derived from secondary sources as well as archival sources in the form of newspaper articles. Furthermore, Maseko is a symbol of the neglect accorded the services of black men in the war, disappearing from the historical record.

### **Radicals and Activists**

**Mary Benson** enlisted in the Women's Auxiliary Army Services in 1941 and was stationed in North Africa in Egypt, Italy and finally Vienna until the end of the war.<sup>112</sup> She then worked for David Lean, the film director, however, it was her friendship with liberal South African author Alan Paton that drew her into activism. She was involved in establishing the African Bureau, worked with the Reverend Michael Scott, was secretary for the Treason Trials Defence Fund and was a witness before the United Nations on the negative effects on apartheid in South Africa urging the Committee on Apartheid to implement sanctions. Her experiences of war appear in her autobiography.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Ian Gleeson. *The Unknown Force – Black, Indian and Coloured Soldiers Through Two World Wars*. (Rivonia: Ashanti Publishing, 1994) p220.

<sup>111</sup> Gleeson. *The Unknown Force*. p101-102.

<sup>112</sup> <http://www.sahistory.org.za/pages/people/benson-m.htm>. Accessed March 3, 2006, 08:22.

<sup>113</sup> <http://www.archiveshub.ac.uk/news/03042403.html>. Accessed March 3, 2006, 08:22.

**Helen Joseph** – Helen Joseph was born in England, worked as a teacher in India and came to South Africa in 1931. Influencing her later activism were her work as an information officer in the Women's Auxiliary Air Force as well as her post-war job as a social worker. Her first foray into politics came with her job in the Garment Workers Union and she later helped found the Congress of Democrats. She was a key player in the Federation of South African women and played an important role in the march of black women to Pretoria to oppose the implementation of the pass laws for women – a day now commemorated as Women's Day on the South African calendar.<sup>114</sup> Her experiences of war are derived from her autobiography.<sup>115</sup>

**Norman Middleton**, a member of the SA Coloured Ex-Servicemen's League, was involved in the action in El Alamein but was captured by the Italians and subsequently spent almost a year as a POW before being liberated by the allies. At the end of the war, frustrated with his poor compensation which consisted of "a bicycle and a few shillings" he was an ardent trade unionist. His story is derived from archival sources in the form of newspaper articles.<sup>116</sup>

**Rusty Bernstein** was born in Durban, South Africa, lost his parents at a young age and was raised by his relatives. While working as an architect in Johannesburg he joined the Labour League of Youth and later the Communist Party. In 1941 he enlisted in the army and was stationed in North Africa and Italy. After the banning of the Communist Party he remained a member and was an important figure in the formation of the Congress of Democrats. He also played a significant role in the drafting of the Freedom Charter and was later accused by state under the Treason Trial and then the Rivonia Trial. He eventually went into exile in the 1960s. His dramatic story is evident in his autobiography *Memory Against Forgetting*.<sup>117</sup>

**A.W.G. Champion** was born in Natal and received his education from Adams College from which he was subsequently expelled. Serving as a policeman followed and then he became a clerk for Crown Mines. He became involved in union activities and subsequently became head of a mine clerk trade union. He was subsequently invited by Clements Kadalie, leader of the

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<sup>114</sup> <http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/people/hjoseph.html>. Accessed March 3, 2006, 08:55.

<sup>115</sup> Helen Joseph. *Tomorrow's Sun – A Smuggled Journal from South Africa*. (London: Hutchison and Co., 1966)

<sup>116</sup> Independent Newspapers Archive. McLoughlin. "The Forgotten Force", in *The Natal Witness*, November 19, 1997.

<sup>117</sup> <http://www.rusty-bernstein.com/rusty-bernstein-profile.htm>. Accessed March 3, 2006, 08:26.

Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union to join that organisation, ultimately taking the position of secretary of the ICU's Natal office.<sup>118</sup> His ideas are drawn from archival sources in the form of the publication *Asalibele*.

**Naboth Mokgatle** was educated at the Phokeng Preparatory School but was forced to end his education prematurely. He subsequently lived in Pretoria where he became immersed in political and labour activism with a keen interest in communism. He then became a member of the Communist Party and contributed much to trade union struggles for the duration of the war as the key figure in the Dairy Workers' Union as well as the African General Workers' Union. Taking a less than positive view of white liberalism as espoused by Smuts Mokgatle was critical of the war effort. Coming into constant conflict with the state he eventually left for London. His story is derived from his autobiography *The Autobiography of an Unknown South African*.<sup>119</sup>

**Don Mattera** was born in Johannesburg and went on to become an important figure in the Black Consciousness movement.<sup>120</sup> Raised by his grandparents in Sophiatown he experienced firsthand the harsh effects of apartheid when his family was forcibly removed to areas demarcated for coloureds. As a youth he was a gangster, involved in numerous violent incidents and imprisoned. He subsequently became a radical leftist opponent of the South African state and went on to work as a journalist and writer. His poignant description of his "Uncle Willie" highlights the disillusionment of black men, post-1945. His moving story is told in his autobiography *Gone With the Twilight: A Story of Sophiatown*.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> [http://www.labourhistory.org.za/new\\_docs/THE%20ICU%20BOOK\\_Final.pdf](http://www.labourhistory.org.za/new_docs/THE%20ICU%20BOOK_Final.pdf). Accessed March 3, 2006.

<sup>119</sup> <http://www.sahistory.org.za/pages/people/mokgatle,n.htm>. Accessed March 3, 2006, 09:10. Naboth Mokgatle. *The Autobiography of an Unknown South African*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971)

<sup>120</sup> Douglas Killam and Ruth Rowe. "Don Mattera". June 1, 2003. <http://people.africadatabase.org/en/profile/11740.html>. Accessed March 3, 2006, 09:20.

<sup>121</sup> Lucille Davie. "Don Mattera: Poet of Compassion". October 15, 2002. [http://www.joburg.org.za/people/don\\_mattera.stm](http://www.joburg.org.za/people/don_mattera.stm). Accessed March 3, 2006, 09:21. Don Mattera. *Gone With the Twilight – A Story of Sophiatown*. (London: Zed Books Ltd., 1987)

*Chapter One*

***The First Casualty when War Comes is Truth'***  
**The Visual Propaganda of the Second World War**

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At the outbreak of war the reaction of many South Africans towards the war was less than unified. This was due in part to the hostility of many Afrikaners towards the English a generation after the South African War which predisposed many towards actually supporting the German effort or, at the very least, remaining neutral. In addition, black men were uncertain about joining a war effort when their participation in early wars had met with marginal if any success. This struck an uneasy balance with their desire to show their patriotism as well as win concessions from the state. The decision for the country to enter the war in aid of Britain was a hard fought one in Parliament but was ultimately successful, making its strongest advocate, Jan Christian Smuts, the new Prime Minister.

This chapter focuses on the way in which state propaganda in the form of films and photographs functioned to create a racial and gendered identity of the war's participants. The first type of films analysed are the films produced for and by government propaganda agencies, allegedly actual footage depicting the war work of white and black men as well as white women in the military and in industry. These films, containing both information and news, lasted between five to fifteen minutes and were shown in cinemas alongside the main feature comprising an American, or in some instances, British film. This chapter goes on to analyse three examples of these British and American films produced ostensibly for entertainment but which, in conjunction with the strong relationship between the film studios and the state, functioned also as a medium of propaganda highlighting the themes of honour, duty and the glory of war. The glamour infused in these films, particularly those originating from Hollywood, made an impact on the way in which South Africans at war were filmed and photographed. The final form of propaganda discussed here is that of official photographs depicting military personnel and emphasising youth, glamour, vitality and adventure. These images are significant not only for

¹ Quote accredited to Senator Hiram Johnson, 1917. Taken from *Collins Dictionary of Quotations*. (Glasgow: HarperCollins Publishers, 1998) p373.

what they show but for what is excluded, what is beyond the frame of the film or the photograph. Most notably this was the death and destruction of war which would have had an adverse affect on morale and subsequently recruitment. Particularly in the case of film, black men were given short shrift, mirroring their exclusion from the key role of combatants in war and citizens in society. This chapter focuses on the way in which these men and women were portrayed by the state, looking at the way in which propaganda could have functioned both as a means of empowerment and limitation for these groups.

With South Africa's less than wholehearted entry into the war came the setting up of an official propaganda organisation – "The National Advisory Committee on Government Policy". It consisted of six members and was established in 1940 under the leadership of Mr S. Cooper who had been drawn from the Argus Company. An additional representative drawn from another newspaper was Mr E.B. Dawson of the Sunday Express who was also the vice chairman of the committee. This initial committee was replaced in 1942 by "The Defence Recruiting and Publicity Committee" under Colonel Werdmuller – a body which, unlike the previous one, was almost solely composed of military personnel.²

Under "The Defence Recruiting and Publicity Committee" the first campaign was "Avenge Tobruk" – which I will discuss in this chapter – which was allocated £22 000. This was followed by the first propaganda campaign collectively organised by the South African government, civilian personnel and the military entitled the "Fighting Services" campaign, which was given a budget of £9 000. £3 000 was allocated to the campaign for the Women's Auxiliary Services, W.A.A.S. and W.A.A.F. under which the propaganda film "Service" fell.³

A key figure in this chapter is E.G. Malherbe, the Director of Military Intelligence. Prior to the war he was a prominent "member of the Carnegie Poor White Commission", editing volume three of the report, *Educational Report: Education and the Poor White*.⁴ His strong interest in education was further demonstrated by his involvement in the National Commission for Education which he helped initiate. He continued this interest in the Second World War with the

² BNS 1/1/266 C17/73. p1.

³ BNS 1/1/266 C17/73. p2.

⁴ E.G. Malherbe. *Never a Dull Moment*. (Cape Town: Howard Timmins Publishers, 1981) p 117, 121. *Education and the Poor White*. Part III of the Report of the Carnegie Commission on the Poor White Problem in South Africa. (Stellenbosch: Pro Ecclesia, 1932)

Army Education Services, designed to inculcate a liberal vision in troops for a post-war South Africa.⁵ It was Malherbe's ideas on the way in which propaganda, particularly in the form of film, was to operate that were significant in South Africa's efforts to persuade. This forms a significant background to the analysis of film in this chapter.

Propaganda and Ideology

Propaganda from the outset had an important role to play in drumming up and keeping alive support for South Africa's war effort in the face of stiff opposition. This opposition was at its most extreme in the form of the Ossewabrandwag, a right wing organisation, which kept the country on a high state of alert. It was particularly in the moments of national stress such as Tobruk that the role of propaganda can be discerned. Key here is visual propaganda, a strong medium when there were differences in language and literacy rates were not high. There are three forms of visual propaganda aimed at both military and civilian audiences which this chapter addresses – the first is that of recruiting and information films created by the Union Defence Force. This is followed by international films which were shown along with newsreels where cinema-going audiences would watch these newsreels before the feature Hollywood film.⁶ These films were ostensibly for entertainment but contained strong themes dealing with war and ideology. Finally, the third section looks at the still photograph which has similar origins to that of newsreels.

This brings the issue of ideology to the fore and its inextricable link with propaganda in this context where:

the concept of ideology can be used to refer to the ways in which meaning services, in particular circumstances, to establish and sustain relations of power which are systematically asymmetrical...Ideology, broadly speaking, is **meaning in the service of power.**⁷

Ideology is particularly relevant here because it is a means of making sense of the world promulgated by the dominant group in the modern state and this is vital to analysing race and

⁵ <http://www.stellenboschwriters.com/malherbeeg.html>. Accessed March 3, 2006, 09:16.

⁶ Neil Roos. "From War to Workplace: Class, Race and Gender Amongst White Volunteers, 1939-1953" (Unpublished PhD Dissertation: Mafikeng, University of North West, 2001) p162.

⁷ John B. Thompson. *Ideology and Modern Culture – Critical Social Theory in the Era of Mass Communication*. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990) p7.

gender relations.⁸ Yet, simultaneously, to see ideology as simply "provid[ing] the symbolic glue...which unifies the social order and binds individuals to it," is to ignore the way in which individuals occupying different strata in the social sphere understand the dominant ideology. This ideology is propagated through the media of communication, be it films or newspapers. This provides the opportunity for the historian to analyse whether these forms which reproduce the ideology can in fact sustain this dominance or offer the possibility for challenges to it.⁹ According to a leading theorist, Michael Renov, ideology operates by, "orienting people toward the dominant beliefs and practices and is generally experienced as unintentional, even unconscious". This can be contrasted to propaganda which, in his view, "is the deliberate attempt to influence mass attitudes on controversial subjects by the use of symbols rather than force", hence adopting a greater specificity.¹⁰

It is here that the propaganda of the Second World War becomes highly significant – being both state and military sponsored, its unequivocal aim was to maintain the dominant social order. However, the nature of the war and the support required from all segments of South African society, meant that propaganda had to incorporate the different and changing needs of the audience at which it was aimed for the duration of the war. This is particularly apparent in the case of propaganda aimed at white women which had to make three major shifts during the course of the war. The first was to recruit women by portraying war work within already existing ideas of the "proper" role of women in society. This was followed by an attempt to stimulate recruiting by tailoring propaganda to highlight the glamour and adventure of war service. By the end of the war, propaganda had to work to contain the empowerment brought about by women's war-time work in order to return them to lives of domesticity.

Long maligned as deception, propaganda is not simply one-dimensional but remains far more complex. Whereas propaganda had been in existence for thousands of years, its growth came in the late 1800s and early twentieth century. This was directly related to the development of mass communication, providing the most efficient media for the transmission of propaganda.¹¹ Nicholas Pronay makes the interesting argument that it was democratic states that had the greatest need for propaganda:

⁸ Thompson. *Ideology and Modern Culture*. p68.

⁹ Thompson. *Ideology and Modern Culture*. p90-92.

¹⁰ Michael Renov. *Hollywood's Wartime Women: Representation and Ideology*. (Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1988) p78.

¹¹ Garth S. Jowett and Victoria O'Donnell. *Propaganda and Persuasion*. (California: Sage Publications, 1999) p97.

...if the essence of political democracy is that it leaves political power and the responsibility for its use ultimately in the hands of the people, then communications and propaganda are a rather more essential part of the workings, and therefore of the history, of a democratic than of a totalitarian state.¹²

This expansion of propaganda was due in no small part to the need for states to extend a greater form of persuasion as a result of the extension of the franchise to all citizens which had the potential to disrupt the ideology of power. This potential, that was only enhanced by the Bolshevik revolution in Russia, brought with it the fears of Communist revolution throughout Europe.¹³

The growth of mass media in the early twentieth century made a tremendous impact on propaganda in the Second World War. In the early decades of the twentieth century there was an increase in the circulation of newspapers in the United States, Australia and, in particular, Britain which was devoured voraciously by the literate public.¹⁴ It was film however which overcame barriers of literacy and language to appeal to a truly mass audience – and Hollywood made the lion's share. The third medium of mass communication was that of radio which was able to appeal to the working classes in places like Britain as it was economically viable, providing an affordable means of entertainment, "For radio transformed the life of the poor, and especially of housebound poor women, as nothing else had ever done. It brought the world into their room."¹⁵ By the 1930s, those who would play the largest part in the Second World War – Britain, the United States, Germany and Japan – were poised to make use of this ability to reach millions.

These countries first had to overcome the poor image of propaganda as deceptive manipulation, which was held in particular by the people in the democratic, Allied countries. This originated largely at the end of the First World War when the British public discovered that much of the anti-German propaganda in Britain depicting German atrocities was unfounded. Propaganda was thus seen as an imposition on democratic freedom of choice and was abandoned in interwar Britain who found herself playing a game of catch-up to the slick machinations of Goebbels at the outbreak of the Second World War.¹⁶ On the other side of the Atlantic too, Americans

¹² Nicholas Pronay. "Introduction" in *Propaganda, Politics and Film, 1918-45*. Nicholas Pronay and D.W. Spring, eds. (Hampshire: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1986) p18.

¹³ Pronay. "Introduction". p17.

¹⁴ Eric Hobsbawm. *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century, 1914-1991*. (London: Abacus, 2000) p194.

¹⁵ Hobsbawm. *Age of Extremes*. p195.

¹⁶ Anthony Rhodes. *Propaganda: The Art of Persuasion: World War II*. Victor Margolin, ed. (London: Angus and Robertson Publishers, 1976) p107.

viewed the necessary setting up of the Committee of Public Information to disseminate propaganda during the First World War with aversion. After the end of the war and the imposition of harsh terms on defeated Germany by the Treaty of Versailles, Americans felt that they had been manipulated by British propaganda – a position that remained intact at the outbreak of the Second World War.¹⁷

So it was the Germans from 1933 that were the first to take full advantage of mass media to manipulate the German people. While the Minister of Propaganda, Goebbels, made use of newspapers and particularly radio, it was the cinema that appealed to him the most as a medium of propaganda. He held the belief that, "visual images – no matter how he himself manipulated them before they were released – possessed greater credibility than spoken or written words."¹⁸ Invoking the visual to a greater extent than had ever been done before, the Nazis were able to turn their political and military agenda into a spectacle, and it was here that film played a significant part:

...[Hitler's] greatest need was for those who could make the German people a mass of *common visionaries* 'obeying a law they did not even know but which they could recite in their dreams' (Goebbels, 1931)...Hitler [directed] the millions of unemployed Germans to relaunch war as an epic. Others would make war to win, but the German nation and its masters already moved in a world 'where nothing has any meaning, neither good nor evil, neither time nor space, and where what other men call success can no longer serve as a criterion' (Goebbels).¹⁹ [emphasis in original]

The Nazi spectacle culminated in the Nuremberg rallies which were rendered into celluloid mortality by Leni Riefenstahl's film *Triumph of the Will*. Here, grandiose architecture, lighting and sound combined with Christian imagery to provoke the hysteric adulation of the masses, "The symbolism was replete from the very beginning, as Hitler's aeroplane descended through the clouds over Nuremberg, casing a cruciform shape over the marching storm-troopers and the thousands awaiting him in ecstatic expectation in the streets below."²⁰ The film, with Hitler as the centrepiece, went on to portray the German leader's "'heartfelt kindness' as he greeted the peasant women...and his 'manly earnestness' as he reviewed the line of standard-bearers", ultimately serving to inextricably link Hitler with his people.²¹ The spectacle was integral to the Nazi rallies with enormous crowds of people, "torchlight demonstrations and firework

¹⁷ Rhodes. *Propaganda: The Art of Persuasion*. p139.

¹⁸ Leonard W. Doob. "Goebbels' Principles of Propaganda" in *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol 14, No 3, Autumn, 1950. p427.

¹⁹ Paul Virilio. *War and Cinema: The Logistics of Perception*. P. Cammiller, translator. (New York: Verso, 1999) p54.

²⁰ Ian Kershaw. *The 'Hitler Myth': Image and Reality in the Third Reich*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987) p69.

²¹ Kershaw. *The 'Hitler Myth'*. p70.

displays".²² For Hitler, with an almost disdainful view of the German people, propaganda was to be a one-way process:

According to Hitler, propaganda for the masses had to be simple, it had to aim at the lowest level of intelligence, and it had to be reduced to easily learned slogans which then had to be repeated many times, concentrating on such emotional elements as love and hatred...The main objective then of Nazi propaganda in both opposition and government was to unify the German people behind a single thought and purpose.²³

During the interwar years Germany demonstrated the way in which propaganda worked in accordance with information – not only to enlighten but also to disseminate a particular ideology and to persuade the audience to act in line with that ideology.²⁴ Despite Hitler's patronising and contemptuous view of civilian populations as being emotionally rather than intellectually driven and hence easily susceptible to propaganda, civilians of any state are not necessarily easily duped.²⁵ There was a clear distinction between official views of the way in which propaganda such as film operated and the way in which they were actually received by audiences:

Films became a form of audiovisual coercion and moviegoers the helpless and innocent objects of political machinations, their minds pounded into mush by a mighty apparatus. This rhetoric at best describes official designs; it does not fully acknowledge Goebbels' constant anxiety and uncertainty about viewer response...The prospect of an all-encompassing ideological control of films that overwhelmed audiences and enjoyed unconditional success, was at best a Nazi dream – and a post-war myth.²⁶

Media and discourse theorists have shown that, for propaganda to be effective, several criteria have to be met – the first being that it has to be tailored to the particular society at which it is aimed. For instance, in Nazi Germany, propaganda was most successful in its visual form – the spectacular of the Nuremberg rallies, film and posters – as well as radio broadcasts. The Nazis made cheap radio sets available to the entire German population.²⁷ Other states too had to cater their propaganda to the needs of their civilian populations, which affected the degrees to which the various media of communication were used. The audience, however, was not a static recipient of propaganda with static needs so propaganda had to be as dynamic:

The process of persuasion is an interactive one in which the recipient foresees the fulfilment of a personal or societal need or desire if the persuasive purpose is adopted...The persuader who understands that persuasion is interactive or a transaction

²² Kershaw. *The 'Hitler Myth'*. p127.

²³ David Welch. "Introduction" in *Nazi Propaganda: The Power and the Limitations*. David Welch, ed. (Kent: Croom Helm Ltd, 1985) p3.

²⁴ Jowett and O'Donnell. *Propaganda and Persuasion*. p26.

²⁵ Rhodes. *Propaganda: The Art of Persuasion*. p12.

²⁶ Eric Rentschler. *The Ministry of Illusion: Nazi Cinema and its Afterlife*. (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1996) p11.

²⁷ Rhodes. *Propaganda: The Art of Persuasion*. p29.

in which both parties approach a message-event and use it to attempt to fulfil needs will never assume a passive audience. An active audience seeks to have its needs fulfilled by the persuader, and an active persuader knows that he or she must appeal to the audience needs in order to ask the audience to fill his or her needs by adopting the message-purpose.²⁸

Thus for propaganda to be an effective means of persuasion the way in which the audience perceives it is a critical factor. Taking the audience into consideration has the potential to allow for a certain degree of flexibility in the dominant ideology. This is particularly evident when it is aimed at the marginalised or the disempowered sectors of society. The propagandist of World War II needed to consider the real needs and desires of these groups and the possibilities for shifts or challenges to the existing social order which could arise as a result of the propaganda and its reception by the audience. This made the Second World War a key moment in time where marginalised groups had the potential to challenge their social position, particularly in terms of race and gender.

The relationship of propaganda with power was not straightforward, nor was it all-encompassing in its ability to advance or limit the possibilities of empowerment brought about by the war. Its creators set out to suggest a vision for a new more egalitarian South Africa post-1945 but propaganda operated within limitations – particularly those relating to race and gender. Key to this chapter – and the dissertation as a whole – is the interaction between race and gender. Propaganda became an important component of state attempts to direct race and gender roles during the Second World War. South Africa's unique position stems not from it being a country with white rule – this was the case for many of the Commonwealth countries such as Canada and Australia. South Africa, on the other hand, was the only country with a minority white population and a government dedicated to maintaining white rule by the subjugation of its majority black population.

White women were integral to this objective. As Cheryl Walker has demonstrated in her discussion of the enfranchisement of white women in South Africa in 1930, it was not ideas of gender equality which was the motivating factor behind the extension of the vote to women as had been the case with the radical suffrage movements in Britain and the United States. In South Africa the loyalty of white women lay with white men and the maintenance of this unity was all important. Extending the franchise to white women was the means by which the white electorate

²⁸ Jowett and O'Donnell. *Propaganda and Persuasion*. p27-28.

was increased at the expense of the black population, rather than any being based on any genuine commitment to women's equality.²⁹ White women even formed the terrain on which conservative white power was established when, in 1929, J.B.M. Hertzog was elected based on the "Black Peril" – the apparent danger posed by urbanised black men to white women.³⁰ White women were used to buttress white rule in South Africa – and were therefore key to the propaganda efforts of the Second World War.

As in the other Allied countries – and some of the Axis countries as well – propaganda had to be used to alter notions of the "proper" role for women as wives and mothers in order to get women to work in war industry and in the auxiliary services. By portraying women's war work as simply an extension of their stereotypically gendered role, it became easier for propaganda to change its message at the end of the war in order to return women to their homes. Yet women were not so easily manipulated and, particularly during the middle years of the war which was marked by a decline in the enlistment of women, propaganda added an element of glamour and adventure in order to attract women to the war effort. By the end of the war, though, the emphasis was once again on the key roles of white men and their greater sacrifice in the war so as to once again compel women to return to their pre-war roles.

Ultimately propaganda was unable to fully curtail the empowerment and independence afforded by war work. Although there was a conservatism apparent in the roles of women throughout the Allied countries in the decade after the war which validated the role of the suburban housewife, a reaction to this set in that was apparent in the radical feminist movement of the 1960s. In South Africa too, women such as Helen Joseph and Mary Benson, seeing the hypocrisy of a war fought for democracy abroad while those same ideals were suppressed at home, threw themselves into the anti-apartheid struggle. They refused to acquiesce to gender expectations of women as being confined to the private sphere, maintaining the home and family. Still, these women were few and far between – the great majority returned to their pre-war status. Part of this was due to the upheaval wrought by war and, linked to this, was the position of white women in South Africa as the means by which the racial status quo could be maintained – which I address in later chapters.

²⁹ Cf. Cheryl Walker. "The Women's Suffrage Movement: The Politics of Gender, Race and Class" in *Women and Gender In Southern Africa to 1945*. Cheryl Walker, ed. (Cape Town: David Philip Publishers, 1990).

³⁰ Nigel Worden. *The Making of Modern South Africa: Conquest, Segregation and Apartheid*. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1994) p77.

The Second World War hastened the process of black urbanisation as influx control laws were relaxed for the duration of the war in order to meet labour demands that had been exacerbated by the exodus of white men to the front lines.³¹ Moreover the opportunities brought by the war-time economy – and Prime Minister Smuts – suggested the possibilities of the war as bringing about greater equality for black men. In a speech in 1942 Smuts ignited the hopes of many with the words, "(i)solation has gone and segregation has fallen on evil days."³² The spirit of liberalism which pervaded the government of the day appeared to support this – even if propaganda did not. South African visual propaganda during the war was a study in attempting to curtail the empowerment of black men – with either a lack of acknowledgement of their efforts or placing their war work within the stereotype of the "noble warrior" which had been used before the war to support the ideology of segregation. Despite the attempts of propaganda to contain their empowerment, black men seized the opportunities presented by the war, using the conflict to call for equal participation which would symbolize citizenship and equal rights. The South African state was thus not wholly in control of the way in which the war was utilised by its participants. This radicalism on the part of black men, their ever increasing numbers in the urban areas of the country and the movements for decolonisation sweeping the continent, once again ignited the fears of a white minority. This was in no small part responsible for the conservatism of white ex-servicemen and women, leading ultimately to their support of Malan's National Party in 1948 or their inability to put up an effective resistance to it. Simultaneously, propaganda rendered the work of black women invisible, an invisibility which was mirrored by patriarchal black and white society before, during and after the war. This suggested that propaganda was at its most successful only when it struck an existing chord within those at which it was aimed.

Nowhere perhaps are the limits of propaganda clearer than in its inability to prevent the triumph of right wing nationalism. Men like E.G. Malherbe, a staunch Smuts supporter and, like many of United Party members, a liberal, could hardly have foreseen that the end of the war would see the defeat of the United Party and the triumph of right wing nationalism which would hold sway for the next fifty years. There is thus a very strong impression that propaganda during the Second World War had failed to adequately predict a post-war South Africa. Its inability to effectively take into account the different needs, motivations and fears of South African men and

³¹ Worden. *The Making of Modern South Africa*. p61-64.

³² Phyllis Lewsen. "Liberals in Politics and Administration, 1936-48" in *Democratic Liberalism in South Africa: Its History and Prospect*. J. Butler, R. Elphick and D. Welsh, eds. (Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1987) p105.

women left a gaping hole allowing right wing conservatism to build on the fears of white South Africa.

Film as Propaganda

Film was an integral part of the art of persuasion and propaganda in the Allied and particularly Axis countries. The German contempt for the "masses", the high illiterate numbers of the peasant population in Italy and the large numbers of different language groups under Japanese control as a result of their massive expansion, meant that, in addition to radio broadcasts, visual images in terms of posters, films and photographs in newspapers, were integral to propaganda efforts. These images were designed to be simple so as to effectively convey specific messages, making use of stereotypes and repetition.³³

Elaine Binedell's work on the relationship between state and film in inter-war South Africa demonstrates the way in which the South African state employed film on the reserves to carry out its policy of betterment. Film was seen by key bureaucrats in the South African state as the most effective medium to counter language and literacy barriers in the 1930s.³⁴ In addition to films supporting the policy of betterment and the reserve system, the South African state used propaganda films aimed at both black and white audiences, highlighting the dangers of venereal disease and, associated with it, sexual promiscuity – which took on racial overtones as well.³⁵

In the inter-war period – and later playing a role in the war itself – two companies were key in the production of films. The first was the African Films Trust initiated in 1913 by Isadore Schlesinger and responsible in that same year for the creation of *The African Mirror*, a newsreel, and the first of its kind in South Africa. From the outset, the company worked closely with the state in its production of "fictional, documentary and historical films" which functioned as agents of propaganda and education.³⁶ By the Second World War an outshoot of African Films Trust, the African Film Corporation, produced propaganda films for the state such as the

³³ Cf. Rhodes. *Propaganda: The Art of Persuasion*.

³⁴ Cf. Elaine Binedell. "Film and the State: Control, Ideology and Space, 1914-1978." (Unpublished Dissertation: University of Natal, Durban, 2000).

³⁵ Cf. Binedell. "Film and the State" and K. Jochelson. *The Colour of Disease: Syphilis and Racism in South Africa, 1880-1950*. (Hampshire: Palgrave, 2001).

³⁶ Binedell. "Film and State". p18-19.

Afrikaans film *Noordwaarts* for the Union Unity Truth Service – which I discuss below.³⁷ However, by the late '30s, the African Film Corporation which had dominated the industry was losing out to the growing Union Film Productions Ltd. Union Film Productions produced English and Afrikaans propaganda films for state agencies such as the UDF Film Unit and the Bureau of Information. Prior to the outbreak of war, in line with their collaboration with the South African state, both companies produced films that buttressed government policies on race, particularly those relating to the reserves as well as emphasising a spirit of reconciliation between English and Afrikaans-speaking white South Africans.³⁸

The state-sanctioned films produced during the Second World War provide a means of gauging the kinds of identity advocated by the state of people participating in the various branches of the Union Defence Force. The Director of Military Intelligence, E.G. Malherbe, was quite clear on the role that film was expected to play as an instrument of propaganda for the duration of the war. This is evident in a lecture he delivered to the Union Unity Truth Service in December 1940 where he explicitly stated the value of film as a form of propaganda or persuasion. For Malherbe the “semblance of truth” which was a defining feature of film as well as its representation of “direct reality” which it purported to show made it a prime instrument in “conceal[ing] propaganda”.³⁹ His use of “conceal” implies a form of deception, a means of making propaganda less than overt. Simultaneously, film propaganda as envisaged by Malherbe, also functioned as a means of disseminating information allowing audiences to develop a “knowledge of facts” leading to knowledge while, at the same time, “building [or shaping] attitudes” – the use of factual information or argument in order to persuade through the medium of film.⁴⁰ More significantly, the film functioned as a source of authority which was difficult to contradict, “You cannot answer the film back”, delivering a message which would be related to others by the audiences exposed to them.⁴¹

The format of film interestingly enough, suggested that the posing and editing of shots did not necessarily impact upon its perceived truth-value:

³⁷ Binedell. “Film and State”. p20, 22.

³⁸ Binedell. “Film and State”. p34.

³⁹ Killie Campbell Africana Library (KCAL). E.G. Malherbe Collection. “Lecture to Union Unity Truth Service 14 Dec, 1940”. KCM 596974 (583), File 438-2.

⁴⁰ KCAL. “Lecture to Union Unity Truth Service”. KCM 596974 (583).

⁴¹ KCAL. “Lecture to Union Unity Truth Service”. KCM 596974 (583).

The camera does not discriminate between real events (which would have taken place even if it had not been on the spot to record them) and action created specifically in order to be recorded. In this respect, the movie simply extends the ambiguity present in any credible image; so long as it looks correct we have no way of telling whether a picture portrays an actual or an imagined subject. The blurred distinction between authentic and staged events helps to make the camera a peculiarly vivid medium.⁴²

A common feature of Second World War films, especially the official films produced by the state for propaganda purposes, was the assembly of actual footage taken of troops in action on the frontlines or men and women working on the home front in line with a particular message that the state was attempting to convey.⁴³ The use of actual footage did not necessarily imply that there was any greater degree of truth in these documentary films as opposed to the fictional Hollywood war film. The persuasive nature and mass appeal of film made it a tool in the hands of both the Allied and Axis powers during the Second World War, to establish support for the war effort. Philip Taylor emphasises that, for the historian, the documentary film is as much a product of its context as any other medium, providing more information about the society in which it was produced than about the war itself:

The initial work on documentary demonstrated that even these sources were not simply windows on the past. Although they used actuality footage, they did not provide us with unbiased records.⁴⁴

As a historical document film "not only reveals a great deal about the external aspects of a historical moment (for example, what places and people looked like), but also may indicate more than 'official' historical documents about ideological trends or social attitudes and beliefs."⁴⁵

Yet, for this chapter, it has been difficult to step back from the narrative of the film in order to effectively analyse it. This is the reason that film was appreciated as such an effective medium of propaganda – its presentation of a closed narrative which does not really allow for different readings:

Far more unsettling is the way each [film] compresses the past to a closed world by telling a single, linear story, with, essentially, a single interpretation. Such a narrative strategy obviously denies historical alternatives, does away with complexities of motivation or causation, and banishes all subtlety from the world of history... The huge images on the screen and the wraparound sounds overwhelm us, swamp our senses, and

⁴² V.F. Perkins. *Film as Film: Understanding and Judging Movies*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972) p68.

⁴³ Cf. Anthony Aldgate. "Creative Tensions: 'Desert Victory', the Army Film Unit and Anglo-American Rivalry, 1943-4" in *Britain and the Cinema in the Second World War*. Philip M. Taylor, ed. (Hong Kong: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1988).

⁴⁴ Philip M. Taylor. "Introduction: Film, the Historian and the Second World War" in *Britain and the Cinema in the Second World War*. Philip M. Taylor, ed. (Hong Kong: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1988) p5.

⁴⁵ Marc Ferro. *Cinema and History*. Naomi Greene, translator. (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1988) p12.

destroy attempts to remain aloof, distanced, critical. In the movie theatre, we are, for a time, prisoners of history.⁴⁶

A Film Unit was set up by the Union Defence force in early 1941 functioning, in addition to propaganda, as a medium of instruction:

This [the establishment of the Film Unit] is another progressive step which is in line with the South African policy of building a modern army in the quickest and most efficient manner. The use and value of films in the sphere of training is so well known that this aspect need hardly be mentioned...At present, nearly forty units have installed projectors. During the day they are used for instruction and in the evening their use is equally valuable for entertainment.⁴⁷

To disseminate information and function as a means of propaganda, news reels created by African Films and Union Films were shown to troops on the frontlines as well as civilians on the home front, some of which I draw upon for this discussion.⁴⁸ The films are usually divided into segments where a particular theme of event is emphasised. Along with actual footage taken from the frontlines are voiceovers describing the scenes and they would have followed the conventional newsreel format familiar to civilian audiences. The films shown were largely acquired through the Army Education Services and comprised news reels and educational films as well as fictional Hollywood films.⁴⁹ An additional feature of the films discussed is that it has been difficult to ascertain the dates on which they were produced, either from the archives or from the films themselves. It is possible to speculate in certain cases, particularly where the films portray a significant event in the war such as the fall of Tobruk. The films themselves fell into different categories from those containing footage of the war itself and the activity on the frontlines to more educational films showing the kind of work carried out by various branches of military service. Included too were films depicting work and industry on the home front in aid of the war effort. I have also included a film script *Service* for analysis – its use being that it is one of the few films where the role of women figured centrally.

⁴⁶ Robert A. Rosenstone. "History in Images/History in Words: Reflections on the Possibility of Really Putting History onto Film" in *The American Historical Review*, Vol 93, No 5, December 1988. p1174, 1177.

⁴⁷ KCAL. E.G. Malherbe Collection. "Films for Training" in *IC Digest*, May 1941, p29. KCM 56974(580), File 438-2.

⁴⁸ KCAL. E.G. Malherbe Collection. "Films for Publicity and Propaganda". KCM 56974(531)a. File 438/1.

⁴⁹ T.R. Ponsford. *War Record of Union Defence Force Institutes (YMCA-TOCH) 1939-1946*. (Cape Town: Hortors Limited, publication date unknown) p199.

News and Information: An Analysis of South African Film Propaganda

I discuss a number of films in this section in terms of the way in which they portray race and gendered roles for South African participants in the war. Produced largely by either African Film Productions or Union Films, the creation of these films was marked by a strong collaboration with the state, as I discuss above. Described as "Major-General George Brink's Call to South Africa", *Fall In* was produced by Union Films and featured Brink as the narrator, interspersing his image with that of scenes from the war – images of fascists, troops going "Up North" with General Smuts there to see them off, men leaving their families, South African troops fighting in East and North Africa, Smuts' farewell to the troops who would later be taken prisoner at Tobruk, a new generation of recruits training and, finally, the image of Table Mountain as representing the homeland.⁵⁰ *With Our Men in the North*, produced by African Film Productions Ltd, opens with the handing out of medals posthumously awarded by Governor-General Sir Patrick Duncan to the widows and fathers of men who had died in the war. The film is further divided into three segments – "Desert Patrol", "America Fights With Us in the Middle East" and "Quentin Smythe V.C."⁵¹ There is also another film in the series *With Our Men in the North*, likewise produced by African Film Productions Ltd, which is divided into three segments, "South Africans Reach Madagascar", "Desert Warfare" and "Avenge Tobruk!"⁵² *The Years Between Part 1*, once again produced by African Film Productions Ltd, focuses solely on Tobruk and the work of men and women in the effort to "Avenge Tobruk".⁵³ *The Years Between Part 2*, produced by African Film Productions Ltd, focuses on women's war work and also contains scenes of white men in combat.⁵⁴ *Planning for Peace*, produced by the Bureau of Information for the Directorate of Demobilisation in 1944, deals with the post-war prospects and career opportunities for returning white men.⁵⁵ *A Navy is Born* was a film produced by the UDF Film Unit in 1940 that focussed on the work of the South African navy, particularly that of repairing

⁵⁰ National Film, Video and Sound Archives (hereafter NFVSA) *Fall In*. Union Films. FA 19.

⁵¹ NFVSA. *With Our Men in the North*. African Film Productions Ltd. South African National Defence Force. FA 45.

⁵² NFVSA. *With Our Men in the North*. African Film Productions Ltd. South African National Defence Force. FA 410.

⁵³ NFVSA. *The Years Between Part 1*. African Film Productions Ltd. South African National Defence Force. FA 92.

⁵⁴ NFVSA. *The Years Between Part 2*. African Film Productions, Ltd. South African National Defence Force. FA 97.

⁵⁵ NFVSA. *Planning for Peace*. The Bureau for Information for the Directorate of Demobilisation, 1944. GCIS. FA 27.

water craft, as well as the invaluable work done by ships in combating enemy submarines, clearing mines and supplying besieged areas.⁵⁶ *She Helps to Heal*, another film produced by the UDF Film Unit, portrays the work of white nurses.⁵⁷ My analysis of the final film *Service* is based on a film script that dealt with the way in which women were recruited for wartime work.⁵⁸

A key event in South Africa's participation in the war was the conflict at Tobruk in North Africa which inspired both a feeling of tribulation and of defeat amongst both the Axis and the Allied powers respectively. After holding off combined German and Italian forces under the command of Major-General Erwin Rommel for most of 1941 and achieving an Allied victory, 1942 marked the defeat of the Allied forces at Tobruk. The inability of troops to evacuate the area due to the Germans capturing transport vehicles led to a huge number of Allied soldiers being taken prisoner-of-war when Major-General Klopper eventually surrendered to Axis forces. Of the approximately thirty thousand men taken prisoner, South African soldiers formed approximately one-third.⁵⁹ The impact on the country was enormous – for those opposed to the war this early setback was the perfect opportunity to decry the South African government who had taken the country into war. Contradictorily, this defeat also spurred supporters of the Allied effort to even greater determination, and the call came to "Avenge Tobruk".⁶⁰

In reaction to Tobruk, the film *Fall In*, called on South Africans to throw their weight behind the war effort. This call came when the defeat was a turning point in South African support for the war.⁶¹ Several themes are apparent in *Fall In* regarding the types of appeals made to South Africans to support the country's participation in the war at this crucial juncture.

The film opens with Brink standing in front of a map of the African continent. Major-General George Brink would have been an instantly recognisable figure to both troops and civilians as a significant leader who headed the 1st S.A. Division.⁶² As such, his presence in the film functioned

⁵⁶ NFVSA. *A Navy is Born*. Union Defence Force Film Unit, 1940. South African National Defence Force. FA 515.

⁵⁷ NFVSA. *She Helps to Heal*. Union Defence Force Film Unit. South African National Defence Force. FA 412.

⁵⁸ *Service – The Film of the S.A.W.A.S. Command 13*. Documentation Centre, Department of Defence Archives, DR 12/44/II.

⁵⁹ Nigel Cawthorne. *Turning the Tide: Decisive Battles of the Second World War*. (London: Arcturus Publishing, 2002) p51-56.

⁶⁰ W.K. Hancock. *Smuts 2: The Fields of Force, 1919-1950*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968) p375.

⁶¹ *Fall In*.

⁶² E.P. Hartshorn. *Avenge Tobruk*. (Cape Town: Purnell and Sons, 1960) p80.

as a means of asserting military masculine authority as well as invoking paternalist authority – he was referred to by his men as “Uncle George”.⁶³ Brink’s opening point was that it was the role of South Africa’s soldiers to stop the Axis advance elsewhere in Africa with the ultimate aim of keeping them from South Africa’s borders. South African troops were referred to as the policemen of war whose role was to defend their homes and farms against the Fascists. Images of Italian and German forces marching were accompanied by Brink’s description of them as “gangsters” – as the organised criminals of war who did not follow the etiquette of warfare. The war was presented in almost local terms as the conflict between policemen and criminals with the aim of the former as preserving social stability, harmony and safety. Images of the crime itself contained burnt and bombed buildings with wounded people together with the explicit message that it was necessary for soldiers to go overseas in order to prevent similar crimes being carried out in South Africa. The metaphor of crime functioned as a means of localizing an international conflict, of making it a concern of those living in South Africa and physically distant from all the theatres of war.

Brink also made reference to Smuts who symbolised the South African decision to enter the war on the side of the Allies, “(a)nd today the world recognises this former Boer general as one of its greatest strategists”.⁶⁴ The reference to Smuts’ role as a Boer General in the South African War where he so effectively fought the British, was a subtle reminder of his service during the Second World War to the Afrikaner nation when Smuts found himself at odds with Afrikaner nationalists opposed to South Africa’s entry into the war. It suggested that Smuts’ primary allegiance lay not with Britain but with South Africa in general and with Afrikaners in particular. This was emphasised by Brink’s words: “General Smuts is always active in the best interests of South Africa,” combined with the image of Smuts saluting departing troops. The overall impression given was not of Smuts’ loyalty to the British Empire, but of him acting in a protective capacity in South Africa, sending troops with the ultimate aim of defending the country. Simultaneously, the part played by Smuts in the decision to enter the war in 1939 as well as the subsequent deployment of troops to the theatres of combat was downplayed, “South Africa’s people through its parliament endorse these views”.⁶⁵ This emphasised the democratic process where all South African citizens bore responsibility for military decisions and the blame

⁶³ Joel Mervis. *South Africa in World War II*. (Johannesburg: Times Media Ltd, 1989) p25.

⁶⁴ *Fall In*.

⁶⁵ *Fall In*.

for Tobruk could therefore not be placed on any one person. This was useful when the military setback evident in the fall of Tobruk had South Africans questioning the validity of participation in the war and, in particular, their support of a government which had led them to this point.

This propaganda operated within a general context of concern voiced by E.G. Malherbe over the alienation of the white Afrikaans-speaking sector of the population. He believed that, with regards to newsreels for instance:

...Afrikaans-speaking **supporters** of the war effort cannot be blamed if occasionally they feel that they are being slighted. How much more have opposition Afrikaans-speaking citizens cause for criticism?⁶⁶

His conviction was that films had to portray a particularly South African form of identity so as to prevent "their [the troops] identity being lost in the Imperial Forces" as they fought alongside other members of the British Empire.⁶⁷ Moreover state and military propaganda found itself up against competing propaganda from Germany which did little to reduce the strength of the parliamentary opposition as well as right wing nationalists and Nazi sympathisers such as the Ossewabrandwag:

...a very large proportion of the Afrikaans speaking population listen exclusively to the Afrikaans service from Zeesen for their overseas news regarding the war, and that their opinions regarding the whole war situation are moulded very largely by these broadcasts. The fact that they listen to nothing else besides these broadcasts and read no other newspapers other than those which are also anti-government and largely pro-Zeesen, determines the force of these impressions, rather than the inherent merit or reliability of these broadcasts from Zeesen.⁶⁸

To counter the anti-war efforts of the opposition and the extremist Ossewabrandwag propaganda had to be adapted in order to "side-track much of the anti-war emotion" where the state and military would:

...help the Afrikaans-speaking section to live out that interest in the cultural distinctiveness rather than give the impression that we oppose their efforts, or carry on as if we were totally indifferent to their cultural heritage and achievements. Here too, a much more positive line should be taken. The film offers many opportunities for remedying this situation, and the palpable blindness and stupidity of those who run the film as a propaganda medium are to blame for the lost opportunities in this respect. For example, every news-reel showing activities of our men in the North should have at least 50% commentary in Afrikaans. Every time *Oom* [Uncle] Jannie Smuts appears on the screen the commentary should be in Afrikaans. This will make people of both sections,

⁶⁶ KCAL. E.G. Malherbe Collection. "Films for Publicity and Propaganda". KCM 56974(531)a, File 438-1.

⁶⁷ KCAL. E.G. Malherbe Collection. "Films for Publicity and Propaganda". KCM 56974(531)a, File 438-1.

⁶⁸ KCAL. E.G. Malherbe Collection. Letter by E.G. Malherbe to Mr John A. Davenport, Overseas Division, The British Broadcasting Corporation, 6 May 1941. KCM 56974(534), File 438-1. Zeesen Radio broadcast German propaganda from Germany to the rest of the world.

including those who hold that this is only an English war, engineered by English capitalists, realise that it is an **Afrikaner war too** and that Afrikaners from the Commander-in-Chief downwards are prepared to give their lives to win it **in the interests of South Africa**.⁶⁹ [emphasis in original]

A key facet of official propaganda then was the need to counter the anti-war effort that occurred largely on the part of Afrikaners hostile to South Africa's role. An important aspect, according to Malherbe, was to make every effort so as not to alienate the Afrikaner segment of the population. This is evident in his reference to Smuts as "Oom Jannie" and his desire that Afrikaans should be used when Smuts appeared on screen which explicitly associated the South African Prime Minister with an Afrikaner identity. It is in this light that *Fall In* emphasised in this instance a South African identity over an imperial one.

To return to an analysis of the film, *Fall In* subsequently focused on the threats to and defence of South Africa's borders that were the motivation behind recruitment efforts. Further footage was shown of white South African troops fighting and emerging victorious in Addis Ababa, "Our purpose was not to acquire new territory but to render that country useless to the enemy as a springboard from which it was an easy jump for Axis planes onto Rhodesia and from there again onto the Union."⁷⁰ In addition to the main theme of defending the Union emphasised by Brink using the map to show the prospective route of Axis troops, the film decidedly refuted any imperial aims on the part of South Africa on the continent. This may have served to detract from the way in which the conflict was portrayed by propaganda internationally and locally, as the "Good War", a war fought against the evils of fascism rather than for material gain as was the case during the First World War. Brink then moved on to discuss a similar engagement in Libya where he, "took the First South African Division to defend South Africa against the Germans and Italians combined".⁷¹ The incongruity of South African troops going as far as North Africa in order to defend South Africa is related to the theme of defending the Union and the convention of portraying the enemy as the aggressor and one's own side as the defender, safeguarding South Africa's borders against the threat posed by the Axis. Evident in the film, the defence of the country was placed solely in the hands of white men, rendering the contribution of black soldiers and women auxiliaries invisible. The invisibility of black South Africans

⁶⁹ KCAL. E.G. Malherbe Collection. E. G. Malherbe to the Director of Bureau of Information. "Recognition of the Afrikaans Element in Propaganda". KCM 56974(544), File 438-1

⁷⁰ *Fall In*.

⁷¹ *Fall In*.

suggested that combat in the war was a natural aspect of white masculinity and it was here that the greatest contribution to the war effort lay.

South African victories were described in the film as bringing “new glory to the home of South Africa” along with heroic images of white South African troops marching and traversing sand dunes as well as troops smiling at the camera.⁷² The notion of glory and accolades heaped on soldiers and country was emphasised here by their victory over “troops second to none in the world”.⁷³ This was further indicated by Smuts’ words to the 2nd Division prior to their departure, many of these men subsequently being taken prisoner at Tobruk:

You 2nd Division are going to be matched with some of the finest soldiers that the world possesses today. The German soldier is not a man to be despised – whether in the air or on the land or even on sea, he is a great fighter whatever other weakness he may have.⁷⁴

South African victories were given greater value by them facing worthy opponents – and their defeats were placed within a similar context. War and combat was presented as a challenge and the opportunity to prove oneself against some of the best fighters in the world. Of course this was a masculine test limited to white men, the sole combatants of the Union Defence Force. At the same time there was an indication of respect between soldiers based on their fighting ability, regardless of the side for which they fought. Despite this, the footage showed only white South African troops in largely combat roles and rendered invisible all those African, Indian and coloured volunteers who were given non-combatant and support duties.

To allay the fears of civilians with men on the frontlines and to encourage white men in particular to volunteer, the war was in many ways sanitised. Images of troops in combat were inevitably portrayed from one angle showing soldiers firing at an unseen enemy, heroically charging ahead through smoke and ultimately emerging victorious. Death and injury were absent from the images shown as well as the myriad discomforts of war – exhaustion, dirt, lack of food, homesickness and fear.

Returning to the theme of defending the Union, *Fall In* showed footage of German planes dropping bombs which was juxtaposed with images of South African cities which would be

⁷² *Fall In*.

⁷³ *Fall In*.

⁷⁴ *Fall In*.

destroyed if more men did not enlist. South Africa was depicted as being strategically important due to its ports and materially important due to its gold reserves and its industrial might – resources which would make the Axis powers impossible to defeat should the country be invaded.

As the film concluded an appeal was made for support based on the sacrifices of those who had gone before:

And I who have seen the great sacrifices that our men have made in this campaign, appeal to you on behalf of those who are prisoners-of-war, who have been wounded and killed. Do not let their sacrifice be in vain.⁷⁵

The defeat at Tobruk was portrayed in two ways – to those who opposed the war it symbolized the poor judgement made by the government to involve South Africa in the war. In *Fall In* the men captured at Tobruk were portrayed as the incentive for South Africans to increase their involvement in the war effort so that the POWs could return home speedily. Using guilt, sympathy as well as the setback at Tobruk, Brink pointed to the camera in a manner reminiscent of recruiting posters during the First World War, calling on South Africans to play their part: "From their prisons of war camps they are calling *to you and to you* to finish this war as quickly as possible and to speed the day of their happy reunion."⁷⁶ Pointing at the camera was an attempt for him to make direct contact with the viewer, making each person responsible for the return of the POWs and culpable, should these men not return safely. The use of a finger pointing towards the viewer calling for the public to play its part was a hallmark of military propaganda dating back to Kitchener's appeal *Your Country Needs You* in the First World War which had led to the enlistment of millions, making it one of the most successful pieces of propaganda. Its form was emulated during the same conflict by countries as diverse as the United States, Germany and the Soviet Union making use of figures such as Trotsky and Uncle Sam.⁷⁷ So *Fall In* was drawing on a long-standing tradition established decades earlier and one which was possibly designed to elicit both an appeal to memories of patriotism and a response on the part of the audience to throw their support behind the war effort.

⁷⁵ *Fall In*.

⁷⁶ *Fall In*.

⁷⁷ Carlo Ginzburg. "'Your Country Needs You': a Case Study in Political Iconography" in *History Workshop Journal*, Issue 52, 2001. p7.

In addition to the men taken prisoner at Tobruk, the final scenes of the film depicted South African landmarks such as Table Mountain with the message that South Africa needed to be defended. An appeal was also made based on South Africa's "heritage": "This land which is good enough to live in is good enough to fight for. Thousands of men have gone forth to protect the heritage which is theirs and which is yours."⁷⁸ It was the duty of South Africans to defend the land from which they benefited and to preserve their history and past which was one of struggle – they could not let a land for which they had fought so fiercely fall into enemy hands.

With Our Men in the North also features a segment on the repercussions of Tobruk entitled "Avenge Tobruk!" It is in this light that segments sanitising the war should be viewed as the capturing of practically a third of South African troops involved in the war was a devastating blow to the country, having a severely adverse effect on morale. The death, destruction and defeat which the early years of the war entailed for the Allies was contained by images emphasising the less ambiguous aspects of war, a position which was applied to both news reels and still photographs:

...the Bureau of Information have in the field two competent photographers who can send back to the Union regular supplies of 'newsy' photographs. Wherever possible, these photographs should show our troops smiling and cheerful. The Middle East weekly publication, 'PARADE', is a good example of cheerful propaganda. Most of the 'PARADE' photographs show the troops bright and happy – 'thumbs up' and 'top of the world' idea.⁷⁹

In this segment images were of South African troops marching through city streets en route to East Africa. They were accompanied by the cheers from the civilian populace who were portrayed as being complicit in sending them off and supporting the volunteers who ultimately made their way to Tobruk:

You cheered them. You were proud of them, you put your faith in them and you were right. For these fellows carried the traditions of South Africa's fighting breed right into the heart of Abyssinia. From every corner of South Africa they came to defend not only the freedom of their own home but yours too. Remember that.⁸⁰

Their sacrifice which came at Tobruk was done in the service of all South Africans and held true to their heritage. This possibly served to allay hostile feeling toward the state as a result of the defeat as well as growing lack of support for the war effort. Using Tobruk the appeal was made to enlist in order to play their part and not let the sacrifices of their fellow South Africans be in

⁷⁸ *Fall In*.

⁷⁹ KCAL. E.G. Malherbe Collection. "Films for Publicity and Propaganda". KCM 56974(531)a, File 438-1.

⁸⁰ *With Our Men in the North*. (II)

vain. Smuts, referred to as the "grand old fighter", broadcasted an appeal to South Africans in similar vein, "No true South African who honestly and sincerely searches his conscience can now stand aside in the gathering peril to his country". The scene shows a family – mother and two children – listening to Smuts' words over the radio, followed by a cut to a photo of the husband and father in military uniform. The scene itself made use of a very conventional gendered image of men going to war and women and children on the home front, providing the rationale behind men's defence of the nation but hardly playing an active role in that defence. The message was clear – the family had made a sacrifice out of a sense of patriotism and duty and it was therefore up to other South Africans, who had not hitherto done so, to do the same. To recruit more personnel "Avenge Tobruk!" made an appeal based on a triple nexus of patriotism, guilt and duty, closing with a scene of a silhouetted figure of a South African soldier accompanying by the waving flag.⁸¹

The impact of the events at Tobruk on South African society can be ascertained by the many references made to it in the various information films. In *The Years Between* battle scenes at Tobruk show South African troops in alliance with both British and Indian soldiers yet the conflict is presented at a distance – men firing guns at an unseen enemy, explosions, diving planes and bombs falling – culminating in Tobruk falling to German forces and the subsequent taking of prisoner of eleven thousand South African soldiers.⁸² Its neglect in presenting the raw combat of the conflict was due to two reasons – first it would be almost impossible to film during pitched combat. Secondly, even if footage existed, seeing wounded and dead South African soldiers would have a devastating impact on morale on the home front. This was particularly the case as the film was largely concerned with showing the contribution of South Africans at home in a segment entitled "National Drive to Avenge Tobruk". This emphasised the voluntary enlistment of a number of men to compensate for those taken prisoner, "South Africa was determined to avenge this disaster. A recruiting drive was launched and thousands of men came forward to fill the Springbok ranks."⁸³

⁸¹ *With Our Men in the North*. (II)

⁸² NFVSA. *The Years Between Part 1*. African Film Productions Ltd. South African National Defence Force. FA 92.

⁸³ *The Years Between Part 1*.

With Our Men in the North also focussed on the combat activities of South African soldiers as well as their allies in North Africa.⁸⁴ The title of the film implied a connection with the soldiers of North Africa – a sense that they belonged to “us” and were supported unequivocally by the country. One segment of the film, “America Fights With Us in the Middle East”, paid homage to the Allied relationship with the United States, who entered the war two years after its onset. American troops arriving at camp were described as “fighting fit” and wearing the “new type of steel helmet”. This suggested the Allied perception of the US as the “land of plenty” and of innovation which would have provided a much needed injection of material and manpower at a critical juncture that would ultimately influence the outcome of the war.⁸⁵

The subsequent segment “Quintin Smythe V.C” relates directly to the opening segment, “For Gallantry and Loyal Service” – both emphasise a cult of the hero. In the latter segment, with which the film opens, a sombre tone was set as medals were given out posthumously to widows and parents. However the final excerpt, “Quintin Smythe V.C”, once again deified the hero. Quintin Smythe of the Royal Natal Carbineers was invested with the Victoria Cross for “gallantry” which brought “honour to the Union”. He was shown being congratulated by women in uniform and later meeting Smuts and his wife. His bravery was portrayed as being a credit to the country and “as an inspiration to all South Africans”. The film mentioned that his equipment was to be displayed at his school suggesting that it would be used to inspire future generations of young men to similar endeavours, after which it would be placed on display in the War museum making his heroism immortal.⁸⁶ The immortality and recognition accrued to Smythe complemented the first excerpt where the heroes were recognised posthumously. Although Smythe survived to appreciate the accolades, the emphasis was not on whether the heroes live or die, but on the example set by them which achieved immortality, and was hence worth the sacrifice.

It is the first segment “Desert Patrol” which is particularly interesting as it looked at the combat role of Indian troops from the subcontinent. The troops, rendered distinctive by their white turbans, were initially shown patrolling in armoured cars and then, when the enemy was reported as being within engaging distance, were portrayed in combat itself firing at aircraft, coming under

⁸⁴ NFVSA. *With Our Men in the North*. African Film Productions Ltd. South African National Defence Force. FA 45.

⁸⁵ *With Our Men in the North*.

⁸⁶ *With Our Men in the North*.

enemy fire as well as exchanging fire with ground troops. After winning the skirmish the troops are shown driving away along a ridge silhouetted against the dramatic backdrop of a sunset – the conventional device for heroic imagery.⁸⁷ Its uniqueness compared to other segments in the official films is due to heroic imagery being applied to Indian troops when conventionally it was used to apply to white soldiers. This suggested that they were capable of equal participation in combat as well as being included within the rhetoric of the brave warrior. Despite this, the empowerment of these men was contained, as they were portrayed as being under the tutelage and leadership of white officers. This would have contained the disruption of the war and preserved the racial status quo for South African audiences who were more accustomed to the role of black troops in auxiliary roles.

The portrayal of black soldiers continued with the second part of *With Our Men in the North* which partially focused on South Africa black men in the Union Defence Force.⁸⁸ The segment "South Africans Reach Madagascar" contains footage of black stretcher-bearers and transport drivers along with white troops on their way to Madagascar via ship. The auxiliary men were presented as relaxed and contented, displaying little apprehension – they were shown staring out to sea, playing the guitar and singing, along with the voiceover:

On board this ship are a number of non-European stretcher-bearers and transport drivers and, although they are many miles from the Union, their songs bring with them a real tang of home. High spirits pervade the whole vessel. **That is always the way when men are on the high road to adventure.** [emphasis added]⁸⁹

The air of relaxation was further emphasised by footage of smiling men getting hair cuts, having language lessons and laughing. The impression given was of male camaraderie, of a group of men happily voyaging into the unknown sharing a common love for adventure regardless of race. Both black and white troops were described as "men" without combat as the defining feature of masculinity, yet contradictions were apparent with this utopian all-male world. Distinctions were evident as black troops were only portrayed interacting socially with each other and the same applied to white soldiers. Once the ship had reached its destination, this division was further exacerbated emphasising white Allied camaraderie between South African troops and their British counterparts, with the black troops once more rendered invisible, "Soldiers get matey, it's a way they have in the army. Men are soon chatting with the British commandos

⁸⁷ *With Our Men in the North*.

⁸⁸ NFVSA. *With Our Men in the North*. African Film Productions Ltd. South African National Defence Force. FA 410.

⁸⁹ *With Our Men in the North*. (II)

already in occupation".⁹⁰ Evident here also, was the sense that men in the military shared a common identity, enabling them to interact with each other regardless of national differences, but with racial divisions very much intact.

Once the South African troops arrived in Madagascar, the black and white soldiers were seen marching in a parade in separate units to the cheers of the civilian population. They are portrayed in the film as the valiant defenders of Madagascar and the final scene in the segment is of a white Union soldier standing sentinel against the sunset as a symbol of a protector against the encroaching darkness.⁹¹

The segment "Desert Warfare" continued the theme of portraying South African troops overseas by focusing on them in combat and at leisure in the North African desert. Here images of combat were somewhat sanitised. Combat footage of South African pilots were invariably of planes taking off to do battle with an unseen enemy followed by footage of wrecked German planes on the desert floor. As with officially produced and distributed still photographs as well as pictures in personal photographic albums, a discussion of which will follow in subsequent chapters, the images of combat render death, particularly on the part of the home side, invisible. No footage is evident here of South African casualties or, for that matter, German ones. It was only machinery that bore the brunt of the destruction in industrialised warfare. When planes took off to bomb enemy lines of communication their protective fighters were there to "engage enemy planes that look like butting in on the party".⁹² The language employed was flippant and light-hearted, downplaying the danger aspect. It is clear that the aim was to allay the fears of the civilian population watching the film, which served as a morale booster.

The only discomforts visible of South African troops were of "roughing it" – men facing the heat and experiencing the sandstorms in the desert. The same hostile climate was itself rendered harmless by a rainstorm, allowing soldiers to collect water and take showers. There is footage of a naked soldier, turning towards the camera and smiling as he soaps himself allowing the rain to serve as a shower. It is an almost surreal take on conventional notions of domesticity and privacy but simultaneously emphasises the boyish, cheery aspect of the young man taking part in "the

⁹⁰ *With Our Men in the North*. (II)

⁹¹ *With Our Men in the North*. (II)

⁹² *With Our Men in the North*. (II)

great adventure".⁹³ These films used the convention of settler masculinity that I go on to discuss in subsequent chapters. This vision of masculinity appeared hegemonic – evident in the official, public and personal images depicting white soldiers during the war, it was nevertheless challenged by the experiences of war – combat and its effects as well as being taken prisoner, as is evident in the personal testimonies further on in the dissertation.

Along with the footage of civilian white men training was that of the contribution of white women in *The Years Between Part 1*. The voiceover to an image of women looking at a WAAF recruiting poster was, "Women who also wanted to do their share took over many of the jobs of men who had joined the Army."⁹⁴ It was a common device in all Allied countries to recruit women for particular kinds of war work, freeing men to take up roles in combat. The closest that South African women came to actual combat was keeping a look out for Japanese submarines or German aircraft near coastal and port cities in the anti-aircraft and coast artillery. The film showed these women directing men to fire at particular locations. The work of women in the anti-aircraft artillery was unique as it remained an almost elitist section of the services where women worked alongside men. Simultaneously they were not allowed to do the actual firing despite having a hand in all the procedures leading up to it as "pulling the trigger" would be crossing a line into combat which neither the military nor the state were prepared to take. In Britain, where nightly raids by the Germans made the role of Auxiliary Territorial Service (ATS) women even more vital and blurred the distinction between combatant and non-combatant, women were even killed in the line of duty, "The girls lived like men, fought their lights like men, and alas, some of them died like men."⁹⁵ South African women were not tested to that great a degree but women of the WAAFS were closer to combat in this context than in any other branch of the service.

The Years Between Part 2 continued the theme of women taking on new roles, albeit somewhat less glamorous ones, with footage of women with hoses fire-fighting, older women sewing, taking over previously male jobs as bus conductors and train stewards as well as delivering the mail,

⁹³ *With Our Men in the North*. (II)

⁹⁴ *The Years Between Part 1*.

⁹⁵ D'Ann Campbell. "Women in Combat: The World War II Experience in the United States, Great Britain, Germany, and the Soviet Union", in *The Journal of Military History*, Vol. 57, No. 2 (April 1993) p309.

"For the first time post women were seen in the streets of South African cities."⁹⁶ In addition to that was the work of women in industry wearing overalls, caps and operating heavy machinery. Footage shows Smuts inspecting war factories where women were contributing to the manufacture of shells, armaments as well as food. Although they were aided by black male workers, the emphasis was on white women workers, while the former remained in the background and were unacknowledged in the commentary.⁹⁷ The roles of women and the kinds of women engaged in them are further expanded on in the film script *Service* which I discuss further on in this chapter.

Along with the changing roles of white women was an emphasis on the masculinity of white men. Images of the industrial white male worker bore strong resemblance to the images of idealised workers created by New Deal art projects in the United States a decade earlier.⁹⁸ Footage of white bare-chested men engaging in heavy manual labour was not only confined to industry but to military service as well such as the South African Railways and Harbour Brigade. Even men in combat were similarly represented – footage of South African men in *The Years Between Part 2* show bare-chested men firing artillery, the conjunction of their bodies and weapons serving to highlight their masculinity.⁹⁹ This visual emphasis on white masculinity appeared to come at a time when the events at Tobruk may have created a crisis in masculinity. As Barbara Melosh argues, representations of the white manly worker in Depression America stressed their masculinity at a time when the high unemployment rate and breakdown of family life weakened traditional notions of masculinity.¹⁰⁰ Although Tobruk may not have had such a widespread impact, the defeat, being taken prisoner and the high numbers of wounded and dead would have been a disempowering event, creating a "mini-crisis" of white masculinity. The use of images emphasising rugged male power confronted this crisis in an attempt to increase recruiting in the face of a major military setback.

⁹⁶ NFVSA. *The Years Between Part 2*. African Film Productions, Ltd. South African National Defence Force. FA 97.

⁹⁷ *The Years Between Part 1*.

⁹⁸ Cf. Barbara Melosh. "Manly Work: Public Art and Masculinity in Depression America" in *Gender and American History Since 1890*. Barbara Melosh, ed. (London: Routledge, 1993)

⁹⁹ *The Years Between Part 2*.

¹⁰⁰ Melosh. "Manly Work". p159.

Although black men’s contributions to the war effort are rendered somewhat invisible in the two films, footage is shown of Smuts addressing the British Parliament where he sketches out his vision of a post-war society:

What is the sort of world which we envisage as our objective of this war? What sort of social and international order are we aiming at? We have agreed on **certain large principles of social quality involving social security for the citizens in matters which have lain at the roots of much social unrest and suffering in the past.** With honesty and sincerity on our part it is possible to make basic reforms both for national and international life which will give mankind a new chance of survival...[emphasis added]¹⁰¹

Although Smuts seems to have made reference to the ideas that would eventually culminate in the United Nations organisation, for South Africa he also appears to foresee a society of greater “social quality” for all its citizens. This, however, was an all-inclusiveness which becomes progressively narrower as the end approached. This is particularly evident in *Planning for Peace*. With its focus on the opportunities for men at the end of the war *Planning for Peace* made reference to Smuts’ promise that all men who had left to fight would have a job at the end of the war – a task which would be undertaken by the Directorate of Demobilisation. The organisation was to be responsible for the aptitude testing of ex-servicemen to place them in appropriate positions, as well as “special training facilities” in the form of tertiary institutions to enable these men to acquire skills for future employment. Included too were disabled soldiers:

They were men of great heart – the men who fought the war. And now they’re back, still fighting. In the war they fought that South Africa should exist; now, at peace they fight that South Africa should live and develop and go forward.¹⁰²

While espousing the ideals sketched out by Smuts to the British Parliament, *Planning for Peace* has one significant difference – it was only aimed at white servicemen. No mention was made of the contribution of black men to the war or of any steps taken to assimilate them back into society post-1945. It was an optimism for a new South Africa but one that is as racially exclusive as pre-war South Africa.

The film, *A Navy is Born*, contained a great deal of footage of black men at work in contribution to the war effort. Simultaneously the film implied a clear distinction between white and black

¹⁰¹ *The Years Between Part 1.*

¹⁰² NFVSA. *Planning for Peace.* The Bureau for Information for the Directorate of Demobilisation, 1944. GCIS. FA 27.

labour.¹⁰³ Concentrating on the transformation of the South African Navy to meet the needs of the Second World War, the film emphasised racial exclusivity from the outset, "Fortunately our people have a seafaring heritage both from Holland and from England".¹⁰⁴ The use of "our" suggests a specific group in which others, namely those not of Dutch or English extraction, do not have membership. So, while emphasising white ethnic unity, it did so at the expense of racial unity. This is borne out throughout the film where the manufacture of anti-submarine netting, which was viewed as integral to Allied coastline defence, was mainly the work of "unskilled" i.e. black labour. The image of black men in overalls assembling the netting under the supervision of white officers invites comparisons with earlier footage in the same segment of the skilled work performed by white uniformed trainees. This is followed by similar scenes showing the repairing of life boats and ships where, "These highly trained artisans have never yet been called upon to do a job which they couldn't tackle." The skill of these white workers was contrasted with the unmentioned presence of black workers engaging in heavy manual labour "supervised by skilled engineers".¹⁰⁵

This attempt to retain entrenched labour divisions corresponded with fears of white men leaving their employment to enlist – a situation that was prevalent in other Allied countries during the war when women filled their positions on the home front. This took on a racial cast in South Africa. Conventional gender roles presupposed that work done by women during the war would be of a temporary nature whereas black men were permanent workers. While women may have been expected to return to their homes in a post-war society, black male workers presented a greater threat due to them being paid far lower wages than their white counterparts.¹⁰⁶ This situation was exacerbated by the high production output required for the war:

The massive expansion of industrial employment prompted by the war thus threatened to destroy the precarious position of white workers, especially since the greatest pressure fell on those at the top of the hierarchy, the artisans. If their position was undermined, then justifications based on skill would be hard to maintain for other white workers. Above all, the unions wanted to maintain distinctions based on skill which were interpreted as synonymous with race.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰³ NFVSA. *A Navy is Born*. Union Defence Force Film Unit, 1940. South African National Defence Force. FA 515.

¹⁰⁴ *A Navy is Born*.

¹⁰⁵ *A Navy is Born*.

¹⁰⁶ Nancy Clark. "Regendering Production: White Women and Black Men in World War II" (Johannesburg: *History Workshop*, University of the Witwatersrand 13-15 July 1994) p1.

¹⁰⁷ Clark. "Regendering Production". p5.

With the racial division of labour on the home front informing *A Navy is Born*, the distinctions made between skilled and unskilled labour took on racial dimensions. The film gave recognition to the skilled white workers at the expense of the unskilled black workers. This became more significantly a means of allaying the fears of the combatant force of the Union Defence Force, white men, as to their post-war position. However the repercussion of boosting their morale was a lack of recognition given to the auxiliary services of black men in the military.

White women, in many instances, were similarly ignored due to the classification of their work as "auxiliary" or supporting in contrast to that of white men who were the key participants in the war. *Over To You*, produced by African Film Productions, focussed on the work of men and women in the Signal Corps. Footage of the Signal Corps showed both white men and boys between the ages of fifteen and seventeen learning particular skills with the emphasis on achieving better qualifications and hence better pay. This would also enable them to take up post-war careers in the postal service, broadcasting or radio. Still, the training of women in the Signal Corps where they learned radio location, which was vital to defence, as well as the more conventional clerical work, was portrayed as a temporary measure in aid of the war effort, "By giving their services they're releasing thousands of men for active service".¹⁰⁸ By the end of the film gendered conventions remained very much intact as the culmination of the work of the Signal Corps allowed for the transmission of news from the front lines to the home front. The final scene is of news of an Allied victory being relayed via a radio broadcast – its audience, women sitting at home, knitting and listening for news of their men folk.¹⁰⁹ The film acknowledged women's work during the war, albeit as a temporary measure. However, by the end of the film, this was reduced to a simple dichotomy of men fighting at the front and women waiting passively at home.

Conversely, *She Helps to Heal* acknowledged and valorised the role of women in a way that was not done for black men.¹¹⁰ The opening shot followed the conventional heroic visual usually reserved for men of a smiling nurse in uniform silhouetted against the sky. Juxtaposed with the image of healthy men leaving to go "up North" to the cheers and waves of smiling women, was that of men returning injured to be ministered by nurses. Although black men appear in *She*

¹⁰⁸ NFVSA. *Over To You*. African Film Productions. South African National Defence Force. FA 380.

¹⁰⁹ *Over To You*.

¹¹⁰ NFVSA. *She Helps to Heal*. Union Defence Force Film Unit. South African National Defence Force. FA 412.

Helps to Heal as stretcher-bearers and orderlies, the emphasis was on white female nurses, and no mention was made of the part played by black men. This once again had the effect of silencing their contribution. Footage was instead shown of uniformed women in the Women's Auxiliary Army Services (WAAS) learning food preparation to aid in the convalescence of the injured soldiers, with the ultimate aim of becoming skilled at good nutrition, which would be useful to them "in their homes and communities" after their military service was over.¹¹¹ Once it had been established that their war work was of a temporary nature, and all the skills they had learned would only be of use to them in the home or in the less threatening field of working in social or community service, the film returned to the valorisation of the role of these women, "She is proud to know that her contribution to the war effort is vital, important and so we salute a service which is playing its part in the bettering of South Africa."¹¹²

As I have discussed in my previous research¹¹³, the recruiting film by the S.A.W.A.S.¹¹⁴ Command 13 entitled *Service* provided a visual mode of expression for the ideology behind the recruitment for women, with the opportunities as well as limitations presented by military service, evident in films such as *She Helps to Heal*, and I will now quote and discuss certain key scenes in the film as laid out by the script.¹¹⁵

The Call To Serve

Shot 1: SCENE at the cottage gate. Jack fully equipped is leaving to join his ship. Mother walks down the path arm in arm with her boy. AUNTIE and EVE follow behind. AUNTIE tries to be cheerful and keep up all their spirits. EVE says:-

When you are far away at sea, we will do our bit with the S.A.W.A.S.

Shot 3: Sun is streaming in on the verandah of a little home built in the old Dutch style. GRANNIE with her knitting in one hand stands inside the stable door to wish the young airman good luck. KOOS with ANNE at his side has obviously called to say Good-bye. ANNE says:-

I'll keep the home fires burning while you fight.

GRANNIE replies:-

Of course we both will. We'll join the S.A.W.A.S.¹¹⁶

First, the film was aimed at an audience of white South African women of both middle and working class status.¹¹⁷ In addition it appealed to both English and Afrikaans-speaking women.

¹¹¹ *She Helps to Heal*.

¹¹² *She Helps to Heal*.

¹¹³ Suryakanthie Chetty. "Gender Under Fire: Interrogating War in South Africa, 1939-1945." (University of Natal Durban: Unpublished MA dissertation, 2001)

¹¹⁴ South African Women's Auxiliary Services

¹¹⁵ Documentation Centre, Department of Defence Archives. *Service – The Film of the S.A.W.A.S. Command 13*. DR 12/44/II.

¹¹⁶ *Service*, p1.

The dominant theme was of men who were related to these women in some form, going off to fight overseas. The women, in their desire to contribute to the war effort along with their men folk, would in turn join the South African Women's Auxiliary Services. A comparison was made between the home, concerning the work of the S.A.W.A.S., and the rest of the world, where the men were going to make their contribution by engaging in combat. The description of the scenes here closely corresponded to conventional gender roles of men going off to fight and women keeping the home fires burning and doing all they could to support their menfolk. The association between the two become stronger in the following scenes.

A Gift to Wish Him God Speed

Shot: Gifts on table, soldiers filing past. An Auxiliary offers one man a pullover. He pauses to examine the card which bears the message:

"With Best Wishes from Mrs Jones"

He gives a bashful grin and an almost imperceptible shake of his head as he replies:-

Can I have one from a Miss?

He gets what he asked for and moves on with every appearance of satisfaction.¹¹⁸

Here, conventional gender roles form the basis for this scene. Members of the Auxiliary service engaged in knitting, a traditional female pastime. In addition the young soldier was not keen to accept a pullover from a "Mrs Jones" - a married and possibly older woman, but instead wished for a pullover knitted by a single woman. This ties in to an article appearing in the monthly magazine *The Women's Auxiliary*, which described the actions of the S.A.W.A.S. where soldiers looking for specific women they have met at any one instance were able to turn to the S.A.W.A.S. to track them down. This role of the S.A.W.A.S. was represented as that of a "dating service" where soldiers were able to arrange meetings with prospective wives.¹¹⁹

Moreover the film *Service* made a strong appeal to duty – it was the duty of South African women to free their men to fight by joining the respective Auxiliary services in service to their country:

Beach Scene

Shot: BETTY, JOAN and three other girls coming up from the water.

BETTY says:- This is our last idle morning. We are joining up to-morrow to help win the war.

Shot: The scene is the yard where the cars are parked. Close up of a car, a girls' bent over form is seen. She straightens herself and looks up from her job of cleaning and

¹¹⁷ Shot 2 – the quote of which I omitted - is a scene with a "wealthier home" when compared to Shot 1.

¹¹⁸ *Service*. p3.

¹¹⁹ Documentation Centre – Department of Defence Archives. H.H. Huxham. "He Wanted a Wife – the S.A.W.A.S. Found Her" in *The Women's Auxiliary*, August 1942, Issue 24, p25.

oiling. She turns round a broad grin on her face, which we see has a big black smear on it. We recognise JOAN.¹²⁰

In this scene an attempt was made to reconcile the notion of women working at previously male-dominated tasks such as repairing vehicles. The notion of women being idle prior to the outbreak of war, and their subsequent sense of accomplishment achieved by carrying out their duty, was represented by the character "Joan", where satisfaction at playing her part in the war effort was signified by her smile. The smear on her face caused by her work on the car, united the formerly male task with her own femininity, perhaps working in a propaganda film to create a sense of acceptance on the part of the viewer for the new roles adopted by women in a time of need.

With the end of the war and the victory of the Allied Forces, *We Are Grateful* was produced by African Film Productions with the aim of thanking South Africans for their contribution to victory.¹²¹ Along with images of flag waving and people celebrating and cheering, was Smuts sitting at a table and facing the camera, "To the soldiers and the war workers victory and the gratitude of the country has been its own reward". This implied that service to the country and the Allies was its own reward with no indication that more material concessions would be made post-war.¹²² Smuts went on to acknowledge the role of women:

With them [volunteers on the home front] were women – women in uniform who came forward to fill the places left by enlisted men. There were services at home that had to be maintained and our women maintained them. They left their homes, their dearly bought leisure to perform a thousand tasks in the service of their country.¹²³

Smuts further acknowledged the role of volunteer workers in the form of the Red Cross or older women who made packages for troops, knitted and provided entertainment and food, after which the film ends.¹²⁴ No mention was made of black servicemen at all, signalling the conservatism which would be the hallmark of a post-war South Africa. However, although *We Are Grateful* seemed to herald a pre-war conservatism, all the films discussed had an inherent conservatism regarding both the roles of black men and of white women. The status quo was maintained in terms of gendered and racialised labour distinctions as well as the temporary nature of women's war work. Moreover the films seemed to serve as an alienating device for

¹²⁰ *Service*. p13-14.

¹²¹ NFVSA. *We Are Grateful*. African Film Productions Ltd. South African National Defence Force. FA 21.

¹²² *We Are Grateful*.

¹²³ *We Are Grateful*.

¹²⁴ *We Are Grateful*.

black servicemen and black people in general who did not form the cheering crowds and parades, culminating in *We Are Grateful*. For white male combatants, the war was presented as sanitised, with none of the discomfort, injury and death associated with war. An effort was made to create a sense of unity between English and Afrikaans-speaking white South Africans which tensions on the home front, in the form of the rise of right wing Afrikaner nationalism, seemed to belie. For white women working in industry and the Auxiliary Services, the war was presented as simultaneously empowering in terms of the new opportunities afforded women, as well as conservative by placing these new opportunities within older gendered frameworks. This was a contradiction that was borne out by the film script of *Service*.

The role of these films during the Second World War was symbolic of South African society itself. Designed to further recruitment and create a sense of nation, they nevertheless contained and were influenced by the same social tensions and divisions evident in the society from which they originated. If the role of film in nation building is indeed as Andrew Higson described it of:

construct[ing] imaginary bonds which work to hold the peoples of a nation together as a community by dramatising their current fears, anxieties, pleasures and aspirations...[allowing] a diverse and often antagonistic group of peoples...to recognise themselves as a singular body with a common culture, and to oppose themselves to other cultures and communities¹²⁵

then the propaganda films of the Second World War worked in two ways. The first was to allay the fears of South Africans regarding the devastating effects of war on its key participants – white male combatants. Simultaneously, it served to obviate the reservations of protecting privilege and prestige in the face of the social upheaval caused by war by containing a strong conservatism regarding both the role of white women and black men. These films served to confirm the status of black men who had enlisted in the NEAS as unskilled labour, taking into cognisance the tensions in industry over the exodus of white men to the front lines. The same applied to white women, but with the added feature of giving much of their work a temporary emphasis in line with the war work done by women all over the world. This confirmed their place in a post-war domestic sphere. By devoting much of the footage to the role of white men and, to an extent, white women in the war, these films gave short shrift to the role of black men. This introduced a discordant note to the ideal of the all-encompassing nation.

¹²⁵ Philip Schlesinger. "The Sociological Scope of 'National Cinema'" in *Cinema and Nation*, Mette Hjort and Scott Mackenzie, eds. (London: Routledge, 2000) p26.

Propaganda as entertainment

Despite the perceived weaknesses of South African propaganda particularly in terms of its ambiguities of race and gender, another medium which impacted upon the creation of identity of South Africans was Hollywood films. South Africa's own film industry had been in decline since the early decades of the twentieth century due to its inability to compete with Hollywood. This was evident in the instance of Union Films which was only able to compete in the limited domestic market when it was tied to the American giant Twentieth Century Fox. This had been a recurring refrain in the South African film industry since its onset.¹²⁶

The focus in the South African film industry on documentary, information and the propaganda films – such as those discussed in the previous section – meant that there was little entertainment value in South African films. This left a gaping hole which the mass entertainment Hollywood productions were able to fill through their domination of the film industry. In this period film-going was a significant pastime, exerting a strong influence on South African audiences.

Although not specifically aimed at South Africans, the widespread release of films made in Hollywood throughout the Allied countries and their popularity dating from the pre-war era, make them a useful area of analysis. Simultaneously the production of films in Hollywood was marked by collaboration between studio executives and the American propaganda agency, the Office of War Information. The heavy influence of government in the production of films, ostensibly solely for entertainment value, gave a strong propagandistic element to studio releases. Many of these films overtly dealt with themes of war. The international dimension of Hollywood films in terms of its widespread influence had an impact not only on American but Allied society at large – the glamorous profile photographs of the Second World War, which I will discuss later, was just one such example.¹²⁷

Simultaneously, the role of the audience watching these films cannot be ignored. Film is a highly persuasive medium due to its "ability to evoke an immediate emotional response seldom found

¹²⁶ Binedell. "Film and the State". p27.

¹²⁷ Clayton R. Koppes and Gregory D. Black. *Hollywood Goes to War: How Politics, Profits, and Propaganda Shaped World War II Movies*. (New York: The Free Press, 1987) pvii, 2.

in other mass media".¹²⁸ These films may have had a tremendous influence in terms of fashion and behaviour. However this is not a one-sided process where the audience are simply able to be manipulated into following the ideology propagated by these films:

...actual audiences are not simply effects of the films which they watch...For the movie-goer, movie-going is only one activity alongside others such as work, education, family relations, sex, shopping, watching TV etc. This suggests that social subjects are formed through multiple different practices, and as a result it suggests that their responses to a film are shaped by their previous history, not simply through their encounter with the film text...¹²⁹

These films therefore, while having an enormous impact, do not close off all possible responses on the part of the audience – responses that may in fact challenge the dominant ideology.

Hollywood entertainment films were often shown in conjunction with the newsreels compiled in South Africa and abroad and, along with other forms of recreational activities, were an important feature of the leisure time of troops serving abroad. Films were seen as a necessary and a popular distraction from the war as evident in the work of the Union Defence Force Institutes, responsible for the recreational activities aimed at troops abroad. Their description of the impact of cinema on South African troops indicated the importance of film as entertainment and a distraction from war:

The boredom and loneliness of serving for weeks at a time in this inhospitable region, the shock received when a man underwent his first baptism of fire – these took their toll too and had to be faced and, not less realistically, had to be overcome. What men saw with their eyes had so registered itself upon the screen of their memories that many of them needed to be brought back to the place where they could recover their former balance of perspective. Nothing we had yet discovered in the desert could make this possible in the same way as cinema entertainment. The mobile cinema, of which we had fifteen operating at full blast in Egypt, Syria, Palestine and the Western Desert, helped to solve this problem and brought healing of the mind and spirit to thousands of men who had come back with minds distraught and spirits depressed and hopeless. These shows were given in rock-caves, under improvised awnings, and in all sorts of places. The effect on the men was almost magical. They entered in silence, thoroughly weary, and after three hours show, they emerged laughing and completely changed in appearance...To enjoy a good laugh together, to be introduced to the world they knew best – these provided the best antidote to 'nerves' and to depression. Many men found mental and spiritual release in this way during their few days rest and recuperation.¹³⁰

It is evident that great lengths were taken to show these films due to their function in maintaining morale under highly adverse conditions. Films were flown from Johannesburg by air and shown with the aid of projectors carried by "mobile cinema vans" in open-air showings,

¹²⁸ Jowett and O'Donnell. *Propaganda and Persuasion*. p113.

¹²⁹ Paul McDonald. "Star Studies" in *Approaches to Popular Film*. Joanne Hollows and Mark Jancovich, eds. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995) p91.

¹³⁰ Ponsford. *War Record of Union Defence Force Institutes*. p4-5.

weather conditions permitting. Where available, electricity was obtained from the nearest town but, should this not have been option, the vans were equipped with generators. The audiences, composed largely of servicemen, were enormous – ranging from about two hundred to almost a thousand men at any one showing.¹³¹ The attempt to overcome logistical problems, particularly near the frontlines, demonstrates the value placed on showing these films and, as such, it is important to assess the ideas propagated by these films.

Even before the United States officially entered the war after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour on December 7, 1941, "war films" were already being released. Perhaps, in an attempt to drum up support for a war after the horror of "the war to end all wars", was *Sergeant York* which premiered in New York in July 1941. *Sergeant York* was an attempt to re-envision the First World War in the conventional heroic mode despite the crashing down of the illusions of glorious warfare brought about by the incredible casualties, men suffering from "shell shock" and the graphic descriptions of life and death on the front evident in literature and poetry. *Sergeant York* premiered to tremendous fanfare. The real life York on whom the character was based "marched down Broadway, escorted by an honour guard of World War I veterans", and was taken to meet President Roosevelt at the White House.¹³² The film itself dealt with the notion of the lone hero responsible for killing and capturing numerous enemy soldiers. "York", a pacifist before the war, was nevertheless compelled to fight out of a sense of patriotism and duty. For those who were persuaded by the film's themes of honour and glory, the army handed out recruitment pamphlets on both York and military service, explicitly connecting Hollywood with the war.¹³³ The film was not without its detractors – America had a long history of isolationism and a proponent of this policy, Senator Nye, vocally criticised the propaganda nature of Hollywood films, purporting to be entertainment and misleading viewers regarding the nature of war: "Films did not show men 'crouching in the mud...English, Greek, and German boys disembowelled, blown to bits. You see them merely marching in their bright uniforms, firing the beautiful guns at distant targets'". This was a convention that was as prevalent in South African propaganda films.¹³⁴ The martial fervour that gripped the United States in the wake of Pearl Harbour however, soon put paid to the voices of dissent.

¹³¹ Ponsford. *War Record of Union Defence Force Institutes*. p13.

¹³² Koppes and Black. *Hollywood Goes to War*. p37-39.

¹³³ Koppes and Black. *Hollywood Goes to War*. p39.

¹³⁴ Koppes and Black. *Hollywood Goes to War*. p40.

Britain too was not without her own film industry. Although Hollywood films dominated British cinemas, providing the escapism, technical finesse and glamour lacking from British films, Britain also produced her own films about the war for domestic as well as international audiences.¹³⁵ The British industry, like the South African industry, had found it difficult to compete with the Hollywood film-making machine:

The great majority of films in distribution were American. Even the Board of Trade's quota legislation, which required distributors to show a proportion of British films, was modified in July 1940 so that the obligatory percentage was lowered from 22½ percent to 14 percent. The British film industry had been declining during the thirties and after the outbreak of war it was to be handicapped even further by shortage of materials and staff.¹³⁶

Initially, at the outbreak of war, British middle class films were an inaccurate reflection of the true threat posed by the Nazis and what it would require from the British people to meet this threat. They focused instead on "British middle class virtues" of "decency" and fair play and were silent on the potential chaos and destruction of war.¹³⁷ And, by and large, British audiences found themselves unmoved by British film:

...the quality of many of [British-made films] was poor, hidebound as they were by the insularity and class-ridden nature of British society, a liability paralleled to some degree by the isolation of national art and music from the continent and America. In general, Hollywood demonstrated both greater technical finesse in film-making and a greater sense of glamour in presentation of the movie stars who were likely to attract the audiences.¹³⁸

One British film which was a tremendous success and a hallmark in British film-making was *The Immortal Battalion*, made in 1944, directed by Carol Reed¹³⁹ and starring David Niven, one of the British actors who was popular on both sides of the Atlantic. It was given an international release with particular emphasis on an American audience.¹⁴⁰ Known as *The Way Ahead* in Britain, this film is particularly important as it helped prepare Allied audiences for the hardships of war.

To appeal to American audiences, the film contained an introduction where parallels were drawn between the Minute Men of the American Revolution and the civilian men of Britain who were

¹³⁵ Clive Coultass. *Images for Battle: British Film and the Second World War, 1939-1945*. (New Jersey: Associated University Presses, 1989) p11.

¹³⁶ Clive Coultass. "British Feature Films and the Second World War" in *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol 19, No 1, "Historians and Movies: The state of the Art: Part 2 (January, 1984) p10.

¹³⁷ Coultass. "British Feature Films and the Second World War" p11.

¹³⁸ Coultass. *Images for Battle*. p11.

¹³⁹ Coultass. "British Feature Films and the Second World War" p18-19.

¹⁴⁰ Carol Reed. *The Immortal Battalion*. Two Cities Film, 1944.

joining up to play their role. This conveniently ignored the fact that the Revolution was in fact fought against Britain! The word "immortal" in the title of the film referred to the eternal notion of men going off to fight motivated by honour, glory and patriotism. This was an idealism that was not confined by borders and which allowed the forging of a common identity between men, regardless of time and space, where their deeds would live on in perpetuity: "And that's why it [their deeds] will never become old or dated. It will live as long as courage and decency and faith and democracy live. It shows us the kind of men who will forever and forever fight anyone who tries to destroy our civilisation."¹⁴¹ The film begins by making a claim for a certain way of life and government, as evident in "democracy" and "civilisation" which the great majority of the Allied powers stood for, perceiving themselves to be arrayed against the darkness symbolised by the totalitarian regimes of the Axis powers.

The film itself follows a group of civilian British men as they sign up for the army and go through the training process in preparation for actual combat against the Axis in North Africa. By tracing this process, *The Immortal Battalion* draws a contrast between civilian life and the transformative process of military training. When the volunteers gather prior to leaving for the barracks one man speaks disparagingly of the army as a disciplinary institution which dehumanises men, in contrast to the "independent-minded" civilian. This acknowledges the strength of democracy, egalitarianism and individual liberty of which American society was so proud, with the United States criticising the more hierarchical nature of British society.¹⁴² It also refers to the British disdain for a standing army as well as the earlier nefarious reputation of soldiers in the nineteenth century where the typical perception of the enlisted soldier in a climate of a strict moral ideology and growing social intervention was a negative one:

One of the groups of people whose occupation and lifestyle left them on the edge of this moral code was soldiers. Their overcrowded and communal housing, their high mobility and reputation for promiscuous sexuality were all a manifestation of their potential or actual failure to adhere to the domestic ideology.¹⁴³

The prospect of war is not presented in a positive light in the film at all. Civilians are shown complaining about the forthcoming hardships in terms of petrol shortages and rationing. One of the recruits, whose wife had taken his place on the farm, was unhappy about the prospect of her

¹⁴¹ Carol Reed. *The Immortal Battalion*. Two Cities Film, 1944.

¹⁴² Coultass. *Images for Battle*. p12.

¹⁴³ Myna Trustram. *Women of the Regiment: Marriage and the Victorian Army*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984) p9.

engaging in heavy manual labour or a "man's work": "She's better looking than me but not for that kind of work", suggesting the disjuncture between delicate femininity and masculine work.¹⁴⁴ The recruits themselves found it difficult to adjust to military routine and work, constantly petulant about their Sergeant-Major, ditch-digging, KP duty, long marches and inspection, while missing their old ways of life – one of the men constantly re-reads his letters from home with the paper practically falling apart. They draw parallels with the discipline and dehumanisation of the army and convicts, bemoaning their lack of freedom and "independence".

Their complaints are taken in stride as the norm for soldiers and the Sergeant-Major informs the commanding officer that they have the potential to be great soldiers. It is only when they abandon a training exercise and return to barracks that their CO delivers an impassioned speech, citing the glorious history of the regiment against Napoleon and in the First World War. It is up to these men to uphold the honour of the regiment of which they were part as well as prove themselves reliable to the other men – a brotherhood whose lives depended on each other. This inspires the recruits to greater efforts and their return to civilian society on leave finds them extolling the virtues of regimental life to civilians in a complete about-turn from their previous beliefs.¹⁴⁵

Several kinds of relationships are evident in *The Immortal Battalion*. The first is that between the men themselves, coming together from diverse works of life and united in their initial reluctance to conform to military life and their ultimate pride in the regiment. There is also an antagonistic relationship between the recruits and the Sergeant-Major who has the thankless task of "toughening" them up to face the ravages of war. This is ultimately resolved when he is rescued by one of the men after being trapped under a piece of fallen equipment. The CO – originating from the upper classes – is the paternalistic figure to whom the men go with their complaints and who, in a protective moment, checks on them as they lay in their hammocks unable to sleep through the explosions in the distance. Although many of the men are married with children, the women in the film have little impact. They are portrayed in the conventional image on the train platforms with young children, waving goodbye to men going off to war, or as nurturers working in the canteen or allowing the recruits to retire to the comforts of home during their training – an elderly woman provides them with food and a hot bath weekly. From the outset of

¹⁴⁴ Carol Reed. *The Immortal Battalion*. Two Cities Film, 1944.

¹⁴⁵ Carol Reed. *The Immortal Battalion*. Two Cities Film, 1944.

the film, they are credited as "The Wives" with little individuality, and the "Wives Committee" of the film represents the women at home trying to learn news of their husbands away on the frontlines. Ultimately *The Immortal Battalion* emphasises the relationships between men in the army, placing women on the fringes of this all-male world.¹⁴⁶

The film ends with the men in North Africa eager to fight. However their first skirmish results in them facing overwhelming odds. Nevertheless they insert their bayonets and valiantly march forward through a haze of smoke to face the German advance. The outcome is not portrayed as it is not important to the film's overall emphasis on heroism and defiance against the odds, but the message is clear:

This is not the story of the past, it's a story of the future. It shows us the kind of men democracies have produced and will continue to produce. Those who turn their backs upon civilian life, who gave up the quiet joys of peaceful living, to accept the discipline, the danger and the glory of army life.¹⁴⁷

The Immortal Battalion highlights important themes of the tradition of heroism and self-sacrifice in the all-male world of the military. Variations of these themes appeared in the great majority of the war films of the era. One of them, the American film *A Guy Named Joe*, allowed for the greater participation of women in the war effort. Directed by Victor Fleming, released in 1943 and starring Spencer Tracy and Irene Dunne, *A Guy Named Joe* was set in the pre-Pearl Harbour era.¹⁴⁸ The use of stars such as Spencer Tracy and Gary Cooper in films is particularly important when stars such as James Stewart drew further attention to the war effort by enlisting. These stars were more than actors – they enjoyed huge popular appeal and, as such, they become the conduit through which ideology operated. They were the heroes and heroines of war.¹⁴⁹ Thus, if ideology made use of the instruments of mass communication such as film, there was no better way to propagandize than through entertainment of which glamorous Hollywood stars were an integral part:

What the Hollywood industry did so well was to provide morale-building films for consumption on the home front and overseas, for during the war, entertainment was not only a luxury but an emotional necessity. American films managed to develop a most potent combination of being able to entertain and propagandize at the same time, thus 'getting the message across' while also attracting the large audiences that obvious propaganda and documentary films were seldom able to do.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁶ Carol Reed. *The Immortal Battalion*. Two Cities Film, 1944.

¹⁴⁷ Carol Reed. *The Immortal Battalion*. Two Cities Film, 1944.

¹⁴⁸ *Variety Movie Guide*. Derek Elley, ed. (London: The Hamlyn Publishing Group, 1991) p249.

¹⁴⁹ Paul McDonald. "Star Studies". p80.

¹⁵⁰ Jowett and O'Donnell. *Propaganda and Persuasion*. p120.

A Guy Named Joe revolved around the relationship between an American pilot flying in Britain played by Tracy and his girlfriend who was a WAAF pilot. His true love is flying which he describes as the only time a man is “really alive” and “free”. He is killed in action and returns as a sort of heavenly guardian angel, training young men to fly in the Air Force. It is here that he once again sees his girlfriend, played by Dunne, and has to come to terms with allowing her to move on from his death with the young pilot who is his charge.¹⁵¹

In one of the earlier scenes of the film he buys her a beautiful dress with “I’ve never seen you in a real dress, remember”. She disappears upstairs to change out of her uniform and, when she returns, making a stately descent down the staircase, the men in the room are still, appreciative of her beauty and femininity. Tracy’s character, “Pete”, remarks, “It makes me realise you’re a girl rather than a sky-flying cowboy.” This, when she had not received similar attention while in uniform, served to confirm that the rightful place of women lay not in uniform but in the attire of glamorous femininity which is where they would get the most appreciation from men. “Pete” also disapproved of her job as a pilot due to her gender, “You know how I feel about women in the air, promise me you’ll get a desk job”. Her reply was, “Wrong place, wrong time”, suggesting that war was an exceptional period, albeit a temporary aberration, which allowed women to take on roles that would be frowned upon in a society at peace – her work was thus a necessary evil.¹⁵²

This theme of somewhat conservative femininity was emphasised in a subsequent scene where she worries about the danger of “Pete’s” flying missions. In response he quotes a line of poetry to her, “Men must work and women must weep”. This upheld the conventional stereotype of women waiting passively at home while men went off to fight, despite the Second World War creating an environment where women were actively called on to serve in non-combatant roles. When he is eventually killed, she plays out this stereotype by stoically accepting his demise, taking on an appearance of passivity and resignation.¹⁵³

A Guy Named Joe also holds similar stereotypical attitudes towards the role of men in war. Dunne’s fear of Tracy’s work leads her to make him promise to return to the United States with

¹⁵¹ Victor Fleming. *A Guy Named Joe*. Loew’s Inc and Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1943.

¹⁵² Victor Fleming. *A Guy Named Joe*. Loew’s Inc and Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1943.

¹⁵³ Victor Fleming. *A Guy Named Joe*. Loew’s Inc and Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1943.

her where he could go work as an instructor. While discussing the matter with his best friend, his feeling is that leaving Britain where he had the chance to engage in combat and returning to the U.S. would be akin to "go[ing] home and crawl[ing] under the bed for the duration". This served to create a black and white dichotomy of combat or cowardice.¹⁵⁴ When he reluctantly agrees to adhere to her wishes he is subsequently killed on the last mission, sacrificing himself to kill the enemy, leaving intact the notion of a heroic death in combat.

The film takes a surreal turn when he goes to a heaven which consists of pilots killed who now perform as guardian angels under the leadership of a great commander. As invisible entities they fly alongside recruits guiding them. The film emphasises the passing of a tradition of flying and of these men even after death continuing their sacrifice to save the lives of others. His first mission as an angel brings him into contact with a commander who adopts a pragmatic attitude towards combat – he claims his role is not "training men to die" but "training men to live" with no place for "budding heroes". One of the recruits cites "Pete's" example of a glorious death in combat where he was awarded the DSC posthumously and the commander's response was that "it came too late". "Pete's" reaction was that he "doesn't like his attitude".¹⁵⁵ The film creates a distinction between glory, personified by "Pete", and the pragmatic world view offered by the commander, with the former ultimately taking pride of place.

The film idealises the death of young pilots as them dying doing what they love doing best and, when "Pete's" charge "Randall" is caught engaging in daredevil stunts, rather than being reprimanded, he is given a dangerous mission. "Hot-dogging" is equated with courage, making him the ideal fighter pilot. It is here that Dunne's character comes into her own, creating a break with the conventional typecast of the passive woman, albeit in uniform. She steals the plane to prevent "Randall" from going with the intention of carrying out the mission herself. As her guide, "Pete" is initially disapproving, telling her that her own aspirations to be equal to male pilots is a sign of her wilfulness and is putting the lives of men in jeopardy. She is motivated by individual rather than group concerns, making her selfish. He refers to her patronisingly as a "good flyer" but one who is simply not the equal of her male counterparts. However, when she reaches the point of no return, he supports her and she is able to carry out the mission. On her return she hears the heavenly choir of the pilots' heaven suggesting that it is no longer a male

¹⁵⁴ Victor Fleming. *A Guy Named Joe*. Loew's Inc and Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1943.

¹⁵⁵ Victor Fleming. *A Guy Named Joe*. Loew's Inc and Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1943.

preserve.¹⁵⁶ *A Guy Named Joe* therefore has a more than ambiguous attitude towards women in the military, holding uneasily to conventional perceptions of femininity along with the changes in women's roles brought about by war. Although Dunne's character is ultimately successful in taking on a male role, it is done within a framework of disapproval signified by Tracy's conservative "Pete".

In addition to the films themselves, Hollywood's female stars were role models emulated by women all over the world. Towards the war years it was apparent that the collusion of the OWI and the film industry had created a convention for the portrayal of actresses in film:

No longer are actresses pictured as leisurely, luxury-loving dolls. Today's femme star or player is as virile as the men – shown washing dishes in canteens, sweeping, hefting five-gallon coffee cans, doing hundreds of other things to prove she can take it, that she's doing her share in the war effort. Jewels, clothes, luxury are out – screenlady today is conscious...minimize theatrical qualities, magnify human attributes...¹⁵⁷

The war work of women, showcased by actresses, was emulated in the films themselves with them taking up positions in the work place and relieving men for frontline duty. They were portrayed as independently managing their new roles as waged labourers and family breadwinners, in many ways similar to the South African propaganda film *Service*, which I have discussed earlier.¹⁵⁸ The opportunities open to women for this independence, although being somewhat tempered by the notion of war work as temporary work and conventional gender role preconceptions, still provided tremendous scope for women in war work as evident in *A Guy Named Joe*.

Unfortunately for black men, the situation was less than ambiguous. African Americans appeared in the small minority of war films in roles that did not challenge but only served to confirm racial stereotypes and their subservience to whites. This was evident, in fact, in their limited military roles. The Office of War Information itself was forced to concur with this bleak picture:

...in general, Negroes are presented as basically different from other people, as taking no relevant part in the life of the nation, as offering nothing, contributing nothing, expecting nothing.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁶ Victor Fleming. *A Guy Named Joe*. Loew's Inc and Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1943.

¹⁵⁷ Michael Renov. *Hollywood's Wartime Women: Representation and Ideology*. (Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1988) p64.

¹⁵⁸ Koppes and Black. *Hollywood Goes to War*. p69.

¹⁵⁹ Koppes and Black. *Hollywood Goes to War*. p179.

Being portrayed as less than citizens, without the roles and social responsibilities of citizenship, mirrored their treatment in American public life where black soldiers were segregated within the military as was their blood plasma. On the home front, they were not allowed access to many public spaces, a situation that did not apply to the actual enemy, white German prisoners-of-war.¹⁶⁰ For South Africans watching these films, this served to confirm the second-class status of black people, even those who had volunteered for the war effort.

White men were not portrayed unambiguously in these films either. Yet their portrayal, although equally clichéd, was far more positive. As evident in *The Immortal Battalion* and *A Guy Named Joe*, men were shown being drawn together from various works of life, forming a brotherhood based on shared experiences and a dependence on each other. Portrayed as noble soldiers without a predisposition for killing – that was left to the Germans and particularly the Japanese – these characters were depicted as reluctant heroes, unwilling to kill and only doing so in a morally unambiguous fashion or when driven to do so by enemy excesses.¹⁶¹ They were placed into the mould of clichéd heroes, dying in a blaze of glory, sacrificing themselves so that others may live, and the truth of their experiences was obscured:

Few pictures...dared breathe what everyone knew but found hard to voice aloud – that death was random and success only partly related to one's desserts. Faced with some of the most profound of human experiences, Hollywood and OWI could only graft the prepackaged emotions of the success story onto the war.¹⁶²

Film or the moving image is rather different to the photograph as "a still photograph is literally an arrested development which can only suggest the events occurring before or after the film was exposed, or beyond the camera's range". This leaves greater possibilities for interpretation whereas the film functions, to an extent, to close these possibilities off, containing within it a complete narrative with past, present and future.¹⁶³ Still film has its origins in the photograph and its ability to capture "reality":

The invention of photography...finally satisfied the demand (which other visual arts had long attempted to meet) for a magical process which would order and process the natural world by capturing its image, and resist the ravages in time by 'fixing' the image of a single moment. Photography satisfied this need more conclusively than, for example, painting, because its mechanical nature made it absorb the features of the

¹⁶⁰ Koppes and Black. *Hollywood Goes to War*. p86.

¹⁶¹ Koppes and Black. *Hollywood Goes to War*. p307.

¹⁶² Koppes and Black. *Hollywood Goes to War*. p308-309.

¹⁶³ Perkins. *Film as Film*. p40.

visible world without interpretation: the personality of the artist did not intervene between the world and its image.¹⁶⁴

The alienation of the various segments of South African society, evident in the newsreels, were emulated to some extent in official photographs created by the Union Defence Force which still retained room for ambiguity, leaving them a little more open to interpretation.

A picture is worth a thousand words: official war photographs

These photographs are somewhat limited as a source due to their lack of context. They exist as isolated negatives in the defence force archives from which prints are made and subsequently given hand-written captions. Some of these official images appeared in secondary sources written about the war such as Ian Gleeson's *The Unknown Force* or in primary official sources such as *Complex Country*. However I have been unable to find any information about the way in which they were created, the photographers involved or the circumstances of their reproduction. Little exists other than their captions. Still the images are important as they depict the way in which the military imagined the identity of the men and women in the Union Defence Force and, in many instances, the conventions of these images were reproduced in private photographs. At the same time they provide an interesting point of comparison with the personal photographs that I will be discussing in subsequent chapters as they allow for an interrogation of the way in which official military photographs perceived the role of men and women in the military and the way in which these same men and women made sense of their own roles.

It is photography's indexical nature, which has made it the ideal instrument of propaganda. Reaching a peak in the twentieth century with the mass production and circulation of images, photography was associated from its outset with notions of empiricism and scientific truth. According to Roland Barthes, the defining feature of photography was its relation to the referent – for a photographic image to be taken the image has to be present in front of the lens of the camera, it has to have existed at a particular space and point in time:

From this emerges the time-specific characteristic of the photograph. It deals with *what was*, regardless of whether the terms or conditions continue to obtain.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁴ Perkins. *Film as Film*. p28-29.

¹⁶⁵ Derrick Price and Liz Wells. "Thinking about Photography: debates, historically and now" in *Photography: A Critical Discussion*. Liz Wells, ed. (London: Routledge, 2001) p29.

A simple definition of photography is that it is:

The recording of images on sensitized material, by means of visible light, X-rays, or other radiation, and the subsequent chemical processing.¹⁶⁶

In a very powerful sense therefore, not only does photography refer to an object that existed at a particular point in time, an actual physical trace of the object in terms of the light reflecting from it has created the image. The object has therefore left a tangible element of itself in the photograph.

Thus in terms of demonstrating the existence of an object – even if it no longer exists – photographs were seen to be representative of truth and reality:

[Photography] was celebrated for its putative ability to produce accurate images of what was in front of its lens, images which were seen as being mechanically produced and thus free of the selective discriminations of the human eye and hand.¹⁶⁷

This is the notion of truth, which makes photography such a powerful instrument of propaganda. The viewer is expected to take an image at face value, divorced from context, which would entail a more critical engagement with the image – when was it produced, by whom and for what purpose? In Caroline Brothers' discussion of the use of photography during the Spanish Civil War, she analyses photography's truth value and considers the implications for its disconnection from context:

Focusing attention on the contents of a photograph, on its indexical link with a particular reality at the moment of capture, ignores both the circumstances of the image's production and the context in which it is ascribed a meaning...Trading on the special relationship to the truth which all photographs claim for themselves and constantly proclaiming their objectivity, these pictures consistently reinforced partisan views and ideological positions over Spain.¹⁶⁸

Contextualising photographs is a further challenge due to the way in which images are produced. Photographs are images taken out of context – a disruption in the flow of time as it were – however a photograph considered meaningful to the viewer is one that constructs a sense of narrative. The image is taken to give a sense of past and future even if it is at odds with the reality:

¹⁶⁶ *Macmillan Concise Encyclopedia*. A. Isaacs, E. Martin and D. Pickering, eds., (Aylesbury: Market House Books Ltd., 1991) p563.

¹⁶⁷ Price and Wells. "Thinking about Photography". p13.

¹⁶⁸ Caroline Brothers. *War and Photography – A cultural history*. (New York: Routledge, 1997) p161.

The professional photographer tries, when taking a photograph, to choose an instant which will persuade the public viewer to lend it an *appropriate* past and future.¹⁶⁹

The word *appropriate* is significant in the quote above as it implies some form of intervention on the part of the photographer. The photograph is an isolated instant devoid of a past and future except for the one given to it by the photographer in terms of framing, subject matter and, particularly, the use of captions to give a sense of time and place. For Clarke, the seeming neutrality of the photograph is undermined by the desire to control, create meaning and impose structure in the world around – a feature which is particularly relevant in conflict by creating a simplified dichotomy of “us” and “them” and the distinctions and potential for difference this may entail.¹⁷⁰

According to Brothers, propaganda images do not occur in isolation but are a product of a particular society and in turn seek to influence that society’s perceptions. For an image to be persuasive it needs to be recognizable in some way. Brothers’ perception of propaganda is that it therefore tells us less about what it attempts to depict than about the society which has given rise to it:

Inflected and adapted to ensure maximum persuasive effect, they [propaganda photographs] speak directly to the cultural concerns of the society at which they are directed, both in the subjects chosen for representation and in the way those subjects are portrayed. Such images, it is argued, provide but minimal information about what they literally depict; they reflect far more richly upon the attitudes and preoccupations of the society that deploys them.¹⁷¹

It is with this in mind that I wish to look at the official photographs produced of the participants of the war in the various branches of military service – white women, white men and black men.

In the United States the iconographic image associating women with war work during the Second World War was *Rosie the Riveter* created by Norman Rockwell. In Melissa Dabakis’ analysis of the image she reveals that the figure of *Rosie* did not serve as an uncomplicated symbol of female empowerment through waged labour. Instead the image was far more ambiguous, revealing both an ambiguous attitude toward women in the workplace as well as a desire to recruit women, while simultaneously accommodating the temporary nature of women’s

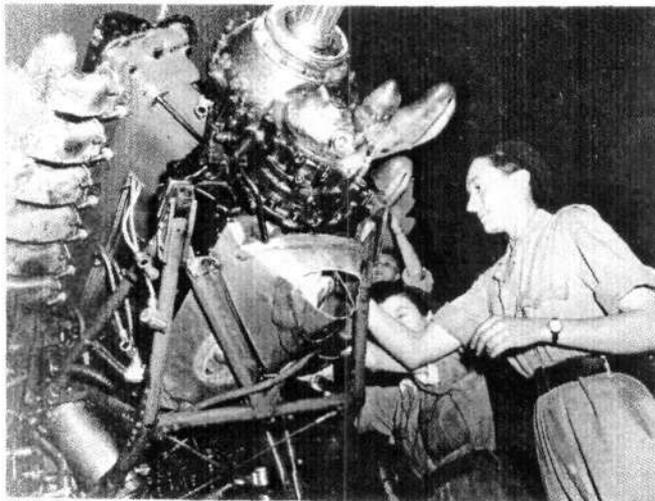
¹⁶⁹ John Berger. “Appearances” in *Another Way of Looking*. Berger, J. and Mohr, J., eds. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982) p89.

¹⁷⁰ Graham Clark. *The Photograph*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press) p11.

¹⁷¹ Brothers. *War Photography*. p2.

war work. *Rosie the Riveter* had a physique which was almost masculine – symbolising “resistance and empowerment” – in appearance yet, at the same time, was equipped with the accoutrements of her gender, “which signified submission and containment”, suggesting an uneasy co-existence between the two gendered characteristics.¹⁷²

Although South African propaganda did not create an image as iconographic as the American *Rosie the Riveter* in terms of having an immediately identifiable figure, nevertheless photographs of women at work demonstrate a similar ambiguity. In the following chapter I will discuss the uneasy co-existence of androgynous and feminine type figures as evident in the *Winnie the WAAF* cartoons appearing in *WAAFS*.



Images courtesy of Documentation Centre – Department of Defence Archives: *SA WW2* and *WAAF Meteorological Pilot SA, WW2771-3091*.

As in all the Allied, and some of the Axis countries as well, photographs appeared depicting women at work in roles that were new to them, stepping into gaps left by enlisting men. The image of the left simply titled “SA, WW2” is of WAAF mechanics working on an aircraft, a “traditionally” male role. The woman in the foreground emphasises practicality for her job with overalls, a functional, as opposed to decorative, watch and her hair – a defining feature of femininity – obscured by a cap. The image on the right is of a “WAAF meteorological pilot SA, WW2”. It depicts a female pilot in the cockpit of a plane wearing a leather jacket, helmet and goggles. This image is highly reminiscent of female pilots of the early twentieth century such as

¹⁷² Melissa Dabakis. “Gendered Labor: Norman Rockwell’s *Rosie the Riveter* and the Discourses of Wartime Womanhood” in *Gender and American History Since 1890*. Barbara Melosh, ed. (London: Routledge, 1993) p196.

Amelia Earhart, creating a romanticised vision of the adventurer pilot which is slightly dampened by her job as a meteorological pilot. In addition, by depicting the pilot within the context of an already existing visual paradigm, there is the sense that her role in the war was not a new or ground-breaking one but one which, to an extent, constrains the gendered empowerment of the image.

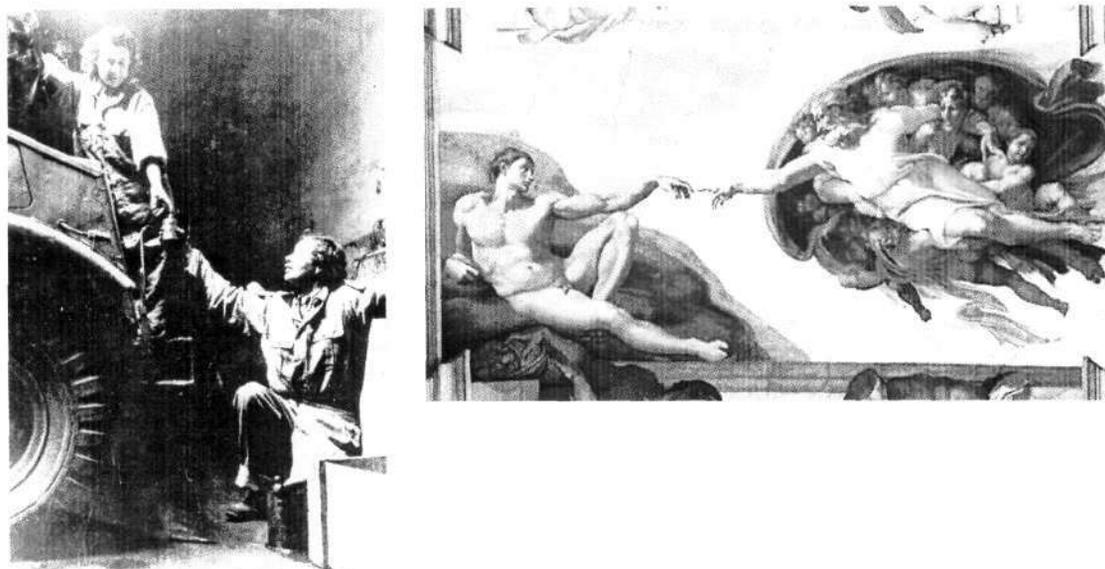


Image on the left courtesy of Documentation Centre – Department of Defence Archives: *Women Mechanics*, 801-1185 and picture *Creation of Adam* by Michelangelo obtained from <http://sun.science.wayne.edu/~mcogan/Humanities/Sistine/Panels/adam.jpg>, accessed June 18, 2004, 13:01.

The photograph above of “Women Mechanics” is an interesting one aesthetically. Its depiction of two women mechanics with hands outstretched towards each other in the process of exchanging a piece of equipment bears remarkable resemblance to the Renaissance image “Creation of Adam” produced by Michelangelo for the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. This resemblance is made stronger by the lighting of the photograph which, from above, bathes the women and carries an almost religious overtone. It gives an impression of their work being an almost higher calling, the pleasing aesthetic of the image portraying an otherwise unglamorous job in a highly positive light.



Images courtesy of Documentation Centre – Department of Defence Archives: *Nurses and Dietary Assistants Prepare Food at 108 SA General Hospital, Italy, WW2*, 761-1707 and *Women Repair Damaged Clothes*, 801-1187.

Alongside images of women engaging in roles which crossed conventional gender boundaries, existed images of them working in more conventional positions, which also formed a large part of women's war work. The photograph on the right "Nurses and Dietary Assistants Prepare Food at 108 SA General Hospital, Italy, WW2" depicts Women's Auxiliary Army Services women cutting, peeling and cooking vegetables at tables in the outdoors. It is similar to scenes found in the film *She Helps to Heal* that I have discussed earlier. Camaraderie amongst the women is evident as is their apparent contentment engaging in domestic chores, with the ultimate aim of nurturing wounded men. Most of these women are wearing aprons over their uniforms that suggest the dominance of the domestic over the military, lessening the possibility of their military service creating a permanent change or, in fact, any change in their gender roles.

The contentment of the previous image is significantly absent from the photograph on the right "Women Repair Damaged Clothes". The women are in a dreary environment – the sewing machines, heaps of clothes and drab surroundings bring to mind an image of a factory. The women are at sewing machines concentrating with their heads down and not looking at the camera. Their concentration on their tasks precludes the contentment or camaraderie evident in the previous photograph. It is a somewhat ambiguous image in terms of its portrayal of women at work. It does not show any happiness on the part of these women and, with the exception of the woman in the foreground, the women remain in shadow with little sign of individuality. While suggesting a dedication to their war work and sewing as a conventional role for women, the almost factory-like environment has strong working-class connotations, yet, should it serve as propaganda, there is little to attract women for this kind of work.



Image courtesy of Documentation Centre – Department of Defence Archives: *NMC Hospital*, 811-670.
[Date of photograph unknown]

An image I found particularly interesting is that of the “NMC Hospital” above. The representation of a white female nurse attending to a black male patient occurred within a highly charged space of gendered and racial interaction where physical contact between the two was a subject of extreme tension. This stemmed from fears of the “Black Peril” – that black men were a threat to the virtue of white women:

...fears about black men coming into contact with white female nurses were shadowed by the creation of a racist discourse of a lowering of standards and a degradation paranoia, which oozed outwards from initial ‘scares’, so that by the 1920s it was less and less acceptable for white hospital officials to expect that any white female nurse would tend any black person, male or female, and vice versa.¹⁷³

This image presented a direct contradiction of contemporary trends of nursing, suggesting that the exigencies of war brought into play a greater flexibility in the interaction between race and gender. However the age of the nurse – she appears to be an older woman – as well as her headgear lessens the “peril” of white hands on black bodies. Her head covering has the religious connotations associated with a nun. It suggests purity and modesty, elevating her from the realm of the physical to the metaphysical. As such, it lessens the disruption to conventionally accepted social interactions between white women and black men brought about by that moment of physical contact. Furthermore, the camera has captured the nurse in the act of handing out food to the patient. It heightens her role as a caregiver and nurturer and simultaneously there is the sense of a power relation implicit in the way she hands out the food and the position of the patient with both hands outstretched to receive it. This suggests that she

¹⁷³ Catherine Burns. “‘A Man is a Clumsy Thing Who does not Know How to Handle a Sick Person’: Aspects of the History of Masculinity and Race in the Shaping of Male Nursing in South Africa, 1900-1950” in *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol 24, No 4, December 1998. p701.

is in a position of higher authority and increases the distance between them, both as the result of their race and of their positions.

The other form of photographs created for both men and women were portrait photographs which bridged the gap between the official and the personal image. The form of these portraits during the Second World War was reminiscent of portraits of Hollywood stars, having similar glamorous connotations. Interestingly enough, the origin of the portrait photographs was not Hollywood but the South African War, which later influenced Hollywood portraiture and, subsequently, images of men and women during the Second World War:

Sometimes photographs of officers [in the South African War] were simply head and shoulders, not in any specific role other than that of celebrity, the property of nation, in soft focus which was later to be adopted as the standard mode of photographic representation of film stars.¹⁷⁴



Images courtesy of Documentation Centre – Department of Defence Archives: *Cpl M Beauchamp, Special Signal Services*, 801-1182 and *Lt P Eaton*, 801-1181.

¹⁷⁴ Steve Attridge. *Nationalism, Imperialism and Identity in Late Victorian Culture: Civil and Military Worlds*. (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003) p57-58.



Photograph courtesy of private collection of May Kirkman

The first two images may be termed official photographs, having their origin in the Department of Defence Archives. The one photograph on the left “Corporal M Beauchamp, Special Signal Services” is of a young smiling woman, her curly hair barely held in check by her cap. It emphasises both youth and femininity and follows the convention of the portrait with her looking into the distance with the light falling on her face. These conventions are also apparent in the photograph on the right simply titled “Lt P Eaton”. Here the figure appears more reserved but, if anything, the conjunction of the lighting and her pose heighten the glamour of the figure, drawing strong parallels with the Hollywood actress publicity shots of the 1930s and 1940s and serving, both to glorify women’s roles in the military, as well as to emphasise their femininity. The final portrait shot was obtained from the personal photo album of May Kirkman and shows her older sister Kay who enlisted in the WAAFS and was stationed in Egypt during the war. The studio photograph, taken in 1941, bears remarkable similarity to the previous two in terms of her pose of looking into the distance rather than directly at the camera as well as the lighting. The photograph suggests that the female participants in the military may have seen themselves in a similar manner to the way in which official sources portrayed them, at least in this context. The convergence of glamour and femininity which also made its

appearance in the Hollywood films of the era – which I have already looked at in this chapter – was apparently a persuasive factor in the recruitment of women for the war effort, drawing on the impact of the Hollywood star.

As I have discussed in earlier research, the emphasis on glamour became even more evident from 1943 onwards, when a shortfall in number of women enlisting led to a shift in propaganda.¹⁷⁵ In a circular on recruiting in October, 1943, Director of Recruiting Colonel G.C.G. Werdmuller emphasised that there had to be a change in the way in which recruiting was carried out – propaganda was no longer effective:

At this stage of the war recruiting, which has always been a specialised task, has become far more difficult than it was during the early stages of hostilities. The old methods of approach such as public meetings, poster, screen and press advertising, have largely lost their value, and it remains for recruiters to employ other means for finding the volunteers now so badly needed.¹⁷⁶

Recruiting was to take on a note of greater personal interaction between recruiter and prospective recruit and the former had to apply the reason for joining which would have most appealed to the individual concerned:

During your talk with a prospect find out what appeals to him most, pay, patriotism, a trade etc., and apply the arguments most likely to convince him. He may have to be contacted several times before he makes up his mind. This must be done where it is necessary.¹⁷⁷

This presents a more clinical and almost manipulative vision of recruiting where the broad sweeping statements such as “fighting the good fight” were no longer applicable. The individual motivations of the recruit had to be taken into account instead. Enhancing this image of a more nuanced attempt at persuasion was the way in which recruiting officers were encouraged to behave in the vicinity of the recruit – as “courteous and amiable” where “overdone militarism is not appreciated by a new recruit”.¹⁷⁸ Hand-in-hand with this policy was the attempt to appeal to the vanity of the recruit by emphasising the glamour of military service, presenting it almost as a finishing school where she would learn poise and grace and be the centre of attention, attended by handsome young men in uniform.¹⁷⁹ It was an attempt by the Auxiliary Services to sugar-coat

¹⁷⁵ Chetty. “Gender under Fire”. p 144-145.

¹⁷⁶ Documentation Centre – Department of Defence Archives. W.A.D.C. Box 11, Ref D.R. (W) F27, p6.

¹⁷⁷ W.A.D.C. Box 11, Ref D.R. (W) F27, p6.

¹⁷⁸ W.A.D.C. Box 11, Ref D.R. (W) F27, p6.

¹⁷⁹ Chetty. “Gender under Fire”. p146.

itself by presenting military service for women in a way that was designed to uphold femininity and glamour.

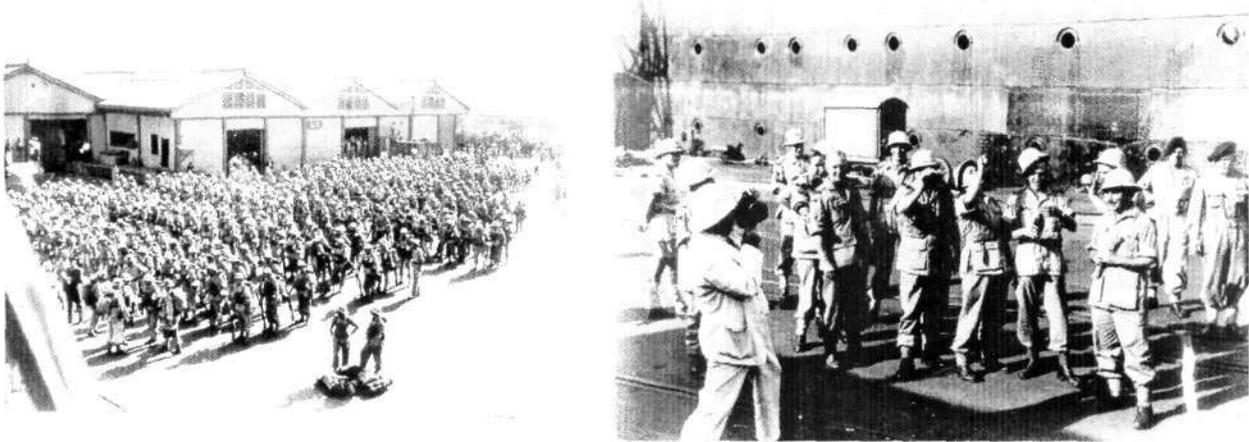


Images courtesy of Documentation Centre – Department of Defence Archives: *Snow Patrol, Italy*, 851-686 and *40 mm Bofors AA Cannon, Italy*, 851-1300.

While similar glamorised photographs were taken of white men in the military, many official photographs played out against the dramatic backdrop of combat. The image on the left, “Snow Patrol, Italy”, is of four men wearing camouflage gear, lying in wait in the snow with their guns aimed at an unseen target in the tree line. Aesthetically, the regulated position of the men, which is so important to military training, emphasises order. This is juxtaposed with the threat of imminent conflict evident in the air of expectancy which the image suggests. The photograph on the right, “40 mm Bofors AA Cannon, Italy”, shows a group of men with an anti-aircraft gun pointing to a target in the air which is out of the frame of the image. The sandbags, helmets and grim expression on the faces of the men in the picture suggest once again an imminent conflict. The two images, although portraying combat situations, render the violence of war invisible. Where actual combat occurs, it is out of the frame of the image, there is no hint of wounded or dead men. The experience of war appears controlled and sanitised. The logic of this is clear – if propaganda was in any way to be successful, it had to control the way in which war was portrayed. In a similar manner to the films I have discussed earlier in this chapter, images of death were only apparent when it was the enemy and conflict was presented from a distance. To show war in its entirety was not likely to impact on recruitment in any positive manner, especially if the images were of one’s own dead:

...war is contained and made fit for public consumption. The reality of war could never be conveyed to civilians. It was not simply a matter of the limits of representation: photography was in the hands of the military authorities; it was a tool of persuasion or

propaganda, and so always constrained. Its purpose was to relay acceptable information about widely publicised ways of soldiering...¹⁸⁰



Images courtesy of Documentation Centre – Department of Defence Archives: *SA Troops Prepare to Embark*, 851-125 and *Troops Have Last Beer Before Embarking in Durban for Up North*, 851-45.

In addition to combat photographs were images showing military discipline and order. The image on the left, “SA Troops Prepare to Embark”, shows a large number of South African soldiers with their packs and rifles waiting in an orderly manner. They form an anonymous mass due to the distance at which the photograph was taken and are suggestive of South African manpower resources. This, in conjunction with images of armaments and equipment, emphasise the capability of a country to engage in modern warfare that is dependent on supplies and resources. The image is in contrast to that on the right, “Troops Have Last Beer Before Embarking in Durban for Up North”, which has appears far more personal. It has an almost party atmosphere, with men drinking beer and the man in the centre with his helmet at a jaunty angle. In addition they appear to be engaging with the camera filming them and “hamming it up” for their imagined audience. The photograph is a far cry from conventional military images of order and discipline. The appearance of gaiety belies the apprehension felt by these men going off to North Africa to fight – some of whom would not return – but holds true to the notion of war as the “great male adventure”. In no way was this sense of adventure confined solely to white men either.

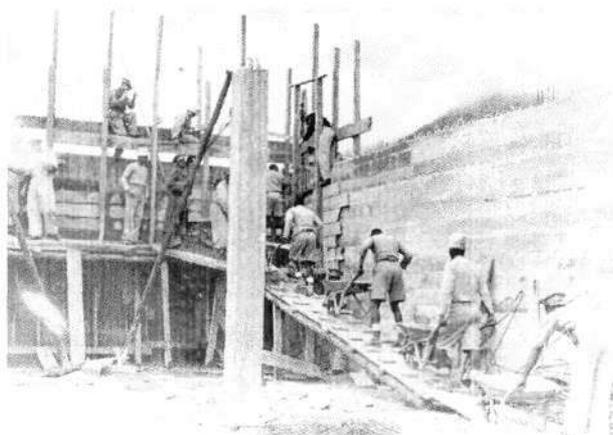
¹⁸⁰ John Taylor. *Body Horror: Photojournalism, Catastrophe and War*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998) p11.

"the first casualty when war comes is truth..."



Images courtesy of Documentation Centre – Department of Defence Archives: *NMC Despatch Rider, N. Africa*, 811-548 and *NMC Medic El Alamein*, 811-609.

The image on the left, "NMC Despatch Rider, N. Africa", conveys a distinct impression of rugged adventure. Taken from a lower angle, the man on the motorcycle is silhouetted against the sky looking into the distance which gives him a heroic appearance, despite his role as a non-combatant. The rugged adventurer convention is further emphasised in the following photograph, "NMC Medic El Alamein", where a black man with the Native Military Corps is portrayed turned towards the camera with a pipe in his mouth. Surrounded by sandbags, with the desert in the background and his helmet on the ground, the protruding handle of the figure's shovel emphasising his manual labour in the digging of ditches, suggests the heroism of this manual labour. This suggests a heroism that is usually reserved for white male combatants.



Images courtesy of Documentation Centre – Department of Defence Archives: *NMC Builders*, 811-497 and *NMC Bricklayers Training*, 811-496.

In a similar manner to the ambiguous portrayal of white women in the military, the two images above entitled "NMC Builders" and "NMC Bricklayers Training", blur the boundary between the military and civilian work. Anonymous black men with their faces turned away from the camera are shown wheeling barrows and working in construction. There is no uniformity in their military dress and their engagement in unskilled manual labour serves to limit the opportunities open to black men in the military as there is no real distinction made between this and their civilian work. It follows the format established in films such as *A Navy is Born*, which I have discussed earlier, where the unacknowledged portrayal of black men engaged in manual labour was likely to have been designed to allay white fears over job protection. Ultimately the images of black men suggested both a kind of heroism, which was not only the sole prerogative of white servicemen despite the non-combatant status of the former. These images simultaneously sought to limit their empowerment by limiting the roles open to them or placing their war work within a similar restricted framework as their civilian roles had been.

This ambiguity present in the South African films and photographs of the Second World War accounts for the failure of propaganda in the early years of the war, not only as it related to white women and black men, but also to those South Africans who were Afrikaans-speaking.¹⁸¹ For instance, even where the manual labour of black men was presented in a heroic light as I discuss above, propaganda failed to minimize the increasing demands of black men to be allowed into combat – which I address in subsequent chapters. In a memorandum drawn up by Major P.T. van der Walt and Sergeant V.J. Clapham at the end of 1943, an indictment is made at the failure of South Africa's propaganda efforts during this period.¹⁸² The memorandum was written during the malaise known as "war weariness" which accounts for the failure of propaganda at that point in time. Although concerned with its failure, the memorandum demonstrates the way in which war propaganda was set up in South Africa from the onset of the Second World War.

Several criticisms were aimed at the organisation responsible for propaganda, "The Defence Recruiting and Publicity Committee" – the first being that the only element of propaganda with which they were concerned was that of recruiting. This suggested that the lack of personnel had

¹⁸¹ Chetty. "Gender Under Fire". p58-61.

¹⁸² Sentrale Argies Bewaarplek/Central Archives Depot. BNS 1/1/266 C17/73.

become a pressing problem as the war progressed.¹⁸³ In addition the actual people responsible for creating the propaganda – “the artist, the copywriter, the layout-man, the creative worker...” – were not represented on the committee.¹⁸⁴ This was perceived to be partly responsible for the overall failure of propaganda to have any significant effect on South African society. However, greater blame was placed on the “spasmodic” nature of propaganda campaigns:

Defence Recruiting publicity is spasmodic. Between each scheme there is a lull, frequently of several months duration, during which no attempt is made to sustain public interest. The public mind consequently goes to sleep, and each new scheme has an unnecessary burden placed upon it, inasmuch that it has virtually to start from scratch.¹⁸⁵

Further factors were the constrained time period under which propaganda campaigns were set up which affected the creative aspect, as well as the last minute changes, leading to “frequently shocking consequences to the campaign in its final form”.¹⁸⁶ There was an allusion to the negative way in which these campaigns were received by the public – suggesting that propaganda was not simply imposed on the general population but that the latter played an active role in determining its form and content. It was due to the inadequately conducted propaganda campaigns and their subsequent inability to have any significant impact on the populace that reforms were required – propaganda campaigns had to change to appeal to the people. Part of this change dealt with way in which propaganda alienated large segments of the population:

Not a single advertising agency in the country employs creative personnel trained to produce special material adjusted to the linguistic and psychological requirements of the Afrikaans section of the community. Almost invariably an Afrikaans advertisement is a translation of an English advertisement. This is bad advertising at any time, but today, under the prevailing political conditions, it is an error of the first magnitude.¹⁸⁷

In addition to the neglect of Afrikaans speaking people, the memorandum suggests an even more perceptible neglect of other racial and ethnic groups in South Africa. According to the memorandum, a feasible solution was to develop a more extensive system in order to better disseminate propaganda “which will enable the Government to reach the minds of **all** of our ten million people with speed, ease and clarity”.¹⁸⁸ This was seen as important for the duration of the war, as well as after its end, in order to avoid “undesirable military, political and economic consequences”, which were not made explicit.¹⁸⁹ Simultaneously, in a contradictory manner,

¹⁸³ BNS 1/1/266 C17/73. p2.

¹⁸⁴ BNS 1/1/266 C17/73. p2.

¹⁸⁵ BNS 1/1/266 C17/73. p3.

¹⁸⁶ BNS 1/1/266 C17/73. p4.

¹⁸⁷ BNS 1/1/266 C17/73. p5.

¹⁸⁸ BNS 1/1/266 C17/73. p7. *Emphasis in original.*

¹⁸⁹ BNS 1/1/266 C17/73. p6.

propaganda was presented as "public opinion" which ignored its constructed nature and the way in which the selfsame public did not readily accept it.¹⁹⁰ It is thus within a context of tension and contradiction that propaganda or "the science of creating and transmitting public opinion" operated in South Africa.¹⁹¹

Conclusion

The three aspects of visual propaganda discussed in this chapter bear remarkable similarity despite their different media and, in the case of motion pictures, their very different origins. The very first element apparent is a re-envisioning of war from the destruction and disillusion brought about by the First World War which had been evident in the writings of the war poets of the period. The visual propaganda of the Second World War returned to pre-First World War archaic notions of honour, glory and duty. Where death was mentioned at all it was either a glorious death in combat, which was a hallmark of white masculinity, or death itself – at least on the part of one's own casualties – was rendered invisible. For South Africans the distance of the frontlines was ignored in favour of holding true to the convention of defending home and country from the enemy horde. And the defeat at Tobruk was converted from a major military setback to the opportunity for the nation to unite and come to the aid of captured South Africans by playing their part. No small amount of emotional manipulation was used by propagandists to provoke a patriotic response and calls to "Avenge Tobruk!".

Appeals to the unity of the nation were not without their shortcomings. The members of the Non-European Army Services – all of them volunteers, whether motivated solely by patriotism or a desire to prove themselves as equal citizens in the hopes of winning concessions from the state at the end of the war – found themselves in an unenviably ambiguous position. The propaganda films produced by the state, in line with the official war photographs, portrayed them in their pre-war roles of manual labourers, holding true to the racial hierarchy by most visual footage keeping them subservient to white male supervisors. The films, by visually showing them at work, but failing to acknowledge their contribution in the narrative unlike their white counterparts, rendered them anonymous and devalued their contribution to the war effort. Simultaneously, some of the images allowed for an individuality and personality of black

¹⁹⁰ BNS 1/1/266 C17/73. p6.

¹⁹¹ BNS 1/1/266 C17/73. p6.

participants that was surprising, allowing them to be portrayed in the conventional heroic mode usually reserved for their white counterparts. However, the South African state chose to ignore the aspirations of black men serving in favour of appeasing those considered key to the war – white men. These images were lost within the greater majority of images emphasising their nameless subservience. This was simply reinforced from across the Atlantic with Hollywood motion pictures.

The portrayal of white women was no less ambiguous. Co-existing uneasily with their new roles in the auxiliary services and positions of waged labour, was the strong sense that their work was of a temporary nature, lasting only for the duration and, in many cases, the training they had received would only be of benefit during the post-war era in the home or in socially acceptable roles. This served to temper the empowerment of their waged labour and military service, which was itself limited in many cases to clerical and domestic duties. Where women engaged in the more glamorous roles such as pilots, this was seen within already existing frameworks of female adventurers from earlier in the century, suggesting nothing unique about their war service. In addition the use of glamorous femininity to attract female recruits as well as placing their participation in relation to their men folk, suggested that the duties of citizenship in terms of patriotism and equal participation in the public sphere were insufficient to attract women. These women required instead incentives tailored to meet their individual needs, suggesting a more selfish rather than selfless motivation, in contrast to the ultimate sacrifice envisioned for white men.

Ultimately the visual propaganda of the Second World War had a strong conservative undercurrent. The war had created a necessary disruption to society but it was the role of propaganda to tread a fine line between permanent social change in racial and gendered roles and a return to a pre-war status quo and it leaned overwhelmingly towards the latter. In this instance its role was not to deceive but to manipulate already existing social norms – its allure came from appealing to these social norms which were mirrored within the people at which it was aimed. Its failure came from this very conservatism in addressing the needs of a society in flux and of its subsequent alienation of participants in the war who desired permanent change in the hierarchically ordered gendered and racial nature of South Africa in the 1940s.

Chapter Two

The Lesser of Two Evils?

Military Publications and Official Identities

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With the outbreak of war, South African women found themselves part of the larger Allied war effort, sharing much in common with their counterparts in Britain, Australia, Canada and the United States. This was a relationship which was made clear in the weekly military magazine, *The Women's Auxiliary*. Yet South African women – and men – found themselves not only part of the larger Allied world, but also facing the peculiarities of South African society, where embedded racial inequality was an uneasy bedfellow of a fight for democracy and freedom. This ambiguity was a strong feature of the increasing liberalisation which was a hallmark of the Smuts' government for the duration of the war – a form of liberalism evident in the official publication, *Complex Country*. Here, in a publication aimed at visiting international troops, the contradictions of South African state and society were clear where approving references to enforced segregation and “Whites Only” signs in *Complex Country* went hand-in-hand with a “respect” for the black races of South Africa.

The official written sources, intended to shape the experiences and interpretation of the war by the South African public, were written and published during the war. They took the form of magazines and booklets created by the Union Defence Force. Analysing these publications allow for a deeper understanding of the way in which both gendered and racial identity in the military was articulated by these official sources for the duration of the war. In addition to the two publications discussed here, there were two other significant publications produced by the military for the duration of the war. One was *WAAFS*, a magazine issued by the Women's Auxiliary Air Force Services and the other was the *IC Digest*. The *IC Digest* was produced by Military Intelligence and Janie Malherbe served as its editor under a Captain Lindsay. *The Women's Auxiliary* was the preferred source for this chapter as every issue published for the duration of the war was available whereas *WAAFS* was not as complete a source. *The Women's Auxiliary* allowed then for the tracing of the portrayal of the war from its outset to the final months. *Complex Country*, on the other hand, was able to fill in the areas not covered by *The*

*Women's Auxiliary* and its importance was that its intended audience was an external one unlike the other military publications. Also under the editorship of Janie Malherbe, it is a means of understanding the way in which the military represented South Africa to the other Allied countries at a time when the state was being criticised from within for its limited democracy.

*The Women's Auxiliary* was a monthly magazine which dealt with issues regarding the role of women in the auxiliary services. Articles ranged from the purely domestic such as recipes, to fashion and hairstyles, as well as deeper concerns regarding the new roles of women in war society as well as their post-war expectations. Although the articles were largely aimed at a white female audience, the official members of the auxiliary services, a close reading of the magazine allows for a significant understanding of the portrayal of the role of white and black soldiers as well as the black women aiding in the war effort on an unofficial basis.

The official magazine of the South African Women's Auxiliary Services, *The Women's Auxiliary*, was published for the duration of the war with its first issue in September 1940 and its final issue in June 1945, making a total of approximately fifty-eight issues. Its regular publication meant that the reader can trace change over time in terms of the official perceptions and portrayal of women in military service in South Africa. For the duration of the Second World War three broad trends following each other were clearly apparent in the magazine dividing the war into three phases – the onset of the war and recruitment, the malaise of “war weariness” and preparation for the end of the war. These phases were indicated by the clear differences in the way in which the magazine portrayed the roles of women in the auxiliary services as well as the expectations placed upon them. An important feature of *The Women's Auxiliary* articles is that authorship is not always clear. Where it is indicated, little distinction is evident between the articles written by women and men as, due to its nature as an official source, there is an overall consistency in terms of the portrayal of women in the auxiliary services during the war. The gender of the writer thus makes little discernable impact on the kinds of identities propagated for these women. Where articles are written by prominent figures in South African society, these tend to be associated with the pro-war cabinet, and no dissenting voice is apparent.

Another source used in this chapter is the booklet *Complex Country* compiled by Janie Malherbe – who worked in Military Intelligence and was heavily involved in recruiting. It contained a wide variety of articles describing South African society for an international audience of largely male

troops. It is significant in that it allows for an understanding of the way in which South Africa wished herself to be portrayed to the rest of the world while simultaneously taking into account domestic anxieties regarding the interaction of foreign troops with South Africans. *Complex Country* is thus a study in the portrayal of the racial, ethnic and, to a lesser extent, gendered tensions evident within this country. These tensions had been exacerbated by the war itself, where the need to raise support for the war effort brought to the fore questions of exclusion and inclusion. Here, issues regarding race were made more explicit than in *The Women's Auxiliary*, which focussed instead on the role of women. Both sources complement each other in that they give an official perspective of the way in which both race and gender were portrayed during the Second World War.

### **The Onset of War: An analysis of *The Women's Auxiliary*, 1939-1942**

The first phase of the war in terms of its portrayal of women in the magazine lasted roughly until May 1942. This phase marked the transition from peace to war and was characterised by a great deal of ambiguity around the changing role of women brought about by the exigencies of war. As this section will show, ideas of the "proper" roles for women that had their origins in the nineteenth century, were used in the official war discourse and attempts were made by *The Women's Auxiliary* in this first phase to fit the war work of women within this already existing framework. This was played out in the magazine through depictions of women in mothering/nurturing roles, which historically had been viewed as being inextricably linked to their biology, and concerns with the control of single women living in barracks. In South Africa before 1939 women had both challenged and worked within these roles of "proper" femininity. This was evident in the way in which Afrikaner women participated in the South African War, the role played by women in the First World War and the differences between the radical suffragette movement in Britain and the United States and its more prosaic form in South Africa, where the demonstration of white unity remained paramount.

The inaugural issue of *The Women's Auxiliary* contained an article titled "They are Carrying on the War Work of Men". The title suggested that the work of women in auxiliary organisations was a continuation of the earlier "pioneering" role played by them, supporting men as they took part in the conflicts which shaped the country's history, as well as being a product of an "innate

characteristic of women – service to others”.<sup>1</sup> The motivation of women was claimed to be a selfless spirit of sacrifice for their children:

Spurred on by that great ideal of wanting to prepare a better world for their children, no obstacle has proved insurmountable, no sacrifice too great.<sup>2</sup>

Here the women of the auxiliary services remained inextricably linked to their family and home – to their role in the domestic sphere as the nurturers of their children.<sup>3</sup> Their impetus was believed to have come from the desire to create a “better world”, a safe haven for their children. This is a strong theme that forms the backbone of the inaugural issue of the magazine. Another article describing the traffic control duties of female auxiliaries who had recently replaced men, emphasised their duties in school districts with the quote, “What an excellent idea to have women controlling the children...I wonder why someone didn’t think of it before.”<sup>4</sup> A few months later this connection between women and their nurturing duties, especially as it related to children, was made even more explicit with the description of the activities of the Auckland Park Canteen. Here SAWAS women voluntarily served refreshments to troops, helped in providing entertainment and special mention was made of them taking care of the children of troops. Despite this activity being given a short paragraph in the article, it became part of the title itself, “They Prepare Babies’ Bottles as well as Feed the Troops”, making it more integral to their duties than it actually was.<sup>5</sup>

This depiction of women as being linked to the mothering/nurturing role had its origins much earlier in South Africa, as well as Britain and the United States and “Auckland Park Canteen – They Prepare Babies’ Bottles as well as Feed the Troops” draws upon this image in its portrayal of women in the Auxiliary Services. The ubiquitous notion of women as mothers and nurturers had taken on a new impetus in the nineteenth century, working as it did with women’s role in the reform movement. This period was one where the suffragette movement reached its height, largely as a product of the adverse conditions brought about by the industrial revolution. The conjunction of poor living conditions for the working class, societal ills such as alcoholism and

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<sup>1</sup> Documentation Centre – Department of Defence Archives. “On Full Time Service – They are Carrying on the War Work of Men” in *The Women’s Auxiliary*, September 1940, Issue 1, p11.

<sup>2</sup> “They are Carrying on the War Work of Men” in *The Women’s Auxiliary*, September 1940, p11.

<sup>3</sup> As I demonstrate in later chapters however, many of the women drawn into military service were young and unmarried which brought with it a whole new set of concerns regarding adequate supervision of their movements on the part of the military.

<sup>4</sup> Documentation Centre – Department of Defence Archives. “Ready to Replace Men – Versatile Women in Civic Service” in *The Women’s Auxiliary*, September 1940, Issue 1, p25.

<sup>5</sup> Documentation Centre – Department of Defence Archives. “Auckland Park Canteen – They Prepare Babies’ Bottles as well as Feed the Troops” in *The Women’s Auxiliary*, April 1941, Issue 8, p27.

prostitution as well as the rise of the suffragette movement led to a proliferation of reform movements in which these feminists played key roles:

The suffragette movements that developed in the industrial world in the second half of the nineteenth century were originally linked closely to the major social and political reform movements of that time, in which middle-class women played an active part – temperance, prison reform, “rescue work” among prostitutes, and, especially important in the United States, the anti-slavery campaign.<sup>6</sup>

This wave of feminism used the Victorian middle class ideals of morality, purity and the role of women as the guardians of these, but extended their role from the private to the public sphere.<sup>7</sup> Yet the ideology behind this remained constant and these middle class women were still perceived to be the receptacles of society’s morality, forming a counterpoint to the ills of industrial capitalist society. As well as being played out on the societal level, a similar process was evident in the home.<sup>8</sup> The same occurred with black women in *Manyanos*, or the African Women’s Prayer Union, in the early twentieth century. One of the key rules at the Prayer Union which drew from these Victorian middle class ideals was – in addition to the adoption of Christian values – “The inculcation of the moral duties of industry, honesty, truthfulness, cleanliness and kindness by example and precept in the home”.<sup>9</sup> African women were to set an example both for their husbands – who may not have converted to Christianity – as well as their children.<sup>10</sup>

The role of white women as moral guardian was extended to the colonial context in a period when colonial expansion reached its zenith. The woman’s position as the guardian of morality and purity within the home, and even within domestic society, took on an added implication in the colonies – she was now the guardian of the white race:

The white home became the arena in which white children were socialised not only into their gender roles, as little men and little women, but also into their roles as members of the ruling group...white women were custodians of “civilised values”, icons to the ideology of racial superiority, to be revered, protected and firmly controlled by their men.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Cheryl Walker. “The women’s suffrage movement: The politics of gender, race and class” in *Women and Gender in Southern Africa to 1945*. Cheryl Walker, ed., (Claremont: David Philip Publishers, 1990) p319.

<sup>7</sup> Walker. “The women’s suffrage movement”. p319.

<sup>8</sup> Chetty. “Gender Under Fire”. p5.

<sup>9</sup> Deborah Lyndall Gaitskell. “Female Mission Initiatives: Black and White Women in Three Witwatersrand Churches, 1903-1939”. (University of London, London: Unpublished PhD dissertation, 1981) p146.

<sup>10</sup> Gaitskell. “Female Mission Initiatives”. p146.

<sup>11</sup> Walker. “The women’s suffrage movement”. p321.

Within a climate where race, class and gender interacted both in the metropole and in the colonies, gender roles took on a moral and racial imperative. As historians studying gender relations in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century have shown, upper class women and through the gradual diffusion of this ideal through churches and popular institutions to the working class, “virtuous womanhood”, was associated with nature, instinct, and nostalgia for the past as a reaction to the changes wrought by modernity. White men, on the other hand, were linked to culture and progress, reason and rationality.<sup>12</sup> This was exemplified in the distinction between the public and the private, nature and culture, where all cultures create a distinction between “culture” (acting on the environment) and “nature” (given by birth):

Every culture, or, generically, “culture,” is engaged in the process of generating and sustaining systems of meaningful forms (symbols, artefacts, etc.) by means of which humanity transcends the givens of natural existence, bends them to its purposes, controls them in its interest. We may thus broadly equate culture with the notion of human consciousness, or with the products of human consciousness (i.e., systems of thought and technology), by means of which humanity attempts to assert control over nature.<sup>13</sup>

Women were linked to nature due to their biology and related biological functions such as bearing children in a way that did not apply to men. Aspects of female physiology such as menstruation and childbirth, bringing with them pain, discomfort and even death, tied women more closely to biology than men, leaving the latter free to engage in more cultural pursuits while confining the former to their biological role to a greater extent.<sup>14</sup> The biological role of bearing children became a social one of raising children. After giving birth she was additionally tied to her offspring by lactation. The bond between the two was then extended after weaning:

...children beyond infancy are not strong enough to engage in major work, yet are mobile and unruly and not capable of understanding various dangers; they thus require supervision and constant care. Mother is the obvious person for this task, as an extension of her natural nursing bond with the children...Her own activities are thus circumscribed by the limitations and low levels of her children’s strengths and skills: she is confined to the domestic family group; “woman’s place is in the home.”<sup>15</sup>

The biological, social and even mental functions of women were thus closely intertwined – the social role followed from the biological, thus linking them with the instinctual and the natural. To return to *The Women’s Auxiliary*, the effect of the article “Auckland Park Canteen – They Prepare Babies’ Bottles as well as Feed the Troops” and others like it, was to create a continuum

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<sup>12</sup> Anne McClintock. “Family Feuds: Gender, Nationalism and the Family” in *Feminist Review*. A. Whitehead, C. Connolly, E. Carter and H. Crowley, eds., Issue 44, 1993. p66.

<sup>13</sup> Sherry B. Ortner. *Making Gender – The Politics and Erotics of Culture*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996) p25-26.

<sup>14</sup> Ortner. *Making Gender*. p28.

<sup>15</sup> Ortner. *Making Gender*. p31.

between women's roles in the home, taking care of men and raising children, with their new roles in the South African Women's Auxiliary Services, lessening the disruption to the gendered order.

In the case of women who were not yet wives or mothers, an important societal concern was their supervision. Many of these women found themselves away from home facing new living conditions in barracks where an emphasis was on military discipline. Janie Malherbe considered the living conditions and supervision of female recruits in the barracks, evident in her letters. In a letter sent to the *Die Transvaler* in 1942, she addressed the concerns of young women living on their own in barracks by emphasising military supervision and control over their movements, in a similar fashion to the way in which their parents or spouses would do at home:

Girls in the services are **not** sent to troop camps...except in connection with daily clerical and other services. In the evening they return to efficiently run and supervised women's barracks. In such barracks the girls are far more strictly supervised than the thousands of working girls who stay in boarding establishments in the cities and towns, and whose coming and going is questioned by no-one. No member of the W.A.A.S. or W.A.A.F. may stay out of barracks unless she is married, or has permission from her parents and guardians to do so.<sup>16</sup>

Historically, army barracks was considered the least appropriate place for young women and was subject to intervention under Victorian ideas of morality and control of sexuality. In Michel Foucault's analysis of the history of sexuality he traces a development in attitudes towards sex and sexuality in Europe from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries where the earlier period was marked by a degree of openness which narrowed, becoming more rigid in the Victorian era. This left a legacy which still influences us today. The nineteenth century created clear norms of sexuality. It was seen solely as the domain of the married couple for the solitary purpose of procreation and its opposite was all other forms of sexuality considered "deviant".<sup>17</sup> In this atmosphere of a defined sexuality and an emphasis on domesticity, the military came to be seen as a site for intervention due to the unsettled lifestyle of soldiers, the high preponderance of single men in the barracks with its connotations of "illicit" sexuality in the form of prostitution and homosexuality as well as the accommodation of married soldiers and their families with the single men.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Killie Campbell Africana Library (KCAL). E.G. Malherbe Collection. Letter sent by Lieut. (Mrs) J.A. Malherbe to *Die Transvaler* 1 May 1942. KCM 56975(1077)b, File 447/6.

<sup>17</sup> Michel Foucault. *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1987) p3-5.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Myna Trustram. *Women of the Regiment: Marriage and the Victorian Army*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

Thus it was somewhat ironic that the various branches of the auxiliary services utilised barracks for women serving in the military, however these were extremely regulated, taking on the characteristics of boarding schools rather than army barracks. Moreover Malherbe's use of "girls" emphasised youthful exuberance and was often used in conjunction with "boys" describing white male soldiers, suggesting youth that needed to be guided. Even within this space of military regulation, domesticity reared its head, as evident in a description of the barracks of the Women's Auxiliary Army Services:

Despite its air of military efficiency and smartness there is a delightfully homely atmosphere at the barracks...flowers are sent every week from the Government House gardens...A committee of Pretoria women is busily engaged making curtains and supplying comforts of various kinds...<sup>19</sup>

Despite the attempts to create a sense of continuity between the perceived conventions of women's pre-war life and their new roles for the duration of the war, there nevertheless existed the necessity to adapt to an extent to a military way of life as well. The article "An Airwoman on Full-Time Duty – Impressions of a 'Rookie'" details the transition from civilian to military life with the young recruit adjusting to life at the barracks. It describes the minutiae of drill, the adoption of the proper attire and the many facets of daily life which distinguished the military world from the civilian:

The intricacies of folding blankets as they are done in the Air Force and the spit and polish required to give one's shoes that extra shine were among the many things demonstrated in the business of becoming a soldier; while mastering the mysteries of "Leave" books...the mental arithmetic needed to turn one minute to twelve into 23.59 hours and acquiring that self-confidence that enables one to walk up the street and salute a superior officer...<sup>20</sup>

Yet, by the end of it, according to the article, the recruit was left feeling herself a soldier, establishing a camaraderie with those with whom she trained, accustomed to the daily routine and enthusiastically embracing the esprit de corps of the W.A.A.F.<sup>21</sup>

However, the subsequent article in the very same issue, demonstrated that the transition from civilian to soldier was nowhere near as clear-cut for women. "Dress with Credit to Your Escort" suggested that women had to walk a very fine line between the overtly feminine and similarly blatantly masculine attire when accompanying male uniformed escorts. The appropriate outfit

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<sup>19</sup> Documentation Centre – Department of Defence Archives. "Women in Barracks – The Colonel's Lady and Judy O'Grady" in *The Women's Auxiliary*, October 1940, Issue 2, p19.

<sup>20</sup> Documentation Centre – Department of Defence Archives. "An Airwoman on Full-Time Duty – Impressions of a 'Rookie'" in *The Women's Auxiliary*, September 1940, Issue 1, p26.

<sup>21</sup> "An Airwoman on Full-Time Duty" in *The Women's Auxiliary*, September 1940, p26.

was described as plain and sensible, foregoing both the frills of femininity and “a masculine poise and dress”.<sup>22</sup> The appearance of a woman was deemed to be a reflection of her male escort so she was advised to adopt the best possible demeanour so as to be a credit to him in the eyes of his peers.

The appearance of women was, needless to say, not without its ambivalence, implying that official positions and attempts at recruiting veered regularly between military pragmatism and the glamour needed to emphasise the feminine nature of the recruits.



(Image taken from *The Women's Auxiliary*, November 1940, Issue 3, p45)

The image above, with accompanying verse, demonstrates the changes in appearance from the civilian to the military woman where the individualistic hats, outfits and jewellery gave way to the uniformity and practicality of military attire. This change in appearance was accompanied by a similar change in skill and a growing competency in their respective fields.

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<sup>22</sup> Documentation Centre – Department of Defence Archives. “You Owe it to His Audience Girls – Dress with Credit to your Escort in *The Women's Auxiliary*, September 1940, Issue 1, p27.

Yet this suggestion of change and new-found competency was still placed within a conservative and ambiguous framework regarding the position of women in the military. In May 1942 a male drill instructor, responsible for training SAWAS women in Durban, pointed out that drilling enhanced rather than detracted from women's femininity, making these women more appealing to the opposite sex:

Mr Storey thinks that a course of parade drill gives a girl more "sex appeal". "There is one thing I have noticed," he says, "and that is the drill has improved the girls tremendously physically. And it has given every one of them a very much improved carriage. The result is that they are women now who command attention by their fine bearing and physique..."<sup>23</sup>

The message was clear – it was no longer the army that made a man out of you but, for a woman too, military service could only make her more of a woman. This served as a means of allaying the fears of those who believed military service would lead to women aping the masculinity of men. It was a fear that periodically resurfaced in *The Women's Auxiliary*, hence the ambiguity present in the first phase of the war.

But, to read the magazine solely within a conservative framework, is to do an injustice to what could possibly be considered genuine, albeit limited, steps forward regarding the perception of women's roles in the public sphere. From the outset, the war was perceived as the opportunity for women to prove themselves. In an editorial penned by Brigadier General F.H. Theron in October 1940, he refers to the auxiliary bodies, giving more significant roles to women who were employed to take on positions previously held by men, releasing the latter for combat, than the largely voluntary and social activities of SAWAS. The women here in organisations such as the WAAS were, according to Theron, "anxious to prove that they are in no way second to the men whose places they are taking," ultimately believing that "their sex [was] 'on trial'", a view which he strongly espoused.<sup>24</sup> He concluded with a strongly optimistic view of women as having undergone a permanent change:

The time when women were regarded as fragile beings unable to do a day's work is long past. The women themselves have given it its death-blow. You will stand shoulder to shoulder with us – our worthy comrades and equals – in this prelude to the victory that is coming.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Documentation Centre – Department of Defence Archives. "A Male Drill Instructor Thinks – "Drilling Makes a Girl More Attractive" in *The Women's Auxiliary*, March 1942, Issue 19, p7.

<sup>24</sup> Documentation Centre – Department of Defence Archives. F.H. Theron. "Women on Active Service – 'Proving their Worth up to the Hilt'" in *The Women's Auxiliary*, October 1940, Issue 2, p3.

<sup>25</sup> "Women on Active Service" in *The Women's Auxiliary*, October 1940, p3.

The quote demonstrated a significant lack of acknowledgement and value of women's pre-war roles, suggesting that all women previously followed the middle class, idealised vision of women at leisure when many women who engaged in war work were not actually engaged in waged labour for the first time. There was nevertheless an intimation that women had themselves changed the public perceptions of them by answering the call to war, redefining themselves as equal citizens in a post-war society.

Moreover the quote does not take into account the roles played by women in previous conflicts, both in South Africa and internationally, for much of the early decades of the twentieth century. For instance, in the South African War, British actions, particularly their attacks on civilian targets and subsequent incarceration of Afrikaner women and children in concentration camps, were an important motivating factor in Boer perceptions that the British were a threat to their very way of life<sup>26</sup>. Yet Afrikaner women played a far more active role than that of camp internees. The threat posed by British troops and the nature of guerrilla warfare meant that women could not remain isolated from the war. In order to protect themselves from being rounded up and taken to the camps, groups of women placed their possessions in wagons and formed defensive laagers, only returning to their homes after the British had left.<sup>27</sup>

Women also visited men in the field although this was frowned upon and later prevented by commanding officers. Like the British and Zulu military systems, the presence of women was discouraged from the all-male world of the commando in the belief that they would be an unnecessary diversion, drawing the attention of men away from the war:

The female presence at the front had an adverse effect on the burghers' morale. Their attention was distracted from military duties and they started leaving their trenches, with or without leave, to visit the women in the laagers.<sup>28</sup>

Perhaps women and the domesticity they represented were incongruent with the military discipline and the state of mind required for killing. In the Boer military system there remained the inclination to control the access of soldiers to women.

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<sup>26</sup> Fransjohan Pretorius. *Life on Commando During the Anglo-Boer War, 1899-1902*. (Cape Town: Human and Rousseau, 2000) p166, 177.

<sup>27</sup> Denys Reitz. *Commando: A Boer Journal of the Boer War*. (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1929) p179.

<sup>28</sup> Pretorius. *Life on Commando*. p301.

It was this very domesticity and perceived distraction of which the British made use by sending Afrikaner women to their husbands on commando in order to persuade them to cease fighting. It was not the first time, and it would not be the last, that men's links with the home would be used to encourage or, in this case, dissuade men from fighting. However these women were not simply the pawns of British military authority. Whereas some did as they were told, many Afrikaner women did the opposite by spurring men on.<sup>29</sup>

At the outbreak of the South African War the place of Afrikaner women was not in the military or in the war, "imperial aggression was to be met with male, not female, militarism".<sup>30</sup> However, according to Helen Bradford, as the war progressed and men were not always so eager to participate, women played an active role in encouraging men to fight. They used their own positions as wives, mothers and daughters to argue that it was the duty of Afrikaner men to protect them and their homes from the ravages of British troops, "Deserters were not merely faithless: they were accomplices to murder, cried one woman to her republican 'sisters'. The imperial army was about to lay waste to 'our country, our houses and also us and our daughters'."<sup>31</sup> Even those women who were taken prisoner along with their children and held under horrendous conditions in concentration camps, refused to submit to the British forces and encourage Afrikaner men to surrender. On the contrary they remained defiant:

Yet most women with men on commando clung to one tenet. Male surrender improved children's life chances. But most refused to ask their own menfolk to 'hands-up'. They mobilized gender differences to denounce traitors who 'did not deserve the name of *man*'.<sup>32</sup>

For these women, those men who did surrender were not worthy of being described as men, or as true patriotic members of the nation. In the South African War then, Afrikaner women were perceived as being "unconquerable", unwilling to accept anything less than total victory over the British, regardless of the sufferings they endured during the war.<sup>33</sup>

Afrikaner patriarchal norms as well as Afrikaner law prevented women from engaging directly in war in the form of combat yet the exigencies of war, the blurring of boundaries between the

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<sup>29</sup> Pretorius. *Life on Commando*. p303.

<sup>30</sup> Helen Bradford. "Regendering Afrikanerdom: The 1899-1902 Anglo-Boer War" in *Gendered Nations: Nationalisms and Gender Order in the Long Nineteenth Century*. Ida Blom, Karen Hagemann and Catherine Hall, eds. (Oxford: Berg, 2000) p209.

<sup>31</sup> Bradford. "Regendering Afrikanerdom". p211.

<sup>32</sup> Bradford. "Regendering Afrikanerdom". p215.

<sup>33</sup> Bradford. "Regendering Afrikanerdom". p216, 218.

home and the front lines and the British advance towards Pretoria, meant that women desired to arm themselves, both to protect their homes and to play their part:

In an exhortation to officers and burghers on 18 May [1900] the Pretoria women's committee explained their position: 'We know that it is not proper and conflicts with Afrikaner custom for women to go to the front with rifles; yet some of us are willing to do so rather than see our beloved country fall into enemy hands...'<sup>34</sup>

However, instances where women took up combatant roles in combat were few and far between, and usually cases where they disguised themselves as men to do so.<sup>35</sup>

A decade later in South Africa, the patriotic outburst which accompanied the outbreak of the First World War in Europe was somewhat tempered by the wariness with which groups of South Africans viewed each other after a century of almost incessant conflict. As a member of the British Empire, South Africa's role to come to Britain's aid was clear-cut. However, as a country divided by the still simmering hostility on the part of many Afrikaans-speaking people – the latter being more predisposed to supporting the Kaiser – as well as similar differences among black South Africans whose role in the South African War had been all but ignored, the country's entry into the war was fraught with dissent.

For English-speaking South Africans, reasons for enlistment paralleled their British counterparts. This included residual patriotism towards Britain, a sense of the great adventure and an opportunity to see the world. For Private F.C. Cooper, his decision to leave for the battlefields of the First World War was in no small part motivated by his desire “to sooner face a German bullet than the scorn in a girl's eyes”.<sup>36</sup> To an extent, this latter motivation bore similarity to the situation in Britain where young women handed out white feathers as a symbol of cowardice to men who appeared in public sans uniform. Women also featured in the somewhat disreputable propaganda campaign where they were accused of preventing their husbands from enlisting despite the reports of purported atrocities carried out by German troops in the occupied territories.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Pretorius. *Life on Commando*. p322-323.

<sup>35</sup> Pretorius. *Life on Commando*. p324.

<sup>36</sup> James Ambrose Brown. *They Fought for King and Kaiser: South Africans in German East Africa, 1916*. (Johannesburg: Ashanti Publishing, 1991) p40.

<sup>37</sup> Martin Middlebrook. *The First Day on the Somme: 1 July 1916*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1984) p22-23.

The mobilization of women for the Second World War was, in a sense, based upon the way in which women had been a part of society previously.<sup>38</sup> For Afrikaner women this was in the area of social work – the work of women in the home was extended to the public sphere, which became an extended home, and was the means by which Afrikaner women entered politics:

Women from varied political persuasions all “exalted women’s capacity to mother and extended to society as a whole the values of care, nurturance and morality”. Maternalist politics “extolled the virtues of domesticity while simultaneously legitimating women’s public relationships to politics and the state, to community, workplace, marketplace...”<sup>39</sup>

There was no movement to overturn the perceptions of gender in terms of the characteristics attributed to men and women – instead women were to bring their attributes and their domesticity to the public sphere. This is evident in metaphors using housework which were employed to describe the role of women in political life:

It seems to me that the need to work certainly exists; when a woman, an ordinary normal woman, notices disorder, she wants to tidy up. Disorder doesn’t bother men as much; unconsciously they suffer from a disordered condition, but they don’t manage to deal with this...<sup>40</sup>

There appeared to be in operation the notion that women could bring their brand of morality into the public sphere and play this role in politics in a way that men could not – as it was in the arena of the moral that women held the higher ground.

The interwar period also saw an opening of various opportunities for waged labour for women in secondary industry and as white-collar workers. However these job opportunities did not challenge the perception of women – they worked very much in line with the characteristics given to women:

Women workers became clustered in particular areas of employment, which could be seen as extensions of their domestic roles and did not conflict with established views about their “natural” abilities. Thus in the professions, they were concentrated in the “nurturing” realms of teaching and nursing; in business, in service and supportive roles as secretaries and sales women; in industry, in food processing and textile concerns, and, of course, in domestic service.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Cf. Chetty. “Gender Under Fire”. p62-64.

<sup>39</sup> Marijke du Toit. “The Nurturing of Afrikaner Nationalism: A Social History of the Afrikaanse Christelike Vroue Vereniging ca 1870-1939.” (University of Cape Town, Cape Town: Unpublished PhD dissertation, 1996) p207.

<sup>40</sup> Du Toit. “The Nurturing of Afrikaner Nationalism”. p215. This quote originally appeared in an article in *Die Burger* titled “Wat kan ons doen?” on August 26, 1924.

<sup>41</sup> Cheryl Walker. “The women’s suffrage movement: The politics of gender, race and class” in *Women and Gender in Southern Africa to 1945*. Cheryl Walker, ed., (Claremont: David Philip Publishers, 1990) p331-332.

The mobilisation of women during the war included them participating in new activities in industry and the Auxiliary Services which had been the previous domain of men. Yet the rationale behind it remained the same. The new activities of women in war were linked to their “natural” qualities as caregivers which was evident in military nursing, as well as supporting men by carrying out non-combative duties on the home front. This was the way in which they were expected to contribute to victory and the speedy return of men from the front lines. Even in the realm of the suffragette movement, white South African women were not radicalised. Enfranchising women was not seen as an important issue in the South African Parliament in the 1920s – even men like Smuts who favoured extending the vote to white women was not vehement about it: “If it [the Bill to extend the franchise to white women] does not win this session, it may win the next session, or the session after.”<sup>42</sup> For Parliament it was infinitely preferable to extend the franchise to white women over black men and, in 1929, extending the vote to white women formed the basis of Hertzog’s re-election campaign, which returned him to power. The enfranchising of white South African women, coming a decade later than the enfranchisement of women around the world, was not due to any particular commitment on the part of Parliament to women’s rights but to allay the threat of enfranchising an overwhelming African majority. For Hertzog it was merely a means of achieving an end and he did not believe that the enfranchisement of white women would cause any major social upheaval in gender roles.<sup>43</sup>

Hertzog’s beliefs were well founded – the entire suffragette campaign never presented a threat to gender roles:

Most suffragettes and anti-suffragettes were in basic agreement: they did not want to upset the existing division of labour between the sexes. Arguments for and against were riddled with naturalist assumptions about male and female identity. Both sides built on an essentially biologist view of gender, which ascribed gender identity to certain inborn differences between men and women...the socialisation theories of gender difference developed by modern feminists did not form part of the currency of the debate.<sup>44</sup>

It is with the suffragette movement in South Africa in mind and its inherent conservatism that women were mobilised for the Second World War. The aims of the suffragettes were not

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<sup>42</sup> Walker. “The suffragette movement”. p333.

<sup>43</sup> Walker. “The suffragette movement”. p336.

<sup>44</sup> Walker. “The suffragette movement”. p337.

radical, the waged labour done by women fell within their “natural” abilities and even the entry of women into politics was based on the perception of their essential natures as mothers and moral guardians. It is thus safe to assume that Parliament believed that allowing women new forms of work in the Auxiliary Services and in industry for the duration of the war – as was being done all over the world – would be unlikely to have lasting repercussions or create social upheaval. The mobilization of women proceeded from existing roles of women in the public sphere, which were themselves based on earlier essentialised differences between men and women.

This vision of women as being limited by their biology and societal expectations to particular roles in the public sphere was expected to continue in a post-war South Africa, evident in *The Women's Auxiliary*. During the Second World War the theme of women as having an important and integral role to play in a post-war society is strengthened in the subsequent issue of the magazine with a piece written by J.H. Hofmeyr. He argued that there was a duty and a place for women to utilise the progress they had made when the war had ended. Hofmeyr was a liberal, a member of the South African Party and a confidante of the Prime Minister. At the outbreak of war he was made Minister of Finance and Education, later becoming Deputy Prime Minister.<sup>45</sup> He wrote of the enthusiasm and spirit of self-sacrifice motivating both young men and women eager to serve that would be key in achieving victory, claiming that they represented values which were some of the positive aspects amidst the devastation of war, and that this would be of necessity in building, what he perceived to be, a revolutionary and harmonious post-war society.<sup>46</sup>

Although Hofmeyr wrote somewhat generally of an idealised role for young men and women, allocating them equal but generic characteristics, Bertha Solomon, in the magazine issue following the one containing Hofmeyr's article, argued specifically for a greater role for women in the public sphere. Her own role as the MP for Jeppe and one of the first women in Parliament in no small way contributed to her outlook. In addition Solomon was, as a member of Smuts' party, very much linked to official government and military views regarding the

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<sup>45</sup> T.R.H. Davenport. *South Africa – A Modern History*. (Johannesburg: Macmillan South Africa, 1978) p222, 232, 250.

<sup>46</sup> Documentation Centre – Department of Defence Archives. J.H. Hofmeyr. “This War and the Reconstruction – The Advance in the Status of Women will Persist in the Post-War World” in *The Women's Auxiliary*, November 1940, Issue 3, p3.

appropriate roles for women during the war.<sup>47</sup> For Solomon, the new roles that women took on were only a recognition that gendered work was a social construction dependent on physical and mental ability: "...there is...no such thing as a man's job or a woman's job, but only a job which has to be done according to the physical and mental capacity of the person doing it."<sup>48</sup> Yet there were limits to Solomon's understanding of the possibilities opening up to women with her conclusion that, even though the war would significantly alter women's participation in the public sphere, they would nevertheless return to their homes at the end of the war and play a greater role in social welfare and the community. This was a vision of moral guardianship little different from the outlook in the nineteenth century:

...as citizens they will have a job to do in the peace that is to come no less important than their present job in the war, the job of helping to create that new social order which we hope for from the war, an order which will put an end once and for all to poverty and starvation in the midst of plenty...<sup>49</sup>

The initial phase of the war, lasting from its outset in September 1939 to May 1942 as presented in *The Women's Auxiliary*, presented some indecision regarding the new roles for women in the auxiliary services and in industry where women had taken positions previously held by men. The demands of the war in terms of labour power came into conflict with pre-existing societal assumptions about the appropriate positions for women. This was highlighted by their service in the military – discipline, the donning of uniforms and life in barracks – brought to the fore concerns about the crossing of gendered boundaries, blurring the masculine and the feminine. Visions of newly empowered women existed uneasily alongside feminine stereotypes, marking the transition from peacetime to war. However, within two years, the effects of a long-term war rather than a short-term conflict pointed towards a new approach in official attempts to construct an appropriate identity for women.

### **War Weariness: An Analysis of *The Women's Auxiliary*, 1942-1944**

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<sup>47</sup> Alan Paton. *Hofmeyr*. (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1964) p200.

<sup>48</sup> Documentation Centre – Department of Defence Archives. Bertha Solomon. "From the Parliamentary Front – The Wider Outlook of Women's Interests" in *The Women's Auxiliary*, December 1940, Issue 4, p5.

<sup>49</sup> Solomon. "From the Parliamentary Front" in *The Women's Auxiliary*, December 1940, p7.

June 1942 heralded the first mention in *The Women's Auxiliary* of what was described as “war weariness”. The year marked a turning point in support for the war. As I have discussed in earlier research, the confluence of a lessening of the initial enthusiasm with a war with no endpoint in sight, as well as the less than ideal conditions on the home front brought about by the high state of alert of a country wracked by dissidents, rationing and many women’s new and pressurised roles as sole bread-winners, led to a drastic decrease in the support for the war. This manifested itself in a recruiting shortfall.<sup>50</sup> On the war front the effects of Tobruk was a major setback initiating a new propaganda campaign, which I have discussed in some detail in the previous chapter, and negatively affecting many women who had had male relations either killed or taken prisoner, bringing with it uncertainty and pessimism.

In June 1942 Colonel G.C.G. Werdmuller, the Director of Recruiting, made a statement in the magazine appealing to women already enlisted in the Auxiliary Services to address the recruiting shortfall by actively attempting to get more recruits and, more significantly, not to speak ill of their military service but to represent it in a positive and optimistic light:

Every woman who is now playing an effective part in the W.A.A.S. is a shareholder in her country’s security. As such she is an active partner in one of the greatest organisations this country has ever known. Every word she speaks in praise of that vast organisation heightens its good reputation among those who as yet have not joined it. Every time she airs her grouses and grumbles in public she damages that reputation and, consciously or unconsciously, discourages some other woman from joining it and contributing towards its further success.<sup>51</sup>

By 1942 it had become necessary to put a positive spin on military service for women. Werdmuller went on to liken the military to a vast organisation where each member had an equal stake in its representation and was thus responsible for giving it their wholehearted support, sacrificing their personal considerations for the greater good which, ultimately, was the victory that would ensure South Africa’s safety.<sup>52</sup> This, in no small way, drew parallels with the propaganda films discussed previously. In these films the war was presented as a real threat to South African borders, making it necessary for the population to throw their support behind the war effort. Additionally Werdmuller made mention of what presumably were women’s complaints regarding military service – the lack of domestic pleasantries, a far cry from the

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<sup>50</sup> Cf. Suryakanthie Chetty. “Gender Under Fire: Interrogating War in South Africa, 1939-1945.” (University of Natal Durban: Unpublished MA dissertation, 2001)

<sup>51</sup> Documentation Centre – Department of Defence Archives. G.C.G. Werdmuller. “Fighting Hitler with a Full Team” in *The Women's Auxiliary*, June 1942, Issue 22, p5.

<sup>52</sup> Werdmuller. “Fighting Hitler with a Full Team” in *The Women's Auxiliary*, June 1942, p5.

domestic themed picture painted of life in the barracks – and weighed it up against the positive benefits, “the companionship, the sense of achievements, the knowledge that you are doing a good job,” with, needless to say, the latter taking pride of place.<sup>53</sup> What this article does suggest was that, by that time, women were not as wholeheartedly embracing military service as had been portrayed by official sources from the onset of war and, to address this drop in morale and enthusiasm, other strategies, some subtle and others less so, were employed in *The Women's Auxiliary*.

Women too were apparently demanding greater roles. A piece appearing in the same issue is titled “Johannesburg Women Want to Shoot” and described the efforts of the S.A.W.A.S. women of Command 14 in Johannesburg who wished to be allowed to be given weapons training. The article itself, while not acknowledging any authorship, portrayed the perspective of these women and used historical precedent to give their claims validity, arguing that, “It is a tradition of South African women to know how to load a gun for a man, as they did in the days of the *laager* when war was fought against the native hordes.”<sup>54</sup> Their argument contended for a specific kind of identity in two ways – the first was that it was an Afrikaner one as it made reference to the pioneer past, evident in the use of *laager*, from which English women were to an extent excluded. Significantly it was also a particularly white identity defining itself against “the native hordes”, still confining the latter to an adversarial category. Ultimately the outcome of the article was indecisive, no subsequent mention was made of arming these women and the request apparently petered out, at least on the part of the magazine.

Although little can be drawn from the short piece regarding the weapons training of Johannesburg women, an interview with the Director-General of the Auxiliary Territorial Services appearing two years later – which I discuss in greater detail below – detailing the work of the ATS in Britain, makes a tentative suggestion regarding the arming of women and potential roles for them in combat:

Thus, so far as can at present be foreseen, there remains scarcely any other combatant job from which they [women] can release man-power in the army, short of their being

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<sup>53</sup> Werdmuller. “Fighting Hitler with a Full Team” in *The Women's Auxiliary*, June 1942, p5.

<sup>54</sup> Documentation Centre – Department of Defence Archives. “Johannesburg Women Want to Shoot” in *The Women's Auxiliary*, June 1942, Issue 22, p35.

armed...I have seen it suggested that we should now take a still farther step and train and equip our women to use arms.<sup>55</sup>

Greater emphasis was placed on larger roles for women in combat-related activities. Articles were written detailing the work of their British counterparts who, due to the more direct effects of war in that country, were involved in expanded roles. Detailed descriptions were made of the W.A.A.F. mechanics who worked and flew alongside regular male R.A.F. pilots. The young woman mechanic flying with a male pilot instructor was portrayed as intent and dedicated to her work, refusing to be distracted by the view in front of her. Her reward was a job perfectly performed and the brief praise from the pilot, "Good job," leaving her, "eager, happy, proud of her work and proud of her instructor."<sup>56</sup>

Along with this article, the issue carried features on female pilots who could possibly soon have been taking on the role of bomber pilots. It also focused on the women of the Auxiliary Territorial Services who worked alongside men in assisting with the firing of the anti-aircraft guns. They did all the tasks including aiming but were not allowed to engage in the actual firing, which was the line on which the state and conventional perceptions of gender stood firm:

Well, our job has been to release men to do that. Killing – as that must be – is the man's job. We've tried to keep a balance. Giving life is the woman's job. She is the creator. It is dangerous to play with her fundamental role in life. We have to protect that vital role as much, and for as long, as we can. We have to think about after the war.<sup>57</sup>

The interviewee in the article was herself in charge of the ATS and her position gives her voice authority regarding the appropriate roles for women in the war. Although the branch was the one which allowed most combat-like roles to women as well as the opportunity to work alongside men building a close camaraderie, there existed still a strong conservatism regarding the appropriate roles for women. This held true to the convention of them as the bearers of life and hinting at a similar role at the end of the war. Yet the appearance of these articles in this issue catered to an audience of women who were not necessarily content to play the role of auxiliaries in its most run of the mill form by engaging in clerical work or volunteers structuring

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<sup>55</sup> Documentation Centre – Department of Defence Archives. An interview with Jean Knox, Director-General of the Auxiliary Territorial Services conducted by John Cashel. "Britain's Girl Combatants" in *The Auxiliary Services*, July 1942, Issue 23, p30.

<sup>56</sup> Documentation Centre – Department of Defence Archives. Marion Slater. "British Women Fly with R.A.F." in *The Women's Auxiliary*, July 1942, Issue 23, p28.

<sup>57</sup> Documentation Centre – Department of Defence Archives. An interview with Jean Knox, Director-General of the Auxiliary Territorial Services conducted by John Cashel. "Britain's Girl Combatants" in *The Auxiliary Services*, July 1942, Issue 23, p30.

social events for male troops, evident in the drop in recruits. These expanded roles, although largely a British phenomenon, attempted to address the shortfall in recruitment by appealing to a sense of adventure and the greater possibilities of equal responsibilities for women, albeit within limits.

The use of articles referring to the work of women in Britain, as well as the Dominion countries, was a common convention in *The Women's Auxiliary*. South African women in the Auxiliary Services constantly appeared to be measuring their activities against those of the women in the other Allied countries. This was evident in the constant comparisons with Britain made by the Transport Services and the coastal batteries. In August 1942, the *Women's Auxiliary* ran an article on the activities of British women in the Army, Navy and Air Force as well as their jobs in munitions and aircraft production.<sup>58</sup> Two months later a similar article appeared on the activities of Australian women, with the added emphasis on the sacrifices made in elements key to their beauty routine:

With war clouds on the horizon, Australian women have discarded unessentials – such as nail lacquer, the nitro-cellulose of which is needed for munitions – and have joined their men in the nation's war effort.<sup>59</sup>

Yet more articles appeared on Canadian, American and even French women. For S.A.W.A.S. the fostering of a bond between the Allied women was essential as it would eventually be a powerful force in bringing about world peace:

Let us compare notes so that, as our service strengthens, so will the bond between Empire women strengthen until our united influence for future peace becomes irresistible.<sup>60</sup>

There was a sense of a growing awareness of their counterparts all over the world and the bond they held based on shared experiences and activities. There was also the appeal to the inherently pacifist nature of women and their role in creating peace. To this end women in South Africa actually paid a visit to England and reported back on the activities of their British counterparts, noting both similarities and differences in what women were allowed to do during the war. The differences arose from Britain's smaller population as well as the threat to her borders, giving British women a more active role to play in the country's defence.<sup>61</sup> For instance, conscription

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<sup>58</sup> Documentation Centre – Department of Defence Archives. *The Women's Auxiliary*, August 1942, Issue 24, p32.

<sup>59</sup> Documentation Centre – Department of Defence Archives. *The Women's Auxiliary*, October 1942, Issue 26, p29.

<sup>60</sup> Documentation Centre – Department of Defence Archives. *The Women's Auxiliary*, November 1942, Issue 27, p32.

<sup>61</sup> Documentation Centre – Department of Defence Archives. *The Women's Auxiliary*, July 1944, Issue 47, p38.

was introduced for young women in Britain, in effect forcing them into war work.<sup>62</sup> Moreover, British women serving in Anti-Aircraft units, working alongside men “helping to fire the guns which, it was hoped, would kill as many German airmen as possible”.<sup>63</sup>

As many of the initiatives of the S.A.W.A.S. modelled itself on Britain, so too did South African women believe that they were setting an example for their allies in India through the medium of *The Women's Auxiliary*. This implied a hierarchy within the British Empire which, to an extent, was based on race. Britain was at the apex followed by the countries with white rule – Australia, Canada, New Zealand and South Africa – with the work of the women of India being under the direction of their white counterparts in South Africa.:

She [Juliet Bader] already has three groups of women taking a course of instruction in garages, running repairs, etc., and these will take over driving of ambulances at cantonments, and such like duties. I think your magazines are responsible for the ideas, and not I...It will be lovely if South Africa can show India the way.<sup>64</sup>

There was therefore an active interaction between women in the Auxiliary Services of the Allied countries. This influenced the activities they carried out and the way in which they perceived themselves as part of a great Allied campaign where the ultimate goal was victory and they subsequently believed that they had a very important role to play in this.<sup>65</sup> These women were portrayed as being part of the British Empire, the women from the different countries making up the empire coming together to help fight fascism, albeit within a hierarchical structure.

The post-war era was also imagined to be the opportunity for women to utilise the training and education that they had received during the war, giving them an equal role to play in peace, and one which made the most of their abilities in a way that pre-war society had not:

Here, as well as in England, girls have equal education facilities with boys, and show equal aptitude for intelligent subjects. Must the average South African woman's adult life be a continual repression of those faculties which she has begun to develop at school, or will she continue to use her brain and intelligence to help the men organise the peace?<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Caroline Lang. *Keep Smiling Through: Women in the Second World War*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) p30.

<sup>63</sup> Ruth Adam. *A Woman's Place: 1910-1975*. (London: Chatto and Windus, 1975) p149.

<sup>64</sup> Documentation Centre – Department of Defence Archives. *The Women's Auxiliary*, March 1942, Issue 19, p5.

<sup>65</sup> Cf. Chetty. “Gender Under Fire”. p130-131.

<sup>66</sup> Documentation Centre – Department of Defence Archives. Ruth Adam. “Changed Attitude and Future Outlook” in *The Women's Auxiliary*, December 1942, Issue 28, p30.

Yet, along with the carrot attempting to increase recruitment by emphasising the new opportunities available to women, came the stick – the not-so-subtle threat of the repercussions of their lack of support, in this case Nazi domination, which would be a major setback for equal rights for women. A German victory would have, in fact, a greater repercussion for women than men, hence making women's role in defending the country even more vital:

Psychologically, women know that by the victory of the Nazis they would lose everything. They would become once more – perhaps for a thousand years, hard-driven chattels and despised playthings. This is their war, in a stronger and even deeper sense than it is a man's.<sup>67</sup>

When this failed to adequately address the problem, from 1943, as I have shown in the previous chapter, a new tack was initiated to increase the shortfall in recruitment. Begun by Werdmuller, the emphasis was on a glamorisation of women's war work when sacrifice and duty were insufficient incentives. In an article penned by a female recruiting officer and aptly titled "The Recruit is Precious", women who decided to enter military service were, from the outset, portrayed as being at the centre of attention particularly at parties. They would be subject to the constant, kind, paternal, caring and rapt attention of men aiding the somewhat helpless female by carrying her bag and helping find her luggage – an attention that was contrasted with the lack thereof that she experienced at home.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Phyllis Bottome. "Women in Wartime Must Work". Excerpt appearing in *The Women's Auxiliary*, December 1942, Issue 28, p11.

<sup>68</sup> Documentation Centre – Department of Defence Archives. E.V. Wroughton. "The Recruit is Precious" in *The Women's Auxiliary*, February 1943, Issue 30, p13.

**GIRLS LIKE THESE**  
Smoke C to C's

Playing her part in the service of the Navy, she naturally makes smartness her keynote. She knows that smart girls smoke "C to C" and always carries the few that make such a big difference to her leisure moments.

GG C to C 99  
THE QUALITY CIGARETTE

Her closest friend, a Naval Captain, introduced to her these excellent cigarettes.

"C to C"  
50 CIGARETTES  
RHOESIAN VIRGINIA

ENJOYED BY THE MILLION

**'a rangetaker**  
is a miss who seldom misses her target . . . who works at a gun site but always looks a vision . . . who keeps cool in the heat of battle . . . and who likes flirting with danger, heavy engagements and being "bombarded" with gifts of Max's Cigarettes.

MAXIMS OF MAX

Men of the World Smoke Max

CHOICEST VIRGINIA

50 for 2/-

In the War Propaganda Piccadilly

S.A.M. 1 250-1

(Images taken from *The Women's Auxiliary*, November 1944, Issue 51, p2 and *The Women's Auxiliary*, July 1943, Issue 35, p72.)

This notion of glamour was apparent in the adverts appearing in *The Women's Auxiliary* as well. Although appearing somewhat late in the war, the advert above for cigarettes emphasised the "smartness" of the Navy woman which would only be enhanced by the cigarettes, giving her added sophistication. In addition it made use of the notion of female camaraderie with "Her closest friend, a Naval Captain, introduced to her these excellent cigarettes."<sup>69</sup> This followed on from a similar advert appearing a year earlier for "Max" cigarettes. Although the caption was "Men of the World Smoke Max", women of the ATS appeared in the advert itself – women whose proximity to combat and camaraderie with men suggested the idealised experience of

<sup>69</sup> Documentation Centre – Department of Defence Archives. "C to C – the Quality Cigarette" in *The Women's Auxiliary*, November 1944, Issue 51, p2.

women in the military. Significantly the poise, confidence and capability of these women working under fire made them more attractive to men, leading to them being “bombarded” with the cigarettes as gifts.<sup>70</sup> The conjunction of the image of women with the male-centred caption for Max cigarettes also suggested, in a perhaps radical manner, that women smoking the cigarettes which were advertised as being for men, bridged the gap between the genders.

Added to that was the portrayal of military training as being akin to a “finishing school” where the recruit would learn “the poise and self confidence”, making them capable and assured young women. A vignette is given of a young girl from the *platteland* with the small town outlook – naiveté, shyness and awkwardness. Her first comfort was being placed with other like-minded recruits and their subsequent experiences of companionship and camaraderie based on their participation in training, sport and social activities. After weeks of lectures, learning military etiquette and the advice of older women, the ordinary girl was transformed into a mature, capable and responsible woman. This was a far cry from her previous persona – a transformation that would prepare for “living a sane, happy and respected life” in post-war South Africa.<sup>71</sup> Here, military training was portrayed as the key to a healthy, happy and fulfilled life, and one from which women would be infinitely more rewarded than if they had not answered the call.

Finally, in addition to these various strategies, was the appeal to guilt and conscience. A poem penned by C. Burmester appeared in March 1944 titled “War Weariness”. The first stanza:

When this wretched World War started  
And our homes in danger lay  
The women in this sunny land  
Got up – and said their say  
With visions of the war work  
And the wondrous tings they’d do  
They linked up with the SAWAS  
So did I – and so did You.<sup>72</sup>

suggested the enthusiasm initially felt by women eager to do their bit – their rush to enlist, the gusto with which they carried out their duties, their attention to the superficial details of uniform,

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<sup>70</sup> Documentation Centre – Department of Defence Archives. “Maxims of Max” in *The Women’s Auxiliary*, July 1943, Issue 35, p72.

<sup>71</sup> Documentation Centre – Department of Defence Archives. “A Rookie’s Life Leads to Poise and Self-Confidence” in *The Women’s Auxiliary*, March 1943, Issue 31, p32-33.

<sup>72</sup> Documentation Centre – Department of Defence Archives. C. Burmester. “War Weariness” in *The Women’s Auxiliary*, March 1944, Issue 43, p55.

regular meetings, social events for soldiers, all of which was given a somewhat less than vital significance when compared to the work of male soldiers in combat. The poem clearly suggested that men had made the greater sacrifice having little choice in their war work, the discomforts associated with it and little freedom or leeway to complain:

They bought their brand new outfits  
All with belt and tie complete  
And they toddled off to meetings  
Looking most important – Neat.  
They learnt to make good coffee,  
Served so many hungry men;  
Took up “first aid,” “knitting,” “transport –  
But !! the war’d just started then.

Do our soldiers ever slacken  
In the snow and slush and dust?  
Do their buttons all get tarnished  
And their rifles filmed with rust?  
No! They’ve got a job to finish  
They must do, or die, or Bust  
Whilst we? Gossip, grouse, and grumble  
It’s not cricket, it’s not just.<sup>73</sup>

Using “It’s not cricket, it’s not just”, introduced a sporting metaphor – so key to the identity of men in combat – signifying that it wasn’t fair play for men to shirk their duty and abandon their role. Similarly women were under the same obligations, in roles that were far easier to carry out. By using the experiences of men at war and contrasting them to what was perceived to be the relatively easier work of women at the home front, the poem was an attempt to evoke an attack of conscience on the part of women, many of whom with male relatives away on the frontlines of North Africa and Southern Europe.

### **“Don’t Rock the Boat”: An Analysis of *The Women’s Auxiliary*, 1944-1945**

While there was no clear-cut boundary between the periods, the issues of the magazine in the latter part of 1944 and early 1945 marked the initiation of the third period of the war, at least on the part of women. This was the phase preparing them for the return of men. It was quite clearly a return to conservatism. With the end of war in sight, there was a subsequent desire to restore the status quo and the “normality” after the temporary aberration of war. In January

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<sup>73</sup> C. Burmester. “War Weariness” in *The Women’s Auxiliary*, March 1944, Issue 43, p55.

1945 Smuts, addressing the SAWAS in Pretoria, marked a return to the spiritual role for women envisaged in a post-war South Africa, moving away from the appeals to greater job opportunities and glamour which were a hallmark of the attempts by propaganda to counter “war weariness”. According to Smuts, men were “politically and business minded”, suiting them for the public sphere, whereas the “noble” qualities for women suggested a different calling – “the spiritual uplift of South Africa”.<sup>74</sup> This raised again the spectre of the spiritual and moral role most suited to women which held such a strong hold on the public imagination in the nineteenth century and again was a feature of the ambiguous first stage of the war. This drew on earlier imaginings of the idealised role of women in the private sphere as mothers and nurturers and was one of the features of this return to conservatism envisaged for the women who had contributed to the war effort.

The article “When Husbands Return” appearing a month later raised the burning issue of women’s reaction and adjustment to their husbands returning from war. Women’s apprehension was defined as a loss of independence as well as the “physiological and psychological demands of marriage”, particularly that pertaining to men who themselves were permanently changed by their experience of war.<sup>75</sup> Additionally it was seen as necessary for those couples who had not done so before the war, to “start a family”, drawing upon the natural reproductive role of women to compensate for society’s post-war needs. To do this it was once again necessary for women to forego their own needs for a greater good:

For a few months, perhaps even for a few years it will be necessary to sacrifice financial, mental and social independence in order to contribute to the welfare not only of the returned soldier, but also, ultimately, to the community.<sup>76</sup>

The article suggests a concern on the part of the military and the state that the initiation of some form of empowerment and independence for women during the war would not be so easy to rein in once the conflict had ended and more conventional and conservative gender roles would be advocated by officialdom. A similar dilemma arose in other Allied countries such as Britain where, “Their [women] accomplishments in their jobs or their participation in the services...provoked continuing challenges to the idea that after the war women and family life

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<sup>74</sup> Documentation Centre – Department of Defence Archives. Jan Smuts. “The Greatest is Yet to Come” in *The Women’s Auxiliary*, January 1945, Issue 53, p5.

<sup>75</sup> Documentation Centre – Department of Defence Archives. S. Kachelhoffer. “When Husbands Return” in *The Women’s Auxiliary*, February 1945, Issue 53, p 29.

<sup>76</sup> Kachelhoffer. “When Husbands Return” in *The Women’s Auxiliary*, February 1945, p29.

would go on as though the war had not happened.”<sup>77</sup> The expected role of the post-war women was to create a haven in the home, making it a centre of calm as a buffer to the turmoil and strain of the outside world. The main benefit accrued to women for this sacrifice would be to relinquish the tension and worry that came with their war-time independence – concerns about running a household without support as well as the financial constraints and anxieties stemming from being single parents.<sup>78</sup> Women too, had to be supportive of their husbands, allowing them to recuperate from the trauma of war by providing a stable and nurturing environment which, after all, was what they were deemed to be best at.<sup>79</sup> Furthermore, asking all this of women was seen to be part of their nature, something for which they were biologically and socially suited, making them naturally acquiescent, “At heart most women are ‘yes women’ and this is the one occasion when wives can fulfil the role of comforter. Their own worries must wait till he is at peace.”<sup>80</sup>

The psychological condition of the returning soldier was a dominant theme in this period, particularly as it dealt with the appropriate behaviour for women. After the euphemism and silences which had hitherto characterised men’s experiences of war for the home front, this was the first time that women were exposed to an inkling of what men had gone through:

Probably you think of war in terms of Ouma’s Gifts and Comforts and of the enviable treat he had during 10 days of leave in Rome when his letters were full of the pleasure of staying in a first-class hotel...These and many pleasant little inconsequential things of service and the thoughts of you at home were what he usually wrote about. He never mentioned the dirt and terror of the front line, trying to sleep in the sleet and the snow, nor the time his platoon was isolated for two days and nights by a curtain of heavy fire, unable to withdraw or get rations up.<sup>81</sup>

Yet *The Women’s Auxiliary* too, as I will show subsequently in this chapter, had colluded in representing the war in a manner which was designed to further recruitment so, for the women who believed in this representation, the articles as the war neared its close must have been a major shock. And this ultimately was their aim – to shock women into returning to a conservative and pre-war mindset. The article used the guilt inspired by the knowledge of men’s experiences to call for women to not “rock the boat” by making individual and “selfish”

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<sup>77</sup> Sonya O. Rose. *Which People’s War? National Identity and Citizenship in Britain 1939-1945*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003) p287.

<sup>78</sup> Kachelhoffer. “When Husbands Return” in *The Women’s Auxiliary*, February 1945, p35.

<sup>79</sup> Kachelhoffer. “When Husbands Return” in *The Women’s Auxiliary*, February 1945, p70.

<sup>80</sup> Kachelhoffer. “When Husbands Return” in *The Women’s Auxiliary*, February 1945, p35.

<sup>81</sup> Documentation Centre – Department of Defence Archives. John Hays. “War Leaves its Scars, Sister” in *The Women’s Auxiliary*, April 1945, Issue 56, p21.

demands on those who had made far greater sacrifices. The article went on to describe in detail the everyday discomforts of a soldier's life, drawing comparisons with the perceived pampered domestic existence of women, making light or, in some cases, rendering invisible, their own struggles in coming to terms with the changes wrought by war on the home front. Another theme was of the possibility of post-traumatic stress syndrome or as it was described in the article "the shock of war [which] has left scars on his mind", experienced by many men in combat and the antidote was deemed to be the patient nurturing care of their spouses engaging in what was now termed their "great war job".<sup>82</sup> These revelations worked in concert to attempt to still the desire in women to carry on the independence afforded them by war to a post-war society.

While *The Women's Auxiliary* was the official magazine of the South African Women's Auxiliary Services, and its presumed audience was therefore white women, there were male contributors to the magazine, particularly soldiers whose letters home were included on a regular basis. A reading of these articles indicates not only what these men felt about what it meant to be a soldier in combat but the way in which they wished themselves to be portrayed to white women. Furthermore, their appearance in an official source, meant that the kinds of identity advocated by these men were in many ways in line with state ideas disseminated in propaganda. It is important however to note that this does not indicate that all combatants felt the same – these were a select few who were published in an official magazine, making them part of an official agenda to promulgate a particular world view, with the ultimate aim of raising and maintaining support for the war effort.

### **Soldiers and Mothers: Women as the Motivation to Fight**

From the inaugural issue of *The Women's Auxiliary* published in September 1940, the first in a series of letters entitled "The Letters of a Young Airman to His Mother" was published. The letters were from a South African, "Hugh", who had enlisted in the Royal Air Force (RAF) in England, to his mother in South Africa, indicating the importance of the mother figure to the soldier. As I have discussed in earlier research, this relationship between the two was a common and powerful one employed in times of war. The encouragement of sons who fought in war

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<sup>82</sup> Hays. "War Leaves its Scars, Sister" in *The Women's Auxiliary*, April 1945, p45.

took the form of patriotic motherhood. This made its appearance in two forms – in Italy and, in particular, Germany. Here its most extreme form came in the state expectations that women defined as being ideal Germans would be encouraged to reproduce. Their biological function was placed in the service of the state in order to reproduce the race.<sup>83</sup> In the Allied countries, such as the United States for instance, patriotic motherhood involved the encouragement of sons to fight, so much so, that mothers were given a gold star for every son lost in war. An organisation was formed called “The Gold Star Mothers of Future Wars” where women anticipated the glorious deaths in battle of sons not yet born.<sup>84</sup> The more gold stars accrued by a mother, the greater her celebrity status as a woman who made the greatest sacrifice in service of her country. To an extent, parallels can be drawn between “Gold Star Mothers” and the ceremonies used to reward prolific mothers in fascist Italy. Both were being rewarded for patriotic motherhood – one for fulfilling her role as a giver of life by bearing many children who were likely to be used in the next war and the other for subverting her role as the same to serve the greater good.<sup>85</sup> The common link to both was the notion of sacrifice and the utilisation of the conventional role of the mother in the home to that of the state:

Women equally with men have a passionate love of mother-country... Though we loathe slaughter we find that after men have done their best to kill and wound, women are ever ready to mend the broken bodies, soothe the dying and weep over nameless graves!... God made two, a man and a woman, to rule the home – the state is but a larger home.<sup>86</sup>

Of course, the actual participation of men in war did not preclude the participation of women in terms of their encouragement of men.

The letter in *The Women's Auxiliary* holds true to this pre-established convention. The letters of the airman were used to reassure his mother – and other mothers in similar circumstance – of his safety yet, simultaneously, it made known his desire to do his duty – a duty which encompassed country, comrades and his mother. In addition to confirming his safety, he made it clear that he was not shirking this duty, and went on to reject men who did. This desire to assume the mantle of the “noble warrior” for his mother went hand in hand with the mediation he created through his letters between the actual experience of war that he was undergoing and his mother's

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<sup>83</sup> Gisela Bock. “Equality and Difference in National Socialist Racism” in *Feminism and History*. Joan Wallach Scott, ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996) p280.

<sup>84</sup> Jean Bethke Elshtain. *Women and War*. (New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers) p41.

<sup>85</sup> Chetty. “Gender Under Fire”. p43.

<sup>86</sup> Elshtain. *Women and War*. p146.

perception of it. As such, “The Letters of a Young Airman to His Mother” followed a similar pattern to that apparent in the other Allied countries, making clear the integral nature of mothers to the idealisation of war, so necessary to create patriotic zeal for the war effort.<sup>87</sup>

Upon being allowed to return to South Africa “Hugh” chose instead to enlist in the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve. His letter to his mother indicates that he understood her disappointment at his remaining in England yet simultaneously she would be as disappointed in his character if he did not remain to do his duty, “I know you may be a little upset, but I also know you would never want your son to be a coward.”<sup>88</sup> His decision to remain in England was not based on legal requirement but on a deeper compulsion where notions of both class and masculinity converged:

I came to England because I felt there was going to be a war, and I wanted to do my bit in the air like a gentleman. That chance has been denied me, so I’ll have to prove myself a man.<sup>89</sup>

As a “gentleman” he felt compelled to play a part in the war but, when the option for which he had signed up was no longer available, he looked for alternatives. His definition of masculinity was not one automatically conferred by his gender but had to be proven by a trial by fire.

A significant theme of his letters is that of courage – he continuously reassures his mother both about his safety as well as his courage in doing his duty. This indicated the ambiguous position that she held as both nurturer and protector of life as well as being a key reason for which he in fact fought and faced death. In a letter six months later he reassures her that he is not afraid of the possibility of dying in combat, it is far more important for him to prove his masculinity and courage under fire to his peers and ultimately his mother. Furthermore there exists a pride in his abilities which it would be remiss of him to waste by not doing his part:

I want you to believe that I am not particularly frightened of what lies ahead, and I should hate myself if, after I have shown myself a better pilot in training than most, I allowed others to do the dirty work. I am your son and you would not like me to be lacking in courage.<sup>90</sup>

Similarly he expresses disdain for those men not motivated by the same:

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<sup>87</sup> Chetty. “Gender Under Fire”. p45.

<sup>88</sup> Documentation Centre – Department of Defence Archives. “The Letters of a Young Airman to His Mother” in *The Women’s Auxiliary*, September 1940, Issue 1, p28.

<sup>89</sup> “The Letters of a Young Airman” in *The Women’s Auxiliary*, September 1940, p28.

<sup>90</sup> Documentation Centre – Department of Defence Archives. “The Letters of a Young Airman to His Mother” in *The Women’s Auxiliary*, May 1941, Issue 9, p71.

I have never had any time for the men who did not take a part in the last war. At the same time I do not expect a man to be a hero; but he must not be a coward and he must retain his self-respect by doing his duty...Only by taking part in operations against the enemy can I come up to my own standards of living and be worthy of all that I love and respect.<sup>91</sup>

An interesting aspect about his contemptuous attitude towards men who “shirked” their duty in the First World War is that the horrendous nature of that conflict in terms of the high numbers of dead and the subsequent disillusionment with war so evident with the war poets of that conflict, has been silenced. The war itself was re-written in terms of the conventional conflict between good and evil and the patriotic and masculine responsibility of men to play a role in it.<sup>92</sup> For “Hugh” being a hero was not a pre-requisite for proving one’s manhood – it was simply sufficient to carry out one’s duty to the best of one’s ability and this duty was to play a role in the war. Only then could men prove their masculinity, not only to themselves but to those around them, making them worthy human beings. Those men who did not fall in with this way of thinking were deemed to be less manly.

The letters from “Hugh” also make reference to the motivation for his fighting, beyond that of proving his masculinity, by bringing in the notion of a “just war” against a heinous enemy. From the second issue of *The Women’s Auxiliary*, “Hugh” writes of his experiences in England – which he continues to do throughout his series of letters. In his second letter he relates his visits to the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre and Jesus College, emphasising the historical traditions and culture of England, as well as a picturesque description of the English countryside and the friendliness of the villagers concluding with, “Sights like this...made me feel this was the heart of England and that there was something decent and clean about it which makes it worth fighting for.”<sup>93</sup> A year later, and the Blitz provided him with further motivation to fight the Germans with a moving description of the poorer classes taking shelter in the underground stations from the German bombing overhead. Facing their obstacles with “dogged courage” in a manner not dissimilar to the one actually portrayed by British propaganda – which I will discuss briefly further on in this chapter – only increased “Hugh’s” desire to defend the British people.<sup>94</sup> His

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<sup>91</sup> Documentation Centre – Department of Defence Archives. “The Letters of a Young Airman to His Mother” in *The Women’s Auxiliary*, July 1941, Issue 11, p15.

<sup>92</sup> This is evident in the film *Sergeant York* which I discussed in the previous chapter.

<sup>93</sup> Documentation Centre – Department of Defence Archives. “The Letters of a Young Airman to His Mother” in *The Women’s Auxiliary*, October 1940, Issue 2, p24.

<sup>94</sup> Documentation Centre – Department of Defence Archives. “The Letters of a Young Airman to His Mother” in *The Women’s Auxiliary*, October 1941, Issue 14, p17.

descriptions of the charms of England and the fortitude of the British people in the face of tremendous adversity also served as a means of increasing South African support for the war itself – a support that for the six years of the Second World War was always under contention and had to be continually reiterated.

What of the enemy that he faced? After “Hugh” was placed on bomber crew rather than given a position as a pilot of his own aircraft, which was his ultimate desire, his “consolation” came,

...with the reflection that we are going on heavy bombers, and if we can't fly ourselves we shall have the satisfaction of dropping some of the biggest bomb loads over Germany and that we have a gun in the nose to have a crack at anything that comes our way.<sup>95</sup>

His eagerness for combat and “having a crack at the Germans” is evident. He refers to his first “baptism of fire” in a letter in November 1941 where he took part in an air attack on two German battleships and “enjoyed it thoroughly”, perceiving it to be a “real job”, after his initial flights involved the dropping of leaflets over enemy territory.<sup>96</sup> This letter is particularly interesting as his account of combat is interspersed with accounts of his exploits on the rugby field, creating a strong link between sport and combat which features extensively in subsequent chapters. He makes the connection even stronger towards the latter part of the letter where he describes an aircraft caught in the searchlights and anti-aircraft fire over Germany. He relates with amazement and admiration how the pilot kept his nerve and completed his mission without coming to any harm, ultimately beating the odds and defying the Germans.<sup>97</sup> “Hugh’s” view of combat was thus perceived as a challenge on par with the sports field where men on one side tested themselves against men on the other, with victory going to the better competitor.

This does not, however, detract from the dangers of combat with its far more serious repercussions than the sports field. A month later he relates his feelings prior to a bombing raid over Germany:

In a few hours I should be well inside Germany. Naturally I am not so tough that I am not a little tense, but a resolution to do my best in a job I really want to do well makes it rather easier than I thought it would be.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Documentation Centre – Department of Defence Archives. “The Letters of a Young Airman to His Mother” in *The Women's Auxiliary*, June 1941, Issue 10, p49.

<sup>96</sup> Documentation Centre – Department of Defence Archives. “The Letters of a Young Airman to His Mother” in *The Women's Auxiliary*, November 1941, Issue 15, p25.

<sup>97</sup> “The Letters of a Young Airman” in *The Women's Auxiliary*, November 1941, p25.

<sup>98</sup> Documentation Centre – Department of Defence Archives. “The Letters of a Young Airman to His Mother” in *The Women's Auxiliary*, December 1941, Issue 16, p15.

His resolution to fight suggests a mental decision to overcome the physiological effects of fear – a fear which he downplays as being “tense” and hence censoring himself. It was nonetheless a fear which was real as he faced the possibility of death in combat that was exacerbated by the death of his close friend three months previously. In this issue he once again censors himself for his mother and the presumed audience at home, “You will realised what I mean when I say George Inniss did not come back from operations the other night,”<sup>99</sup> a euphemistic reference to his death over Germany. He goes on to mention other friends also killed previously and, ultimately, he believes that the only way to honour their sacrifice is for him to “blast Germans”, using their deaths to increase his own resolution.<sup>100</sup> The greater significance of the letter was that it served as a means of encouraging South Africans to continue their support for the war despite the setbacks in terms of casualties which are an inevitable feature of war. However this form of encouragement was even more necessary for a country whose borders were not directly under threat and whose parliament was divided over entry into the war. While acknowledging the possibility of his death, “Hugh” emphasises that he is living according “to our own standards of conduct, and I hope to be worthy of you and my friends,”<sup>101</sup> the death of his friends and the pride of his mother steeling him in his resolution. However the actual possibility of death in combat is reduced to chance – he reassures his mother of his flying ability and foresees no harm “unless [his] luck leaves [him].”<sup>102</sup>

In addition the censoring of war experiences for the benefit of those at home was by no means confined to the character “Hugh”. A further letter, ostensibly from a pilot taken prisoner-of-war at Sidi-Rezegh, once again written to his mother who was herself a member of the W.A.A.S. (Women’s Auxiliary Army Services), details his experiences at the prison camp where he apparently led an almost idyllic existence of walks “in the countryside”, playing games and even sun-bathing. It is only by his exhaustive description of the food in the Red Cross parcels that there is a mere suggestion of the food shortages and hunger which prisoners-of-war experienced, which I had only learned from other sources.<sup>103</sup> The article explicitly stated its aim of allaying the fears of women in a similar position to the mother of the POW a few months after so many

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<sup>99</sup> Documentation Centre – Department of Defence Archives. “The Letters of a Young Airman to His Mother” in *The Women’s Auxiliary*, September 1941, Issue 13, p13.

<sup>100</sup> “The Letters of a Young Airman” in *The Women’s Auxiliary*, September 1941, p13.

<sup>101</sup> “The Letters of a Young Airman” in *The Women’s Auxiliary*, September 1941, p13.

<sup>102</sup> “The Letters of a Young Airman” in *The Women’s Auxiliary*, September 1941, p13.

<sup>103</sup> Interview of Godfrey Herbert conducted by S. Chetty and S. Sparks, June 9, 2004.

South Africans were taken prisoner at Tobruk. Its aim of editing the experiences of these men therefore converged with the interests of the men themselves who desired to protect those at home from the truth of war, be it being taken prisoner or watching the death of comrades and coming under enemy fire.<sup>104</sup> It was however these very experiences that challenged this hegemonic idea of white male masculinity as is evident in subsequent chapters in the dissertation when the personal testimonies of the soldiers are consulted.

In *The Women's Auxiliary*, whereas "Hugh" adopts a pragmatic approach to death, in other articles death in combat was also romanticised. In April 1941 an issue of the magazine carried little more than a paragraph titled "Brothers-in-Arms" which detailed the burial of two comrades who were killed in the war. The focus of the piece was on their camaraderie which had overcome class differences as one of the men was a, "blue-blooded English aristocrat [and the other] a sunny South African".<sup>105</sup> Their role as soldiers had fostered this close friendship, rendering the two inseparable even in death which was described by the article as an "ennobling" aspect of the war.<sup>106</sup> It also suggested that the close bonds formed by men thrown together by war had the potential to overcome social distinctions which would otherwise have separated them.

"Hugh" paints a similar picture of his comrades-in-arms, describing the various men in his squadron, their personalities and detailing their suitability as fighting men, making them worthy of his respect and admiration. The trait he appeared to appreciate most was their ability to be cool and collected under pressure. He discusses the first combat experience of a navigator from the Royal Canadian Air Force who had recently begun flying with him:

The trip the other night was his baptism under fire and he showed promising mettle. When the shells were bursting right close up behind our tail he just looked back and said nothing. While we were running in to the target with a score of searchlights on us his only cool, drawling remark was, "Gees, I can't see anything."<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Documentation Centre – Department of Defence Archives. "A Waasie Mother Receives Letters from a Prisoner-of-War Son" in *The Women's Auxiliary*, November 1942, Issue 27, p15. This censoring of their experiences on the part of men for the benefit of those on the home front and the silences evident in their war-time experiences is a recurring theme to which I will return in subsequent chapters.

<sup>105</sup> Documentation Centre – Department of Defence Archives. "Brothers-in-Arms" in *The Women's Auxiliary*, April 1941, Issue 8, p3.

<sup>106</sup> "Brothers-in-Arms" in *The Women's Auxiliary*, April 1941, p3.

<sup>107</sup> Documentation Centre – Department of Defence Archives. "The Letters of a Bomber Pilot to His Mother" in *The Women's Auxiliary*, February 1942, Issue 18, p17.

The facility to be not only courageous but laconic and downplay the dangers of a near fatal experience inspired in “Hugh” a determination to do the same in order to measure up to those with whom he worked. The final letter in the series demonstrated his willingness to sacrifice himself, not only in carrying out his duty, but to uphold the faith in him held by his parents and comrades, “...unless I am at least as much a man as the fellow next to me, it would be better that I should not come through this war.”<sup>108</sup> In this manner his role as a fighter pilot was based as much on his own belief system as on the consideration of others’ expectations of him. It was in light of this that he was ultimately shot down over Germany and taken prisoner-of-war. His final act in the war was to allow his crew to eject from the plane first, before doing so himself, making him a hero and earning him the respect of his peers.<sup>109</sup>

### **The Racial Hierarchy of War**

This valorisation of the role of white men in combat, the emphasis on their courage and nobility was not apparent for their black counterparts in South Africa. It is clear from the letters written by “Hugh” that he was English-speaking, educated and middle class. This was evident in his writing as well as him receiving a commission.<sup>110</sup> As a South African pilot with the RAF in England, his status was evident from him residing in an officer’s mess as well as having “a batman to clean one’s buttons and shoes”. Significantly, issues of race were not mentioned at all.<sup>111</sup> The overall effect of this series of articles as well as others appearing in the magazine, along with the photographs, created an image of whiteness and military service as the norm. Where black men and women are mentioned, it was done so explicitly and, ultimately, *The Women’s Auxiliary* gave short shrift to black men, mentioning them only in passing. In an article focussing on the Transport Unit of the South African Women’s Auxiliary, an incident was mentioned where a woman had driven a terrified African man to hospital:

One woman had as her passenger a native who was so terrified at the idea of going to hospital that he was making frantic and repeated attempts to jump the car. Only by swerving violently from one side of the road to the other, whenever he seemed about to take the leap, did she succeed in keeping him aboard and delivering him safely to the

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<sup>108</sup> Documentation Centre – Department of Defence Archives. “Bomber Pilot’s Letters – His Only Fear: That His Mother May Grieve” in *The Women’s Auxiliary*, May 1942, Issue 21, p5.

<sup>109</sup> “Bomber Pilot’s Letters” in *The Women’s Auxiliary*, May 1942, p5.

<sup>110</sup> Documentation Centre – Department of Defence Archives. “The Letters of a Bomber Pilot to His Mother” in *The Women’s Auxiliary*, September 1940, Issue 1, p28.

<sup>111</sup> Documentation Centre – Department of Defence Archives. “The Letters of a Bomber Pilot to His Mother” in *The Women’s Auxiliary*, March 1941, Issue 7, p53.

mine hospital. Coolness and presence of mind, as well as mere driving skill, is called for in this type of emergency.<sup>112</sup>

Here the gender roles are reversed – the man is relegated to the status of a terrified and uncomprehending child under the protection of the cool and collected woman – features of her personality akin to that of white male combatants but apparently not to black men, making the kind of masculinity advocated by “Hugh” unavailable to them.

For those men who had enlisted in the Non-European Army Services, there existed some leeway but nowhere near sufficient, to place them on equal terms to their white combatants. An article detailing life at a W.A.A.S. Barracks made only a passing reference to the black men on guard duty at the entrance to the barracks, “And at the gate – oh, Shades of Chaka! – are two natives with assegais, in two bell tents, to guard the W.A.A.S. within.”<sup>113</sup> The equation of African men with a heroic past was a conventional one during the Second World War as I will demonstrate in subsequent chapters.

Important to *The Women's Auxiliary's* depiction of race is that whiteness is rendered the norm and invisible. Moreover black voices are silenced except in rare and mediated occasions which I discuss below. Spivak, in her discussion of the subaltern Indian woman, looks at the silences of this group with their triple oppression of race, class and gender, and a similar process is evident in *The Women's Auxiliary* in relation to black men. And it is these silences, this absence of the voice of African men, which is itself indicative of a perception of their racial distinctiveness and inferiority, “Part of our ‘unlearning’ project is to articulate that ideological [masculine-imperialist] formation – by **measuring** silences, if necessary – into the **object** of investigation.”<sup>114</sup> One of the singular instances where African men are given a voice in *The Women's Auxiliary* occurred in the issue in May 1943, however, this was mediated by the patronising voice of white women. The article contained excerpts from letters from black soldiers thanking the African Women War Workers, a group initiated by the South African Women's Auxiliary Services, for the various knitted clothing which they had received. One of the excerpts is in the form of a poem

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<sup>112</sup> “Prepared to Drive Anything: Work of Unit No. 2, Command No. 14” in *The Women's Auxiliary*, October 1940, p17.

<sup>113</sup> Documentation Centre – Department of Defence Archives. “The Modern Girls: A Sporting Life in the W.A.A.S. Barracks” in *The Women's Auxiliary*, March 1941, Issue 7, p17.

<sup>114</sup> Gayathrie Spivak. “Can the Subaltern Speak?” in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Cultures*. C. Nelson et al, eds. (London: Macmillan, 1988) p297.

ostensibly penned by a black South African servicemen and described derisively as “the Native’s sense of the dramatic”:

Have courage, Africans, do your bit.  
Every mother to stand like a big Willow Tree  
When those boys up Africa  
Tearing thos [sic] wretched Germans  
Driving upon huge numbers  
When many a night become sleepless nights  
Watching the Enemy to come  
But my wish is Great Britain what I term THE LION HAS WINGS,  
therefore she will not be a servant of a heathen folk.<sup>115</sup>

The poem, although treated in a condescending manner, made reference to several themes espoused by white combatants such as “Hugh”, beginning with the call to Africans to do their duty by participating in the war. This duty would be possible only with the support of their mothers, metaphorically likened to a willow tree in terms of its strength and wide sheltering branches, indicating the key role played by mothers in the motivation of their sons. The poem also creates an image of combat and the tense sleeplessness of war, culminating with a reference to the indomitable will of the British which would not allow them to submit to the Germans. Here the poet places himself unequivocally on the side of the Allies and, in an about-turn from the racist ideology that dominated in the past, suggests that it is the Germans who are the “heathens”, not following Christian morality, making participation in the war a righteous duty.<sup>116</sup> These are themes which recur and which I discuss in greater detail in the following chapter.

That the poem is treated with such condescension is difficult to understand – it is perhaps the unfamiliarity of its structure in combination with the perception of the lower status of black men. However the poem suggests that black men were in many ways motivated by similar conventions as white men yet the role of the former was given much less attention and downplayed significantly in *The Women’s Auxiliary*, both as a result of South Africa’s complex history in terms of race relations as well as the auxiliary role of these men.

For black women who had no official role in the auxiliary services, their portrayal in the magazine was treated with even greater patronisation. The articles detailing the work of African women knitting for troops were few and far between. Where they existed, they largely

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<sup>115</sup> Documentation Centre – Department of Defence Archives. “For African Soldiers: ‘To Thank the Work You Done’” in *The Women’s Auxiliary*, May 1943, Issue 33, p25.

<sup>116</sup> Historically those who had not adopted Christianity compounded by their racial difference were derogatorily considered “heathen savages” which served to equate Christianity with white civilisation.

reinforced the status quo by placing their activities under the tutelage of white women officers. For instance, in the November 1942 issue of the magazine, an article describing the efforts of these women concluded with the subsequent invitation of them and like groups to pay a visit to Isie Smuts. The resulting photograph published was of the white officers of the African Women War Workers' Unit alongside the Prime Minister's wife – the black women involved in the work rendered both nameless and invisible.<sup>117</sup>

Six months later another issue raised the concern of communication difficulties and a lack of understanding between black and white women engaged in this work. Black women were presented as almost unfathomable with their white supervisors as long-suffering and patient, having to contend with these childlike and irrational women. The views of these black women were governed by racial prejudice and stereotyping:

Their work bristles with psychological difficulties. Native women will turn up to work for several meetings in succession. Then for some reason they won't come. Nobody can tell why...Many people think that this work for Natives is a thankless job. The Natives seem ungrateful. But they are not really. They don't quite understand it, and in typical Native manner they are trying to find out what lies behind it without asking straight questions.<sup>118</sup>

What the quote does suggest to me – despite the patronisation and misunderstandings characterising it – is that black women wanted to participate on some level in the war effort. The perceived failure of black and white women to work together harmoniously appeared to stem more from misunderstanding and lack of adequate communication, which then became easy to categorise according to racial stereotypes. The silence of the voices of black women regarding their role in the war effort is thus glaring when their work is related through the words of their white supervisors.

Simultaneously there existed the potential for improving race relations in the future. The same article suggested that the efforts of white women would have had an effect on black children, leading to a more sanguine vision of a decrease of racial tension between the two in succeeding generations where black people would come to understand the benevolent intentions of their white counterparts.<sup>119</sup> This feeling of optimism continued a year later when acknowledgement

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<sup>117</sup> Documentation Centre – Department of Defence Archives. "Growing War Work of African Women" in *The Women's Auxiliary*, November 1942, Issue 27, p22.

<sup>118</sup> "For African Soldiers" in *The Women's Auxiliary*, May 1943, Issue 33, p25,27.

<sup>119</sup> "For African Soldiers" in *The Women's Auxiliary*, May 1943, p27.

was made of the “loyalty of Non-Europeans in this war” where African people were described as a “national asset” due to their contributions to the war effort and the close proximity with which the two groups worked was an indication “that there can be real co-operation between Europeans and non-Europeans”.<sup>120</sup> The portrayal of black women thus displayed some of the many contradictions evident with South African “race relations” – on the one hand they were perceived as the “other”, with an inherently different way of thinking and subject to the patronising attitude of white women. Yet there was also a recognition, albeit a brief one, of their efforts and the belief that the war had initiated a positive turn in South African “race relations”. However, for a more comprehensive understanding of the divisions and tensions within South African society, which was dealt with only briefly in *The Women’s Auxiliary*, it is necessary to turn to another official publication. *Complex Country* helps to fill in the gaps evident in *The Women’s Auxiliary* where explicit arguments regarding race were not articulated – racial differences were taken as self-evident in a publication aimed at a South African audience. Where key South African political figures such as Jan Smuts or J.H. Hofmeyr appeared in *The Women’s Auxiliary*, there were no overt political statements regarding South African society, and their efforts were largely aimed at the recruitment of women. The emphasis was on gender roles, leaving matters of race largely silenced or self-evident to readers. *Complex Country*, while making little mention of gender, by being aimed at more than just South Africans, makes race and racial interaction far more explicit and, as such, both sources complement each other regarding official portrayals of racial and gendered identity. Unlike *The Women’s Auxiliary*, the audience for *Complex Country* was moreover imagined to be largely male – the “Allied troops” who would be travelling through the country.<sup>121</sup>

*Complex Country* was not only an attempt on the part of the South African military authorities to put forward ideas of what it meant to be South African for an international audience, namely the Allied troops who found themselves in the country, it was itself riddled with the same complexities and contradictions which were hallmarks of South African society. Ostensibly created by the Army Education Services – which I look at in greater detail in subsequent chapters – from contributions by serving South Africans for international visitors, it could nevertheless be used to advocate a certain kind of national identity for South Africans

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<sup>120</sup> Documentation Centre – Department of Defence Archives. “Loyalty of Non-Europeans in this War” in *The Women’s Auxiliary*, June 1944, Issue 46, p15.

<sup>121</sup> *Complex Country*. Janie E. Malherbe, ed. (London: Longmans, Green and Co., Ltd., 1944) p5. Killie Campbell Africana Library, KC 4985-4.

themselves as evident by the words of Isie Smuts in the foreword: "...I think South Africans themselves will not only enjoy reading the booklet, but will find it very instructive and handy at all times".<sup>122</sup>

### **The Unique Case of South Africa: An analysis of *Complex Country***

The foreword, written by Isie Smuts, itself reads suspiciously like an attempt to account for South Africa's "uniqueness", in particular, in terms of its policies such as segregation and racial inequality as well as the somewhat nefarious right wing activities of the Ossewabrandwag in the climate of democracy and liberty – the ideals for which the war was fought:

We South Africans, a small people with our own ideas and problems, are not easy to understand, and I fear we are often misjudged by those who do not know us, but in this booklet everything has been put so clearly that I feel sure it will open the eyes of many a one, who has only looked at South Africa and its people superficially, and has never really tried to understand us.<sup>123</sup>

Isie Smuts emphasised South Africa's nature as an oddity which was inevitably misunderstood by the world unless one were an insider. The country's conservatism – which was really by no means unique amongst the Allied countries if one considered policies in other previously British colonies such as Australia – could then be placed within context. The uniqueness of South Africa's situation lay not with her overtly racist policies – the aforementioned Australia practiced segregation as did the United States Armed Forces. It lay rather with the hostility of a significant number of the white population to the war effort. South Africa's white Afrikaner settlers, unlike the other Allied countries, had only over a generation previously fought a war against the British, the very people that they were now fighting alongside. For some, old resentments still smouldered, making them more predisposed to support the Axis. In light of this, much of *Complex Country* deals largely with white South Africans – the interaction between English and Afrikaans-speaking people with an emphasis on Afrikaner identity.

One of the ways in which Afrikaner identity was asserted in *Complex Country* was in terms of an emphasis of the importance of Afrikaans as a language – it was given equal if not greater validity with English in the country, its ancestry had to be respected by visiting troops as an indication of

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<sup>122</sup> *Complex Country*. p5.

<sup>123</sup> *Complex Country*. p5.

the strength of the Afrikaner nation and, rather than just being a unique language confined to South Africa, Afrikaner troops were portrayed as its ambassadors conveying it to the world:

South Africans have fought for this language [Afrikaans], and seen it steadily thrive. It is something that inseparably belongs to them. It is not, incidentally, the exclusive preserve of the anti-war element in the country. The majority of Afrikaners support the war effort, and Afrikaans has been spoken in Abyssinia, Madagascar, Libya, Tunisia and Italy. It will yet be spoken further afield. So don't feel suspicious, as some do, when you hear it spoken. People are inclined to feel restless if they can't understand what is being said around them, but that, after all, is a very good reason for learning something about it, as so many members of the R.A.F., for instance, have already done.<sup>124</sup>

More importantly Afrikaans was not solely seen as the preserve of Afrikaner right-wing nationalism but of nationalism in terms of nation-building and consolidation of white South Africa as a whole. It was an assertion of independence in the face of criticism from those opposed to the war effort who considered South African involvement in the war as being merely a reflection of their subservience to Britain, a hangover from the colonial era as it were.

However the Smuts administration had taken a stance in favour of Britain from September 1939 and was thus based on co-operation between the two white ethnic groups which dominated South African political and economic life. A strong theme of the booklet was of the strong relations between the two groups. Interestingly enough, a means of doing this was a re-envisioning of the past as it were. Incidents such as the Slagtersnek Rebellion, which was described as being "considered [a] grave injustice" in *Complex Country*, was portrayed as being little different from the excesses of the Dutch when the latter was in control of the Cape.<sup>125</sup> This more conciliatory tone was in contrast to the way in which the rebellion had been portrayed by Afrikaner nationalists:

In the twentieth century Afrikaner nationalist writers and politicians tried hard to use the uncompromising material of Slagtersnek to support a nationalism myth. The rebels were depicted as brave martyrs paying the ultimate penalty for standing up against British autocracy.<sup>126</sup>

The Great Trek too,<sup>127</sup> was portrayed as not only due to British oppression but as also due to the independent nature of Afrikaners who found it nearly impossible to live under British rule. Where the British were cited as a reason for the mass emigration of Afrikaners from the Cape,

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<sup>124</sup> *Complex Country*. p65.

<sup>125</sup> *Complex Country*. p15.

<sup>126</sup> Hermann Giliomee. *The Afrikaners: Biography of a People*. (Cape Town: Tafelberg Publishers Ltd, 2003) p86.

<sup>127</sup> In 1938 only a year before the outbreak of the Second World War, the Great Trek was re-created to celebrate its centenary and played a significant role in Afrikaner nation-building. Janie Malherbe, the editor of *Complex Country* was also involved in the proceedings.

blame was placed on an intractable government which exercised equal control over English settlers. These settlers were shown as supportive of Afrikaners and strong relations had been built between the two during their co-existence at the Cape prior to 1838:

The sympathetic attitude of the English settlers towards their Afrikaans country-men is amply proved by opinions expressed in various letters, documents, etc., of the period which are still in existence. A beautiful tribute was paid the departing Voortrekkers by the English community of Grahamstown, which presented the leader Koos Uys with a magnificent brass-bound Bible.<sup>128</sup>

Emphasis is placed on the notion of reconciliation after the open hostility of the South African War. An interesting anecdote is related of two young RAF airmen who met a veteran of the South African War at the Kruger Museum on the site of the former ZAR President's home in Pretoria. On hearing about the British activities during the war from the veteran, the two were appalled and vented their anger towards their countrymen. The old man's reply was forgiving in the extreme, "Don't take on so laddie, you're not to blame, you were not even born," the old man soothed him gently, 'and remember, besides, that a nation is never wrong and wicked, it's only **Governments** [emphasis in original] that make mistakes."<sup>129</sup> By placing the blame squarely on the government of the day nothing could reasonably stand in the way of South African support for Britain, especially in aid of a generation who had not even been born during the South African War. If forgiveness was so easily given on the part of a veteran of the war then there was little to stand in the way of a similar reaction from other Afrikaners.

Furthermore, in a segment written by "an Afrikaner" which apparently was a device to give his or her point of view greater validity, fighting on the side of the Allies was not simplistically seen as a defence of the old enemy, Britain but as being an integral part of the Afrikaners' own desire for freedom, keeping their current actions in line with the sacrifices for freedom they had made in the past:

We are not fighting for the British Empire. We are fighting to preserve the untrammelled freedom which the Afrikaner people today enjoy, and which was achieved by the sacrifices, suffering, endurance and honourable actions of our fathers and forefathers. We are fighting as the ally of the British Commonwealth of free and independent nations, of which the Union of South Africa is a member, in order to keep safe our precious right to freedom of speech, thought and action. Events of this war have shown us that small and weak nations like ourselves have not the least chance of keeping this

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<sup>128</sup> *Complex Country*. p15.

<sup>129</sup> *Complex Country*. p20.

liberty intact except in co-operation and alliance with strong democratic nations like Great Britain and the U.S.A.<sup>130</sup>

The emphasis was on South African liberty and independence. The means of preserving this lay only with co-operation with more powerful nations to form a united front in the face of German incursions that could ultimately lead to South Africa losing the independence for which she had sacrificed so much. In the final analysis, differences of ethnicity were immaterial and forgotten in the face of war, and both groups were intent on working together for a common cause: “The men and women who are helping on the home front and the battle front, in uniforms...do not stop to consider whether they are Afrikaans or English-speaking. They are simply South Africans first and foremost, out to save their country from destruction.”<sup>131</sup> This section also emphasized the philosophy of “South Africanism”, a strong feature of Smuts’ United Party which placed it in opposition with the Afrikaner focused ideals espoused by the National Party:

On an ideological level, the notion of ‘South Africanism’ has a certain relevance...This ideology found a ready political home in the United Party and was given added impetus with Smuts’ holistic philosophy of smaller units being incorporated into larger entities. It promoted a composite white South African nationhood consisting of Afrikaans and English-speakers which stood in contrast to the narrow ethno-nationalist line taken by the National Party.<sup>132</sup>

The editor of *Complex Country*, Janie Malherbe, was a strong proponent of South Africanism. Born to an Afrikaans father and an English-speaking mother, Malherbe embodied the spirit of South Africanism which was only strengthened when, after the Treaty of Vereeniging ending the South African War, “[her family] opted for the Botha-Smuts reconciliation stance between English and Afrikaner”.<sup>133</sup>

In the reconciliatory atmosphere suggested by *Complex Country*, how then to explain the openly hostile attitude of the OB? The activities of the Ossewabrandwag were traced back to the formation of the Broederbond in 1918 where its strong anti-British and right-wing Afrikaner sentiment had the ultimate aim of preserving the purity of the Afrikaner race in order to realise their “God-given destiny” of a “Christian National Afrikaner Republic”.<sup>134</sup> This left them open

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<sup>130</sup> *Complex Country*. p14.

<sup>131</sup> *Complex Country*. p35.

<sup>132</sup> Albert Grundlingh. “The King’s Afrikaners? Enlistment and Ethnic Identity in the Union of South Africa’s Defence Force During the Second World War, 1939-45” in *The Journal of African History*, Vol 40, No 3, 1999. p359.

<sup>133</sup> Hazel Dunlevey. “Janie Antonia Malherbe/Mrs E.G. Malherbe, 1897-1945”. (Unpublished Honours Dissertation: University of Natal, Durban, 2003) p7.

<sup>134</sup> *Complex Country*. p21.

to the influences of Nazism which was capitalized upon by the arrival of a Nazi spy to the country whose ultimate recommendation was that an exploitation and exacerbation of tensions between English and Afrikaner could be achieved by Nazi propaganda, “Tak[ing] out of the past only that which is base and bitter, and build on it for the future of Nazidom”.<sup>135</sup> In other words, Nazi propaganda would increase tensions by a selective reading of the past enmity between the two groups. Interestingly enough, as I have just shown, reconciliation was also based on a recreation of the past. Ultimately, right-wing agitators were presented as easy marks, susceptible to Nazi manipulation and their activities were downplayed, “Opposition Afrikaner hostility is not active on a large scale. Cases of violence against overseas fighting personnel are few and far between, and are committed by irresponsibles.”<sup>136</sup> This appears to be a somewhat different version of events from that obtained in personal interviews of military veterans, which I will discuss in a subsequent chapter.

Although the overall emphasis of *Complex Country* may have been on English-Afrikaner relations, several other themes crept into the booklet – one of which dealt with the portrayal of white women in the country. Interestingly enough, despite Janie Malherbe being a member of the auxiliary services, in particular the transport service, little space was devoted to the activities of these women. It boiled down to a paragraph detailing the various branches of the Women’s Auxiliary Services with a two-line description of each.<sup>137</sup> Part of this may relate to the booklet’s publication in 1944 where the end of the war may have been envisioned, leading to a subsequent toning down of the activities of women in the military and industry to a more conservative post-war society which was so evident in the official publications of the auxiliary services. However *Complex Country* does strike a particularly interesting note when it cautions visiting foreign troops in terms of their interaction with White women in the country:

In your treatment of South African girls you must be particularly careful. In the first place there are more men than women in South Africa, and the girls are used to being competed for. Physically owing to the warmer climate, the normal girl in the Union matures far more quickly than girls in England; you may be making advances to what you think is a sophisticated 20, only to find you are in reality shocking a comparative innocent of 15. In spite of the Calvinistic influences in the Union, girls you meet in South Africa may appear more friendly than those you meet at home. Don’t let this lead you to try anything on. The reserve may be different, the preserves are the same.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> *Complex Country*. p21.

<sup>136</sup> *Complex Country*. p72.

<sup>137</sup> *Complex Country*. p35-36.

<sup>138</sup> *Complex Country*. p9.

Several interesting points can be made about this statement placing it within the context of the time. The phrase “Calvinistic influences” suggest that the women discussed here are Afrikaner and the quote may partly link to both E.G. and Janie Malherbe’s interest in the “poor white” problem in South Africa prior to the outbreak of war, where the former took a somewhat controversial stance regarding the correlation between the number of children in a family and “poor whiteism” and the need for the provision of some kind of birth control:

In those days contraceptive devices for limiting the size of families were practically unheard-of amongst the rural poor. Even where they were used by the more well-to-do classes, such artificial methods were sometimes frowned upon as being against Nature and even against God’s will...With the aid of statistics and diagrams drawn on a blackboard, I demonstrated to this august, black-coated assembly [the Dutch Reformed Synod of the Transvaal], the close relationship between poverty and the size of the family, especially amongst the Afrikaans-speaking population, many of whom had become landless and were drifting to the cities where they formed slums.<sup>139</sup>

There is thus a sense of limiting the interaction between international troops and local women – an issue that was confronting all the Allied countries in this period which I discuss below – which in South Africa was more explicitly linked to “poor whiteism” and the fears of this class’s position being affected in the racial hierarchy.<sup>140</sup>

Significant here too, is the notion of climate affecting the physical maturity of white women in South Africa. This is a fascinating take on the ideas propounded by Anne Stoler where black women in colonial space were viewed as the sexualised other, the temptresses of white men, and contrasted with the virtuous, pure white women at the metropole. This virtue was brought by the latter to the colonies, making them ultimately responsible for the purity of their race.<sup>141</sup> In this instance climate, specifically climate south of the equator, was deemed responsible for the mature physicality of South African women in comparison to their counterparts in the north, giving them an appearance of being sexually mature and hence making them attractive to men from elsewhere who did not know better. The quote also goes on to refer to their strong religious upbringing which nevertheless does not preclude them from being naively friendly to troops who may subsequently misinterpret this friendliness – the men are in no uncertain terms warned off making any advances to these women, or girls. And the concluding line, “The

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<sup>139</sup> E.G. Malherbe. *Never a Dull Moment*. (Cape Town: Howard Timmins (Pty) Ltd, 1981) p130.

<sup>140</sup> Malherbe. *Never a Dull Moment*. p127.

<sup>141</sup> Ann Laura Stoler. “Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power – Gender, Race and Morality in Colonial Asia” in *Gender in Colonial History and Anthropological Discourse*. M. Di Leonardo, ed., (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991) p80.

reserve may be different, the preserves are the same,”<sup>142</sup> implies that, although South Africa may be far removed from Europe, there were similar expectations regarding their interaction with women.

Yet British society itself was having similar concerns regarding the sexuality of British women and their interaction with foreign troops. In a similar manner to the “khaki fever”, the term given to young women who overtly associated with young men in the military during the First World War,<sup>143</sup> much public attention was devoted to the interaction between young British women and the influx of American GIs, particularly black GIs.<sup>144</sup> The GIs were ultimately not held responsible for sexual liaisons between the two groups. By drawing on racial stereotypes classifying black men as infantile and not in full control of their own sexuality, the responsibility was placed solely on white women who engaged in these relationships as they were considered immoral, more so, if they had relations with black GIs as opposed to white GIs.<sup>145</sup> These inter-racial relationships had a significance that went beyond the individuals involved. British propaganda had constructed a sense of nationhood, an “imagined community”, based on the idea of ordinary Britons making tremendous sacrifices and remaining sturdy in the face of the hardships of war, particularly during the testing period of the Blitz. This created a united sense of nationhood despite pre-existing divisions.<sup>146</sup> Women too had a role to play in nation-building, “Women have generally been included within the nation in their role as mothers – as reproducers of the race, rather than as political participants in civil society.”<sup>147</sup> “Race” was rendered invisible yet assumed to be white evident in the outcry against these women fraternising with black GIs. These so-called “good-time girls”, seeking individual pleasure, were hardly fitting in with the idealised definition of “self-restraint, moral fortitude and cheerful altruism that were being touted as characterizing the British people in this time of adversity”.<sup>148</sup> More significantly, the long-term effects of these relationships in terms of offspring blurring clear racial definition, were construed as having a permanent and detrimental impact on the British

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<sup>142</sup> *Complex Country*. p9.

<sup>143</sup> Sonya O. Rose. “Sex, Citizenship, and the Nation in World War II Britain” in *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 103, No. 4 (Oct., 1998) p1147.

<sup>144</sup> Rose. “Sex, Citizenship and the Nation.” p1150-1152.

<sup>145</sup> Rose. “Sex, Citizenship and the Nation.” p1158-1159.

<sup>146</sup> Rose. “Sex, Citizenship and the Nation.” p1160-1161.

<sup>147</sup> Rose. “Sex, Citizenship and the Nation.” p1163.

<sup>148</sup> Rose. “Sex, Citizenship and the Nation.” p1167.

definition of nationhood as “white”, creating repercussions which would last beyond the temporary aberration of war.<sup>149</sup>

In Australia too, similar concerns were apparent, however the country had taken the more drastic step of segregating American black servicemen which still did little to alleviate concerns regarding the interaction between white women and black men:

As one report of June 1942 of the Office of Strategic Services commented, “Few Australians will acknowledge their racial problem in the presence of our coloured troops in Australia. However, in many cases, white girls have associated intimately with coloured troops, and, of course, the effect is very bad”.<sup>150</sup>

Although South Africa did not have a significant contingent of black Americans in the country during the war, they nevertheless had an enormous influx of foreign troops which raised similar fears. The warning given to visiting troops in *Complex Country* suggests, in a similar way to Britain, that the interaction between these men and local women would not only impact on the efficacy of South Africa’s white male combatants away from home for long periods of time, but the perceived immorality of the interaction would threaten the idea of a nation built on strong Calvinist principles when the perpetuation of a unified nation in the face of external and internal strife needed to be at its strongest.<sup>151</sup> This issue of sexual morality was not only confined to the interaction between foreign troops and civilian women but was also raised in connection with women in the Auxiliary Services, however this is a theme that I will pursue at length in a subsequent chapter.

## **Segregation and Race**

Unlike Britain or Australia with black populations forming a small minority, South Africa did not require an influx of Black American GIs to create tension. The visitor to South Africa in *Complex Country* was introduced to segregation in South Africa:

You will see throughout South Africa the odd legend ‘Europeans Only.’ It is prominently displayed on park benches, cinema tickets, saloon bars, public lavatories, railway waiting-rooms and other haunts of the people. In spite of this, it is wise to remember that the blacks and coloureds, too, are citizens of South Africa, and deserve all the respect and lack of familiarity from you that any host does from a visitor.<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> Rose. “Sex, Citizenship and the Nation.” p1157.

<sup>150</sup> Kay Saunders and Helen Taylor. “The Reception of Black American Servicemen in Australia During World War II: The Resilience of ‘White Australia’ in *Journal of Black Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 3 (Jan., 1995) p342.

<sup>151</sup> Rose. “Sex, Citizenship and the Nation.” p1151.

<sup>152</sup> *Complex Country*. p8.

By making reference to all the areas from which Blacks were forbidden entry – areas which were reserved for “the people” – yet simultaneously describing them as “citizens”, the quote strikes an ironic note as citizens are often considered as deserving of equal treatment, yet the segregation implies that this is clearly not the case. The booklet goes on to consider the black races of South Africa as one the country’s “biggest problems, and at the same time one of her potentialities”, striking yet another ambiguous tone.<sup>153</sup> The visiting soldier is warned off any interaction with black people which may be construed as being overly familiar due to the Colour Bar.<sup>154</sup> In this sense it follows the British and Australian situation but with the roles reversed – white men and black women rather than black men and white women. The strength of segregation policies within the country are explained as not only being of benefit to whites but perpetuating a way of life that best suits blacks as well:

In any dealings with a Native, treat him as a human being. Familiarity or rudeness is equally out of place. The Native has no wish to ‘mix’ with White people. He is proud of his race and will do justice to himself if given a fair chance and a square deal. He is not a ‘nigger’ to be bullied; he resents unfair handling as much as anybody else. Here the adage ‘Familiarity breeds contempt’ is essentially true. Familiarity with natives means trouble.<sup>155</sup>

Along with an injunction advising foreigners to treat African men with dignity and respect, came the necessity to keep the two races apart, not because of racial discrimination, but because blacks wished it so as well. *Complex Country* demonstrated the key contradiction of South African liberalism in this period – a contradiction that was held by its producers and commissioners as well as military organisations such as the Army Education Scheme and by the South African government. While actively campaigning for better economic and social equality for black South Africans that won them the support of Smuts’ United Party, liberals nevertheless were unable to conceive of a South Africa truly united in terms of race due to their fears of “intermarriage and miscegenation” which would ultimately lead to a loss of “the purity of the white race”.<sup>156</sup> Smuts’ United Party was caught between the democratic ideals of the Allied cause and maintaining the support of conservative white South Africa against the strong influence of Afrikaner nationalism. It was also a product of its time and held on to the paternalistic mantle of “trusteeship” of black South Africans. In a speech made by Smuts in 1942, this entailed “welfare services, such as the

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<sup>153</sup> *Complex Country*. p53.

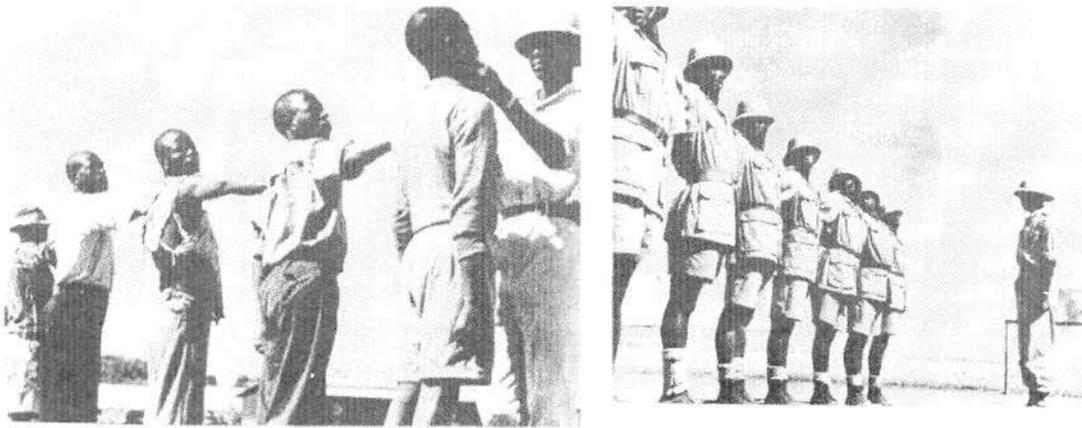
<sup>154</sup> *Complex Country*. p53.

<sup>155</sup> *Complex Country*. p58.

<sup>156</sup> Phyllis Lewsen. “Liberals in Politics and Administration, 1936-48” in *Democratic Liberalism in South Africa: Its History and Prospect*. Jeffrey Butler, Richard Elphick and David Welsh, eds. (Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1987) p104.

duties of providing housing, nutrition, education, and transport” for black South Africans, but would still occur “within the framework of the systematic oppression of the Land and Urban Areas Acts and the system of migrant labor”.<sup>157</sup> *Complex Country* thus held true to a paternalistic, but nevertheless segregationist, stance taken by the South African liberal-influenced government which mirrored the segregation apparent in the Union Defence Force.

For the coloured, Indian and African troops who had volunteered for service during the war, they were given some acknowledgement in *Complex Country*, albeit once again in a somewhat vague manner. From the outset it must be noted that black troops were barred from combat and served in auxiliary roles as stretcher bearers, drivers, medics and cooks, leaving the key combatant roles of war to white men.



(Photos reproduced in Ian Gleeson. *The Unknown Force*. Rivonia: Ashanti Publishing, 1994)<sup>158</sup>

The two images above entitled *Raw Recruits* and *The Finished Product* respectively appearing in *Complex Country* portray a group of recruits from their entry into the Non-European Army Services to the endpoint of the training process. The ragged civilian clothing evident in the first image is transformed into the impeccable uniforms of the second and the images demonstrate the extreme control over the body and, ultimately the mind, rendering it into an obedient, useful and subservient subject, initiated by the military training process. Moreover, the captions of the images are couched in the language of industrialism, dehumanising the recruits. Although there is little about these images that distinguish them from other military training photographs

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<sup>157</sup> Lewsen. “Liberals in Politics and Administration”. p105.

<sup>158</sup> These photographs also appeared in *Complex Country* and their origin is the Bureau of Information, making them official images.

depicting white men as well, they take on racial overtones when viewed in the context of the article in which they appear. Although acknowledging the enthusiasm of the many African volunteers, *Complex Country* suggests that the reason that they have not been allowed to participate in the war on equal terms with white combatants is the history of conflict between the two races, citing specific battles occurring in the nineteenth century and concluding with, "There is still a fear lurking in the minds of many that if Natives are taught to use arms, especially modern arms, they will become **uncontrollable** again" [emphasis added].<sup>159</sup> There is little sense of the spirit of reconciliation and reworking of the past evident in the relationship portrayed between the English and Afrikaners and mistrust of African men was still emphasised. The images in conjunction with this take on a note of control – the military exercising dominance over African men to allay white fears. Yet simultaneously the article acknowledges the motivation of these men in joining up, "The Natives, on the other hand, contend that their complete loyalty to the cause of South Africa is shown by their joining up, and that if they are good enough to risk their lives for their country they are good enough to use weapons in its defence."<sup>160</sup> While noting that the restriction of the roles of black men in the military was due to "prejudice" the article does little to contest the prevailing stereotypes.

This stereotyping of races is even more apparent with the portrayal of Indians:

The Indian's tendency to multiply rapidly, coupled with his ability to underlive and undersell the white man, in course of time helped to create one of South Africa's most serious economic problems...Approximately 200,000 Indians live in Natal (only 7,000 less than the white population in that province), and of these 88,000 are to found in Durban, whose European residential areas in this city, as well as similar developments in the Transvaal, caused the Government to take temporary steps to stem the tide.<sup>161</sup>

The excerpt suggests a fear of being swamped physically by Indian population growth as well as economically by Indian business, based on the perception of their poorer living standards and unfair competition. This arises within the context of the 1940s which was a turbulent time for white-Indian relations in Natal. Smuts, requiring the support of white voters in Natal, attempted to alleviate their concerns by introducing the Pegging Act which restricted Indian access to land, only a year before the publication of *Complex Country*.<sup>162</sup> The cartoon below of an Indian

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<sup>159</sup> *Complex Country*. p57.

<sup>160</sup> *Complex Country*. p57.

<sup>161</sup> *Complex Country*. p59.

<sup>162</sup> W.K. Hancock. *Smuts 2: The Fields of Force, 1919-1950*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968) P459-460.

“Sammy” is of the stereotypical Indian market gardener. His physical features are exaggerated and his unkempt appearance bears testimony to the perception of the lower living standards of Indians, responsible for them “underselling” their white counterparts as well as fears of them encroaching upon the living space of White residents, due to their perceived unhygienic living standards.<sup>163</sup>



(Image taken from *Complex Country*, p59)

When it came to Indian men serving during the Second World War, *Complex Country* came up with a remarkable tame and somewhat trite response to the serious tensions between Indians and whites:

It is to be hoped that some amicable and mutually satisfactory solution will be found for this problem since the Indians are quiet, law-abiding inhabitants who now, as in the past, have been prepared to come forward in large numbers to help defend South Africa in time of need.<sup>164</sup>

Simultaneously, in line with the overall pattern of ambiguity where *Complex Country* still endorsed the racial inequality of a pre-war South Africa, there remains a tantalizing hint of a new social order envisaged for post-war South Africa which would rectify the imbalances of the past:

Later on, as you get to know the country better, you may feel that something ought to be done to improve the native’s position economically and politically. But don’t forget that there are more and more South Africans thinking on the same lines, and probably there will be welcome changes after the war. But remember that South Africans look back on generations of fighting with native tribes, that they are aware of being in the minority –

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<sup>163</sup> *Reader’s Digest Illustrated History of South Africa – The Real Story*. Dougie Oakes, ed. (Cape Town: The Reader’s Digest Association South Africa, 1995) p273.

<sup>164</sup> *Complex Country*. p59.

outnumbered four to one by the Non-Europeans – and that the antagonism from the anti-war extremists to any change will be intense.<sup>165</sup>

While suggesting that many South Africans were beginning to experience a change of heart in race relations, nonetheless a somewhat less than optimistic tone is set by qualifying the statement with the ubiquitous “siege mentality” – the fear of a tiny white minority being swamped by a “sea of blackness”. This was compounded by the inevitable stiff opposition which would come from the militant right-wing, despite downplaying the influence of the latter for much of the booklet. When discussing race therefore, *Complex Country* is awash with innuendo and ambiguity. This had parallels with the racialised discourse of South Africa during the Second World War where the opportunities for social change presented by a war fought for democracy was counterbalanced by existing conservatism.

## **Conclusion**

The Second World War thus exposed numerous tensions and contradictions of race and gender in the South African military which was itself a microcosm of society – and these are reflected in the official military publications of the period. In *The Women's Auxiliary* for instance it was apparent that the expectations of women in the military varied according to the constraints of war. In the initial period appeals to women to throw their support behind the war effort displayed an ambiguity between the conservatism of women's pre-war roles and the new demands made upon them in the public sphere, toeing an uneasy line between the two. The middle period of the war, initiated by setbacks such as Tobruk, suggested that older appeals to duty and sacrifice were no longer sufficient and this period marked the most interesting one in the depiction of women. Along with a glamorisation of military service was an indicator of more prominent and challenging roles for women in the military, acknowledging greater equality. This however was undone by the return to conservatism towards the end of the war when, faced with the influx of men returning from the frontlines, appeals were made largely on the basis of guilt to encourage women to return to their homes and take up the pre-war domestic roles. This complexity however did not apply to the black women supporting the war effort. Little recognition was given to their roles and, when it was, it reinforced the status quo by placing them under the leadership of white female officers. Although the interaction between the two was

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<sup>165</sup> *Complex Country*, p53-54.

characterised by a patronising attitude on the part of these white officers and a lack of understanding, there still existed the possibility, albeit a limited one, of a future mutual respect and a decrease of racial tension.

For white male combatants their war service was based on honour, duty and loyalty to family and comrades as evident by the series of letters ostensibly penned by “Hugh”, representing the idealised white male combatant. This also implied a type of peer pressure with contempt and disdain expressed for men who failed to successfully endure this trial of masculinity. Yet this ideal masculinity was not open to black men who were barred from combat due to white fears of arming a majority black population. In this instance the spirit of reconciliation evident between historical foes such as the English and Afrikaner-speaking white populations was not evident. While history was re-written to suggest greater historical harmony between the two white groups, it instead emphasised the martial nature of African men, thus catering to white anxieties and reinforcing the secondary status of black men in the military. Along with the stereotypical representations of black men, compounded by the use of military service for them as an instrument of control rather than empowerment, came a recognition of their services as patriotic members of war society. For South African men and women in the military therefore, this period was riddled with contradiction and ambiguity, opening up possibilities while simultaneously employing stereotypes and social conservatism to limit them. The post-war period was bequeathed an uncertain legacy in terms of race and gender relations.

## Chapter Three

### *All the news that's fit to print* Media Representations of Identity

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Introduction

The use of print media during the Second World War, both in the form of magazines as well as newspapers keeping the reading public up to date with the numerous events occurring around the world, was a powerful means of creating a vision of the war in the minds of the population, both civilian and military. However the degree to which any form of media aimed at a general audience could be reasonably objective within the context of the high degree of censorship entailed by the exigencies of war, is highly debatable. Despite this however, print media through its reach of a wider audience than the largely official publications such as *The Women's Auxiliary*, functioned as a means of modifying gendered and racial identities for the purposes of the war. An analysis of the magazine *Libertas* as well as of various newspapers between 1939 and 1945 – sources that were aimed at a wider audience than simply military personnel – allows for an understanding of the way in which the state sought to construct gendered and racial identity during the war. To an extent these sources also allow the voices of black participants to be heard, as these media ultimately functioned as a bridge between the official and the personal. Yet this chapter is unable to adequately address the issue of audience reception. Whereas letters to the editor in newspapers provide a useful gauge for understanding the way in which readers made sense of the war and their part in it, the use of these sources does not allow for a clear understanding of the response of readers to these publications or their circulation. The sources instead provide a means of understanding the way in which the war was portrayed to readers in the various publications, using print media to address the concerns of readers while acknowledging the limitations placed on these media by a country at war. My choice of *Libertas* as the key source for an understanding of the portrayal of white identity during the war stemmed

¹ Motto of the *New York Times* accredited to Adolph S. Ochs. Taken from *Collins Dictionary of Quotations*. (Glasgow: HarperCollins Publishers, 1998) p260.

from its stance as a liberal, pro-war publication with close links to the state. E.G. Malherbe's role in the appointment of Constance Stuart as a war photographer for the magazine demonstrates this. Moreover its extensive use of photographs offers interesting possibilities for analysis to complement the written text.² Yet *Libertas*, while very rich, nevertheless remains a constrained source as it was aimed at a white audience, with a narrow and wholly inadequate perspective on black men serving in the Union Defence Force.

Due to this narrow focus of *Libertas* this chapter also looks at news media aimed at a black readership so as to understand the way in which the war was portrayed to these marginalised groups. Newspapers with a large black readership before the war such as *Ilanga Lase Natal* as well as *Indian Opinion* allow for an understanding of the way in which these groups were mobilised during the course of the war. These newspapers also show their responses to this and the expectations held by the black readership regarding military service and their participation in a war fought to defend democracy. *Ilanga Lase Natal* with its roots in the protests of missionary-educated Africans against state-sanctioned discrimination in the early twentieth century, is an interesting source in terms of its reaction to the war and to its advocacy of the war effort, highlighting the tensions of supporting a state that did not extend equal rights to its citizens and, in fact, had a limited view of who constituted its citizenry. While this chapter does draw, to an extent, from other publications aimed at a black readership such as *Bantu World* and *Indlovu*, these were largely under white ownership from the outset – as I discuss below. There were two newspapers aimed at an Indian readership in Natal – *Indian Opinion* and *Indian Views*. Both were funded by the *Gujerati* linguistic group of largely trading origin and hence, with the capital to fund these publications. As such, both newspapers contained articles written in both English and *Gujerati*. However *Indian Opinion*, as it was initiated by M.K. Gandhi, acquired a certain prominence and has been consulted as a source to a far greater extent. *Indian Views* was therefore my preferred source as a means of gauging the way in which South African Indians – particularly those still with strong ties to India – perceived the war and their role in it.

² Other magazines published in this period included *Trek*, a magazine focussed on the war but with a relatively small readership as well as more mainstream magazines such as *Huis Genoot*. The rationing of paper during the war made publications such as *Libertas* a valuable source.

The *Ilanga Lase Natal* began in 1903 under the leadership of John Dube, initially a Methodist Minister who went on to become leader of the African National Congress.³ Yet the *Ilanga* always adopted a fairly temperate tone, taking care to distance itself from the radicalism of the Bambatha Rebellion which overshadowed its early years in print, "This newspaper developed largely within the tradition [of] becoming politically involved but carefully nurturing a reputation for 'responsibility' and 'moderation'"⁴ The *Ilanga*, like earlier indigenous language newspapers aimed at a black readership, were begun by the *kholwa* who were the Western, largely mission-educated African elite in colonial Natal. Members of this class, such as John Dube, formed, "vigilance and welfare societies to protect their interests, and turned to the political arena to gain redress for their grievances"⁵ Thus newspapers such as *Ilanga* were a means of voicing these grievances and for advocating a kind of limited equality that was hardly radical in nature:

In their newspapers and at congress meetings they stressed their demand for land, for improved education and for more equal franchise rights. Their demands were articulated in petitions to both the colonial and imperial authorities. In general these were remarkably moderate, for example they demanded representation in parliament by white rather than African members.⁶

The newspaper later became affiliated with the more conservative position of mining and commercial interests after the formation of the Bantu Press which acknowledged, "[The newspapers] importance in the moulding of native opinion [which] makes their control a matter of utmost importance to South Africa's well-being...[Their future is also to maintain a progressive yet moderate policy on political and economic questions."⁷ The white-owned Bantu Press was initiated in 1931 with the Argus Printing and Publishing Company as a significant investor. It incorporated previously independent black-owned newspapers such as *Mochochonono*, *Imvo* and *Ilanga Lase Natal* by 1934. It also initiated *The Bantu World* with the aim of reaching a national readership.⁸

Unlike *Ilanga Lase Natal*, *Indian Views* was able to maintain its independence yet, it too, adopted a conformist stance, similar to the Gandhi vehicle *Indian Opinion*. *Indian Views* ran its first edition

³ Rosalynde Ainslie. *The Press in Africa: Communications past and Present*. (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1966) p49.

⁴ Shaun Johnson "An Historical Overview of the Black Press" in *The Alternative Press in South Africa*. Keyan Tomaselli and P. Eric Louw, eds. (Bellville: Anthropos Publishers, 1991) p18.

⁵ Robert Morrell, John Wright and Sheila Meintjes. "Colonialism and the Establishment of White Domination, 1840-1890" in *Political Economy and Identities in KwaZulu-Natal: Historical and Social Perspectives*. Robert Morrell, ed. (Durban: Indicator Press, 1996) p82-83.

⁶ Morrell, Wright and Meintjes. "Colonialism and the Establishment of White Domination, 1840-1890". p83.

⁷ Johnson. "An Historical Overview of the Black Press". p22.

⁸ Ainslie. *The Press in Africa*. p51.

in 1914 with articles published in both Gujarati and English which indicated a leaning towards North Indian commercial interests. Moreover, as is evident in the articles addressed in this chapter, its key aim was to inform its readership of events on the Indian subcontinent.⁹ Ultimately though, by the Second World War, the local context could not be ignored. Despite both *Ilanga* and *Indian Views* being less than radical newspapers, as well as the former being subsidiary to the Bantu Press, they managed to launch a powerful critique of the role of black South Africans in the Second World War, linking war service to citizenship, which this chapter will seek to explore. *Ilanga* carried articles in English and Zulu and *Indian Views* in English and Gujarati and this chapter draws on the English articles and editorials. Unlike the proliferation of the African and Indian press, a similar process was not evident with coloured newspapers. For instance, “*The Sun*, [was] established in the Cape in 1931, to support the ruling United Party”, thus serving a clear political agenda.¹⁰ This chapter makes use of articles drawn from different sources in order to gain some understanding of coloured representation in the media. Both the *Ilanga Lase Natal* and *Indian Views*, which are discussed in explicit detail in this chapter, while adopting a conservative liberal approach, were in a sense very different from *Libertas* which was aimed at a white readership.

A reading of the magazine *Libertas* published in South Africa until the late 1940s demonstrates its employment of specific kinds of identity for men and women engaging in war work. These were, in many instances, not essentially different to that advocated by the more official publications – or those that were created by the military for the military – discussed previously. Of course, the high degree of censorship exerted by states during the Second World War, as well as the control of movement of photographers and journalists in war zones, was necessarily a limiting factor. It placed constraints both on what is possible to capture as well as publish for a general audience. The magazine itself, like many South African publications during the war, presupposed a white audience. In an issue in December 1942 it identified itself with the origins and aspirations of the white settler population in South Africa and imagined African South Africans as the savage, and later subjugated, other:

We outspanned here first as voyagers on the way to a land of treasure and spices. The cabbage patch grew and with gunpowder and lead we subdued the savage instincts of Black Africa. We found gold and diamonds, and the Bantu put aside their blood-

⁹ Ainslie. *The Press in Africa*. p48.

¹⁰ Ainslie. *The Press in Africa*. p53.

drenched spears for the ploughshare and rock drill. Our ideal was the Voortrekker policy of “a white man’s land”.¹¹

Its clear siding with a settler history meant that the magazine itself adopted an unambiguous position regarding race, which emphasised white domination of South Africa. It once more relegated African men to the primitive foe, to be subdued and ultimately turned into a docile labour force. While acknowledging overall white superiority, *Libertas* simultaneously advocated a specifically unified liberal white identity, a union of Afrikaans and English and many of its articles appeared in both languages. As was evident in Janie Malherbe’s *Complex Country* discussed in the previous chapter, this ideology espoused the view of Afrikaner leaders such as Jan Smuts which was one of reconciliation between the two white ethnic groups in the country, as well an unambiguous support for the war effort and South Africa’s part in the conflict.

Furthermore, it saw its role ultimately as “facing the Challenge of Africa, to understand its nature and to meet it with all the resources evolution has placed at our disposal”.¹² Here, Africa was portrayed as the “Dark Continent”, where its people and environment colluded to make difficult the bringing of “civilisation”, the “challenge” referred to in the quote. It was up to this evolutionarily endowed white civilisation to meet the challenge, bringing “progress” to the continent. Despite this overtly racist tone of the piece, it perceived the role of white settlers in South Africa as “trustees”, taking on the role of benevolent benefactors. This was a paternalistic view which, nonetheless, held an optimistic and somewhat idealistic view of the country’s future. South Africa, with its dominant white civilisation, was thus envisaged in taking the lead in this “mission” of bringing light to the continent.¹³ It is clear from a reading of the magazine’s stated ideals that its ideological position lay largely with the dominant political stance of the Union Party in South Africa during the era of the Second World War. For this chapter, the magazine functions as a means of understanding feminine and masculine identity through the lens of South African liberalism.

Women and the Glamour of War Work

¹¹ Killie Campbell Africana Library (KCAL). “Africa’s Challenge” in *Libertas*. December 1942, Vol 3, No 1, p18.

¹² “Africa’s Challenge” in *Libertas*, December 1942, p19.

¹³ “Africa’s Challenge” in *Libertas*, December 1942, p18-19.”

War work for women was represented by official sources as glamorous, with the aim of making this work appealing and increasing support for the war effort. This subjective portrayal of war work was just as apparent in *Libertas* as in the official magazines of the South African Women's Auxiliary Services. A photo essay on the life of a factory garment worker, while not a member of the auxiliary services, nevertheless celebrated women's waged labour outside the home in a way which was unique to a society at war. The conventional view articulated in the nineteenth and early twentieth century was far more likely to portray the conservative middle class ideal of the women's role in the private sphere as wife and mother. Where their work was acknowledged, it usually concentrated on their activities in social welfare, an extension of their nurturing role in the home.

The photo essay, comprising a series of photographs with captions below them, traces the day in the life of a garment worker, beginning with her waking up and getting ready for work. She is shown as living the independent life – on her own and embracing the modern conveniences, "Machine-minded Edna has her own hot-plate, electric cooker and electric iron".¹⁴ The portrayal of her work was also positive, detracting from the usual dehumanisation associated with factory labour, "While her daily output of work is fairly regular, Edna is not harassed by the conveyor-belt system which as *Libertas* mentioned was condemned in the Transvaal for 'making machines out of girls'".¹⁵ The adjective, "machine-minded", suggests her familiarity with machines which had come to dominate her thinking and her way of life, making her the perfect industrial worker. Although the photo essay is concerned primarily with the working woman, only one of the pictures actually showed her working. The emphasis was instead on leisure. An interesting image was of her relaxing with a book, a cup of tea and cigarette in hand during her lunch break in a canteen containing "flowers, prints, [and] a wireless-gramophone", combining glamour and domesticity. A photograph showing her receiving her wage, stresses its utilisation to maintain her independent and alluring lifestyle. It also suggests a lack of responsibility on her part for failing to save, due to her need to "keep up appearances", and hence keep up with the latest fashion. This photograph is interesting as, for the first time, her co-workers are shown. They present a stark contrast to her own appearance, striking a note of ambiguity in the ostensibly glamorous life of the factory worker. The sequence of captioned photographs concludes with

¹⁴ KCAL. "16,000 Garment Workers Could Live Like This Girl" in *Libertas*, December 1942, Vol 3, No 1, p40.

¹⁵ "16, 000 Garment Workers Could Live Like This Girl" in *Libertas*, December 1942, p40.

her preparing to go out – her recreation being “dancing and skating” after a day at work.¹⁶ The depiction of a carefree lifestyle where one could dress at the height of fashion, and was free to socialise, coincided with the period of war weariness, which I have discussed in some detail previously. This led to a shift in portrayals of women’s war work, emphasising independence and self-interest above the conventions of patriotism and selfless service.



Images taken from *Libertas*, December 1942, p40-41

¹⁶ “16, 000 Garment Workers Could Live Like This Girl” in *Libertas*, December 1942, p41.

For those women who were in uniform in the auxiliary services, similar emphases were placed as with the civilian factory workers, albeit with a greater stress on discipline. An article titled “A Day in the Life of a Woman Transport Driver”, written by Janie Malherbe and appearing in the *Libertas* issue of January 1941, begins with the transport driver of the Women’s Auxiliary Army Services rising and preparing to leave for her work. Her work is however of a more hurried nature, with strict adherence to a schedule, as opposed to the less rigorous portrayal of the factory worker. Interesting contrasts emerge when the photograph of the transport driver at work is compared to that of the garment worker at lunch.



Image taken from *Libertas*, January 1941, p50

Here, the transport driver’s uniform is contrasted with the more glamorous apparel, and her reading of a newspaper suggests a greater interest in world affairs and the war itself. This is in line with her military service, as opposed to the more leisurely novel reading of the garment worker.

Where the similarities do creep in, is in the description of the female camaraderie and socialisation of the women working together:

A laughing, jolly group of five set out in a diminutive private car called “Bertie”, and make for their favourite eating-haunt in the city, where the relative merits of a fruit or cold meat lunch are soon being discussed with more fervour than the outcome of the war.¹⁷

¹⁷ KCAL. “A Day in the Life of a Woman Transport Driver” in *Libertas*, December 1942, Vol 1, No 2, p50.

Here however work and the war is relegated to the background. The light-hearted female camaraderie is emphasised by the description of evening activities where the uniform worn during working hours is replaced by civilian clothing in preparation for an evening out.



Image taken from *Libertas*, January 1941, p50

The photograph of the transport driver dressing in flowered gown putting on her stockings – similar to that of the factory worker dressing – heightens the sense of femininity which was hidden by the utilitarian nature of her military uniform during the day. It suggests a dual nature of the female auxiliary, both practical and pragmatic while on the job, yet still retaining her femininity and sense of glamour after hours. She is portrayed as being equally excited about the possibility of evening recreation, without the constant weight of duty:

To-night is not a parade or lecture night, and it’s fun to know that there’s a dinner and dance date. Recreation luckily has its regular place in the incredibly busy routine of the transport girl.¹⁸

Ultimately though, there was a limit to the liberty of a woman in military service, and the article ends with the early conclusion of the dance, allowing the women to return home in time to get a good night’s sleep in preparation for a resumption of their duties the following day.

¹⁸ “A Day in the Life of a Woman Transport Driver” in *Libertas*, December 1942, p51.

A fascinating note is struck by the juxtaposition of two images at the end of the article. These images were explicitly placed adjacent to each other in the article so that it would be impossible for the reader not to draw parallels between them.



Images taken from *Libertas*, January 1941, p58-59

The image on the left appears to be of an Afrikaner woman taking part in a commemoration of the Great Trek. This is suggested by the date, 1836. Her *Voortrekker* dress was re-invented by Afrikaner nationalists for the commemoration of the Great Trek in 1938 and the hugely successful staging of the centenary celebration suggests that readers would possibly have drawn parallels between the attire of the woman and the event held three years before, associating her with patriotism as the ideal *Voortrekker* woman.¹⁹ She is wearing the attire of a nineteenth century Afrikaner woman as invented for 1938 and leading a team of oxen. It is contrasted with the image on the right of Janie Malherbe, the female transport driver in military uniform, dated at 1941. It suggests a continuum between the nationalist “volksmoeder” and the patriotic activities of the auxiliary woman, both working in service of the nation. The notion of the *volksmoeder* arose in the early decades of the twentieth century. Soon after the South African War women were represented as the mothers and moral guardians of the nation, “...women were called upon to rear children for the community of the church, but also to build a white *volk* defined by

¹⁹ Lou-Marie Kruger. “Gender, Community and Identity: Women and Afrikaner Nationalism in the *Volksmoeder* Discourse of *Die Boerevrou* (1919-1931)” (University of Cape Town, Cape Town: Unpublished MA dissertation, 1991) p216.

language.”²⁰ According to Kruger, the *volksmoeder*, or “mother of the nation”, came into its own by 1918.²¹ Its symbolism was drawn from the South African War where the hardships endured by the majority of Afrikaner women and their families in the concentration camps lent itself to the creation of this mythology – the cultural icon of Afrikanerdom who endured as mother of the nation during great adversity. These women were likened to the *volksmoeders* of succeeding generations:

The point of the *volksmoeder* discourse...was to translate the ordinary life of the ordinary mother in more dramatic terms linking it with the history of the nation. The purpose of introducing the heroines of the past was to compare the ordinary mother’s suffering in child-bearing and her daily sacrifices for her husband and children to the more dramatic suffering of her foremothers.²²

It was not the first time that Janie Malherbe had drawn parallels between herself and the *volksmoeder*. She had had a family portrait taken of herself with her four children using *volksmoeder* imagery. She used the image of the *volksmoeder*, not as a symbol of narrow Afrikaner nationalism, but as being tied to her role as a staunch adherent of the United Party.²³ Parallels are also drawn between the different forms of transportation while still conforming to the women’s roles as transport drivers. This suggested that the work of women in the Second World War was in fact not so different from what their forebears had been doing and was still occurring within a culturally and socially acceptable framework. Yet there are subtle distinctions within the images. The *volksmoeder* image is of a woman apparently leading a team of oxen, a task ironically which she was not historically expected to do. The photograph of the transport driver on the other hand is of a woman involved in war work, engaging in an action – that of driving a truck – that *was* expected of her for the duration of the war. The juxtaposition of the photographs then invites the drawing of similarities between the two when the one is based on a posed image with little grounding in historical accuracy. The *volksmoeder* photograph is also a representation of a recreation – it is not a direct capturing of a woman in the nineteenth century but is instead the posed image derived from a twentieth century reconstruction of a historical moment. It suggests that the image was carefully chosen for what it showed so as to create a particular perception that would then be mirrored in the photograph of the transport driver. The superficial

²⁰ Marijke du Toit. “The Nurturing of Afrikaner Nationalism: A Social History of the Afrikaanse Christelike Vroue Vereniging ca. 1870-1939”. (University of Cape Town: Unpublished PhD dissertation, 1996) p101, 110.

²¹ Kruger. “Gender, Community and Identity”. p202.

²² Kruger. “Gender, Community and Identity”. p215.

²³ Hazel Dunlevey. “Janie Antonia Malherbe/Mrs E.G. Malherbe, 1897-1945”. (University of Natal, Durban: Unpublished Honours Dissertation, 2003) p68.

correspondences between the photographs could then provide a deeper social and historical context for the work of women in war – a context that it is in part a construct of the *volksmoeder* image.

Janie Malherbe’s appearance in these images, along with an article written by her detailing her work and life as a transport driver, is highly significant. Married to E.G. Malherbe who would become the Director of Military Intelligence during the war, and working as a freelance journalist, she and her husband volunteered immediately after the declaration of war. Janie Malherbe wanted the full experience of military service and volunteered as a private for the transport service. Involved in the transportation of Afrikaner dissidents within the union, she had first-hand experience of the hostility of right wing Afrikaner nationalists to the men and women of the Union Defence Force.²⁴ Following transport work, she was transferred to military intelligence as an officer where she was one of the editors of the “Ic Digest”, a monthly magazine published in military intelligence, as well as the editor of *Complex Country*.²⁵ She was heavily involved in recruiting drives, traveling the country in order to recruit Afrikaner women in particular.²⁶

Yet, Janie Malherbe had a narrow conception of the potential for a change in women’s role, holding fast to ideas of domesticity which sat uneasily with her idea of the “modern woman”. For her, woman’s true place lay in the home as the wife and mother.²⁷ In an article written for *The Outspan* where she debated the issue of equal pay in the military for men and women, she ultimately giving white men pre-eminence in the war, “In this article Janie Malherbe argued that women should not get the same salary as men...men should be paid a higher salary as they voluntarily gave up their life for their country.”²⁸ For Malherbe, women’s role in the war was simply an extension of their role as wives and mothers, providing support to the key roles played by the men in war and, as such, not necessarily deserving of remuneration, “She reminded the women that they were volunteers and implied that the state was generous enough by giving them

²⁴ E.G. Malherbe. *Never a Dull Moment*. (Cape Town: Howard Timmins (Pty) Ltd, 1981) p211.

²⁵ KCAL. E.G. Malherbe Collection. “A Day in the Life of a Woman Transport Driver” in *Libertas*, December 1942, p51. KCM 56949/95, File 142/1.

²⁶ KCAL. E.G. Malherbe Collection. Janie Malherbe. “General Report: Recruiting Tour Undertaken Through Northern and Eastern Transvaal by Lieut. (Mrs) J. Malherbe”, 18 December, 1941. KCM 56992(16), File 143/2.

²⁷ Dunlevey. “Janie Antonia Malherbe”. p26.

²⁸ Dunlevey. “Janie Antonia Malherbe”. p43.

any payment at all”.²⁹ Thus, although heavily involved in recruiting for women, Malherbe did not envision the roles played by women in war as being permanent or as serving as a form of empowerment or even independence. Their work occurred within the framework of wives and mothers.

The recruiting drives, in which Malherbe was involved, were an attempt by the Union Defence Force to mobilize Afrikaans support for the war. To do this, they drew on symbolic moments in Afrikaner nationalism, such as the commemoration of the Great Trek in 1938, “The recruiting campaign attempted to tap into the upsurge of Afrikaner nationalist sentiments as refracted through the commemorative celebration of the Great Trek in 1838.”³⁰ It is in this light that the previous pictures appearing in *Libertas*, of the woman leading the team of oxen at the centenary of the Great Trek, juxtaposed with that of Malherbe taking on the role of a transport driver, must be understood. Moreover, the appearance of the article and photographs in *Libertas*, implies a link between the magazine article and official attempts at recruitment, links which are as strong in the case of photographer Constance Stuart, whom I discuss later. Further attempts to garner Afrikaner support were also evident in the use of the “Steel Commando” and “Air Commando” recruiting units traveling the platteland. The use of *Commando* was significant, along with Malherbe’s use of the Trek image, as these terms were designed to mobilize Afrikaners based on an already existing “martial and social tradition”.³¹ Malherbe was herself a significant speaker on recruitment tours to the *platteland* for the Women’s Auxiliary Army Services. She addressed the concerns of civilians which hindered the recruitment of women such as the poor conditions of accommodation and food in the military. A considerable and ubiquitous concern raised here was the possibility of immorality on the part of young women without parental supervision:

No effort was made to make out that **no** cases of moral misbehaviour occur. It was however pointed out that such cases would occur among any group of over 9,000 women (3 services combined) collected anywhere in the world – that they occur in any community, even in congregations, but we don’t blame the town or pastor concerned –

²⁹ Dunlevey. “Janie Antonia Malherbe”. p43.

³⁰ Neil Roos. “From War to Workplace: Class, Race and Gender Amongst White Volunteers, 1939-1953”. (Mafikeng: University of the North West, Unpublished PhD Thesis, 2001) p96.

³¹ Roos. “From War to Workplace”. p96.

that such ones were rare among Army women, and therefore apt to be overemphasized...³²

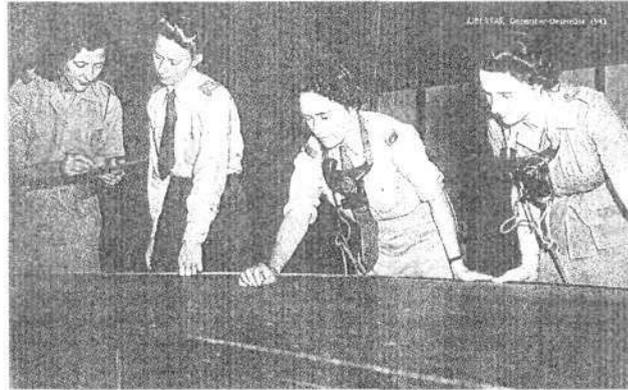
Here, Malherbe emphasizes that, although there were instances of “moral misbehaviour”, it fell within the boundaries of any similar group of women and was not confined to military women in particular. She adds instead that it was the rarity of such behaviour amongst military women that led to such focus being placed on it when it did occur. This speech occurs within the context of the molestation and perception of “promiscuity” of women in uniform which I address in the following chapter. Malherbe’s article appearing in *Libertas*, “A Day in the Life of a Transport Driver”, was intended to address similar anxieties towards women’s service in the military. It emphasised the discipline and pragmatic nature of military work for women. This work still retained notions of femininity and she, simultaneously, set military service within an already existing framework of Afrikaner cultural traditions.

By 1943, *Libertas* placed greater due on the capability of women in the work place in roles that went beyond the auxiliary. These images emphasised women’s capability for this type of war work which was considered vital in protecting South Africa’s coastline. Their work here was contrasted with the less key roles of other auxiliaries, giving them a direct hand in defence. This also suggested that this kind of work, with its emphasis on secrecy and duty, did not entail glamour, socialising or recognition for their work. Hence it would not necessarily appeal to all women, particularly those motivated by personal, rather than selfless concerns. These women were thus considered to be largely inspired by patriotism and a desire to serve their country.³³

Along with images depicting women at work, were photographs depicting female camaraderie, showing women relaxing in groups with books or board games, on the beach or fishing. Portraits were also printed of the various members of the Special Signal Services with a brief accompanying description of their education and work experience. Their smiling faces gave an overall impression of youthful exuberance.

³² KCAL. Janie Malherbe. “General Report: Recruiting Tour Undertaken Through Northern and Eastern Transvaal by Lieut. (Mrs) J. Malherbe”, 18 December, 1941.

³³ KCAL. “Radar: Magic Eye of Fighter Defence – S.S.S. Girls find New Career in Secret War Service” in *Libertas*, December 1943, Vol 4, No 1, p52-53.



Images taken from *Libertas*, December 1943, p52-53

The article emphasised the ability of these women to adapt themselves to life in these remote areas far from the “social scene” where the work they carried out was reward enough in terms of the lives they would save by aiding planes and ships. This had the potential of continuing beyond the war itself:

The value of their work is becoming more and more apparent and, as a peace-time organisation, they will provide a service of the highest importance to mankind. The future will find the women who are today operating radar, providing safety for countless airmen, sailors and travellers.³⁴

This acknowledgement of the capability of these women and the important service they provided, suggested a wider role played by women in war. It moved beyond the representations of glamour and femininity conventionally associated with war work, which was evident in the previous examples. Yet, simultaneously, it places women within the role of the protector and the nurturer. However the SSS may have created a kind of frontier for redefining gender roles which I will address in greater detail in the subsequent chapter.

³⁴ “Radar: Magic Eye of Fighter Defence – S.S.S. Girls find New Career in Secret War Service” in *Libertas*, December 1943, p53.

Sport, Hunting and War: The Representation of White Men in the UDF

Sluit aan by die Springbok-leër van Sportmanne

By alder dapperste en 'n jeuggeerd mak teken staak aan die alder goet van die valding in die Noorde. Vir die Suid-Afrikaanse soldaat is die somer 'n loekfe.

Daar is 'n plek vir u in die Leër van Sportmanne



South African member of a hunter-brotherhood with his cub in the Transvaal. The S. African soldier of today rates it all in his stride.

Join the Springbok Army of Sportsmen

You need to be tough to tame a cheetah, but it is all part of the campaign up north. The South African soldier of today rates it all in his stride.

There is a place for you in this Sportsmen's Army.

Sluit aan by die Springbok-leër van Sportmanne

Majoor Danie Cronje, Direkteur van Leger-voorsiening, en hereroende Springbok-voetspeler, het die nuwe formele oefeninge van die reëlmatige spelt van die opleiding van die Unie se nuwe leër. Die Suid-Afrikaanse soldaat van vandag is liggaamlik, geestes, gesond en gelukkig.

Daar is 'n plek vir u in die geleedere van die Sportsmanseleër.



"Lige Oor" (Lige Oor) is a new method of training for the soldier of today. The S. African soldier of today rates it all in his stride.

Join the Springbok Army of Sportsmen

Majoor Danie Cronje, Direkteur van Leger-voorsiening, en hereroende Springbok-voetspeler, het die nuwe formele oefeninge van die reëlmatige spelt van die opleiding van die Unie se nuwe leër. Die Suid-Afrikaanse soldaat van vandag is liggaamlik, geestes, gesond en gelukkig.

There is a place for you in the ranks of the Sportsmen's Army.

Images taken from *Libertas* January 1941, p13, and December 1940, p19

A reading of *Libertas* during the war years allows for an understanding of the way in which women were represented during the war. It drew upon existing societal expectations regarding appropriate roles for women, adapting them to the exigencies of war and, in some instances, moving beyond them. A similar process was evident in the portrayal of white men in the magazine. This, and subsequent sections, focus on white masculinity as portrayed in white print media looking at the importance of hunting and sport imagery in the construction of white masculinity and, associated with it, the emphasis on healthy physicality with its origins in the concerns of "poor whiteism" and degeneration earlier in the century. Key here to white masculinity was combat that not only served as a process of distinction between white and black men, but simultaneously and ambivalently drew upon images of the black "noble warrior" utilised by white combatants. Finally, the discussion of white masculinity concludes with a case study of Constance Stuart – a female war photographer – whose portrayals of South African troops on the front lines add an extra dimension to conventions of what was appropriate to photograph and publish for readers on the home front.

In terms of the recruitment of white men, two advertisements appearing in various issues of *Libertas*, advocated a particular kind of white masculinity for the ideal combatants of the Union Defence Force. In the advertisement on the left, two airmen are depicted with cheetah cubs, the mascots of their squadron. The advertisement itself makes explicit reference to the task of rendering the animals docile, "You need to be tough to tame a cheetah, but it is all part of the campaign up north. The South African soldier to-day takes it all in his stride."³⁵ It is hard not to see parallels between this advertisement and the claims made by the magazine to take up the "challenge" posed by Africa in terms of "the obstacles of nature" impeding the "march of Progress".³⁶ Here, this challenge has been imagined as met by exerting control over nature within an African context, a challenge which has ultimately prepared the men for action up north. Settler masculinity has been strengthened by its battle with and ultimate victory over Africa, as represented by the natural world. This has prepared them for the theatres of war, particularly East and North Africa. These advertisements drew on and fed into already existing ideas of settler masculinity, evident in their similarity to the personal photographs taken by servicemen in East Africa, which I discuss in the following chapter. Moreover, there are clear parallels between these images and those taken in the South African mandate, South West Africa, where colonial officials posed with guns and hunting trophies in full safari gear. This made these advertisements part of an established visual tradition.³⁷

The advertisement on the right, on the other hand, emphasises sport and physical activity – however both adverts use the slogan "Join the Springbok Army of Sportsmen: There is a place for you in the ranks of the Sportsmen's Army".³⁸ The advert depicts orderly rows of smiling men engaged in "Legs Over", a physical game, with an inset of Major Danie Craven, the Director of Physical Training, who was considered a South African rugby hero.³⁹ Emphasis was placed on competitive physical activity between the young men, making them "fit, vigorous and happy".⁴⁰ The description of the Union Army as a "Sportsmen's Army" brings to mind two notions. The first is the equation of war and military activity with sport, the pitting of two teams

³⁵ KCAL. *Libertas*, January 1941, Vol 2, No 2, p13.

³⁶ "Africa's Challenge" in *Libertas*, December 1942, p19.

³⁷ Cf. Paul S. Landau "Hunting with gun and camera: a commentary" and Wolfram Hartmann "Performing gender, staging colonialism: camping it up/acting it out in Ovamboland" in *The Colonising Camera: Photographs in the Making of Namibian History*. W. Hartmann, J. Silvester and P. Hayes, eds. (Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press, 2001).

³⁸ KCAL. *Libertas*, December 1940, Vol 1, No 1, p19.

³⁹ *Libertas*. December 1940, p19.

⁴⁰ *Libertas*. December 1940, p19.

against each other competitively, which serves to de-emphasise the destructive aspect of war by re-imagining it as sport. The use of “Sportsmen” also suggests sportsman-like behaviour – rules of honour and fair play on the gaming field, suggesting the employment of a certain kind of etiquette in the Union Army. It perhaps serves to distinguish them from the enemy who did not necessarily subscribe to the same rules. This had strong parallels with ideas of sportsmanship espoused in Britain and North America, which I discuss in greater detail in the following chapter.

Simultaneously, both advertisements draw on a tradition of equating masculinity with hunting, sport as well as war dating from the nineteenth century in Europe, North America and South Africa, which I have discussed in some detail in previous research. The private schools, with their emphasis on sport, allowed for the continuation of the sporting metaphor to military service itself.⁴¹ To a large extent sport was perceived as helping men to prepare for a life in the military. Besides fostering male camaraderie, bloodsports such as hunting accustomed men to the kill and, the greater the number of hunting trophies, the greater the physical prowess and the masculinity of the individual. And men, in turn, equated war with a game and the killing of the enemy with hunting, which desensitised men to death.⁴²

The symbol of sport also led to a perception of the enemy as being reduced to that of an opposing team – it diminishes the reality of war, giving it the status of a game. In Natal for instance, the settlers were in perpetual conflict with Zulu communities north and south of the Tugela. Portraying the latter as members of a rival team, British soldiers trivialised their conflict and the reasons behind it:

The metaphor of the team was particularly efficacious when a rival team could be invoked. In the colonial context, the Zulu army conveniently provided opposition. Admiration for the other team was frequently expressed: during the 1879 war the “dash, élan and fearlessness of Zulu warriors was widely admired”.⁴³

Simultaneously, the enemy was dehumanised. The metaphor of the team was effective in creating a simple dichotomy of “us” against “them”. This essentialised the two groups, making

⁴¹ Suryakanthie Chetty. “Gender Under Fire: Interrogating War in South Africa, 1939-1945.” (University of Natal Durban: Unpublished MA dissertation, 2001) p13-14.

⁴² Michael C.C. Adams. *The Great Adventure: Male Desire and the Coming of World War I.* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990.) p43.

⁴³ Robert G. Morrell. “White farmers, social institutions and settler masculinity in the Natal midlands, 1880-1920”. (University of Natal Durban: Unpublished PhD dissertation, 1996) p132.

unlikely any interaction beyond that of conflict and hostility. Within the colonial context the process of "othering" was even more pronounced. Faced with people who appeared different socially, culturally and even physically, the settlers demonised the Zulu, making the categories of "us" and "them" even more rigid.⁴⁴

The recruiting advertisements for the Union Army during the Second World War demonstrate that the triple nexus of sport, hunting and war, was still very much alive well into the twentieth century. They drew on South Africa's colonial and settler past and, to some extent, paralleled nineteenth century Britain. However, the process of "othering" was not as rigid as during the colonial context as, for the most part, with the exception of the Japanese with whom South African troops had little contact, the enemy in the form of German and Italian troops were hardly physically or culturally all that different.

White Masculinity

This emphasis on the physical aspect of white masculinity was a strong theme in *Libertas*. A feature appearing in December 1941 considered the issue of "poor whiteism" – an issue that was also addressed significantly in *Complex Country*. The economic and social status of this sector of the population created significant problems for a state promoting a certain standard of living for its white population which served to differentiate them from Africans, coloureds and Indians. From the end of the nineteenth century to the 1930s, fears of "poor whiteism" had become increasingly predominant, leading to an intensive investigation into the problem. The solution was to remedy the economic status of the poor whites by extending social welfare services to them as well as privileged employment.⁴⁵

The article in *Libertas* revealed a concern with racial and physical degeneration as a result of the poor white problem:

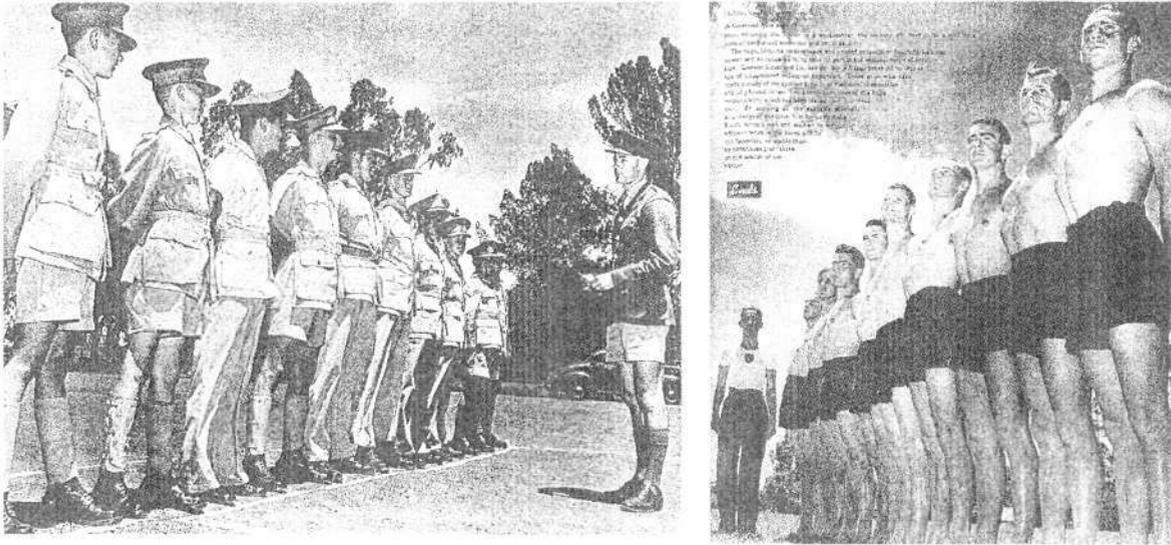
The fine physique of early settlers was no longer apparent in their children and grandchildren. Mental apathy which modern research has revealed to be associated with

⁴⁴ Morrell. "White farmers, social institutions and settler masculinity. p133.

⁴⁵ T.R.H. Davenport. *South Africa: A Modern History*. (Johannesburg: Macmillan South Africa Publishers, 1978) p225.

dietary deficiencies, became widespread, if not characteristic of the poor sections of the population.⁴⁶

The remedy lay with physical training under the auspices of the Physical Training Battalion. Numerous images appeared in the article of young men engaging in various types of physical training with an emphasis on youth, health and physical activity.



Images taken from *Libertas*, December 1941, p41 and p47 respectively

This highlighted a specific representation of masculinity inextricably linked to race. Furthermore, the physical training and drill was perceived to inculcate discipline into both the minds and bodies of these young men. This is evident in the image on the left, suggesting the creation of proficient soldiers with the ultimate aim of making them disciplined, acquiescent bodies as an antidote to what was perceived as the “apathy”, and lack of “responsibility” of poor whites. This would ultimately increase their usefulness to the state.⁴⁷

The image of the line of young men adopting a confident and proud posture suggests a robust and physically healthy image of white masculinity. This was, in many ways, a reaction to the threat to the notion of white racial superiority presented by the poor white problem. The image also can be contrasted with a following article in the same issue describing poor health conditions in the reserves. The images here are of African men in poor health waiting patiently to be attended to by overworked doctors.⁴⁸ These images also served to reinforce an idea that was made into concrete reality at the end of the war with the creation of the National War

⁴⁶ KCAL. *Libertas*, December 1941, Vol 2, No 1, p41.

⁴⁷ *Libertas*. December 1941, p41, 46.

⁴⁸ *Libertas*. December 1941, p60-61.

Memorial Fund, a type of living memorial, set up by ex-servicemen to address the poverty, poor health and malnutrition of black South Africans – which I will discuss in greater detail in the final chapter.



Image taken from *Libertas*, December 1941, p61

While adopting a form of liberalism by acknowledging the poor social and economic conditions on the reserves, the article and its accompanying images with a representation of a subservient black masculinity, serve nevertheless to invite a comparison between the vigorous white men in the previous piece. This is strengthened by the observation that although “poor whiteism” is discussed in detail, the images do not correspond to the description of the problem but instead give prominence to the positive effects initiated by military training. This distanced them from the physical degeneration that was believed to be characteristic of “poor whiteism” as well as from African men suffering from similar economic and social deprivations. This issue thus serves to reinforce the ambivalent nature of *Libertas*. On the one hand it adopted a paternalistic liberal viewpoint towards black South Africans in the spirit of national patriotism brought about by the war. It simultaneously advocated the notion of white superiority as stated in “Africa’s Challenge”, making black people the followers in the wake of the march of progress and civilisation, and retaining the distance between the two groups.

White Men and Combat

White masculinity was also related to combat in warfare yet, in this edition of *Libertas*, the hallmarks of white masculinity were portrayed somewhat indecisively.



Photos taken from *Libertas* December 1941, p18 and Ian Gleeson *The Unknown Force* respectively

The image on the left is of a soldier in the South African infantry training with a bayonet, a weapon that was used for close-quarters fighting where it was no longer possible to take aim and shoot. In its form it bears some resemblance to the image on the right which was an official photograph reprinted in Gleeson's *The Unknown Force* of men from the Non-European Army Services training with assegais and gas masks. However the latter were prevented from using guns and assegais were deemed the safer option to appease white concerns regarding the arming of black men. The juxtaposition of the gas masks and the assegais appears incongruous, suggesting that the weapon was hardly considered effective in modern warfare. However the white soldier training for combat with a bayonet belies that impression to an extent, suggesting instead a correspondence between the two. This relationship is strengthened by the caption of the bayonet charge image where, "In the present push up north the deeds of our fighters, who charge with fixed bayonets singing and shouting native war-cries as they go, have astonished their friends and terrified their foes."⁴⁹ Here, the bayonet charges of white combatants were accompanied by war cries accredited to the historical settler enemy, given such a prominent place in the white psyche, which was largely responsible for giving black men limited roles in the war. Yet it was ironic that the bayonet charge was symbolic of the most extreme form of close-

⁴⁹ KCAL. "Steady" in *Libertas* December 1941, Vol 2, No 1, p18.

quarters fighting – the very essence of combat – and white soldiers used “native war-cries” as a form of psychological warfare accompanying the charge, whilst those who were being emulated were rendered powerless, relegated to auxiliary services and prevented from taking part in combat roles. The ambivalence of white South Africa towards the “noble warrior” – the brave, proud and defeated enemy which I discuss further on in this chapter – suggests that it was an important factor not only in their adoption of “native war-cries”, but also in their depiction of African men in the military.

White soldiers also drew on their own traditions – the ubiquitous confrontation with the “Zulu hordes”. An article entitled “Gunnery Were Everywhere” begins with the history of the artillery within the settler context:

More than one hundred years ago, on December 16, a few hundred “Sannas” and one solitary brass cannon blazed away with crazy fits and starts at Zulu hordes trying to wipe out a small Voortrekker laager in Natal.⁵⁰

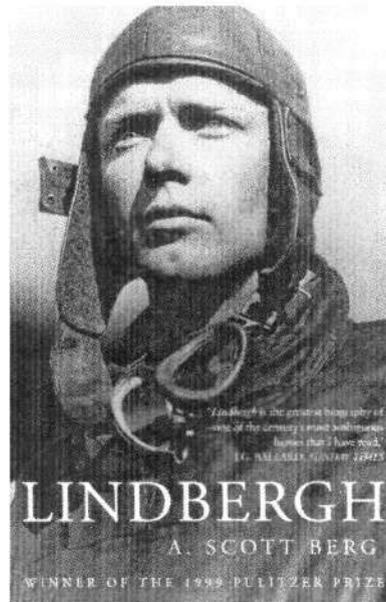
The fighting tradition of white soldiers therefore defined itself against the indigenous people with whom their forebears came into conflict, while contradictorily incorporating elements of that enemy’s fighting tradition. The conflict referred to in the quote was between Dutch Afrikaans Trekkers and the Zulu army at the Battle of Blood River. This marked a devastating defeat for Zulu forces coming into contact with modern weaponry, still relegating the assegai to second place over the gun. In addition, while being considered a settler victory despite overwhelming odds, it was hardly likely to have been viewed in a similar light by African men. Thus the military tradition as articulated in South Africa during the Second World operated on a principle of both inclusion and exclusion. *Libertas* defined itself as originating within a settler context and placed itself in opposition to black South African men so the latter’s exclusion from the Union Defence Force’s fighting tradition was an inherent feature of the very identity of the white combat regiments.

Yet the article describing the activities of the South African artillery in the combat zones in North Africa, acknowledged the auxiliary roles that supported them. Alongside dramatic images of white men, crouched at the Howitzers and firing the guns at an unseen enemy, were photographs taken of workers in factories – the guns manufactured by white male artisans and the shells being made by white women and black men working together. The armaments were

⁵⁰ KCAL. “Gunnery Were Everywhere” in *Libertas* December 1941, Vol 3, No 1, p44.

shown finally being transported in convoys to where they were needed. These images of various groups presented as working together for a common cause were meant to suggest a patriotic pride in being South African. This was enhanced by the captions emphasising South African skill and ingenuity in manufacturing the Howitzers faster than their British and American counterparts as well as stressing, “South African steel...South African workmen [and] South African design”.⁵¹ It was an idealistic, patriotic vision that suggested a country united for the war effort and that papered over the schisms and tensions of race, gender, ethnicity and class.

But, in contrast to the images of the various groups working together for a common cause, there still remained the vision of the heroic white male combatant. In a similar vein to the glamorisation of white women’s roles in war which I have addressed in the previous chapter, there was a glamorisation of the role of white men.



Images taken from *Libertas*, December 1940 and A. Scott Berg *Lindbergh* (London: Pan Books, 1999) respectively

The image on the left, accredited to P.J. Vorster, is of Lieutenant Van Der Spuy of the South African Air Force prior to his departure for North Africa. It bears remarkable resemblance to the one on the right of the aviation pioneer Charles Lindbergh taken in 1927. The similarity between the two brings to mind similar romanticised image overlaps between female pilots and female aviation adventurers such as Amelia Earhart.⁵² At the same time, the image of Lt. Van

⁵¹ “Gunnery Were Everywhere” in *Libertas* December 1941, p46-49.

⁵² I have discussed this in greater detail in Chapter Two with its emphasis on visual propaganda.

Der Spuy which appears on the cover of the December 1940 issue of *Libertas*, is strongly suggestive of Hollywood publicity images of film stars. This is evident by the strong lighting, the close-up of the pilot's face and his gaze out of the frame of the camera. The effect of the image is to locate the pilot within a framework of the alluring, fantastical adventurer, keeping intact the notion of the lone hero. Simultaneously this presents a different image of masculinity to that also portrayed in *Libertas* of the rugged hunter. Here the pilot is clean-cut and appears urbane and the image bears little in common with the more hegemonic settler masculinity advocated in the earlier images discussed. The settler image was defined by the rugged adventurer/explorer, strongly associated with hunting and sport and largely middle class. It had its origins on the frontiers of colonial expansion where the masculinity of white men was linked to their roles as aggressors as well as defenders as they came into conflict with indigenous groups. Their prowess in war and in hunting and killing wildlife, first out of necessity and then for sport, were the hallmarks of this masculinity.⁵³ The photograph of the pilot, while carrying connotations of heroism and adventure, do so in a way that is different to those depicting settler masculinity that focussed on hunting and sport, images that were emulated in the personal photographs of soldiers as well. The photograph of Van Der Spuy does not create an impression of the physicality evident in settler masculinity but suggests instead sophistication and glamour that is more closely linked to the metropole than to the colony. As such it implies a different version of white masculinity in *Libertas*.

Constance Stuart, War Photographer

In addition to these representations of masculinity appearing in *Libertas*, an important feature of the photographs are taken is the role of the photographer and an added dimension is evident by looking at the way in which female photographers portrayed masculinity in war. This section focuses on Constance Stuart and, in particular, the way in which she portrayed South African troops in Southern Europe within the constraints of what was considered "appropriate" to show by the editors of *Libertas* as well as military officialdom as represented by E.G. Malherbe. Stuart provides an interesting case study of a war photographer who, because of her gender, has been given greater acknowledgement in South African print media than was usually the case when much of the official images were taken by photographers rendered anonymous in the archives.

⁵³ Cf. Morrell. "White farmers, social institutions and settler masculinity".

The Second World War paved the way for these female photographers who were allowed into combat situations that female soldiers have only been able to access on a limited basis over the past decade. This may be due to the greater social acceptability of women using cameras as opposed to guns. Early Kodak advertising campaigns, dating from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century, made use of the figure of a young woman, the “Kodak Girl”, to show the ease with which the camera could be used, pairing women with the camera for the fifty years prior to the outbreak of the Second World War.⁵⁴

Women remained a minority in war photography until the Vietnam war where their numbers expanded tremendously. During the Second World War, Margaret Bourke-White was the first professional female war photographer. Working largely in Germany and Eastern Europe, she was also present at the liberation of the concentration camps by the Allies.⁵⁵ Thus enterprising women war photographers were not necessarily perceived as intruding in a male sphere, as they would have been had they been in the military, involved in actual combat. Yet there still remained limits on how far women could penetrate the war theatres, even as photographers – which I shall subsequently go on to discuss. *Libertas* itself carried the images of Constance Stuart who was among select few of female war correspondents – and the first South African woman in this capacity – on the front lines.

Although a woman war photographer, Stuart’s work fell within conventional depictions of masculinity as I demonstrate below. This was also due to her association in this context with Malherbe as well as *Libertas*, a magazine with links to Malherbe and thus the war aims of the South African state. While her gender introduces an interesting dynamic, she fits squarely within the genre of war photography. It is thus with the perception of her as a war photographer rather than necessarily as a *woman* war photographer that I have chosen to focus on her photographs that appeared in *Libertas* in 1944. There were however certain provisions and perceptions of her on the part of officialdom pertaining to her gender that also have to be considered, as I do below.

⁵⁴ Cf. Nancy Martha West. *Kodak and the Lens of Nostalgia*. (Virginia: The University Press of Virginia, 2000).

⁵⁵ Lewinski. *The Camera at War*. p26.

Born in England in 1914 Stuart, along with her parents, emigrated to South Africa as a baby. Her interest in photography was piqued as a child when she was given a Kodak Box Brownie for a birthday present, a camera which was part of a move to make photography more accessible, particularly for women. Her interest in photography grew to a calling and, upon her completion of secondary school in Pretoria, she went overseas to study at the Regent Street Polytechnic School of Photography in England as well as the Bavarian State Institute for Photography in Germany. When she returned to South Africa she initiated the Constance Stuart Portrait Studio in her hometown of Pretoria. Here she specialised in photographing the political, literary and social public figures of the era.⁵⁶ Her work, which appeared in a number of South African magazines, gained her some form of recognition.⁵⁷ She was thus appointed by Colonel E.G. Malherbe, the Director of the South African Military Intelligence, as a photojournalist for *Libertas*.⁵⁸

Her appointment by Malherbe suggested a collaboration on the part of *Libertas* with the military due to Malherbe requesting that her photographs be published in the magazine. This is evident in a letter written to T.C. Robertson, the director of the Union Unity Truth Service, responsible for the publication of the magazine, "I sincerely hope that the material which she has been sending you has been satisfactory for your purposes. I particularly wanted you to use her photographs in the 'We Were There' series for 'Libertas'."⁵⁹ Malherbe, representing the interests of official state propaganda, acted as a go-between between Stuart and *Libertas*. This is apparent in a cable sent to the photojournalist by Robertson after the publication of the pictures she obtained from the south of France after liberation, which I discuss below, "South France pictures published. Anxious obtain Six Division studies. Suggest contact Colonial Malherbe to arrange."⁶⁰

Malherbe was further involved in helping Stuart gain access to the South African troops she was to photograph, arranging for accommodation, transport and access to the relevant areas:

⁵⁶ <http://www.sahistory.org.za/pages/people/larrabee.htm>. Accessed August 10, 2004, 09:22.

⁵⁷ <http://www.nmafa.si.edu/exhibits/larrabee/larrabee.htm>. Accessed August 10, 2004, 09:18.

⁵⁸ <http://www.sahistory.org.za/pages/people/larrabee.htm>. Accessed August 10, 2004, 09:22.

⁵⁹ Killie Campbell Africana Library (KCAL). Letter by E.G. Malherbe to T.C. Roberston, Director, Unity Truth Service, 16 October 1944 in E.G. Malherbe Collection. "Film and Radio Broadcast Units. Miscellaneous Correspondence, 1941-4". KCM 56974(557) File 438/1.

⁶⁰ KCAL. E.G. Malherbe Collection. Letter by T. C. Robertson to E.G. Malherbe, 30 October 1944 in E.G. Malherbe Collection. "Film and Radio Broadcast Units. Miscellaneous Correspondence, 1941-4". KCM 56974(569) File 438/1.

I told Lindsay...that he should make it possible for her to get among the South African troops. This could easily be arranged as she could sleep over night in the Officers’ Mess which is a good hotel in Florence, leaving by car out to the troops during the day and returning at night.⁶¹

His arrangements imply a resistance to the presence of women on the war front. This is borne out by Stuart’s difficulty in gaining access to areas in which little provision for women was made, “I understand, also, that she had some difficulty in getting anywhere near the front line because of the difficulty in accommodating a woman in this area.”⁶²

Stuart’s early taste of the military experience in Cairo was somewhat intimidating and a drastic change from her life before as evident in her journal entry on July 20, 1944:

Attended my first press conference today and met many correspondents. The routine of army life rather frightens me after the very individual life I have led. It’s odd to be in uniform and to talk in capital letters, like ADPR, DGMS and GOA...⁶³



Images taken from *Libertas*, September 1944, p40-41

Her contributions to *Libertas* in the September 1944 issue reveals a range of images depicting the scenery of Italy and newly liberated Southern France, the ordinary citizens – their pleasure at being freed from German occupation evident – prisoners-of-war as well as the Allied troops, in particular South Africans. The depiction of South Africans was a reflection of her mandate to photograph South African troops given by Malherbe. They helped allay his fears that her trip to the south of France would be a wasted effort in terms of being able to depict South Africans at war:

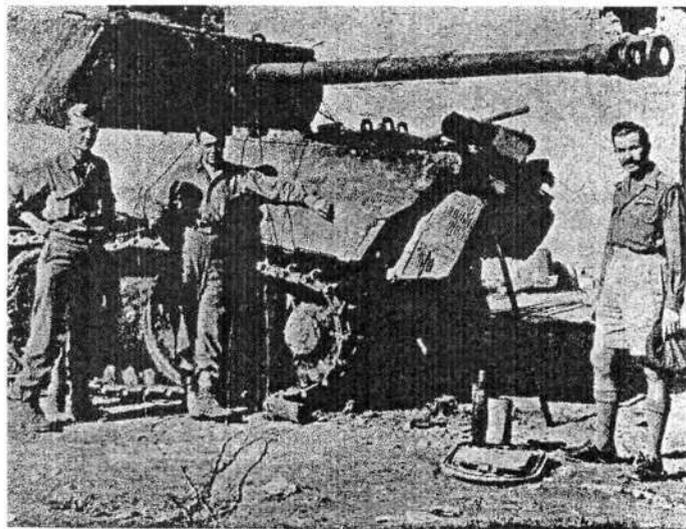
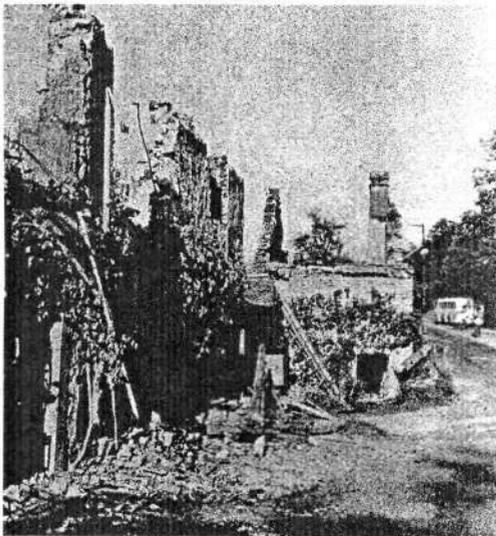
⁶¹ KCAL. E. G. Malherbe Collection. Letter by E.G. Malherbe to T.C. Robertson, 12 December 1944 in E.G. Malherbe Collection. “Film and Radio Broadcast Units. Miscellaneous Correspondence, 1941-4”. KCM 56974(573) File 438/1.

⁶² KCAL. Letter by T.C. Robertson to E.G. Malherbe, 30 October 1944.

⁶³ Except from Constance Stuart Larrabee’s *Jeep Trek* taken from <http://www.virginia.edu/insideuva/textonlyarchive/95-06-09/5.txt>. Accessed August 10, 2004, 10:07.

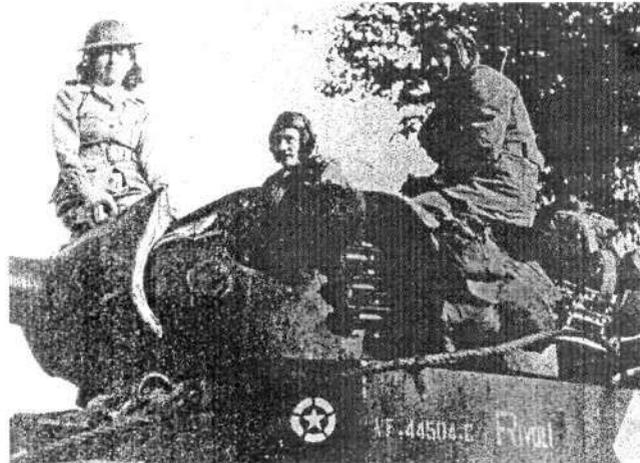
The fact that Miss Stuart has spent all her time in the South of France is somewhat disconcerting to me...Of course I do not know how she may have built up the South Africa angle in connection with her work in France, and I may have quite needless fears regarding the fruitfulness of her mission...⁶⁴

A picture depicting Lieutenants Cawood and Marais prior to the two leaving on a “strafing mission over German supply lines”, depicts the two young men in relaxed pose with broad smiles and little evidence of apprehension at their forthcoming mission. The parallels between that and the nonchalant acceptance of danger on the part of the bomber pilot “Hugh” in the previous chapter are evident. However Stuart’s depiction of the war was not wholly positive – one of most powerful images in the photo essay is of French women deemed collaborators who were having their heads shaved. This image displays none of the joviality of previous images and the violence that is implicit in it is clear. Stuart herself describes being “shocked” at what she had witnessed.⁶⁵



⁶⁴ Letter by E.G. Malherbe to T.C. Robertson, 12 December 1944.

⁶⁵ Historical Papers, William Cullen Library, University of the Witwatersrand. *Libertas*, September 1944, Vol 4, No 10, p40-41.



Images taken from *Libertas*, October 1944, p12-13

Her photographs also depict the destruction by the war and the German occupation of France. The image on the left is of a destroyed village and the right of a destroyed tank. Yet the destruction, particularly of the village, was not only taken as a sign of German malice but, more significantly, as a sign of Allied victory, as evident by the caption:

A village which was gutted by the Germans. The road of the enemy’s retreat was marked by many such signs of battle – blown-up bridges, burnt-out tanks, discarded equipment and abandoned fortifications.⁶⁶

This, along with the destroyed tank, served a similar function to many of the official images of war as well as the personal images of war, I will discuss in the subsequent chapter. They showed the damage, both of the enemy’s equipment, as well as that caused by the enemy. This served to psychologically distance the Allies, both from the devastation wrought by war, as well as rendering their own defeats in battle invisible in terms of the material and, particularly, the human cost. These images do not show the human destruction – images of suffering both on the part of civilians and particularly soldiers. In the photograph below Stuart herself poses with a tank group as part of the triumph, emphasising the victorious nature of the Allies, as well as the shift in the war from destruction to a more optimistic outlook, “The Germans are on the run...and, at present, there are no shells or mud – only sunshine and champagne.”⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Historical Papers, William Cullen Library, University of the Witwatersrand. *Libertas*, October 1944, Vol 4, No 11, p12.

⁶⁷ *Libertas*, October 1944, p13.



Images taken from *Libertas*, January 1945, p46-47

Her images of South African men of the Sixth Division on the Italian frontlines, having to contend with adverse weather conditions, served as a means of reassuring concerned South Africans on the home front. The emphasis was on their rugged nature and ability to cope with the environment and master the icy elements yet, simultaneously, her account of these experiences describe the difficult conditions men on the frontlines had to endure:

...in the meantime, the cold is the most serious enemy. The nights begin at 5 o'clock, when the icy winds sweep into the holes which the men have dug into the frost-hardened slopes, and cut through their blankets, coats and battledress. Sleep often becomes an impossibility, and the cold a physical pain.⁶⁸

The images belie this description, depicting men with cheerful expressions and coping adequately, despite the different jobs they had held before the war. For instance, the caption accompanying the image of Private Rhebock on the left, describes him as being a “paymaster’s clerk in Johannesburg” while Private Barnes, on the right, was a farmer from Natal.⁶⁹ Stuart’s photographs of men on the front lines all make reference to their civilian lives and this serves to draw a comparison between that and their newfound capability as soldiers, suggesting that within all these men, despite their diverse backgrounds, there existed the potential for the making of a good soldier. This served both, to allay the fears of their families, as well as encourage other men to enlist.

⁶⁸ Historical Papers, William Cullen Library, University of the Witwatersrand. *Libertas*, January 1945, Vol 5, No 2, p47.

⁶⁹ *Libertas*, January 1945, p46-47.



Images taken from *Libertas*, February 1945, p45 and p43 respectively

Yet Stuart’s portrayal of the war was not always as optimistic. Along with the conventional images of cheerful male camaraderie, evident in photograph of Yeld and Harding on the left, was the more sombre note struck by the evacuation of a wounded man down a mountain, bringing home a little of the negative experiences of war. However, this negativity is alleviated somewhat by the fact that the soldier is wounded rather than dead. Moreover, he is discreetly covered, lessening the impact of the image. This image is particularly interesting as it is one of the few which shows a member of the Cape Coloured Corps at work and he is named as “Stretcher-Bearer Lewis...who worked in a ginger beer factory in Cape Town before enlisting”. This gives him an individuality on par with white soldiers, which is often missing from official photographs.⁷⁰

Black Men and the “Noble Warrior”

Evident in Stuart’s work and in *Libertas* as a whole with its intended white readership, the war efforts of black men were rendered largely invisible. The group considered auxiliary to the war effort were the African, Indian and coloured men who made up the Non-European Army Services. Yet, although the main focus of *Libertas* was the white men and women who were considered key to the war effort, some attention was paid to the activities of these men,

⁷⁰ Historical Papers, William Cullen Library, University of the Witwatersrand. *Libertas*, February 1945, Vol 5, No 3, p43.

particularly African men, who were seen once again within the framework of "warriors". In addition, as this chapter has already demonstrated, white masculinity was defined against black men, particularly in combat which was the hallmark of distinction between the two. This section thus focuses on the way in which black men in the war were portrayed in *Libertas* as well as other media aimed at white readership so that these portrayals may be more effectively compared and contrasted with, not only the portrayal of white men in the magazine, but also black men in print media aimed specifically at a black readership.

An article detailing the exploits of Lucas Majozi, the only black man to win the Distinguished Conduct Medal, drew explicit parallels between his bravery and self-sacrificing devotion to duty with the exploits of Zulu warriors of the past. Here however, their bravery and, ironically for the contemporary non-combatants, skill as fighters was emphasised, rather than their conflict with white settlers:

In those days the impi – that formed his front-line troops and personal bodyguard – hand-picked by Chaka himself from strapping young volunteers, proved their valour and strength in a death struggle with lions trapped in the Zululand mountains; the young warriors employed no other weapons than their bare hands and rimpies to overcome and truss up the savaged, rending beasts. That same fearlessness is being turned today to a finer purpose on the battlefields.⁷¹

The emphasis was on bravery that was no longer confined to combat but to another use in the contemporary conflict. Majozi himself was recognised, not for any role involving combat, but for his work as a stretcher-bearer where he carried wounded men to safety under enemy fire at the battle of El Alamein while being wounded. It was this selfless act that led to the drawing of similarities with a brave warrior past. Here bravery was not equated with any action in combat, but with self-sacrifice and the courage under fire. Heroism was based on saving others rather than killing the enemy. This relates to the notion put forward by Jean Bethke Elshtain regarding the "noble warrior". The ideological construction of the noble warrior is not a taker of life but a preserver of it. Along with the justification of war by the countries involved as "fighting for freedom", comes the equally powerful rhetoric of defending the homeland. The enemy is portrayed as the aggressor and the soldier as the righteous defender of women and children. In addition to this, the idealised soldier is expected to take no pleasure in killing. It is considered an appalling but necessary task to kill to save a wounded comrade, a battalion under siege or

⁷¹ Johannesburg Military Museum. E.T. Stubbs, NEAS Press Cutting Book. EQ. 355.31 (68) Sou. "Zulu Hero: Old Fighting Spirit Lives On" in *Libertas*, July 1944, Vol 4, No 8, p58.

civilians in the line of fire, “Men’s experience of war is defensive, a story of aggression held (for the most part) in check, a tale of trying to protect, to save, to prevent.”⁷²

This was particularly the case on the part of the Allies of the Second World War where the presence of a clearly defined aggressor in the form of Hitler and the threat he presented with his quest for *lebensraum* (or, for the Americans, the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour), created a justification for a “noble war” – a desire to rid the world of the evils of fascism.

The images of the article continued in this vein of equating past Zulu strength with the efforts of Majosi and others like him. An image of Majosi referred to as “the modern brave” was juxtaposed with that of an old Zulu warrior who “believe[d] that the days of Zulu might died with Chaka”.⁷³



⁷² Jean Bethke Elshtain. *Women and War*. (New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1987) p224.

⁷³ “Zulu Hero: Old Fighting Spirit Lives On” in *Libertas*, July 1944, p58-59.



Images taken from *Libertas*, July 1944, p58-59

The old Zulu warrior with a care-worn, lined face is contrasted with the more confident pose struck by Majosi, suggesting that the latter was in many ways a sign of the earlier strength of the Zulu nation which had not been entirely lost. This theme is continued in the following set of images where a group of Zulu dancers are related to that of NMC men marching with assegais resting on their shoulders, in the position where guns were usually held. The Zulu dance had been carried out in Cairo in celebration of Rommel’s defeat and was seen in the context of a “warrior remain[ing] supremely staunch to his ancestors”. In this light the image on the right of men at drill with assegais was, rather than a sign of their exclusion from combat, a tribute instead to their warrior ancestry and the disciplining of these men for the Union army.⁷⁴ An interesting note however is that the emphasis on the rule of Shaka as being symbolic of the height of Zulu military strength and the core of the identity of Zulu men, not only suggests the strong hold the Zulu king exerted on the popular imagination, it simultaneously disregards the subsequent rulers who had come into conflict with and were eventually defeated by white settlers. This conveniently bypassed the hostility or tension that mention of subsequent Zulu history may have aroused.

The use of Zulu imagery was a common one in this period in the representation of African men and was not a representation solely confined to the military. The book *The Golden City* detailing the history of Johannesburg makes use of the conventions of the “noble savage/warrior” in its description of African men arriving in Johannesburg to work on the mines:

Notice that man leading them; naked except for a skin loin-cloth. Head held proudly erect, posed on a massive well-shaped neck. Back straight as a guardsman’s. Watch how

⁷⁴ “Zulu Hero: Old Fighting Spirit Lives On” in *Libertas*, July 1944, p58-59.

the muscles ripple under a golden brown skin glistening with health, and, above all, note how he walks. No stolid shuffling plodding here, but a lithe, springy step; every moment a poem./ As he walks he leads the chanting, his generous mouth wide open, disclosing magnificent rows of snow-white teeth, all the more beautiful because of the contrast to his dark face.⁷⁵

The emphasis here is on a physical masculinity – youth, vitality and above all, dignity – ironic when juxtaposed against the horrendous conditions of mining. It is an idealised vision of the “noble warrior” which was borne out in the photographs in the book.



Images *Natives on the Warpath* and *Young Native Manhood* taken from *The Golden City*, Allister Macmillan, ed. (London: W. H. and L. Collingridge Ltd, date unknown) p175 and p191 respectively.

Here the photographs, while focussing on urbanised African men, hark back to a pre-colonial stereotype showing indigenous dress and activities, suggesting that this was the inherent identity of African men. When the transformation from the rural “noble savage” to the urbanised African is described the man becomes almost an object of ridicule:

The native when first recruited for the mines arrives clad in a blanket. He is a mould of a well-built man, tall, but not corpulent, strong, muscular, and erect in bearing...When he returns to the kraal after many months’ service on the mines or any other of Johannesburg’s industries, the change is remarkable. He is dressed in European clothing, often in a loud check and with wide trousers, an incongruous contrast to the heavy mine boots he still wears.⁷⁶

The ubiquitous “noble savage” thus becomes corrupted by his contact with modernity, standing with a foot in both worlds, yet belonging to neither. This image of the “noble warrior” was one

⁷⁵ G. Ballenden. “Native Customs and Conditions” in *The Golden City*. Allister Macmillan, ed. (London: W. H. and L. Collingridge Ltd, date unknown) p173.

⁷⁶ G.H. Clement. “Native Folklore, Etc.” in *The Golden City*. Allister Macmillan, ed. (London: W. H. and L. Collingridge Ltd, date unknown) p187.

which thus exerted a strong hold on the imagination of white South Africa and permeated white society through the circulation of publications such as *The Golden City*. It was the idealised lens through which African men were viewed for the first half of the twentieth century.

Yet, historically, white South Africa had a highly ambivalent attitude towards the "noble Zulu warrior" stemming from colonial conflict. In the nineteenth century the military prowess of the Zulu army led to an acknowledgement on the part of the British of their bravery. The use of the adjective "bravery" is important here, taking on not only racial, but class connotations. Within the British army itself, "courage" was the hallmark of the officer, whereas "bravery" was attributed to the rank and file. The latter implied an "instinctive, almost a mechanical reaction" whereas the former was "a virtue, and a lofty and noble sentiment".⁷⁷ By relegating Zulu warriors to the status of "brave", their unflinching advances in the face of superior enemy fire, leading to the death of thousands, was downplayed as unthinking instinct, an inferior form of courage. This was heightened by the juxtaposition of the orderliness of British military formation with the perceived chaos of the "savage horde", evident in T.H. White's *Savage Victoria*, indicative of the widespread perception of the Zulu people in the British Empire:

In it [the novel] he described the Zulus as an 'army of ants, automatically fearless and unforgiving...It was like fighting a different and incalculable species – a species like the termites.' The English troops, as he called them, stood in their squares, bravely firing a hail of bullets, but 'The Zulus came on, blood-lusting, incomprehensible. Those death-disdaining stabbers were black, were impossible. Their bodies smelt strangely, their expressions were inhuman; their cries were in a foreign tongue, were those of beasts and cattle.'⁷⁸

The use of collective animal imagery such as "ants" and "termites" had the effect of rendering the Zulu army a faceless horde, incapable of individual notions of sacrifice and courage. Their "otherness" is emphasised in terms of physical difference, making them less than human and in total contrast to the British. The adjective, "death-disdaining", while acknowledging their suicidal advance in the face of British fire, rendered it devoid of agency and courage. courage only comes from performing despite one's fear and, if they did not fear death, then they were not really courageous in facing it. Their bravery was unthinking and inferior.

⁷⁷ Christopher Duffy. *The Military Experience in the Age of Reason*. (London: Routledge, 1987) p76.

⁷⁸ Robert B. Edgerton. *Like Lions They Fought: The Zulu War and the Last Black Empire in South Africa*. (New York: The Free Press, 1988) p5.

Despite this, there remained admiration for a worthy adversary:

Sergeant Jervis of the 90th added, ‘I confess that I do not think that a braver lot of men than our enemies in point of disregard for life, and for their bravery under fire, could be found anywhere’. A colonial officer who had fought bravely at Hlobane was also impressed by the Zulus’ courage: ‘We all admire the pluck of the Zulus. I wish you could have seen it. Under tremendous fire they never wavered, but came straight at us’.⁷⁹

By 1945, as a non-combatant, Lucas Majozi himself went on to become symbolic of the role played by black men during the Second World War – a different kind of “noble warrior”. His portrait was painted by Neville Lewis, the first official war artist, in 1942 and currently hangs in the South African Museum of Military History.⁸⁰



Image taken from the *Readers' Digest Illustrated History of South Africa*. Cape Town: Readers' Digest Association South Africa, 1994

The transformation from that picture to the one appearing in newspapers is quite remarkable. Here Majozi is portrayed more distantly, looking past the observer. His figure appears against a backdrop of sky and earth giving him a heroic appearance. The Red Cross on his sleeve, symbolic of his role in saving the lives of wounded men, is prominently displayed. In this image Majozi has transformed from the individual, personable figure to become almost iconic of the role which black men were expected to play during the Second World War – idealised, self-sacrificing non-combatants.

Libertas presupposed a white audience and its articles, concentrating on the role of white men and women, were tailored to this audience. In its portrayal of black men, *Libertas* therefore followed a trend that was evident in other white mainstream media. An assessment of many of the newspaper articles written about this group of auxiliary war workers gives an indication of

⁷⁹ Edgerton. *Like Lions They Fought*. p129.

⁸⁰ Ian Gleeson. *The Unknown Force – Black, Indian and Coloured Soldiers Through Two World Wars*. (Rivonia: Ashanti Publishing, 1994) p220.

the way in which these men were perceived by white society. This stood in contrast to the way in which they perceived themselves and their contribution to the war effort, evident in the black newspapers, which I discuss further on.

Important here too is the role of the Argus Printing and Publishing Company, the largest and most influential media group in southern Africa. From the late nineteenth century the Argus had close links with mining interests after Cecil John Rhodes became a major shareholder and changed its policy from a liberal attitude towards race, embodied by earlier shareholder Saul Solomon, to one of "prudence in racial matters".⁸¹ These links with the mining industry were only strengthened and, "by 1891, most of the great names in gold mining were shareholders, including Barney Barnato and Solly Joel" – a relationship that was to continue in the twentieth century.⁸² Some of the significant newspapers falling under the Argus Group were *The Cape Argus*, *The Star*, *The Natal Daily News*, *The Sunday Tribune* and *The Pretoria News*.⁸³

With the outbreak of war in 1939, the Argus Group were unstintingly supportive in their support of the South African war effort, as evident in a statement issued by the General Manager in early 1940, where he emphasised that the publishing group was fully behind the war effort and would act accordingly, adding that many of its workers had enlisted or were eager to do so.⁸⁴

The media company went on to have close links with the government in its representation of the war, playing key roles in recording news on the front lines and actually enlisting as members of the Union Defence Force where, "Lieut.-Colonel B.W. Thwaites, the News Editor of *The Star*...became Director of Intelligence".⁸⁵ Many of the following articles have been drawn from the newspapers in the Argus group and thus bear the influences of the company's perspective on race as well as participation in the war.

⁸¹ Ainslie. *The Press in Africa*. p41.

⁸² Ainslie. *The Press in Africa*. p41.

⁸³ L.E. Neame and Eric Rosenthal. *Today's News Today: The Story of the Argus Company*. (Johannesburg: Argus Printing and Publishing Co. Ltd., 1956) p307-308.

⁸⁴ Neame and Rosenthal. *Today's News Today*. p271.

⁸⁵ Neame and Rosenthal. *Today's News Today*. p273.

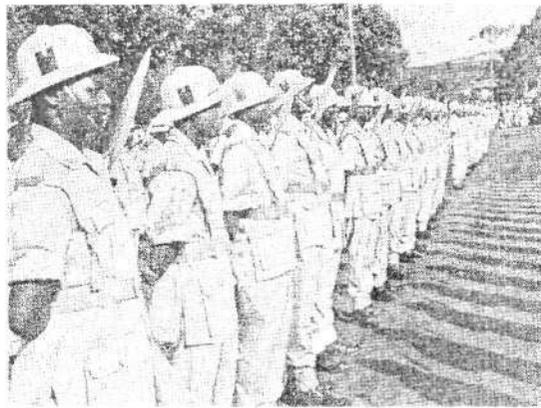


Image taken from E.T. Stubbs, NEAS Press Cutting Book. EQ. 355.31 (68) Sou. *Cape Argus*, 5 November, 1942

The image above of troops from the Native Military Corps (NMC) is accompanied by a description of the capable manner in which these men both adapted to and successfully carried out military training:

Native Troops Impress: Thousands of spectators round the Grand Parade late yesterday afternoon repeatedly broke into applause while watching the perfect precision and dignity with which members of the 3rd Battalion of the Native Military Corps performed the difficult evolutions of the "Retreat" ceremony.⁸⁶

The description of efficacy with which they carried out the drill, and the report of approval which it subsequently generated, suggested an acceptance of these men in the military in a role that was limited which was attested to by them carrying assegais. As the Majozi example shows however, this did not necessarily preclude from being extended a masculine identity based on bravery and heroism, despite being excluded from combat. Black masculinity could only be envisaged as being excluded from combat, as in the case of Majozi or as the subjugated "noble warriors" of the settler past.

A description of camp life of the Indian Malay Corps in Cape Town demonstrated the way in which their training had made them capable and highly skilled individuals, inducing permanent change in their pre-war lives:

In all sections of this vast camp it was the same. A flower seller from Cape Town had left his pitch, and to-day he sat with test-tubes showing me, by chemical test, water that was fit to drink and water samples, had I cared to sip them, which would have left me in a torment of fever.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Johannesburg Military Museum. E.T. Stubbs, NEAS Press Cutting Book. EQ. 355.31 (68) Sou. *Cape Argus*, 5 November, 1942.

⁸⁷ Johannesburg Military Museum. E.T. Stubbs, NEAS Press Cutting Book. EQ. 355.31 (68) Sou. NEAS Press Cuttings.

Along with this was the ubiquitous reference to sport. Here, white officers who were formerly Springboks trained the men in team sports such as cricket and rugby, with the use of donated equipment. The aim was to build team spirit and camaraderie in the belief “that a good sport makes a good soldier”. The combination of skills training and sport was to prepare these men for their non-combatant roles in North Africa:

When these men of the Indian Malay Corps leave their home of training among the hills to face the icy desert winds or to stew in the sizzling heat of a treeless plateau “up North”, they will be primed and ready to face the hardships. I am sure they will also prove themselves to be resourceful and courageous soldiers worthy to uphold the traditions of their race.⁸⁸

Their military training to ultimately make them effective soldiers was linked to the upholding of racial “traditions”, serving to place them within the context of historical precedent. It also restricted them to a particular racial category that affected the kinds of roles which they could adopt.

However, black men themselves did not necessarily see their role as being less than integral to the war effort.

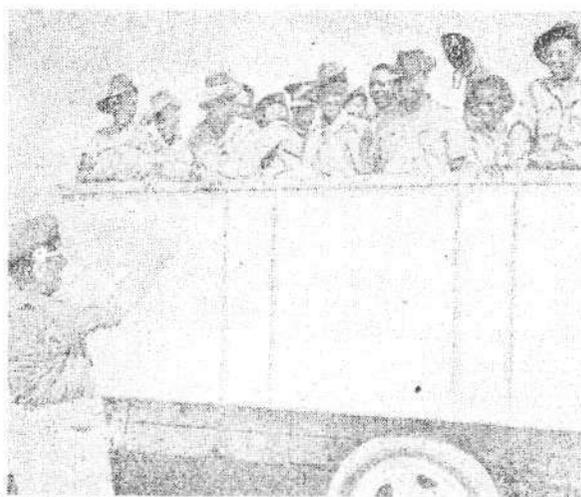


Image taken from E.T. Stubbs, NEAS Press Cutting Book. EQ. 355.31 (68) Sou. *The Bantu World*, 9 January, 1943.

A picture captioned “The Smiles Hitler Cannot Destroy” and published in *The Bantu World*, depicts a group of men arriving in the Middle East in the back of a truck. These men have broad smiles on their faces, implying a willingness or eagerness to play a role in the war effort. It is this attitude that is portrayed as being a threat to the enemy, creating a direct link between their

⁸⁸ NEAS Press Cuttings.

activities and the defiance and, ultimately victory, of the Allies against Hitler. This served as a psychological means of giving importance to the role of these auxiliary men.⁸⁹ *The Bantu World* fell under the Bantu Press, in which the Argus had a minority share. With its first issue in 1932, “*The Bantu World* [had] a national circulation [and was] published in English, Xhosa, Zulu, Sotho and Tswana”, making it available to the widest possible African audience.⁹⁰ Through its history, *The Bantu World* was perceived by radical groups as being little more than a white tool, due to its conservative stance as well as its affiliation:

Though editors and staff of most of the South African papers were Africans, all worked under white supervision, and final editorial control. The open hostility of the *World*, main paper of the group to the African National Congress actually led to the exclusion of the *World’s* correspondent from an A.N.C. Congress in 1955.⁹¹

It is this conservative context within which the war-time representation of black men at war in *The Bantu World* must thus be viewed, evident in the wholly positive portrayal of war work in the photograph above.

The Role of Black Leaders in Recruiting

The war effort was not averse to using traditional leaders to further the recruitment of black men in this auxiliary capacity. Traditional leaders had a fraught association with the South African state and, before that, British colonialism. At the height of British colonialism and imperialism British rule took two forms – “direct” and “indirect” rule. The first, as the name suggested, involved direct rule of the colonies by British officials and bureaucracy. The second however – and the most common – operated through already existing power structures where British rule was accomplished with the aid of “traditional” leaders who were able to benefit from this alliance.⁹² Traditional leaders thus had a history of collaboration to varying degrees with colonial structures and were able to be co-opted in the service of the state for the war effort.

These men with a history of collaboration with colonial and state structures could however be contrasted with the growing radicalism evident in African – as well as coloured and Indian – politics in the 1920s and 1930s. This could be seen by the tremendous support given to the

⁸⁹ Johannesburg Military Museum. E.T. Stubbs, NEAS Press Cutting Book. EQ. 355.31 (68) Sou. *The Bantu World*, 9 January, 1943.

⁹⁰ Ainslie. *The Press in Africa*. p51.

⁹¹ Ainslie. *The Press in Africa*. p52.

⁹² D.K. Fieldhouse. *Colonialism, 1870-1945: An Introduction*. (London: George Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1981) p31-35.

Industrial and Commercial Workers’ Union (ICU), “by a new black working class [as well as] the black lower middle classes who were losing out in an increasingly segregated society”.⁹³ The ICU was particularly powerful in the rural areas drawing its support from the failure of more conservative black organisations to address the needs of the poorer classes. Ultimately though, it became a spent force by 1929.⁹⁴ Yet greater radicalism emerged within the ANC in the 1940s, exemplified by men like Xuma – whom I discuss further on – placing them at odds with the old guard, represented by the traditional leaders.⁹⁵ These appeals made by traditional leaders must thus be viewed against this background of tension within African politics.

The *Indlovu* newspaper ran a number of articles of the appeals made by men like Chief Albert Luthuli and Chief Mshiyeni KaDinizulu, leader of the Zulu, who encouraged their followers to throw their weight behind the war effort. These articles appeared in an African newspaper and were translated in Zulu, English, Afrikaans and, in the case of Chief Jeremiah Moshesh, Sesotho, making them available to as wide an audience as possible. They provide an interesting insight into the motivations used for recruitment as well as the benefits that these men hoped to gain from their military service and their overt demonstration of patriotism towards the South African state.



Image taken from E.T. Stubbs, NEAS Press Cutting Book. EQ. 355.31 (68) Sou. “Appeal by Chief Jeremiah Moshesh” in *Indlovu Newspaper* [date unknown]

⁹³ Nigel Worden. *The Making of Modern South Africa: Conquest, Segregation and Apartheid*. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1994) p53.

⁹⁴ Worden. *The Making of Modern South Africa*. p56.

⁹⁵ Worden. *The Making of Modern South Africa*. p85-86.

The picture of Chief Jeremiah Moshesh accompanying his appeal showed him in European attire, with an array of medals pinned to his chest, serving to already place him on the side of the South African state in the recruiting drive. Moreover, the Basuto had had a close history with Britain dating from the mid-nineteenth century, when Basuto leader, Moshesh, enlisted British aid against Boer forces and the area was subsequently annexed by Britain and made a Crown colony. Through the system of indirect rule the Basuto were offered some measure of independence, “No white settlement was allowed... [and] British control was little more than nominal and advisory.”⁹⁶ Thus Jeremiah Moshesh’s attempt at recruitment operated within an already existing framework of co-operation with British rule, making him a strong ally for the war effort. His appeals to the Basuto people to throw their weight behind the war effort showed parallels with the recruitment films discussed in a previous chapter, particularly in terms of the way in which South Africa was portrayed as being directly threatened by the German advance:

The German hordes are menacing the whole world – they have over-run nearly the whole of Europe. They are attacking Asia and have now penetrated into North Africa. We must not allow them to have a firm footing in Africa because if that happens they will eventually come into South Africa with its alluring gold and diamond fields.⁹⁷

South Africa’s mineral resources were portrayed as placing her in grave danger by making her a tempting target for German forays into the country. Should this happen Moshesh raised the question of the treatment of Africans under German rule by considering the treatment of their counterparts in Damaraland in present-day Namibia. Ultimately German control of South Africa was seen as the greater evil to their already secondary citizen status where, “They [Africans] would either be exterminated or sent into the fever stricken areas of Central Africa.”⁹⁸ Germany was thus presented as a threat, both to the country as a whole, as well as to African people in particular, based upon their brutal colonial history in Namibia which only ended during the First World War when South West Africa was made a mandate of South Africa.⁹⁹

⁹⁶ D.W. Kruger. “The British Imperial Factor in South Africa from 1870 to 1910” in *Colonialism in Africa, 1870-1960: Volume 1 – The History and Politics of Colonialism, 1870-1914*. L.H. Gann and Peter Duignan, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977) p326-327.

⁹⁷ Johannesburg Military Museum. E.T. Strubbs, NEAS Press Cutting Book. EQ. 355.31 (68) Sou. “Appeal by Chief Jeremiah Moshesh” in *Indlovu Newspaper* [date unknown]

⁹⁸ “Appeal by Chief Jeremiah Moshesh” in *Indlovu Newspaper* [date unknown]

⁹⁹ Patricia Hayes, Jeremy Silvester and Wolfram Hartmann. “Photography, history and memory” in *The Colonising Camera: Photographs in the Making of Namibian History*. W. Hartmann, J. Silvester and P. Hayes, eds. (Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press, 2001) p3.

To preserve the status quo in South Africa, Moshesh encouraged Basuto young men to join the Non-European Army Services (NEAS), yet this appeal was based on an evocation of their warrior history – which often pitted them against those that they were now expected to support:

...You know the African is a soldier by birth – In the days of old you were called to defend your land and you did it for no pay. Your pay was the land fought for – But your Government to-day wants you to defend the land, and at the same time you will get paid while you are on active service.¹⁰⁰

There was a clear convergence between duty and patriotism, with the more pragmatic requirements of payment and the employment opportunity afforded by military service. This was a theme that was strengthened by the appeal made by Chief Mshiyeni ka Dinizulu to the Zulu people. Moshesh's appeal concluded by claiming that enlistment would be a demonstration of loyalty to the South African state and be a significant addition to the international alliance opposing Hitler, an alliance which members of his own family had already joined. He highlighted the voluntary nature of their enlistment but his concluding words, "...the successful ones rid the train to go where duty calls them singing the old Basuto War Cry like their fathers did of old, when men were men," suggested that the men who enlisted in the NEAS would be following in the footsteps of their ancestors, making them "real men". He indirectly drew a distinction between the men of the NEAS and those who did not follow their duty and were thus prevented from attaining the status of their ancestors who epitomized masculinity.¹⁰¹ Thus, the voluntary nature of enlistment, was supplanted by the pressure exerted on these men to live up to a warrior ideal drawn from the past along with motivations of duty and loyalty, going hand-in-hand with self-preservation and financial incentives.

Appeals made by members of the Zulu traditional leadership brought with them their own history of collaboration and conflict. After the British conquest of the independent Zulu kingdom in 1879 one of the key features of the indirect rule implemented by the British was the codification of customary law that, "entrenched the rights of chiefs and headmen", while ensuring the latter's subservience to colonial authority.¹⁰² In the interwar period Zulu traditional leaders continued their association with a conservative Zulu nationalism based on culture and "tradition": "...the Zulu royal family and the traditionalism that it represented constituted a bulwark against radical change – a bulwark as much for the African intelligentsia as for the white

¹⁰⁰ "Appeal by Chief Jeremiah Moshesh" in *Indlovu Newspaper* [date unknown]

¹⁰¹ "Appeal by Chief Jeremiah Moshesh" in *Indlovu Newspaper* [date unknown]

¹⁰² Morrell, Wright and Meintjes. "Colonialism and the Establishment of White Domination, 1840-1890". p71.

ideologues of segregation.”¹⁰³ This was exemplified by the Zulu Cultural Society which had as its initiator Albert Luthuli and with which the Zulu Regent, Mshiyeni, was strongly associated – both of whom appear below. Furthermore, the Society was also financially supported by the Native Affairs Department, making its links with white authority explicit.¹⁰⁴ Luthuli and, in particular, Mshiyeni, as well as the secretary of the Zulu Cultural Society, Charles Mpanza, played key roles in recruitment during the Second World War. He worked with the Native Affairs Department in furthering war recruitment, along with Mshiyeni. Mpanza also made radio broadcasts in Zulu, using propaganda to increase recruitment.¹⁰⁵

The appeal made by Chief Albert Luthuli [sic] was similar to that of Jeremiah Moshesh in that it was concerned with the threat presented by Germany’s advance. However Luthuli focuses on the threat to Europe rather than Africa. It was not South Africa’s mineral wealth that would suffer but the heart of Britain itself:

The King’s call is to all able-bodied men to come out and join his armies. The fire that was started by the enemy is burning dangerously. Will you let it reach the Royal Apartment? Answer the call and join up!¹⁰⁶

The war was presented as a direct threat to the England – which in fact it was – requiring the mobilisation of young men to defend it. Loyalty to the British monarch was emphasised in the appeal along with an itemisation of the various members of the Zulu royal house itself who had joined the war effort, thus drawing upon loyalty both to the British Crown as well as the traditional leaders.¹⁰⁷

Moreover the Commonwealth, with the King at its head, was presented as representing the ideals of democracy and freedom, making support for them a matter of idealism, especially when confronted with the prospect of the dominance of fascism;

The great and mighty Commonwealth of our King stands for freedom...It is true, Zulus, that the Commonwealth of our King (The British Commonwealth of Nations), and King George VI, endeavour to uphold and practice the principles of allowing each man personal freedom and well-being. Freedom is in consonance with the plan and purpose

¹⁰³ Shula Marks. “Patriotism, Patriarchy and Purity: Natal and the Politics of Zulu Ethnic Consciousness” in *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa*. Leroy Vail, ed. (London: James Currey Ltd, 1989) p217.

¹⁰⁴ Marks. “Patriotism, Patriarchy and Purity”. p217.

¹⁰⁵ Marks. “Patriotism, Patriarchy and Purity”. p217, 223.

¹⁰⁶ Johannesburg Military Museum. E.T. Stubbs, NEAS Press Cutting Book. EQ. 355.31 (68) Sou. “Appeal by Chief Albert John Luthuli of the Umvoti Mission Reserve – The King’s Call” in *Indlovu Newspaper* [date unknown]

¹⁰⁷ “Appeal by Chief Albert John Luthuli of the Umvoti Mission Reserve – The King’s Call” in *Indlovu Newspaper* [date unknown]

of the Creator who created man and made him a free agent with the right and privilege of free choice.¹⁰⁸

Although the emphasis was on the freedom represented by King and Commonwealth, a freedom that was given form by the voluntary conscription instituted, Luthuli’s call to enlist was based on an appeal to Zulu culture, emphasising duty and obedience, “But Zulus, know this, that loyalty and respect, which are ingrained in you Zulus, demand that you listen to an expressed desire of a superior.”¹⁰⁹ Like Moshesh’s appeal, “voluntary conscription” was a phrase not necessarily borne out in practice. However, while Moshesh made the more subtle appeals to masculinity, Luthuli was more overt by drawing on the hierarchical structure of Zulu society and the example set by those at the apex to provide a compulsion for enlistment. Ultimately though, the contribution made by Zulu men to the war effort, supporting the fight for liberty, converged with their own principles and “aspiration...for freedom and peace”, still bringing in the idealistic element put forward by Moshesh.¹¹⁰



Image taken from E.T. Stubbs, NEAS Press Cutting Book. EQ. 355.31 (68) Sou. “An Address by Acting Paramount Chief Mshiyeni Ka Dinizulu to the Zulu Chiefs and People” in *Indlovu Newspaper* [date unknown]

¹⁰⁸ “Appeal by Chief Albert John Luthuli of the Umvoti Mission Reserve – The King’s Call” in *Indlovu Newspaper* [date unknown]

¹⁰⁹ “Appeal by Chief Albert John Luthuli of the Umvoti Mission Reserve – The King’s Call” in *Indlovu Newspaper* [date unknown]

¹¹⁰ “Appeal by Chief Albert John Luthuli of the Umvoti Mission Reserve – The King’s Call” in *Indlovu Newspaper* [date unknown]

The appeal by the acting Paramount Chief of the Zulu, Mshiyeni ka Dinizulu, was however based on more pragmatic considerations. Like Moshesh, Mshiyeni appeared in the *Indlovu* in European dress, in this instance full military uniform, making a less than subtle statement regarding his support of the Allies. Interestingly enough, Mshiyeni's appeals for recruitment were not necessarily met with wholehearted approval, "So unpopular were the Regent's war efforts that in 1942 it was reported that he was 'nearly stabbed by one of his own men at Mome, [and] someone else threw a big stone...at him in his tent...at Eshowe.'"¹¹¹ In this article, once again, both King and Commonwealth were represented as symbolising liberty and democracy, the antithesis of fascism, and as holding the possibility for equal citizenship for black colonial subjects. And again, the voluntary nature of enlistment was emphasised as an example of the South African government's commitment to the ideals for which the war was fought, but there remained the added pressure of proving one's manliness:

But we wish to see manliness and love in you. And that will be proved by your coming forward yourselves of your own will. I want you to make up your will, and determination NOW, and not wait until it is too late.¹¹²

Enlisting was depicted as a proof of masculinity and loyalty, as well as a sign of strength of character, once again working to undermine its voluntary nature. In fact it was this very concession to volunteerism that was cited as proof of the freedom for which the Allies fought, making it an added incentive to enlist.

Where Mshiyeni departed from the other two appeals was in terms of his emphasis on the sorely needed material benefits derived from military service. Along with what he perceived to be the positive outcomes of military service in terms of "physical health [and] discipline", was the steady employment afforded by enlisting which would help alleviate the poverty that was rife in the country:

We hear natives are poor and have no money. But look at those boys in khaki: Do they look hungry? Do they look in need of money? Ask their wives and children if they hunger at all? Why should you go about hungry in the midst of plenty? The boys in khaki don't starve...they have money in their pockets, but you who roam about idle will starve, and your families will be broken and you will come running some day to join the army and live.¹¹³

¹¹¹ Marks. "Patriotism, Patriarchy and Purity". p237.

¹¹² Johannesburg Military Museum. E.T. Stubbs, NEAS Press Cutting Book. EQ. 355.31 (68) Sou. "An Address by Acting Paramount Chief Mshiyeni Ka Dinizulu to the Zulu Chiefs and People" in *Indlovu Newspaper* [date unknown]

¹¹³ "An Address by Acting Paramount Chief Mshiyeni Ka Dinizulu to the Zulu Chiefs and People" in *Indlovu Newspaper* [date unknown]

The picture painted here by Mshiyeni is of a less idealistic, unified and contented society. Military service was the means of providing for one’s family in the face of unemployment, poverty and starvation. This had the added impact of bolstering masculine identity derived from being the breadwinner. The army was perceived as being the one solution to economic hardship and idleness, drawing the distinction between those in the army who were able to provide for their families, and those who could not as they had not enlisted.

Finally, Mshiyeni concluded with a euphemistic portrayal of camp life – the benefits of outdoor life and communing with nature, “I enjoy sight of my wild neighbours, the baboon, the mosquito, the toad and the frog...I like the wild smell of wild flowers...; it is pleasant and educating to be out there.”¹¹⁴ These benefits could be contrasted with the poverty and famine rife in the reserves which he had described previously. It also suggested the idyllic nature of military service, providing a further incentive to join up. The common theme across these three appeals made by the leaders of their people was that voluntary enlistment was mediated by factors such as duty, obedience, escape from poverty and, ultimately, a proof of masculinity. All of this worked in tandem to attempt to encourage enlistment in the Non-European Army Services.

Loyalty to the Cause: The *Mendi* and the Patriotism of Black South Africans in *Ilanga Lase Natal*

Throughout the war, the *Ilanga Lase Natal* voiced an alternative to that of encouragement to join the Non-European Army Services, propagated by the traditional leadership in their recruitment efforts, discussed above. As a newspaper aimed at an African and largely Zulu readership, *Ilanga*, while under white ownership, was able to offer a different perspective on war service for black men. This section addresses the way in which *Ilanga*, while demonstrating its loyalty to the South African government and the war effort, was still able to formulate a criticism of the existing social, economic and political conditions which left African men second class citizens. In contrast to the convention of placing black and, in particular, African men within the constraints of colonialism and the subjugation it entailed evident in the images of the “noble warrior” as well as the use of traditional leaders to further recruitment – which I have addressed above – *Ilanga*

¹¹⁴ “An Address by Acting Paramount Chief Mshiyeni Ka Dimizulu to the Zulu Chiefs and People” in *Indlovu Newspaper* [date unknown]

was able to address the more immediate concerns of its readership in the modern state, focusing on economic and particularly political rights and the implication of war service for these. This, and subsequent sections, focus on the way in which the war and black service was portrayed in the newspaper, tracing the changes over the course of the war from the desire to prove their loyalty as citizens to the disillusionment that ultimately set in as the war drew to a close.

A few months after the outbreak of war in 1939, an article “Faithful Stewardship” affirmed their loyalty to the cause of Britain in the spirit of the previous loyalty shown during the First World War. Sacrifice for others was portrayed not only as a demonstration of loyalty but as a sign of humanity. It also suggested that this fealty required a similar recognition of the rights of Africans:

The loyalty hitherto evinced by the Africans towards Britain has been quite exemplary and praiseworthy. They went overseas in their thousands to relieve the soldiers during the Great War so that they could be released to take their part in the front. Many more could be available were they so required. If a people were ready to make the supreme sacrifice of their lives for their country, this always means that they are human beings and worthy of human rights.¹¹⁵

The issue of previous loyalty resurfaced with the commemoration of the sinking of the *Mendi* a month later in Johannesburg when the Chief Native Commissioner took the opportunity to, not only praise the African people for their steadfast loyalty and sacrifice, but admonished them to remain “calm and co-operate with the authorities and not to listen to irresponsible people who spread false propaganda and rumours...”¹¹⁶ The commemoration of the sinking of the *Mendi* demonstrated the way in which African participation in previous foreign wars was publicly acknowledged and given a certain significance, which took on an additional meaning during the Second World War.

During the First World War the sinking of the *Mendi* had been the equivalent of a trial by fire for African men such as that experienced by white South Africans on the Somme. It was a ship carrying members of the native labour contingent that collided with another ship, the *Darro*, and subsequently sank, leading to a tremendous loss of life, numbering more than six hundred.

¹¹⁵ KCAL. “Faithful Stewardship” in *Ilanga Lase Natal*, 17 February 1940, p15. KCN 134. J496.3442 ILA.

¹¹⁶ KCAL. Walter M.B. Nhlapo. “Mendi Disaster Anniversary” in *Ilanga Lase Natal*, 23 March 1940, p15. KCN 134. J496.3442 ILA.

Subsequent investigation found that the captain of the *Darro* had failed to take adequate measures to rescue the men alive in the water leaving most to drown or die of hypothermia.¹¹⁷

The impact of the sinking of the *Mendi* had reverberated as far as the South African Parliament where Louis Botha acknowledged the sacrifice made by black volunteers during the war and, in a manner unprecedented the House of Assembly, “stood as a sign of respect though the majority dead were black”.¹¹⁸ The use of the *Mendi* had become increasingly politicised for the first half of the twentieth century:

To many Africans the disaster dramatically symbolized the stark realities of their positions in South Africa: black sacrifices on behalf of white interests. Through the Mendi Memorial Club...and the annual commemoration of Mendi Day in the larger urban centres, the symbolic significance of the tragedy was kept alive...the Mendi Memorial Bursary Fund was founded in 1936 to sponsor promising black pupils. A distinctive feature of this fund was the perceived need to increase black self-esteem through education and to stimulate an awareness of education as an important weapon in the struggle against white domination.¹¹⁹

Its increasing association with black aspirations and demands during the 1940s drew the attention of the authorities until the Nationalist government took steps to prevent Mendi Day services. It did this by making life difficult for those who wished to mark the occasion, without actually outlawing it. Constant intervention by the authorities ultimately lessened the impact of the services until it eventually faded into obscurity.¹²⁰

However, in the Second World War, it became immortalized in popular consciousness, assuming mythical proportions. In 1941 a legend surfaced purporting to be the words of Isaac Wauchope Dyobha, a mission-educated minister who died on the *Mendi*. As the ship sank he was believed to have called out to the men:

‘Be quiet and calm, my countrymen, for what is taking place is exactly what you came to do. You are going to die, but that is what you came to do. Brothers, we are drilling the death drill. I, a Xhosa, say you are my brothers, Swazis, Pondos, Basutos, we die like brothers. We are the sons of Africa. Raise your war cries, brothers, for though they made us leave our assegais in the kraal, our voices are left with our bodies.’¹²¹

¹¹⁷ Grundlingh. *Fighting Their Own War*. p94-95.

¹¹⁸ Clothier. *Black Valour*. p1.

¹¹⁹ Grundlingh. *Fighting Their Own War*. p139.

¹²⁰ Grundlingh. *Fighting Their Own War*. p140.

¹²¹ Clothier. *Black Valour*. p20. According to Clothier the first mention of the story of the sinking of the *Mendi* made its appearance in J.S.M. Simpson *South Africa Fights*. (London: Hodder and Stoughton Ltd, 1941) p87. Simpson used the story to demonstrate that “The men of the *Mendi* showed that Africa bred courage, regardless of skin,” (p87).

Although the veracity of this claim has been the subject of contention, I find it nonetheless to be extremely significant, arising as it did in the early years of the Second World War where black men faced similar challenges to 1914. Dyobha's purported words emphasised the spirit of sacrifice and grace in the face of death which was a hallmark of courage and military service, combatant or not. Although their non-combatant status and therefore departure from their perceived traditional roles – evident with the use of the word "assegai" – was acknowledged, their sense of masculine identity as brave men united and defiant in the face of death remained intact. There was also an idea of African nationalism that transcended ethnic boundaries.

The spectre of the Mendi made an appearance a year later in the *Ilanga* in 1941 in a very different context from that of the Native Commissioner's use of it in 1940 when A.B. Xuma, the president of the ANC, used the very same incident to argue that the sacrifices of the men on the Mendi and others like them should not have been in vain. The reward for their loyalty and sacrifice should be the legal equality of all races in South Africa. Xuma made the argument that, if Africans had equal access to legal rights and some form of political and economic equality, then their loyalty to the state would be resolute, leaving no chink for hostile propaganda to penetrate:

'Many responsible people,' added Dr Xuma, 'have been anxious about the dangers of anti-state propaganda among the Africans. If all statutory regulations and technical offences which are crimes for Africans only, were removed, employment offered and a living wage established for all including Africans, no amount of propaganda from any source would be effective among the Africans. As I speak, South Africa is fighting for noble and high ideals...for Christianity, democracy and human decency. And because of these ideals South Africa dare not discriminate against any section of her population on account of race or colour and be true to her ideals.'¹²²

For Xuma, South Africa could not afford to be hypocritical by failing to extend rights to her black population while she was fighting for democracy abroad. He linked democracy with religious and moral values, making it a moral imperative on the part of the state to extend equal rights to black South Africans. Xuma, as president of the ANC, represented a mounting radicalism and opposition to the Native Commissioner, different to the greater collaboration represented by Dube, Luthuli and Mpanza, "[marking] a new phase of regeneration in African nationalism during the war years after a long period of weakness and division in the 1930s

¹²² KCAL. "Brave Men Will Not have Died in Vain" in *Ilanga Lase Natal*, March 1941, p13. KCN 135. J496.3442 ILA.

and...this was linked with a growing democratic spirit engendered by the war itself."¹²³ Key to the speeches by the Native Commissioner and Xuma, was the use of the Mendi incident for different purposes – the first by the Native Commissioner to call for African loyalty which stood in contrast to Xuma's use of it to demonstrate a loyalty and sacrifice which was not infinite and needed to be concretely acknowledged by the state in the form of the extension of equality. The Mendi in this period became a lens through which issues surrounding African participation in the war became articulated.

Equal Participation

Another issue raised in these articles is that of hostile anti-allied propaganda broadcasted by German radio which was having an adverse effect on the African population, a theme that runs through the articles of *Ilanga Lase Natal* during the early years of the war. Seen by the state as a threat to African loyalty, as evident in the words of the Native Commissioner that I have discussed earlier, the *Ilanga* affirmed that Nazism was the greater evil in terms of its racial denigration of black people:

...it makes us laugh and at times annoys us to hear those lunatics from Berlin say that the African is only a degree higher than the ourang-outang [sic] or whatever you choose to call it, in intellect. It is unfortunate that the world will always have such lunatics... 'Germany is fighting for the removal of an injustice, England is fighting for its preservation,' squeaks the Berlin Nazi broadcaster... In the Nazi conception of right and wrong 'justice' means the treatment of the African as an inherently inferior human creature, with no capability to rise and live freely in God's wide, wide world, for, their segregationist God made the world for the white man only and appointed Nordic lunatics to administer 'justice' in that world on his behalf.¹²⁴

Acknowledging the fallacies evident in Nazi "black" propaganda did not lessen the *Ilanga's* agitation for equal participation in the war and, in particular, combat and the arming of black men was a thorny issue for most of the war. In an article written in 1940 equal participation in war was linked to demands for citizenship and ideas of masculinity:

The recent decision by the Union Government to at least give the Africans a small share in the **manly** [emphasis added] duties of the defence of their country will go far to our

¹²³ Paul B. Rich. *White Power and the Liberal Conscience: Racial Segregation and South African Liberalism, 1921-60*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984) p74.

¹²⁴ KCAL. "Gleanings from Life (By Jo the Cow) The War" in *Ilanga Lase Natal*, 22 June 1940, p6. KCN 134. J496.3442 ILA.

people that they are also considered as human beings and not mere chattels...As to the disappointment which may be expressed by some that the project is an incomplete one since these squads will not be allowed training in the use of weapons of precision, an impartial onlooker may realize that the present Government have not only one side to look at, but to carefully see to it that they do not tread on the 'corns' of anti-Government and reactionary elements who would eagerly grasp at any shred of evidence that the present Government are attempting to pamper the Africans into thinking that they are as good as white men...The project will help to assure the Africans that in the future they will be allowed human rights to improve their position as citizens in the country of their birth and to gradually, as they prove their ability, to take their place in the civil service as well as in the manly duties of the defence of the country...¹²⁵

The use of the word "manly" emphasized that participation in the war as soldiers in defence of South Africa was seen as integral to their role as men. The war was the testing ground where African men would be able to prove themselves in terms of loyalty as well as their combat ability. It was only by their willingness to fight and die for their country that they could demonstrate their worthiness of citizenship. Yet their allocation to auxiliary roles, rather than combat roles on par with white men, was a further concretization of the segregation and limited rights on the home front. Interestingly enough, the article did not apportion sole blame for this on the government, but rather on the government's need to allay the fears of the opposition, those who were hostile to any form of state recognition of African equality.

The readership of the *Ilanga* was not as keen to accept the government's catering to the demands of the white opposition at the expense of their own and a strongly worded letter was written to the newspaper by C.B.I. Dladla from Durban. This was in response to activist Yusuf Dadoo's arrest where Dladla argued that people had the right to refuse to defend a government if such a government did not extend equality to them. Dladla used Smuts' defence of democratic principles to highlight the hypocrisy of a state which was unwilling to implement the same ideals for which the war was being fought on the home front. Those people who refused to fight and who criticized the government's policies, were not necessarily the agents of fascism, but actually the proponents of freedom:

As Africans, in view of past experiences we are entitled to demand and to know from the Government what we are being called upon to defend and if it is democracy, then we must also enjoy those democratic rights which it is the fortunate lot of a few white people to enjoy...it is our moral right to refuse to defend a system which denies us the right to live as free human beings under God's sun. We do not need to be Communists, Fifth Columnists, Nazi Agents, subversive propagandists...to understand the sanity of

¹²⁵ KCAL. "Worthy Government Gesture" in *Ilanga Lase Natal*, 20 July 1940, p15. KCN 134. J496.3442 ILA.

such an attitude...If, as General Smuts has said, the present struggle to-day is for the establishment of a World Federation of Nations where between man and man there shall be rule of law, the absence of force and violence and the maintenance of peace, are we not justified in demanding from Gen. Smuts as head of the Government that the fight for democracy must be based on genuine democracy at home?¹²⁶

In 1942 the calls for racial equality by the end of the war was a dominant issue in the newspaper, played out through the campaigning for the arming of black men in the military. Arming black men came to symbolize, not only equal participation on the war front, but the duties, and particularly rights, of citizenship. In *Ilanga* the arming of black men was portrayed as a necessity, due to the nature of warfare and the conditions under which they worked close to the frontlines, facing the same threat of enemy fire as white combatants, but without the means of defence. Moreover, the reports of the self-sacrifice and heroism of men like Majozi who risked his own life to save others, was used as a demonstration of bravery and loyalty of black soldiers, adding impetus to the appeals for black soldiers to be armed:

Accounts reaching the Union mention the exemplary way in which our unarmed Black men rescue White soldiers under concentrated enemy fire. Their courage and efficiency are spoken of in the highest terms by Europeans themselves.

The only defence these Bantu men are equipped with against bullets from the Hun’s machine gun is their **courage**. They have been mowed down by enemy fire but have never complained nor refused to be exposed to destruction by a ruthless enemy.

White South Africa may ask its conscience, seriously and honestly, if it is right, moral and in accord with the principles for which he is being asked to fight, to make a man sacrifice and risk his life with no means of defending against attack? How far should a fellow human being sacrifice his life if he will not be trusted to defend it?...South Africa is as much our fatherland as it is the White Man’s and Africans have as much right to defend it as White people...¹²⁷

Increasing fears of Japanese aggressive expansion in this time period brought the conjunction of race and loyalty further into the spotlight.¹²⁸ The fall of Singapore, a British stronghold, to the Japanese in 1942 marked a period where black South Africans appeared to be in two minds, a situation reflected in *Ilanga* and, later, in *Indian Opinion*:

Japanese successes at Singapore have exploded the myth of White invincibility and if we are not to have South Africa treated to a similar humiliation, our Government together with its voting supporters must take a broad and realistic view of things.

¹²⁶ KCAL. “Non-Europeans and the War” in *Ilanga Lase Natal*, 5 October 1940, p6. KCN 134. J496.3442 ILA.

¹²⁷ KCAL. “Casualty Lists” in *Ilanga Lase Natal*, 14 February 1942, p11. KCN 136. J496.3442 ILA.

¹²⁸ In the following section where I analyse the newspaper *Indian Views* during the war years, the role of the Japanese in the war was a major theme provoking an ambivalent reaction on the part of the newspaper and its readership.

Because of our so-called civilized labour policy, the Union's factories cannot expand to their maximum limit and their production is limited. Black men cannot be employed in these factories, merely because they are Black. They cannot take up arms in the defence of their common fatherland merely because they are Black. Whilst danger hourly increases precious time is wasted on hesitation...¹²⁹

On the one hand there existed the threat presented by Japan to the Allies which was another basis for the calls for the arming of black men in the Union Defence Force. There was nevertheless a respect for Japanese prowess in being able to defeat white forces, "Japanese successes at Singapore have exploded the myth of White invincibility", and the Japanese were as capable in war and combat despite being a race historically construed as racially inferior.¹³⁰

There was, nevertheless, a hurried disavowal in the newspaper of sympathy with Japan. This was in response to opposition attacks in parliament which used the basis of their non-white status to question the loyalty of Africans, "...it does not surprise us that the opposition went to the extreme of suggesting that the Bantu would side with the Japanese against the Europeans...Such nonsense has no foundation in fact."¹³¹ A further disavowal in late May of that year went hand in hand with a criticism of the South African government's failure to address the needs of black South Africans, making Japanese propaganda with its emphasis on "the more positive creed...with its colour appeal [of liberation]" appealing to those territories under European domination, which Japan ultimately conquered, imposing its own foreign rule.¹³² To counterbalance this, *Ilanga* argued for the lifting of discrimination against black South Africans, particularly in terms of the arming of the black men in the military, which would "[give them] something to fight for" as well as, more significantly, "the complete overhauling of Government propaganda services for the Bantu together with the infusion of a more progressive spirit in race relations,". This suggested that there was a failure on the part of state propaganda efforts to adequately address the aspirations of its black populace, leaving them susceptible to the doctrine of freedom and equality propagated by the Japanese to which the article made reference.¹³³

¹²⁹ KCAL. "Singapore" in *Ilanga Lase Natal*, 21 February 1942, p13. KCN 136. J496.3442 ILA.

¹³⁰ "Singapore" in *Ilanga Lase Natal*, 21 February 1942, p13.

¹³¹ KCAL. "Parliament on Arming of the Bantu" in *Ilanga Lase Natal*, 28 March 1942, p11. KCN 1346. J496.3442 ILA.

¹³² KCAL. "Under No Illusion" in *Ilanga Lase Natal*, 30 May 1942, p11. KCN 136. J496.3442 ILA.

¹³³ KCAL. "Under No Illusion" in *Ilanga Lase Natal*, 30 May 1942, p11.

1942 was a watershed year for South Africans, marking the point of war weariness, where support for the war was low, as was recruitment. This initiated a change in recruiting appeals. One of the factors contributing to war weariness was the fall of Tobruk and the subsequent taking of thousands of white and black South Africans as prisoners of war. In response to this there arose again the issue of the arming of black men as well as the latter's loyalty in responding to the government's appeal for more men. This was evident in films such as *Fall In*, which I have discussed in the previous chapter. Black loyalty, as noted by *Ilanga*, was not acknowledged:

Four thousand Bantu were reported last week to have responded to our Prime Minister's appeal for recruits to avenge Tobruk...The South African Army is a White man's army and is such that no man of African descent joining it is accorded that status accorded a White soldier...These highly objectionable barriers have not lessened the African's appreciation of the dangers to which his country is exposed. They have not made him deaf to the call of those in authority to sacrifice his all in the country's hour period of direst need...The acknowledgement they received of their loyalty was expressed in the refusal to arm them; the refusal to pay them on fair terms; the refusal to abolish Pass Laws; increased anti-Asiatic agitation...The Africans reply to all this is FOUR THOUSAND TO AVENGE TOBRUK in less than four weeks...White South Africa...must realize that the only way to avenge Tobruk is...to harness the energies and minds of 8,000,000 non-Europeans in a really total 'all-out' effort to smash Tojo, Hitler and Mussolini once and for all time.¹³⁴

Disillusionment in *Ilanga*

By 1944, when these repeated calls for equal treatment in society and in the military had failed to have any permanent effect, a pessimistic tone came to dominate articles. This was evident in the way in which *Ilanga* portrayed Allied high points of the war such as the invasion of Normandy or D-Day in June 1944:

This is what the gigantic struggle now being waged in Europe means to the white people – 'a free world in which goodness and honour will be the foundation of men in every land'¹³⁵ irrespective of colour and creed.

Surely the African who is also doing his share in this struggle is also fighting for this Free World! He is also fighting and remaining loyal and law abiding on the Home Front to enable those Crusading Forces to embark on their hazardous mission unfettered by the subversive elements behind them.

We are sure of ultimate victory in this fight against evil forces...but it seems as if this great message of hope to oppressed peoples will mean nothing to our people who, even as we write, are organizing anti pass laws campaigns all over the country in order to live free and full lives in the country of their birth. Even as we write they are thinking almost

¹³⁴ KCAL. "4000 Africans for Tobruk" in *Ilanga Lase Natal*, 8 August 1942, p11. KCN 136. J496.3442 ILA.

¹³⁵ This is a quote taken from an address by King George VI of Britain.

despondently of whether or not this fight 'against evil' means the evil of oppression, of intolerance and of colour prejudice which are the moral enemies in this country...¹³⁶

Similarly, the achievement of the allied victory in Europe was a bittersweet moment for the *Ilanga*. Africans, who best understood the nature of racist oppression and fascism because they had direct experience of it in South Africa, had mobilized for the war on the basis of this understanding. They, however, were to benefit the least from victory as little was changed for them:

The African came out to fight fascist tendencies, not only abroad, but at home. He wanted to prove that he was the enemy, not of the white man, but of systems and policies; that he was for right and justice not evil and wrong; that he was a friend to and was prepared to co-operate with white South Africa; that he was a contributor to, and protector of civilization and Christianity, and not a menace. He wanted to prove that the world was not divided by race and colour, but by interest and ideology...

But...all this is ended.¹³⁷

Yet African men were not alone in their ambivalent experience of the Second World War in South Africa. Another group of black South Africans who formed a minority were experiencing their own conflict of loyalties, compounded by the majority of them being of indentured origin. The following section focuses on the impact of war on Indians in Natal as portrayed through the newspaper *Indian Views*. Here, loyalty to the South African state during the war was moderated by strong ties with India as well as the insecurities of an immigrant population.

Ambivalence: Loyalty and Equal Rights

In the late nineteenth century Indian politics in South Africa took on a largely elite cast when the Durban Indian Committee, comprising largely affluent Muslim traders, was formed. This was followed by the Natal Indian Congress under the leadership of M.K. Gandhi which also addressed the needs of the prosperous minority North Indian class. However, from the early years of the twentieth century, Gandhi attempted a broader class-based movement by drawing attention to the grievances of the largely South Indian population of indentured descent.¹³⁸ Like the liberalism of the *kholwa*, the politics of the NIC was hardly radical in nature, serving the

¹³⁶ KCAL. "Fight Against Evil..." in *Ilanga Lase Natal*, 17 June 1944, p11. KCN 138. J496.3442 ILA.

¹³⁷ KCAL. "The Demands of Peace" in *Ilanga Lase Natal*, 19 May 1945, p15. KCN 139. J496.3442 ILA.

¹³⁸ Morrell, Wright and Meintjes. "Colonialism and the Establishment of White Domination, 1840-1890". p85.

narrow class interests of its founders. By 1939, just prior to the outbreak of war, a group of more militant political campaigners split from the NIC and allied with the Colonial Born Settlers Indian Association, comprised of the descendants of indentured labourers, to create the Natal Indian Association, "This new grouping reflected the aspirations of the ex-indentured, colonial born, emerging petit bourgeois class of teachers, civil servants and professionals".¹³⁹ Class differences and tensions thus existed in Indian society between these two groups and the newspaper *Indian Views*, which I will subsequently discuss, was a product of the elite. Its value is that this group interacted initially with colonial authorities and later, the South African state, in order to gain greater political and economic concessions. Their perception of war service based on their long history with the state is thus a significant one.

The Indian population based largely in Natal thus found themselves in an unenviable position following the outbreak of war in September 1939. Along with the fear of German aggression and its implications was distrust on their part of Great Britain as well as the South African state due to the oppression and unequal extension of rights for which Indians, as well as other black groups, had been campaigning. An editorial piece appearing in *Indian Views* a little less than two weeks after the outbreak of war and South Africa's subsequent entry into the conflict on the side of the Allies, demonstrates this ambiguity of feeling among South African Indians over participation in a war in which they had no political voice:

We as a community, of course, had no say in the decision [of neutrality or participation]. Deprived of political rights we are in the position of being merely lookers on, though as the war progresses we may be called upon to make our sacrifices with the rest of South Africa. We express, we believe the feeling of the Indian community when we say that all our sympathies are with Great Britain in this matter and that as far as we are permitted to do so we will give our loyal support to General Smuts and to his coalition government...We Indians as a race have suffered as much from Imperialism as any. Whilst having no delusions as to our fate were Hitlerism to triumph, we cannot at the same time look forward to the strengthening of British Imperialism with any degree of comfort.¹⁴⁰

Although giving their support ultimately to the Allies, and willing to participate in the war in that vein with the perception of Nazism as being the greater evil, there existed still a fear of the buttressing of British Imperialism. The detrimental effects of this imperialism had directly affected the South African Indians, as well as their counterparts on the subcontinent. This

¹³⁹ Paul Maylam. "The Changing Political Economy of the Region, 1920-1950" in *Political Economy and Identities in KwaZulu-Natal: Historical and Social Perspectives*. Robert Morrell, ed. (Durban: Indicator Press, 1996) p113.

¹⁴⁰ Durban Municipal Library – Don Africana Collection. Editorial – "What Does it Mean to Us?" in *Indian Views*, Friday, September 15, 1939, Vol XXVI No 11, Book No 3367, Class No 079.68.

situation was also complicated by the status of South African Indians as a diasporic community with, in many cases, strong links to India. India often served as a reference point for the Indian community here and the outbreak of war revealed an even greater ambiguity of support in India whose population was, at the time, agitating for their own independence from British rule. Local Indian newspapers like *Indian Opinion* or *Indian Views* carried a number of articles in every issue describing the situation in India, quoting from the newspapers on the subcontinent, as well as detailing the varied responses to the outbreak of war. These ranged from opposition to neutrality to support of the Allied cause. A common theme was the perceived hypocrisy of Britain in her claims to fight for freedom against the tyranny of fascism while simultaneously denying India her own independence:

England's democracy is extremely circumscribed, she may be democratic at home, but she is certainly imperialistic abroad, at any rate, in India...how would India fare if England lost the next war to the totalitarian powers; would she then stand a better chance of achieving democracy? If India will have no democracy then, she has none now either nor even a prospect of it, if England has her way.¹⁴¹

Yet there also existed the belief that fascism had to be stopped as it presented the greatest threat to democracy and freedom for which the Allied countries stood. The issue became one of moral duty to play a role in supporting the Allies to end the fascist threat, "As a self-respecting and God-fearing people, we must unequivocally throw in our lot with the nations which stand for justice, righteousness and self-determination for all, strong and weak alike."¹⁴² This support was echoed by Sir Rama Rau, the Agent General for India who, in a speech to the Durban Rotary, drew upon the historical support given to the British by the Indian princes:

An intense feeling of loyalty to the British Throne has been a tradition among all the Indian Princes, and when ever his Majesty's Government have been at war with Foreign Powers the Indian Princes have been foremost in offering their services.¹⁴³

The overall consensus however appeared to be an ambiguity based on Britain's oppression at home coupled with her vociferous defence of the European states falling to German aggression. This co-existed uneasily with the realisation by many Indians that, while this was hypocritical and that while British imperialism was a threat to their nationalist dreams of independence, Nazism was the greater of two evils. Helping to stop it entailed them supporting the Allied effort.¹⁴⁴ It is

¹⁴¹ Durban Municipal Library – Don Africana Collection. Excerpt from *Servant of India* in *Indian Views*, Friday, September 29, 1939, Vol XXVI No 13, Book No 3367, Class No 079.68.

¹⁴² Durban Municipal Library – Don Africana Collection. "Indian Must Stand by Britain in *Indian Views*, Friday, September 29, 1939, p3, Vol XXVI No 13, Book No 3367, Class No 079.68.

¹⁴³ Durban Municipal Library – Don Africana Collection. "India and War: Sir Rama Rau's Views in *Indian Views*, Friday, October 20, 1939, Vol XXVI No 16, p11, Book No 3367, Class No 079.68.

¹⁴⁴ "India and War: Sir Rama Rau's Views" in *Indian Views*, Friday, October 20, 1939, Vol XXVI No 16, p11.

thus apparent that the ambiguity evident in the South African Indian community was mirrored by that in India, both agitating for equal rights against those they felt obligated to support. An editorial appearing in *Indian Views* in 1940 attempted to resolve this awkward impasse by removing the allegiance to South Africa from the equation and concentrating instead on the threat posed by Nazism, recognising that their situation was similar to that of other black groups in the country caught in the same dilemma:

We would ask the non-Europeans to support these war efforts, not only because of any alleged duty they owe to a country which treats them as helots or out of a non-existent sense of gratitude towards those who ground them underfoot, but because of the duty they owe to themselves as men of honour and conscience to help crush the monster of Hitlerism which stalks the earth today like an ugly, nightmare ghoul. In other words, we would urge them to join in the war efforts of South Africa from an anti-Nazi rather than a pro-South Africa urge.¹⁴⁵

This recognition of the common sentiment felt across “non-European” groups regarding support for the war was apparent in the running of articles and opinions expressed in other newspapers around the country. In July 1940 an excerpt appeared taken from *The Sun* in Cape Town which related the position of coloured soldiers. They felt that the South African government had called upon them to make similar sacrifices to white soldiers but did not extend to them similar treatment in terms of pay and benefits. Along with this was the expressed desire to be treated equally as a man by being extended the same privileges, as they were being called upon to do “a man’s job”:

It must not be lost sight of the European soldier enjoys a high rate of pay, his dependents a liberal allowance, backed up by the Mayor’s Fund. On the other hand, the poor non European soldier must be content with a miserable pittance, and his dependents are expected to exist on loyalty and enthusiasm.

Let me emphasise the fact that the Coloured soldier will be called upon to face the same dangers and sacrifices as the white soldier on the field of battle. There will be no discrimination, every man will have a man’s job to do therefore every man is entitled to expect ‘to be treated as a man’.¹⁴⁶

Here, masculinity was not only tied to equal participation in the war. The equal recognition, particularly in terms of the material benefits, would allow the soldier to provide for his family. His identity as a man did not derive solely from engaging in “a man’s job” but in being recognized and rewarded as one.

¹⁴⁵ Durban Municipal Library – Don Africana Collection. Editorial in *Indian Views*, Friday, June 7, 1940, Vol XXVI No 48, Book No 3368, Class No 079.68.

¹⁴⁶ Durban Municipal Library – Don Africana Collection. Excerpt from P. Dreyer in *The Sun in Indian Views*, Friday, July 5, 1940, Vol XXVI No 52, Book No 3369, Class No 079.68.

Yet equal participation in the war remained the central consideration for black troops. As Indians were enlisting, the *Natal Daily News* ran an article citing the disappointment of recruits on learning that they would not be allowed into combat. These recruits felt that their contribution, albeit limited, was a demonstration of their patriotism and thus significant to the war effort, “This is just as much the Indian’s war as it is the Europeans. Our part in the struggle may be comparatively small, but we mean to do our job well.”¹⁴⁷ Yet the issue of equal participation and the exclusion of black men from combat was a stubborn one, leading to a shortfall in Indian recruits evident in an article in November, 1940, despite claims that a small limited role was sufficient. The article made an appeal to increase the number of recruits by highlighting the benefits of enlisting in terms of the wage, the food rations – in a similar manner to the appeals made to the African men by their leaders – and significantly, the important nature of their role, albeit a non-combatant one, in achieving victory, “...the transport section of a modern army entails very responsible duties and that the final victory will be as much due to the driving personnel as to other sections of the services.”¹⁴⁸

Combat

Combat remained the key distinction and the debate around the exclusion of black men from playing equal roles to white troops in the war did not die down and was a constant theme throughout the war. This was evident in *Ilanga lase Natal* as well as *Indian Views*. This debate manifested itself in various ways. For instance, *Indian Views* carried articles on the combat activities of troops from India, describing their roles, their expertise at carrying them out and their ultimate success against the enemy.¹⁴⁹ The description of the combat roles of Indians from the subcontinent appears to have been a means of asserting an empowered masculine identity based on combat even as South African blacks were prevented from doing the same. This assertion took on the most unexpected forms.

¹⁴⁷ Durban Municipal Library – Don Africana Collection. “How Indians are Helping in this War” in *Indian Views*, Friday, August 23, 1940, Vol XXVII No 8, Book No 3369, Class No 079.68.

¹⁴⁸ Durban Municipal Library – Don Africana Collection. “Appeal for Indian Recruits” in *Indian Views*, Friday, November 8, 1940, Vol XXVII No 19, Book No 3369, Class No 079.68.

¹⁴⁹ Durban Municipal Library – Don Africana Collection. “India Prepared for Far East” in *Indian Views*, Friday, January 9, 1942, Vol XXVII No 27, Book No 3372, Class No 079.68.

Although it was clear from the outset that Germany was the hostile aggressor that needed to be stopped, the attitude of Indians towards the Japanese was far less clear-cut. In 1940 *Indian Views* carried an article suggesting some form of admiration for Japanese aggression:

Indians who regret Japanese aggression on China, are obliged to concede that Japan is doing a service to human solidarity by establishing the capacity of a coloured race to master the military and industrial technique of the White man so as to meet him on his own ground.¹⁵⁰

This form of support was not an isolated incident. Two years later an article was published countering perceptions of Japan as the “saviour” of the colonised “non-European” by emphasising her connection to fascist Germany and Italy and highlighting her aggression in China, “Japan is our enemy, she is enemy of humanity, and as such we must fight against Japan”.¹⁵¹ The support for Japan, like the description of the success of Indian troops in combat, served as a means of demonstrating vicariously the capability and strength of these men in roles which were denied to their South African counterparts, showing that race was not a determinant of combat capability and hence masculinity. Japan’s aggression against the Americans was almost a means by which those oppressed by racial discrimination could assert themselves and, despite being an imperial power bent on domination, Japan was selectively viewed as being the saviour of the colonised and the subjected. Part of this may have been due to the “black” propaganda broadcast by Japan where the country claimed via radio broadcasts to be liberating Asia from the tyranny of the West. However ineffective translation served to alienate many listeners, lessening the impact of the messages broadcast.¹⁵²

1942 saw the link between the shortage of manpower and the limited roles given to black troops made explicit in *Indian Views*:

...why is the colossal amount of manpower in this country being neglected?...When is the Government going to drop its shortsighted policy and open the ranks of all services to non-Europeans? Until this is done the recruiting of Indians for labour and transport unit is going to be very slow. Let us see that we are being offered equal opportunities with the next man and recruiting campaigns will not be necessary.¹⁵³

¹⁵⁰ Durban Municipal Library – Don Africana Collection. *Indian Views*, Friday, October 11, 1940, Vol XXVII No 15, Book No 3369, Class No 079.68.

¹⁵¹ Durban Municipal Library – Don Africana Collection. Anna Lyst “The Birth of ‘Shonan’” in *Indian Views*, Friday, February 20, 1942, p3, Vol XXVII No 3, Book No 3372, Class No 079.68.

¹⁵² Anthony Rhodes. *Propaganda: The Art of Persuasion: World War II*. Victor Margolin, ed. (London: Angus and Robertson Publishers, 1976) p256-257.

¹⁵³ Durban Municipal Library – Don Africana Collection. “Recruiting” in *Indian Views*, Friday, February 6, 1942, Vol XXVII No 31, Book No 3372, Class No 079.68.

To demonstrate that it was not just blacks that were calling for equal participation in the military, an excerpt was included from the liberal publication, *The Forum*¹⁵⁴, in which a white soldier argued that the arming of black men was a necessity in war zones as a means of protecting themselves against the enemy. Their own loyalty, courage and capability had demonstrated that they could be trusted to bear arms. Moreover, the “principles of liberty and humanity” for which the war was being fought, made it incumbent upon the military authorities to extend equal roles to black men and allow them the means of protecting themselves against enemy aggression.¹⁵⁵

Ultimately the call for equal treatment in the military came to colour the way in which the defeat at Tobruk was received. Whereas the South African state allocated funds to an “Avenge Tobruk” propaganda campaign and highlighted the plight of the many South Africans taken prisoner, *Indian Views* used Tobruk to argue once again for the extension of equality to the black men who had enlisted, citing this very discrimination as being a key reason for the defeat in North Africa:

Just imagine what a different story it would have been in Libya if the South African army had been double its present strength. And what’s more it could have been more than double had the non Europeans been allowed to play their rightful role in the war...

- 1) Arm all non-European soldiers
- 2) Skilled industries to be opened to non Europeans
- 3) Non-European soldiers to be given the same facilities and allowances as European soldiers.

This is the only way to avenge Tobruk.¹⁵⁶

It can be seen therefore that, although there existed a pre-Second World War colonial stereotype of a “noble warrior” for African men, nothing similar was evident for Indian men. However there was nonetheless a desire on their part to participate in the war on an equal footing with white troops. Through a reading of *Indian Views* it is apparent that a kind of martial identity was created as a means of asserting Indian masculinity and capability in war by drawing on the exploits of Indian troops from the subcontinent as well as the fighting strength of the only major “non-European” power in the war, Japan, despite her being considered the enemy.

¹⁵⁴ *The Forum* was a weekly news publication and one of its owners was the man described as Smuts’ right hand and ardent liberal J.H. Hofmeyr and its editor was “Hofmeyr’s protégé” John Patrick Cope. Information taken from “Trial Balloon” in *Time Magazine*, January 17, 1944.

<http://www.time.com/time/archive/printout/0,23657,796324,00.html> Accessed April 5, 2006 10:25.

¹⁵⁵ Durban Municipal Library – Don Africana Collection. “Democracy!” in *Indian Views*, Friday, February 13, 1942, Vol XXVII No 32, Book No 3372, Class No 079.68.

¹⁵⁶ Durban Municipal Library – Don Africana Collection. “Non Europeans and War” in *Indian Views*, Friday, July 17, 1942, Vol XXIX No 3, Book No 3373, Class No 079.68.

Conclusion

Both *Indian Views* and *Ilanga Lase Natal* expressed a similarly ambivalent admiration of the Japanese yet nevertheless assured the state of their loyalty. Yet this loyalty of African South African citizens inevitably led to these newspapers making repeated calls for equal treatment in the military, particularly with regards to combat, in a war fought in defence of democracy. In the case of *Ilanga*, these calls also drew on past loyalty and sacrifice made by African South Africans, such as the sinking of the Mendi during the First World War which came to have a powerful symbolism during the war and after. Equal treatment in the military was inextricably linked to equal citizenship and went to the heart of fears voiced by the conservative opposition regarding the arming of black men. As the war drew to a close, these calls for military and social equality gave way to pessimism when it became clear that no lasting social change for black South Africans would be created in a post-war society. Being forced to participate on unequal terms in the war was linked to the subjugated status of black people in South Africa by a state which nevertheless called upon their support to fight the Axis. This placed African, Indian and coloured people in a very ambivalent position regarding their support of the war effort.

The photo magazine *Libertas* was no less ambiguous in its portrayal of the men and women at war. To an extent its adoption of a liberal white perspective allowed for the acknowledgement of the roles played by black men. Yet this was placed squarely within a pre-existing warrior tradition which also served to provide a justification for the decision to not arm black men. Interestingly, this same warrior tradition was invoked as a means of acknowledging the non-combatant and auxiliary roles of African, Indian and coloured men, while simultaneously being drawn upon by white men to strengthen their own fighting roles. The use of Zulu war cries as well as the pose struck by men with bayonets provided a striking example of this. This notion of combat was furthermore inextricably linked with masculinity, equality and citizenship, evident by the constant petition by black men to be allocated equal roles as well as the equally firm refusal by the state to do so.

For the white women in the Auxiliary Services, *Libertas* struck a further ambiguous note. Alongside images of the creation of an almost all-female world of camaraderie, work and leisure, there existed the idea of participating within an already existing tradition. Here the image of the *volksmoeder* was employed by proponents of the war to justify women's roles in it. It was also

utilised by those opposing the war to argue for women's place in the home. In addition, alongside the depiction of their work in the military or in the factory, was an assertion of their femininity through the use of dress and social interaction. The bridging between the work of women and of men in combat was evident by female photo journalists such as Constance Stuart. Her depictions of the front line in many ways followed the conventional format established by official images in their portrayal of white masculinity yet also allowed for a portrayal of the negative effects of war, as well as the work done by black men. The media of the Second World War thus can be defined by the ambiguous way in which the participants were depicted, both in terms of the way in which they were portrayed in official contexts as well as the way in which they represented themselves. This was particularly evident in the way in which black men were called upon to join the war effort and this was largely due to the legacy of both gendered and racial conservatism of the South African state, which was mirrored by South African society as well.

Chapter Four

...it was a different way of life altogether, very difficult to describe the war years...¹

Personal Experiences of War

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Personal experiences of the Second World War, as well as the sense that the members of the Union Defence Force made of them, are as myriad and diverse as the individual men and women who took part in that conflict. Yet, within this almost overwhelming richness of experience, certain strong themes and commonalities are apparent which this chapter attempts to draw out. In this chapter I argue that war service exacerbated the tensions of the constructed identities of the three groups involved – tensions that were already existent in South African society. The war experiences of white men challenged the hegemonic idea of settler masculinity. While this form of masculinity was propagated in the official as well as personal images of these men, I show that it nevertheless served as a process of inclusion and exclusion for those men who did not live up to the ideal or when that ideal was weakened by combat or being taken prisoner. The strain evident in state attempts to maintain a status quo were shown by the aspirations of black men empowered by their war work and calling for inclusion and, with it, citizenship. Finally, in the case of white women, this chapter demonstrates that their war work highlighted the tensions between their personal desire and their duty, creating an uneasy and not always successful balance between the glamour, independence and excitement of war work as well as their roles as wives, mothers and good citizens.

Using a number of sources detailing the personal experiences of these figures in the war, I attempt to construct a narrative of their war-time service beginning with their rationale for enlisting, their experiences of training and, particularly in the case of men, combat and violence on the frontlines. These experiences, in many ways, suggested a state of tension brought about in South African society between keeping intact the balance of power, particularly in terms of racial inequalities, and the new roles and possibilities for empowerment brought about by the war. This was particularly evident in the case of black men, driven to enlist by a desire to

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<sup>1</sup> Quote taken from interview with Godfrey Herbert conducted by Stephen Sparks and Suryakanthie Chetty, 24 June, 2004.

demonstrate their patriotism in the hopes that this would have positive repercussions beyond the war, only to find that their auxiliary roles and non-combatant status in the war was a precursor to the inequalities and disillusionment that would come after V-E Day.

In the official discourses circulating through South African society, the rights and obligations of citizenship were increasingly associated with war service and patriotic duty. Black men were, however, excluded from citizenship. They were mobilised instead as subjects. In the military combat was inextricably linked to this racially exclusive citizenship. To appeal then to black men who were excluded from both combat and citizenship, the military highlighted duty and loyal service to recruit black men. This representation of black war service was evident in propaganda and communicative media such as newspapers. These newspapers – largely white owned but, in some instances, under black editorship – were expected to propagate this image of black men as loyal, patriotic subjects. The link between combat and citizenship was a key motivation for black men participating in the war where their attempt to demonstrate their loyalty stemmed from a desire to participate as equal citizens. Yet their role was complicated by their position as “subjects” – without the rights and obligations of citizenship and confined to servile status in the military. This mirrored their standing in South African society. This issue was highlighted by the African National Congress which became increasingly vociferous in its calls for equality, drawing attention to the tensions between duty, loyalty, patriotism and citizenship.

Important here too is the theme of masculinity evident in the bonds forged between men in combat as well as the experience of combat itself. The attempted assertion of masculinity comes to the fore in the discussion of POWs playing rugby, engaging in escape attempts as well as numerous acts of sabotage – the latter two being not solely confined to white men. For white women, also citizens, their motivation was in many ways similar to white men and their experiences of war arose out of, at times, an uneasy amalgamation of personal interest and duty. This was a tension which came to the fore in their interaction with white men. These themes go to the heart of this dissertation in terms of the way in which the men and women who played such prominent roles in the Second World War viewed themselves, as well as those with whom they participated, in this seminal rite of passage. In addition, they allow for the drawing of comparisons between these diverse reactions to the war and the relative paucity of identities propagated by the state – identities which were different yet also remarkably similar. This chapter traces the identity of the war’s participants in terms of their war experiences such as their

reason for enlisting, training and the experiences of war itself – combat, being taken prisoner, the violence of the front lines. It focuses on white men, black men and, finally, white women. By looking at immediate sources such as diaries and letters, the historian is able to understand the way in which these men and women actually perceived their war service. Sources such as autobiographies and interviews allow for an understanding of the way in which they remembered and made sense of these experiences.

This chapter uses a variety of sources to attempt to capture the experiences of the men and women who were involved in the Second World War, ranging from written to oral to visual. The written sources are largely in the form of autobiographies and commemorative newspaper articles with first-hand testimony. Autobiographies have a tendency to favour the middle to upper echelons of society – those who have the self-assurance to believe that their stories are worth relating and have historical relevance. As such, they are skewed in terms of both class and race to an extent.<sup>2</sup> Oral evidence may help fill this gap allowing for the participant to place images – if used – in context and to relate their experiences. This gives the researcher greater flexibility in pursuing themes which may be absent from written sources.<sup>3</sup> Both in this instance rely on memory – autobiographies as well as interviews may take place some years after the event and their memories of war are inextricably coloured by their perceptions of their lives after as well as their contemporary circumstances. Therefore some form of consensus with other narratives and sources is necessary.<sup>4</sup> Sources dating from the war itself are used such as letters and diaries. The former differ from the latter in that letters are written for audiences at home and may thus experience a degree of censorship, both official and personal, whereas diaries allow for the individuals to express their innermost thoughts and fears. These sources thus work together to attempt to create a coherent picture of the experiences of these men and women, forming an integral part of a larger historical narrative.

### **“For King and Country”: The Enlistment of White Men**

As the South African military participating in the war was composed entirely of volunteers, a situation largely unique in this time period, the support of these white men of the war effort was

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<sup>2</sup> Trevor Lummus. *Listening to History – the Authenticity of Oral Evidence*. (London: Century Hutchinson Ltd, 1987) p84.

<sup>3</sup> Lummus. *Listening to History*. p81.

<sup>4</sup> Lummus. *Listening to History*. p108, 130.

clear. Perhaps the most common factor here was the rally to the cry of "For King and Country" and, for English-speaking South Africans still with strong loyalties to Britain, there was little debate about participation. Quentin Smythe, who was presented as the archetypal war hero in the official state films discussed earlier due to his winning of the Victoria Cross, was ultimately motivated by loyalty to the Empire, "Several of us got together and decided we would definitely volunteer for service. We had heard a hell of a lot about the Nazis, and we still had strong feelings for Britain. Natal was the last outpost."<sup>5</sup> Here he made specific reference to the notion of Natal as a British colony, "the last outpost" in the Union. In his testimony as a South African of English descent, the ultimate loyalty of those with strong ties with Britain appeared to lie with the British and their decision to enter the war was straightforward. This was in contrast to those who had fought against the British in the South African War and were more ambivalent about their support.

Many Afrikaner men were ambiguous in their attitude toward Britain. They had been, in many instances, either participants in the South African War or descendants of those who had fought Britain as well as being subject to the ravages of the war carried out by the British against the civilian population in the form of concentration camps. Yet they too also enlisted in large numbers.<sup>6</sup> The dilemma facing Afrikaners over participating in the war evoked the rebellion of 1914 where prominent Afrikaner generals refused to fight on the side of the British at the outbreak of the First World War and attempted to seize control of the Union. The rebellion was brought to a bloody end by Prime Minister Botha and his right hand man, Smuts.<sup>7</sup> The spectre of the rebellion resurfaced in the 1930s and 1940s with the publishing of the autobiographies of key rebel figures. These autobiographies served to condemn the actions of Botha and Smuts, perceiving the rebels to be "freedom fighters" – an image that was used by the National Party.<sup>8</sup> According to Sandra Swart, a key contribution to the rebellion of 1914, were new ideas of citizenship which had been promulgated in the "Defence Act, 13 of 1912": "To many [Afrikaner men] this Act seemed designed to replace this sense of identity based both on what it meant to

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<sup>5</sup> Independent Newspapers Archive. Terry McElligott and Keith Ross. "Remembering the Declaration of World War 2", September 2, 1989.

<sup>6</sup> Jan Smuts was a notable example of one who had played a significant role fighting the British during the South African War against what was perceived to be British imperialism. In addition General Dan Pienaar, another hero of the Second World War who inspired troops, both English and Afrikaner alike, spent part of his childhood along with his mother and siblings in a concentration camp during the South African War.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Sandra Swart. "The Rebels of 1914: Masculinity, Republicanism and the Social Forces that Shaped the Boer Rebellion". (University of Natal, Durban: Unpublished MA dissertation, 1997) Chapter Two.

<sup>8</sup> Swart. "The Rebels of 1914". p11.

be a man in a modern state and the ‘English’ sense of what it meant to be a man.”<sup>9</sup> Afrikaner masculine identity was linked to the *commando* system, which the new Act replaced with the modern notion of the military system. Those that supported and participated in the rebellion, stood therefore, in opposition to the idea of the modern state and its perceived attack on their masculine identity. They hoped that the rebellion would lead to the implementation once again of the old republic system.<sup>10</sup> Its failure marked the triumph of the modern state. Yet, this state was once again placed in a dilemma with the outbreak of the Second World War.

The rationale behind the enlistment of Afrikaners in the Second World War was expressed by E.G. Malherbe, Director of Military Intelligence, and, like Leo Marquard, Afrikaner liberals in the Smuts camp and prominent members of the war effort. His reasons are evident in Malherbe’s autobiography:

...I said to Leo, “Do you realise that about 40 years ago your father and mine shared a tent in the Anglo-Boer War fighting **against** the British? Now you and I are here sharing a tent fighting **with** the British. Isn’t that rather remarkable?” “Not really, ‘E.G.’” replied Leo, “Our fathers were fighting for their freedom against British imperialism. Now we are fighting against a worse imperialism, namely Hitler’s. History is the story of one man’s eternal struggle for freedom.” With these words Leo virtually epitomized the feelings of so many Afrikaners who volunteered to serve in this war against Nazism.<sup>11</sup>

Here, according to Marquard, Nazism was equated with British imperialism and serving in the Second World War was linked to a past of imperial exploitation and a belief in a fight against oppression, be it against British imperialism or the fascism represented by Germany, Italy and Japan. More than imperialism, Marquard equated participation in the Second World War as being a kind of human condition, a resistance to tyranny and oppression which was embodied by the fight against Nazi Germany. And, in this way, the two were able to reconcile the sense of the British as historic oppressors of the Afrikaners with their role as allies.

Nazism served as a key motivation for many volunteers – its perception as presenting the greatest threat to freedom and human liberty, necessitated a stand made by the democratic nations, allowing men to participate in the “good fight against evil”. Guy Butler, who went on to become a prominent South African in literary circles, was raised as a pacifist by his father who espoused that philosophy. Butler was ardently opposed to the militarization of South African

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<sup>9</sup> Swart. “The Rebels of 1914”. p39.

<sup>10</sup> Swart. “The Rebels of 1914”. p40-41.

<sup>11</sup> E.G. Malherbe. *Never a Dull Moment*. (Cape Town: Howard Timmins Publishers, 1981) p217.

young men and objected to being forced to participate in drill while a student at Rhodes University, “By the time I am 21 I hope to have accumulated knowledge and character enough to strike hard at this system of militarising the youth of South Africa.”<sup>12</sup> The never-ending quest on the part of Germany for *lebensraum*, leading to the conquest of Austria, Czechoslovakia and Poland and ultimately the declaration of war on September 3, 1939, forced both Butler and his father to reconsider the stance on pacifism, as evident in his father’s words:

I have brought you up in the doctrine of non-violence; but I never dreamed that the world would produce a Hitler, who had no conscience...You will make up your own minds. But I want to assure you of one thing: while I will never urge you to join up, I want you to know that if you do, you will not be doing so against my express wish.<sup>13</sup>

According to Butler’s autobiography, published forty years later, he viewed the threat posed by Nazi Germany as one which compelled men – and women – to enlist out of a sense of duty. Yet, even within this overall framework of duty, there nonetheless existed further reasons influencing the participation of men in the war.

Part of this stemmed from the schooling system – as I have mentioned earlier, Guy Butler held an unfavourable view of the martial training given to young men in tertiary institutions. Yet, even earlier, there existed a system of primary and secondary schooling based upon the English public school model where military service was propagated as a norm and a rite of passage. In a similar manner to that which occurred in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Europe, the United States and even South Africa – which I have discussed at length in previous chapters – the schooling system, in many instances, for boys was composed of a triple nexus of sport, gentlemanly behaviour and military service:

The atmosphere about the school was top-notch. It could easily have compared with any school of similar standing in England...Here we grew up in an atmosphere of friendliness and sport...Nunn [his teacher], a more debonair type, with an air of “polish” about him, took the opportunity during class hours of imparting tips on gentlemanly behaviour and something of social graces and courtesy...<sup>14</sup>

The inculcation of particular kinds of values in the youth by this schooling system allowed for the creation of generations of young men willing and, in many ways, feeling compelled to serve in the military out of a sense of duty, patriotism and belief in the importance of military service as being integral to masculinity:

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<sup>12</sup> Guy Butler. *Bursting World – An Autobiography, 1936-45*. (Claremont: David Philip Publisher, 1983) p24.

<sup>13</sup> Butler. *Bursting World*. p111-112.

<sup>14</sup> Major Allan Ryan. *Thru Times and Places*. (Johannesburg: Creaprint, 1977) p35-36.

This, then, and through the passage of years preceding and following, was the type of school which had provided the background and helped shape the destinies of a high proportion of our manhood now plucked from successful pursuit of civilian careers to serve in the fighting forces of our country Up North as well as in other places abroad wherever dedication to duty and place and time had decreed.<sup>15</sup>

Ryan's recollection of the influence of his school in shaping the lives of his contemporaries and himself is idealised and this idealisation comes from him looking back decades later as he views his youth with the hindsight of memory and experience. It serves to give him a foundation for a coherent narrative of his life as he accredits his schooling with providing the basis for his subsequent enlistment and participation in the seminal moment that was the war. The significant role of schools in shaping white masculinity and having a strong influence on military service is apparent in Natal in the early twentieth century, personified by men such as Allan Ryan who were a product of the system:

The groundwork for the militarism of the volunteer regiments was laid in the schools and on the sports fields. There, the notion of teamwork, was entrenched and the importance of bravery and self-sacrifice underlined.<sup>16</sup>

In addition to the schooling system and the traditions of the youth of preceding generations, there existed also the notion of following in the footsteps of one's own family tradition, which often allowed little leeway for even the thought of dissent:

...it's very difficult to explain but I came from a family of soldiers, my father was a soldier who fought the Matabele and came to Natal...my father trained the Mounted Infantry for the Boer War...there was never any question...that one would fight for one's king and one's country...that was how we were brought up, never occurred to us there were people who tried to get out of it...But all of us, we just went and fought for our country against what we thought was an evil, terrible evil...<sup>17</sup>

On a more personal level, the outbreak of the Second World War provided adventure and escape from a humdrum existence. According to an English-speaking veteran, “We were so thrilled that we jumped up and shook hands and said that at last we were going to get a bit of adventure.”<sup>18</sup> This desire to take part in the adventure of war was related to the notion of the glamour of military service, of being in uniform, which allowed for the projection of a masculine persona along with being seen as attractive by women. This was evident in the autobiography of Allan Ryan “Feminine attention from the young and not so young was focussed on the heroic and

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<sup>15</sup> Ryan. *Thru Times and Places*. p39.

<sup>16</sup> Robert Morrell. *From Boys to Gentlemen: Settler Masculinity in Colonial Natal, 1880-1920*. (Pretoria: University of South Africa, 2001) p142.

<sup>17</sup> Interview with Godfrey Herbert conducted by S. Sparks and S. Chetty, 24 June, 2004.

<sup>18</sup> Independent Newspapers Archive. Terry McElligott. “Clive was probably the first to volunteer for active service”, September 9, 1989.

“...it was a different way of life altogether...”

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manly appearance of the chaps in uniform.”<sup>19</sup> Here, personal motivation based on glamour and heroism, coincided with that of duty and patriotism to provide a strong incentive for young men to enlist.

The flip side of the coin of course was the pressure brought to bear on men who did not conform. Allan Ryan experienced an inkling of this when, classified as a “key man”, he was unable to enlist immediately upon the outbreak of war:

At this time there might frequently have hung a question mark in the mind of an enquiring type as to why an apparently fit young man about in civilian dress was not in uniform. I was not without a feeling of embarrassment over this issue on the odd occasion.<sup>20</sup>

The voluntary status of enlistment and the wide variation of support for the war and the country’s part in it, meant that overt pressure could not be brought to bear on men who did not enlist. Ryan’s own background, particularly his school’s emphasis on responding to the call to duty as well as his sympathy for the Allied cause, meant that he himself felt a sense of guilt over failing to enlist. In this way, a form of coercion linked to masculinity, duty and patriotism was apparently present – not necessarily overt but internalised – in the decision to volunteer.

Later in the war, the nature of volunteerism itself was in the spotlight with the passing of a law requiring men willing to serve anywhere in the world to take a further oath. Their compliance was signified by the addition of a red patch to their epaulettes, distinguishing them from soldiers who had not taken the oath. This distinction caused tension between the two groups which was itself complicated by the hostility with which it was perceived by the parliamentary opposition, “The Nats dubbed the new oath ‘die rooi eed’: red, in Afrikaner symbology [sic], signifying ‘imperialist’.”<sup>21</sup>

Yet simultaneously, according to A.E. Blamey, a decorated veteran who was stationed in both East and North Africa, it was volunteerism itself and the sense that the men in the military were those that wanted to be there as opposed to the overt coercion of conscription, that was accredited with the strong camaraderie felt by those in the military, “...with conscripted men we would not have the same wonderful spirit of comradeship and esprit de corps which officers and

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<sup>19</sup> Ryan. *Thru Times and Places*. p27-28.

<sup>20</sup> Ryan. *Thru Times and Places*. p28.

<sup>21</sup> Translation of “die rooi eed” in Butler. *Bursting World*. p163.

“...it was a different way of life altogether...”

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men in our regiment – and in so many other regiments – were so privileged to enjoy.”<sup>22</sup> Although, as I have attempted to show, volunteerism was not a straightforward process and without coercion in any form – peer pressure, a sense of duty and obligation were recalled as key factors in the decision of these men to enlist and within the group of volunteers itself.

Once enlisted in the military the next step, evident in the personal testimonies of these men, was training and drill under drill instructors. The way in which these men ordered their experiences – enlistment, training, combat – suggested the way in which the intervening years and the media of writing and recollection worked to order their experiences, giving a consistent narrative to their lives. The use of training in military lore was to create a disciplined cohesive force, where individual men would be able to function as a unit, obedient to authority and deferring their personal concerns to that of the group, dehumanising but essential to the creation of effective soldiers:

The physical and mental exertion imposed quite a strain. The “square bashing”, being run around by drill-sergeants, unremitting in their stress upon our performing variations in quick succession of marching formations – with their ever preying stance over the unfortunate candidate...These parade-ground instructors were like hawks, impassionate and hard and with little else to recommend unhidden virtues or intelligence of a higher order. They could call us anything they liked by any other name...<sup>23</sup>

Yet training provided the key distinction between those who were fit for military service and those who were unsuitable. For men like Ryan, the hard physical training and the near brutality of the drill instructors presented a “challenge”, a means of proving themselves worthy soldiers, “It was the accepted theme of the course that we were here to be tested and ‘broken’ – or otherwise make the grade!”<sup>24</sup> According to Ryan, military training, while serving to create the disciplined, capable soldier, had the additional function of “weeding out” those unsuitable, without the physical and psychological stamina for war. For those who “made the grade” there was the pride in having met the challenge and risen to the occasion, of having proved their manhood, of being the elite.

The ties between these men who had come through training together and would share the experiences of war were strong and enduring:

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<sup>22</sup> Major A.E. Blamey. *A Company Commander Remembers – From El Yibo to El Alamein*. (Pietermaritzburg: The Natal Witness, 1963) p2.

<sup>23</sup> Ryan. *Thru Times and Places*. p72.

<sup>24</sup> Ryan. *Thru Times and Places*. p72.

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Looking back, I can really say that the war years were the best years of my life. That's probably because of the fellowship...being able to rely so implicitly [sic] on your fellow men in the army.<sup>25</sup>

According to Quentin Smythe, the camaraderie between these men was forged by their common experiences of living together, in training and in battle and, more significantly, the necessity for each man to be wholly dependent on the support of his comrades, particularly in battle. It was the war which provided the direction for this camaraderie – the coming together of men from diverse walks of life in a spirit of volunteerism with the common goal of fighting Nazism. However, with the defeat of Germany and the subsequent lack of direction and demobilisation – which I will discuss later in the chapter – the “esprit de corps”, so evident earlier, ended.<sup>26</sup> Yet, for men like Smythe, one of the few positive aspects in a war filled with death and destruction was these strong bonds which coloured their memories of war, giving it a positive slant. These positive experiences stood the test of time to be one of the defining memories of their war experience and thus one that veterans were most likely to relate in their testimonies.

### **“Up North”: The Experiences of White Men in North Africa**

Part of this experience of war too was the opportunity for these men, many for the first time, to travel to other countries, creating the possibility for a wider understanding of the world. For white soldiers travelling abroad, their representations of the places and people they saw are an important indication of their state of mind regarding different cultures. I have chosen the following images taken by soldiers in North Africa, in particular Egypt, as, taken at the time, they are a direct representation of reality as the soldier saw it sans the intervention of memory. Memory does come in later when soldiers discuss the photographs in conjunction with their remembered experience. These images are drawn from photo albums with little in the way of captions yet, as I discuss below, they function as a means of ordering the experience of travel, providing a visual record of these experiences as well as functioning as part of a greater context of travel, tourism and empire, of which masculinity is a significant part.

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<sup>25</sup> McElligott and Ross. “Remembering the Declaration of World War 2”. September 2, 1989.

<sup>26</sup> Rusty Bernstein. *Memory Against Forgetting – Memoirs from a Life in South African Politics, 1938-1964*. (London: Viking, 1999) p81.

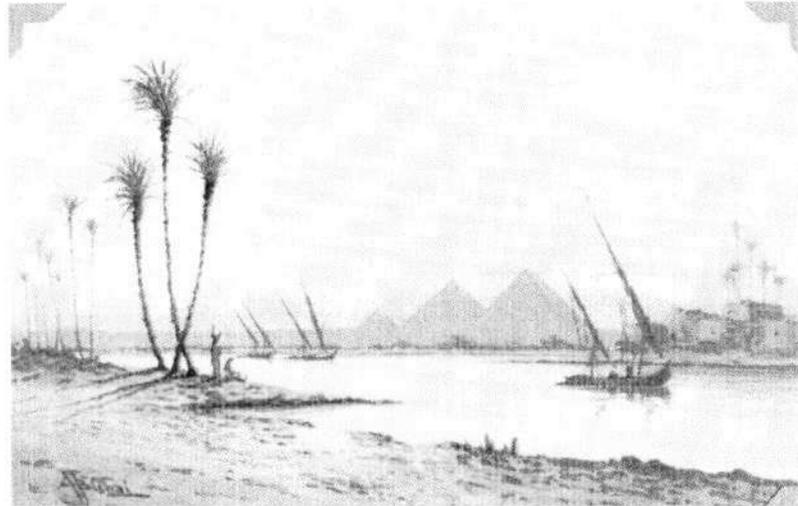


Image taken from Photo Album 1 of Donald Murray, 11 Motor Ambulance Company (MAC), courtesy of Documentation Centre, Department of Defence Archives

The depiction of Egypt is one that appears strongly influenced by postcard images of the country which themselves mirrored the vision of Egypt in European popular imagination. Actually in many instances, in the photo album, postcards actually stood in for direct representations of what the soldier had seen. They functioned as equivalent to the photographs taken by soldiers of Egyptian scenes and were placed in the album alongside photographs taken of similar scenes. This suggests that Egypt already symbolised something which the photographs then captured, the emphasis on ancient monuments are indicative of a perception of Egypt in terms of a mythical past, rather than an attempt to deal with the contemporary. The images taken and their similarities to the postcards suggest that the photographer had already in mind a vision of the mythical Egypt which his images merely reaffirmed.<sup>27</sup>

Yet these images of Egypt are ones that are as easily identifiable today – Egypt is evocative of the ancient past, of the pharaohs, the tombs, the Sphinx and the pyramids. It is interesting to note the similarity of images taken by men and even women on their first trip to the country, the common hold that the Egyptian past had on their imagination. This is due to the already existing place held by Egypt in the tourist imagination evident by the overwhelming number of travel guide books written over the past two hundred years. They were written in the spirit of “romantic travel” with its emphasis of “the wildness of nature, cultural difference and the desire

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<sup>27</sup> Peter D. Osborne. *Travelling Light – photography, travel and visual culture*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000) p22, 83.

“...it was a different way of life altogether...”

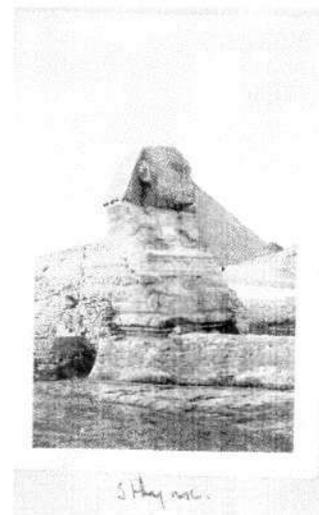
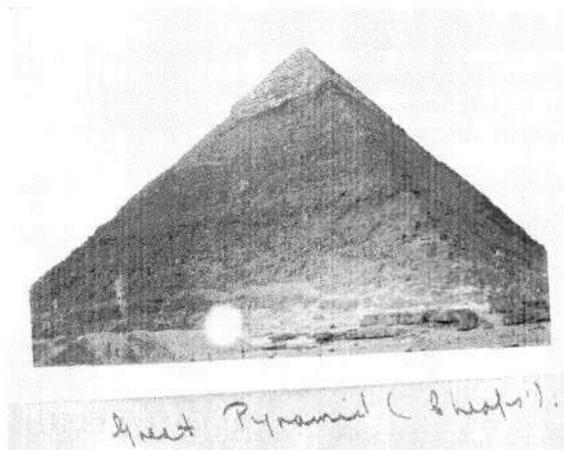
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to be immersed in local colour”.<sup>28</sup> This vast “travel writing” literature served to give Egypt a particular hold on the visitor’s mind by controlling how Egypt was perceived, serving to fix it as a particular representation:

Travel scripting produces a serialized space of constructed visibility that allows and sometimes even requires specific objects to be seen in specific ways by a specific audience. Places are thus signposted so that tourists can find them as ‘sites’ and locate them within an imaginative landscape where they become meaningful as ‘sites’.<sup>29</sup>

Capturing these sights with a camera, with a paintbrush or pencil thus becomes a means of further fixing and validating these images in line with an already existing perception. It also brings coherence and a semblance of regulation to the sights to which the tourist is exposed.<sup>30</sup>

The photographs below, of the soldiers astride camels with the pyramids in the background, and that of a group of soldiers inserted within a similarly romanticised landscape, are evocative of the adventurer/soldier T.H. Lawrence, the intrepid explorer who united the Arabs in a fight for freedom. This recalled the “boy’s own” adventure stories in a way that the East African images further on would do. These photographs then place these men within a similar narrative, creating a vision of masculinity based on adventure and exploration. Their similarities across albums suggest that this vision was shared.



Images taken from private collection of Godfrey Herbert

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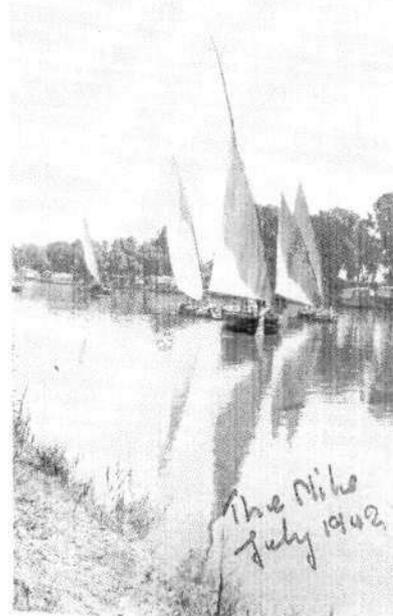
<sup>28</sup> James Duncan and Derek Gregory. “Introduction” in *Writes of Passage: Reading Travel Writing*. James Duncan and Derek Gregory, eds. (London: Routledge, 1999) p6.

<sup>29</sup> Derek Gregory. “Scripting Egypt: Orientalism and the Cultures of Travel” in *Writes of Passage: Reading Travel Writing*. James Duncan and Derek Gregory, eds. (London: Routledge, 1999) p116.

<sup>30</sup> Gregory. “Scripting Egypt”. p135.

*"...it was a different way of life altogether..."*

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Images taken from private collection of May Kirkman

However it is in the descriptions of contemporary Egypt that an element of the “other” was introduced. The images of life in Egypt – old men, vendors, craftsmen – introduce an element of the exotic and of difference.

“...it was a different way of life altogether...”

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Images taken from Photo Album 1 of Donald Murray, 11 Motor Ambulance Company (MAC), courtesy of Documentation Centre, Department of Defence Archives

The perception of the country and its people as being in contrast to the “civilised” West – a significant feature of the visual depiction of Egypt – is evident in written memoirs as well. The South African officer, Major A.E. Blamey’s, colourful and compelling descriptions of crime, vice and poverty were again a common feature of soldiers’ narratives of the experiences of the country as was the use of derogatory language when describing the Egyptians:

The continual “peep, peep” and “clonk, clonk” of motor klaxons in the streets, together with the shrill cries of the shoe shine boys loudly advertising their business, at practically every street corner, combined to make a babel of noise. The persistency of many scalawags who pestered one to buy their wares and the rascals who shouted: “Dirty pictures, George”, caused us much amusement. We were repelled by the numerous beggars in the streets and in the slums, as well as by the loathsome sight of diseased people and the awful squalor and trays of dates, literally smothered with flies.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Blamey. *A Company Commander Remembers*. p85.

“...it was a different way of life altogether...”

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Two contrasting images of Egypt dominated in these narratives – the chaos and “squalor” of the city streets and, removed from it all, the remnants of a glorious past and heritage. There is a similarity between the impressions of Egypt held by Blamey and Ryan – both officers in the war – who, unlike Butler, Malherbe or Bernstein, did not go on to become key figures in post-war South African society. However their autobiographies, concentrating solely on their war experiences, suggest the Second World War to be a defining moment in their lives, as well as forming part of a larger historical narrative. A poem reproduced in Ryan’s autobiography captured this contradiction where disdain and revulsion were the dominant emotions felt by soldiers. This co-existed, to an extent, with the tourist style images of ancient monuments. It served ultimately to create the impression of a country which had degenerated and whose citizens were unequivocally represented as the “other” to the “civilised” troops of the British Empire. In the poem entitled “Farewell to Egypt”, the country is described as:

‘Land of brothels, land of smells,  
Streets of bars and vile hotels;  
Land of bugs and flies and lice,  
Home of every sort of vice...’<sup>32</sup>

This excerpt portrays Egypt as a haven for licentiousness evoking a revulsion of the sense evident in “land of smells”. It is defined as solely consisting of “vice” – prostitution, liquor – that are alongside the verminous parasitic pests that are rampant. Nor do the country’s human inhabitants fare better, evident in, “Harlots, thieves, and pestering wogs”, emphasising nefarious activities as well as the ubiquitous use of the derogatory “wogs”.<sup>33</sup> Women are described as “harlots” and prostitutes and there is a strong indication of their promiscuity and their integral place in the land of the exoticised “other”:

‘Land of mystery, land of the Nile,  
Land of the Sphinx, with the inscrutable smile;  
Land of Sheiks in tailored clothes,  
Egyptian girls in silken hose;  
Girls who are dark without a care;  
They will entice you if you dare...’<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Ryan. *Thru Times and Places*. p99-100.

<sup>33</sup> Ryan. *Thru Times and Places*. p99-100.

<sup>34</sup> Ryan. *Thru Times and Places*. p99-100.

*“...it was a different way of life altogether...”*

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## **The Great White Hunter: Masculinity in East Africa**

Whereas Egypt was represented by tourist images as well as seediness and poverty, the experiences of East Africa was defined by hunting and an appreciation of the natural world.



Images taken from Photo Album 2 of Donald Murray, 11 Motor Ambulance Company (MAC), courtesy of Documentation Centre, Department of Defence Archives

These three images are of soldiers in East Africa. The first is of two soldiers standing in the bush, one holding a rifle. The pith helmet bears strong overtones of the conventional nineteenth century image of white men on safari. The portrait of a soldier standing in front of his tent, pipe in hand, presents a romanticised, dashing, heroic figure, reminiscent of popular characters in

“...it was a different way of life altogether...”

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“boy’s own” adventures such as H. Rider Haggard’s *King Solomon’s Mines*. Furthermore, it suggests the ideal white soldier advocated by the public schools and the military academies. This was a theme with its origins in the 19<sup>th</sup> century British, American and ultimately South African schooling system which has been dominant in my analysis of masculinity in preceding chapters. In the subsequent image of a soldier squatting with his hunting trophies, posing with rifle in hand, the parallels between war and hunting are emphasised – which I have discussed in the previous chapter – particularly in relation to the recruiting advertisements demonstrating that the experiences of service sustained the recruiting promise of adventure. The common element of the three images is of a nineteenth century colonial mindset of white adventurers on safari, dominating the natural landscape. It creates a world of male camaraderie that is restricted both on the basis of gender as well as race – neither women nor black men are present in the images. These photographs were part of an already existing genre. As Paul Landau and Wolfram Hartmann show in their discussion of the colonial era in Namibia, the personal photographs of colonial officials were largely of white men on safari, posing with guns over their kills.<sup>35</sup> These soldiers’ photographs thus drew upon an established genre but adapted it to the context of war.

Photograph albums function not only as a means of remembering experience and of emphasising particular kinds of identity, they are also a means of relating these experiences. As memory is a factor, time may change the meanings which these photographs accrue. However, the conjunction of these images with written descriptions of soldiers’ travels in East Africa, suggest a convergence between the oral, written and the visual. This was the way in which these men saw themselves during the war. According to Annette Kuhn, “Telling stories about the past, our past, is a key moment in the making of our selves. To the extent that memory provides their raw material, such narratives of identity are shaped as much by what is left out of the account...as by what is actually told...”<sup>36</sup> Through the use of writing and personal photographs, and in conjunction with memory, these men were able to construct a specific kind of masculine identity based on their war experiences.

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<sup>35</sup> Cf. Paul S. Landau “Hunting with gun and camera: a commentary” and Wolfram Hartmann “Performing gender, staging colonialism: camping it up/acting it out in Ovamboland” in *The Colonising Camera: Photographs in the Making of Namibian History*. W. Hartmann, J. Silvester and P. Hayes, eds. (Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press, 2001).

<sup>36</sup> Annette Kuhn. *Family Secrets: Acts of Memory and Imagination*. (London: Verso, 2002) p2.

To return to the image of the male hunter, in his autobiography, Blamey captures the excitement and the thrill of the hunt: “I was tingling with excitement with the thrill of having all this wild life around us. We were tensed and keyed up with rifles at the ready, expecting every second to be confronted by some wild animal.”<sup>37</sup> Isolated from his companions the hunting narrative took an unexpected turn when, overcome by the beauty of his natural surroundings, killing the animals was perceived to be marring the tranquillity of his surroundings. He eventually returned to camp without having fired a shot. Yet his companions, unmoved by a similar reverie, managed to shoot several animals.<sup>38</sup> In what may be seen to be a contradiction in terms, the desire to hunt went hand-in-hand with a love for the natural world and an appreciation of its beauty.

## Combat

This recreational aspect of the experiences of white soldiers in terms of tourism and hunting was only a small part of their total experience of war. Once on the frontlines, a variety of different features came into play, one of which was the way in which the enemy was perceived. The impression of the Germans was one that was inevitably coloured by hindsight which is key to these personal narratives related so many years later. When enlisting, the Nazis were perceived generally as being a threat to democracy, but, additionally, later knowledge of atrocities and of the Holocaust was a significant factor in soldiers’ memories of the Germans. This is evident in the oral testimony of Godfrey Herbert, an English-speaking volunteer, who was taken prisoner at Tobruk:

...they hated Jews for instance, imagine what they’d be like with Blacks and Indians. They were, they were a very evil, dreadful people when you think of the Holocaust, what they did to those millions of Jews, I mean, the very thought of it makes you sick and weak all over, and we just knew they were evil.<sup>39</sup>

Important in these narratives – both written and oral – is the way in which memory functions. Distant from the events itself, it incorporates subsequent occurrences which become the lens through which participation in the war was perceived, with the past and later life experiences working together to create a coherent narrative. In a very interesting way here, the racial oppression symbolised by the Nazis was seen as an indication of what they would do to blacks in South Africa were they to triumph, which would have had an impact far greater than apartheid.

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<sup>37</sup> Blamey. *A Company Commander Remembers*. p8.

<sup>38</sup> Blamey. *A Company Commander Remembers*. p9.

<sup>39</sup> Interview with Godfrey Herbert.

“...it was a different way of life altogether...”

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In this way, white soldiers could have seen themselves – with hindsight – as fighting against racial oppression and contributing towards greater equality in South Africa. This would play out at the end of the war with movements such as the Springbok Legion and the Torch Commando, headed by Sailor Malan, resisting the rise of the apartheid state. This was also evident with the creation of *The Living Memorial* to address the health needs of black South Africans created by poverty.

The nature of modern warfare meant that little personal interaction could take place between South Africans and soldiers from the Axis. Prominent South African activist and Communist Party member, Rusty Bernstein’s, account draws attention to the way in which modern warfare took on an alienating, dehumanising face. This was no longer the days of charging into battle and meeting the enemy face-to-face, which had been the hallmark of battle prior to the modern era:

If war is ever totally pointless and pursued purely out of habit, this must have been it. The German gun was a nuisance with little strategic purpose. It was invulnerable to attack from ground or air, and was there presumably only to remind us it was there. In the mindless nature of the game, we were obliged to show that we were there too. We would fire off our own ration of shells at odd hours of day or night at targets we could not see, working only from map references. We never knew what we were aiming at and were scarcely ever told whether we hit or missed.<sup>40</sup>

War was reduced in this instance to simply carrying out the motions against an unseen enemy, the only visible part being the gun. For both sides camped out for weeks and running low on ammunition, there existed simply the routine of firing periodically upon each other, with the target depersonalised and reduced to a set of map co-ordinates.<sup>41</sup> At this abstracted level there existed no real strong emotion, either positive or negative, for the enemy.

In situations where the two groups came into close contact, such as when South Africans found themselves being taken prisoner-of-war in North Africa, a situation which would likely emphasise the negative perception of their captors, there was instead an acknowledgement that amongst German troops there were both “decent” men as well as those who were violent and vicious. Colonel A.C. Martin related an incident where one of his fellow POWs was shot by a German guard – whom they subsequently nicknamed “Killer” – for attempting to retrieve a football, an action which was frowned upon by the camp Commandant “who was a decent

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<sup>40</sup> Bernstein. *Memory Against Forgetting*, p73.

<sup>41</sup> Bernstein. *Memory Against Forgetting*, p73.

*“...it was a different way of life altogether...”*

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chap” as well as the other German guards who has some satisfaction in telling the POWs that he had been posted to the Eastern front.<sup>42</sup> Writing his memoirs years later, time served to order his experience. This time lapse inevitably means that, for the historian, the immediacy of his experiences have been mediated. We are left with the way in which Martin has come to understand his war service and those whom he fought against. It is only by using these in conjunction with more immediate sources such as diaries and letters, written at the time, that a greater understanding can be achieved.

For soldiers taken prisoner by the Italians – or Ities as they were invariably termed by South African soldiers – lack of food and the poor living conditions experienced by the South Africans were still compared favourably to the worse treatment meted out to Eastern Europeans. Godfrey Herbert related the story of a camp commandant who was unnecessarily malicious towards the prisoners by forcing them to engage in physical exertion, despite their near starvation, and concludes with some satisfaction that he was eventually killed by a South American prisoner. However Herbert did not see most Italians as being overly vicious and their attitude towards prisoners changed based on the changing nature of their alliance with Germany. Furthermore, he described Italian civilians in a largely positive light based on the assistance they willingly gave to escaped POWs. This suggested a distinction between the perceptions of the ordinary people whom they encountered as POWs and the soldiers with whom they fought, as well as a further distinction between the grand narrative of fascism, an ideology abhorred by the allies, and the individual acts of human kindness of everyday interaction.<sup>43</sup>

Although describing the harsh conditions of being a prisoner of the Italians, Herbert nevertheless compared his experiences favourably with what he viewed as the far harsher treatment meted out by the Japanese, despite having no direct experience of the latter.<sup>44</sup> However Herbert’s perception of the Japanese was mediated by his using hindsight to compare the experiences of those taken prisoner by the Japanese to his own. Thus, by the time that he was interviewed, he was able to bring a greater detachment. He saw these horrendous occurrences that had a personal bearing on his life within a greater narrative. This is an unavoidable feature in testimonies obtained years after the event. It is nevertheless important as

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<sup>42</sup> Killie Campbell Africana Library (KCAL). Memoirs of Colonel A.C. Martin, p156. KCM97/2.

<sup>43</sup> Interview with Godfrey Herbert.

<sup>44</sup> Interview with Godfrey Herbert.

it allows the historian to understand the way in which these men came to terms with the individual psychological devastation caused by the war. A common theme across most accounts from a variety of sources of the experiences of the Second World War was of the perception of the inhumanity of the Japanese, particularly towards the Chinese, as well as their prisoners-of-war:

...the world was shocked from the leakage of news emerging of the atrocities being perpetrated by the Japs, upon the prisoners of war; the common practice of slitting the throats of the hospitalised, the wounded, and any other encumbrances...<sup>45</sup>

The emphasis on the cruelty of the Japanese far outweighed that of the Germans – at least until news of the Holocaust became widespread. A large part of this was related to race – unlike the Germans and the Italians, the Japanese were “foreign”, the “other”. Yet, interestingly, this did not preclude them from being viewed as exemplifying the notion of the “noble warrior”. While relating stories of Japanese atrocities, Ryan simultaneously suggested that it was in fact their idea of honour that was partially responsible for their treatment of prisoners:

Regardless, it was an acknowledged fact that the Jap, was a very heroic type, a soldier of supreme courage, and without par on any other warfront. He was, without doubt, very deeply ingrained with the Samurai spirit of valour and death before dishonour – and of “Bushido”: the code of military honour. To the Jap soldier, the greatest honour he could achieve was to die for his Emperor...No doubt this diehard attitude contributed in no small measure to the fact that so few Jap prisoners were ever taken: only some one per cent of the numbers killed. Is it any wonder, maybe why the Japs were somewhat contemptuous of those who surrendered to them?<sup>46</sup>

Most notably in this account, it is evident that the basis of racial difference was insufficient to preclude the Japanese from participating in combat and earning the respect of even their enemy, as effective fighters and honourable men. Ryan’s acknowledgement of their abilities, with no small amount of admiration, is somewhat ironic when one considers that black South Africans were excluded from combat on the basis of race. This also echoed their exclusion from citizenship. Ryan’s perception was also unusual when compared to his less than positive perception of the Egyptians. This admiration on the part of Ryan stemmed from the willingness of the Japanese to sacrifice their lives in combat as opposed to what was seen as the dishonour of being taken prisoner. Ryan viewed this as a poor second, both in terms of the ideal manner in which a soldier was expected to behave – a glorious death in combat as opposed to the ignominious distinction of being prisoner – as well as being linked to masculinity, a theme which I will return to later.

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<sup>45</sup> Ryan. *Thru Times and Places*. p189.

<sup>46</sup> Ryan. *Thru Times and Places*. p189.

The key experience of war for white men, and the one which was to have lasting repercussions, was combat. The South African military, as I have mentioned earlier, was racialised due to the exclusion of black men from combat, and the armed forces in general were restricted on the basis of gender around the world until very recently. Other than its restriction based on both race and gender in South Africa during the Second World War, the military exerted an allure which is difficult to pin down. This allure – the glamour of uniform and ideas of heroism and glory in combat – was integral to the perception of military service by soldiers and civilians. And part of the mystery of military service was the silence around the harsh effects of combat. This explained why succeeding generations would eagerly sign up in 1939 even after the enormous losses of the First World War.

Several themes are apparent in the way in which these men remember and relate the experiences of combat – the first is the reticence, the silences and self-censorship in the description of death and destruction, evident in the written and oral accounts as well as the visual sources. Part of this may have related to the horrendous experiences of death and destruction which were impossible to describe to an outsider. This was also in line with an overall censoring of combat evident in official and public sources as well. This was a convention that personal accounts as well as images followed, while also drawing on conventions of what was “proper” to show, as I discuss later on in this chapter. Where combat was described and remembered, there was often a sense of distance from the events. Combatants appeared to function automatically, leaving the analysis of their experiences for later. Combat also became relegated to the mundane, a normal part of the existence of the soldier. Yet combat nevertheless exerted some form of attraction for participants torn between the perpetuation of stereotypical ideas of glory and sacrifice in war and experiences that stood in stark contrast to this. As the defining event of war, it became politicised too as an obligation of citizenship and was important in policies of inclusion and exclusion. Black men were excluded from combat which mirrored their exclusion from citizenship.

Guy Butler, compromising his pacifism to enter the war, was determined nevertheless to retain some elements of his pacifist upbringing, choosing to join the Engineers rather than one of the more combative corps:

“...it was a different way of life altogether...”

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...I didn't like the idea of the artillery...I had seen many a grisly picture of the effects of shellfire. Nor did I fancy the infantry – too much square-bashing, and I really could not see myself sticking a bayonet into anyone, even a Nazi. I was still pacifist enough to prefer a corps in which the chances of having to kill anyone were less.<sup>47</sup>

Yet principled pacifist or not, and adopting a somewhat pragmatic approach to war, Butler nevertheless found himself envious of his younger brother Jeffrey, who had come under intense fire:

Two days before Jeffrey had got the fright of his life. Shelling had compelled them to lie flat on mother earth. When it stopped, he glanced up. Swishing through the grass towards him came a fine pair of Jerry jack-boots. To his enormous relief he then saw that his enemy did not have a weapon in his hands, which were empty and above his head. Behind him came three others...I envied my younger brother. I felt out of it, prosaic, unheroic, almost a base wallah. And likely to remain so for the duration.<sup>48</sup>

Combat exerted some form of attraction even for one as opposed to it as Butler. This attraction was based on the notion of the heroism of coming under fire, of proving oneself under pressure and the romanticism of achieving glory, of being the “noble warrior”.

Like many individual experiences of war, combat itself was perceived differently by the men involved. For Rusty Bernstein – initially neutral about participation in the war due to the position adopted by the Communist Party and thus less likely than Blamey, for instance, to be “gung ho” – the predictability and routine of his experience, where combat was confined to the Germans firing daily on Allied trucks traversing a bridge with the expected retaliation, was a far cry from the stereotypes of heroism and glory:

...the drivers who played this perilous game of Russian roulette would shrug the whole thing off. For them and us, the familiarity of it all make it feel more like theatre than war – lots of suspense but little blood. When the day's ammunition had been expended, the gun would pull back into the tunnel, and the performance was over for the day. We were left with the only other thing there was to do – games of poker. If war is ever totally pointless and pursued purely out of habit, this must have been it.<sup>49</sup>

The spirit of adventure and possibilities for individual heroism were totally removed from this context. War was reduced to an almost automatic series of acts and retaliation, where each side played a designated and expected role, creating a sense of unreality, making it seem almost like a staged event or farce. This was compounded by the periods of inactivity and boredom, making Bernstein's period of combat somewhat anticlimactic.

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<sup>47</sup> Butler. *Bursting World*. p125.

<sup>48</sup> Butler. *Bursting World*. p220.

<sup>49</sup> Bernstein. *Memory Against Forgetting*. p73.

“...it was a different way of life altogether...”

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However, more conventional visions of combat were apparent as well. On hearing firing in the distance for the first time, Blamey was torn between concern for his comrades facing the Germans, as well as apprehension and nervous tension. For him, it was difficult to describe his emotional reaction – part of it was a condemnation of the war and the killing of men, while another was a desire to be closer, to experience what was happening. When eventually he found himself under fire for the first time, there existed a detachment from the fear of being injured or killed and, instead, a concentration on duty:

We soon made contact with the enemy, and it was a strange feeling to be at the receiving end of the machine-gun bullets which were whizzing past us, mostly over our heads. This was my baptism of fire, but strangely enough I was not afraid for no doubt my mind was too occupied with my responsibilities to think about anything else.<sup>50</sup>

This detachment existed even during the most horrific incidents. When Guy Butler’s driver was killed by a mine in front of him he was compelled to analyse his own reaction, the reasons behind his calm and detached façade in the face of a gruesome and brutal experience. His recollection was that this ultimately served as a means of allowing the soldier to continue to fight even when confronted with the worst aspects of war. Retaining a sense of detachment allowed the war in a sense to be confined to the unreal which allowed for its continuation:

If the normal connections between stimulus and response, between pain and pity, between danger and fear continued intact among soldiers, no war would last for long. Perhaps our species in its fight for survival had developed this disconnecting reflex, automatic during war; a censor at the door of the heart quietly blue-pencilling all messages addressed to Pity, and sugaring all reports sent on to Fear.<sup>51</sup>

Yet, simultaneously, the war itself and death became incorporated into everyday life, not only confined to the unreal: “A fatal Wimpie crash today – whole crew killed – machine burnt out completely. Broke out in some kind of rash – not getting enough grub.”<sup>52</sup> Here, the disturbing death of comrades – at whose funeral young Kevin Aloysius Kelly was later to be pallbearer – was juxtaposed with his more mundane experiences and personal concerns in Egypt. Kelly’s diary carries an immediacy allowing the historian to see the way in which he was able to juxtapose the extraordinary and the mundane, or the way in which the extraordinary became the mundane. Written as a private account, unmediated by time and an ordering of experience, his diary unequivocally captures the way in which the combatant experienced the war. And, despite understanding the nature of war, Kelly had no qualms about the possibility of being killed in combat which stemmed from his belief in dying while doing what he loved best, “I shall never

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<sup>50</sup> Blamey. *A Company Commander Remembers*. p21-22.

<sup>51</sup> Butler. *Bursting World*. p249.

<sup>52</sup> KCAL. *Diary of Kevin Aloysius Kelly, Wednesday, November 17<sup>th</sup>, 1943*. KCM 55127-55129.

regret joining the SAAF and learning to fly even if it costs my life in the near future – it has been well worth it and I’d sooner “Go” in an aeroplane than anywhere else.” This was entry made particularly moving by it being one of his last before he too was killed the following year, aged just 22, when his parachute failed to open after his plane was shot down.<sup>53</sup> It is interesting though that, even in his acceptance of death, he nonetheless uses euphemistic language when writing of it, perhaps suggesting that its reality had not really taken on a personal aspect.

Yet, for some men, the extreme nature of combat forced its way past the detachment or even the pragmatism. It overwhelmed some even as they performed their duty and even went beyond. This is evident in the autobiography of anti-apartheid activist Mary Benson, whose narration of her experiences allow the historian to understand the way in which an outsider to the men’s world of combat interacted with these men and understood what they had undergone. While stationed in Egypt, she received news of men’s combat experiences second hand:

When I visited the wounded men in hospital, a South African had news of another friend, Brewer – tall, blond and cheerful. After killing four Italians as he single-handedly captured a machine-gun post, he had been badly wounded, his leg would have to be amputated; he’d just sat there, *laughing*, until he was captured by the Italians.<sup>54</sup>

For Brewer, whose actions mirrored those of Quentin Smythe whom I have mentioned earlier, his response is difficult to comprehend, suggesting a kind of insanity or hysteria which had taken the place of the conventional detachment in battle. The image evoked by Brewer is poignant and an indictment of war, capturing both its complexity and its horror and perhaps something of its reality, a far cry from the simple stereotypes employed in propaganda. Yet this image of war is rare – little exists in sources written for an audience such as letters home or those mediated by time and memory such as autobiographies or interviews. It appears here only because Benson told the story of another soldier. It is possible for him to tell only because it is not his story. There is thus a sense of keeping intact a stoic image of masculinity.

Soldiers in combat found themselves confronted with two very different and even conflicting perceptions of the war and combat – the first was the ideals of honour and duty, the desire for glory, which was a strong motivation for many of these men enlisting and was something which was integral to their understanding of war. However, once on the frontlines, the death, destruction and loss of those with whom they had formed close ties, belied this belief. Yet they

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<sup>53</sup> Diary of K.A. Kelly, Friday, December 31<sup>st</sup>, 1943,

<sup>54</sup> Mary Benson. *A Far Cry*. (London: Viking, 1989) p28.

“...it was a *different way of life altogether...*”

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continued to fight, echoing in many respects the war poets of the preceding war – understanding and abhorring the nature of warfare yet stoically remaining duty bound. In many cases the effect was a kind of reticence or inability to give voice to their experiences. Mary Benson, working as a member of the WAAS or “Waasie” in Cairo and thus an “outsider” to combat, describes this reluctance on the part of soldiers to discuss “the bloody battles”, concentrating instead on, “...the boredom, the brewing up of endless cups of tea and gypsy tummies from food alive with flies.”<sup>55</sup> Quentin Smythe, whose exploits were used by government propaganda as a means of creating and maintaining support for the war, was ironically himself unwilling to describe those same experiences:

I never even told my own parents what I did in that thing, so that is out completely...Can one ever really tell people what it was like? You know your mind rejects things that were nasty; you can read up the citation if you like, but you'll get nothing from me.<sup>56</sup>

His actions had resulted in him being awarded the Victoria Cross for bravery and had led to him being personally congratulated by Jan Smuts. Through this, and the information films detailing his exploits, he had achieved military glory yet the price at which this was achieved, both psychological and physical, was high. It was an experience that he preferred not to relive through the recounting of it and he chose instead to define his war experiences in terms of the camaraderie, the humour and the loyalty of those alongside whom he had fought.<sup>57</sup>

For those involved, combat was an intense and life-changing experience. Its effect was to confront these men with war in its awful reality and to end the schoolboy idealisation of war, bringing to the fore the experience of combat, participation in the war and being a witness to horrendous sights:

...I've seen tanks, burnt tanks, rotting bodies...I don't know, people make a romance out of war now, it's not romantic at all, I mean it's not very nice – bloody bombs going off and shells. I mean when Tobruk fell the shells when whizzing overhead like mad, you know, and some friends of mine, great friends of mine were in one little dugout near me and a Stuka bomb went straight in and took the whole lot of them – finished. And, you know, it's not fun when, when bombs and shells going off all round you – but somehow you – you're young, you're resilient.<sup>58</sup>

In Herbert's descriptions of combat there is little sense of agency in terms of what he had actually done as a combatant, the emphasis is instead on the violence done to those around him.

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<sup>55</sup> Benson. *A Far Cry*. p26.

<sup>56</sup> Independent Newspapers Archive. Sam Sole. “The War to End All Wars”, *Sunday Tribune*, September 3, 1989.

<sup>57</sup> Sole. *The War to End All Wars*. September 3, 1989.

<sup>58</sup> Interview with Godfrey Herbert.

*“...it was a different way of life altogether...”*

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The bombs and the shells are given agency as inanimate objects and the actual violence committed by men on both sides is rendered invisible, subordinated to the artillery. Moreover his hesitations in his descriptions suggest the difficulty of recounting these experiences yet indicate their firm hold on his memory so many years after the event.

### **Sporting POWs**

For many South African soldiers during the Second World War, combat was not the only key event. The fall of Tobruk and the huge numbers of South Africans taken prisoner, about a third of the Union Defence Force, meant that being taken prisoner of war was an important and defining experience in their recollections. Being a POW involved no small amount of physical discomfort, as evident in Godfrey Herbert's description:

...then we had 18 months of prisoner-of-war camps in Italy, great big concentration camps. We weren't, we weren't brutally treated like the Japanese treated their prisoners but we didn't have enough to eat, we were very, very hungry the whole time – 18 months, I can honestly say that we were hungry most of the time there. And the water came on at midnight and, you know, in dribs and drabs and there were terrible stinking latrines and, you know, it wasn't very nice.<sup>59</sup>

The adverse conditions and desperate hunger reduced these men to a shadow of their former selves yet sport nonetheless made its ubiquitous appearance. In the German POW camp, Stalag IVB, South African men competed with their Allied counterparts from Australia, New Zealand, England, France and Wales in “international” rugby matches. The preparation that went into these matches in the midst of deprivation, where Italian long underwear was converted into shorts and the yellow dye was obtained from anti-malarial tablets, as well as the cost of each uniform, “Five precious cigarettes, which would buy a tin of sardines, were needed to buy a vest and so one rugger jersey could cost a man a third of his weekly ration,” as well as the physical exertion when many were on the brink of starvation, suggested that playing rugby was more than mere recreation.<sup>60</sup> For one of the men involved, Ross Hinds, it served as both an act of defiance and a “morale booster” in the face of tremendous odds, as well as an assertion of patriotism, “The mere staging of rugby ‘internationals’ by prisoners who were suffering incredible privation was a triumph of diplomacy and endurance.”<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Interview with Godfrey Herbert.

<sup>60</sup> Independent Newspapers Archive. Bob Frean. “Memories of Rugby ‘Boks’ in German Camp”, June 26, 1991.

<sup>61</sup> Bob Frean. “Memories of Rugby ‘Boks’ in German Camp”, June 26, 1991.

Sport, and in particular rugby, also served as a process of inclusion and exclusion. The playing of sport such as cricket and rugby in South Africa in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century came to symbolise the contempt of English speaking white South Africans for Afrikaners due to the perception of the latter's lack of idealised sportsmanlike behaviour. This contempt was denoted by test cricket where, “the Boers did not feel either welcome or inclined to participate in the game, which remained very much an expression of Anglo-Saxon separateness and superiority in the eyes of Afrikaner farming people”.<sup>62</sup> Yet, interestingly enough, the same did not apply to rugby which was a defiant assertion of Afrikaner identity:

They [the Boers] developed a keen interest in Rugby, which became a kind of ruling passion in the rural areas between the wars and a vehicle for a Afrikaner self-expression and identity...The way the Springboks perceived the game is of the utmost importance. The controlled power of their forwards, their speed, and the fierceness of their tackling offered an image of the Afrikaner people, which stood in stark contrast to the apparent ‘softness’ of Anglo-Saxon cricket...The Springboks may have been playing an ‘imperial’ game but they were playing it to assert themselves as a proud and independent people, whose attitude to the British Crown was ambiguous to say the least.<sup>63</sup>

Yet the South African national rugby team, the Springboks, also functioned as a means of reconciliation between English and Afrikaner post-South African War as well as a means of propagating a particularly white masculine identity. The ability of sport to create a “united white nation”, only a few years after the signing of the Treaty of Vereeniging that ended the South African War, was evident in 1906 when the South African rugby team toured Britain. The team comprised both English and Afrikaans speakers and the moniker “Springbok” was chosen by the Afrikaner captain and English-speaking vice-captain. Both groups through the twentieth century “were united in their support of the Springboks and in their identification with Springbok success”.<sup>64</sup>

Yet this white unity created and propagated by the emblem of the Springboks necessarily precluded other race groups from the outset and sport was segregated on the basis of race for much of the twentieth century. Representing the country in sport was an honour given only to white sportsmen and women – the privileged few allowed to wear the “national sporting colours and the Springbok emblem.”<sup>65</sup> Thus, by designating the combatants of the Union Defence Force “Springboks” as evident in the *Libertas* recruiting advertisement discussed in the previous

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<sup>62</sup> Richard Holt. *Sport and the British: A Modern History*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990) p228.

<sup>63</sup> Holt. *Sport and the British*. p228.

<sup>64</sup> John Nauright. *Sport, Cultures and Identities in South Africa*. (Claremont: David Philip Publishers, 1998) p83.

<sup>65</sup> Nauright. *Sport, Cultures and Identities in South Africa*. p11.

chapter, there was a clear sense that rugby, like combat, served as a process of racial exclusion. This was an exclusion which continued in the apartheid era where “along with military parades, international and provincial rugby matches were large public displays of defiant white South African power in the face of perceived hostile and internal and external enemies”.<sup>66</sup>

Rugby was also an assertion of masculinity in the POW camps which was sorely needed as the lack of food and the will to survive reduced these men to an almost subhuman level. This is evident in a poem in the diary of a South African prisoner, suggesting that he saw parallels between its imagery and his own experiences:

Of all the places in the world,  
At least it seems to me,  
A prison camp is not a place  
For women’s eyes to see.

For months behind a barbed wire fenced  
Can warp the sanest mind  
Unless it keeps some sort of hold  
Or somehow strength can find

And hunger causes men to steal  
The lowest thing to do  
While some behave like animals  
To get some filthy stew.

The saddest thing of all to see,  
Is virile manhood brave,  
Reduced to fleshless skin and bone,  
Like those due for the grave.

So God forbid that you, my son  
Should ever captured be  
And pray that all your battles then  
Should end in Victory.<sup>67</sup>

A key theme in this poem is the way in which being a POW was seen as being in stark contrast to the notion of “virile” masculinity, making these men an unfit sight for women still holding onto idealised visions of men in uniform. The poem suggests that life as a POW had robbed them of this masculinity, of their “manhood”, reducing them to a desperate existence where even their higher ideals such as honour had to be sacrificed in the struggle to survive. The poem appearing in a diary carries with it an immediacy of experience unlike the interviews and

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<sup>66</sup> Nauright. *Sport, Cultures and Identities in South Africa*. p87.

<sup>67</sup> KCAL. Diary of Gert Spencer Dreyer, “Prison Camp II”. KCM 65263.

autobiographies which carry with them implications for memory and recollection. There is thus a greater sense of helplessness which does not fit into the conventions of honour and duty which are such a strong component of written and oral accounts appearing years after the events, when their authors had made some kind of sense of their war experience, incorporating it into public and official narratives.

In these accounts, a key theme was the way in which some of these men were able to assert themselves. This was evident by the numerous escape attempts. This became a means of holding true to one's notion of duty in an almost impossible situation. Colonel Martin, when captured, had an internal debate over the possibility of escape, coming to the conclusion that his duty as a commanding officer called for him to instead not “desert our men who would almost certainly need protection in some way or another”.<sup>68</sup> The escape attempt became yet another trial and men felt compelled to try to escape even if their hearts were not in it:

Shortly afterwards Chesney...and MacDonald staged an “*escape effort*”. They chose a foggy afternoon and walked with their suitcases to the wire. Whilst they were doing that, I was walking down to the next bungalow and I noticed that though one could see nothing to within two feet of the ground you could see any person's knees to his feet. Thus the Italians had no difficulty in discovering the two “*heroes*”. They were picked up with their suit-cases at the wire. A more ridiculous “*attempt*” could not be imagined. I think it was phoney from the word go. [emphases in the original]<sup>69</sup>

It is clearly evident that Martin has a highly contemptuous attitude of the two men, apparent by his use of quotes when describing them as “*heroes*” which introduces a sarcastic tone. His attitude was based upon the assumption that these men were hypocritical in their escape attempt, only doing so in a half-hearted effort to carry out their duty, making them less than the idealised soldier in comparison to the many men who carried out well-planned and often successful escapes. Martin supports this assumption by detailing the various exploits of these men, suggesting their lack of moral character.<sup>70</sup> The overall effect is to suggest that these men were fundamentally flawed and not imbued with the military ethic of honour and duty. Yet it simultaneously raises the interesting consideration of the pressure exerted on these men to prove their masculinity and carry out their duty, compelling them to attempt to escape, even if it was a somewhat desultory effort.

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<sup>68</sup> Memoirs of Colonel A.C. Martin. p138.

<sup>69</sup> Memoirs of Colonel A.C. Martin. p145.

<sup>70</sup> Memoirs of Colonel A.C. Martin. p145-146.

*"...it was a different way of life altogether..."*

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Once a successful escape had been achieved, the challenges did not end there. For those who did, months spent in the open exposed to the elements with little food, having to rely on the kindness of the local civilian population and living with the constant fear of being recaptured, took its toll, forcing men to surrender. For those who refused to do so, desolation was a constant companion, as evident in Dreyer's diary entries:

One of these days we'll be recognised and then what? Jerry is pressing all the younger Ities into service as labourers. If they start searching again we'll be in for a spot of bother. There is a scare on today. Oh! God when is all this nightmare going to end? I am tired so tired that I don't know how I still manage to keep on existing... Things are black for us now that I do not feel like entering anything. It seems as if all our sacrifices have been in vain, and we are destined for a prison camp once more. So far we have not been caught, but it seems only a matter of time before we are. I have never despaired as much as I do now.<sup>71</sup>

Their negative circumstances and all that they had endured, predisposed men like Dreyer to take a pessimistic view of the nature of war, stuck as he was in hostile territory with little hope of rescue, and without the benefit of hindsight:

Oh Hell! I wished I could shake someone or something and let this crazy old world set right. I wonder how long this madmans [sic] nightmare is still to last. Sometimes one feels that it must all end soon – The world must regain it's [sic] sanity. Yet at other times things look as if there is no likelihood of an end to this war at all. It seems as if the population of the world have decided to destroy itself – to go on killing until there is no one left to kill or be killed.<sup>72</sup>

As a POW, Dreyer took a markedly dismal view of the war as well as the future and the nature of humankind itself. This was in stark contrast with the almost euphoric patriotism and optimism with which young men enlisted at the outbreak of war. However, the difficult experiences of men like him as well as those exposed to the worst ravages of combat evident in his diary, were noticeably absent in the portrayal of war to those on the home front. Part of this stemmed from their desire to spare their loved ones the truth of the experiences, part of it was related to the censoring of all letters sent to and from the front lines and part of it was their own inability to give voice to their experiences. The overall effect was to create a highly skewed portrayal of the war on the home front.

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<sup>71</sup> Diary of Gert Spencer Dreyer, December 29, 30, 1943 and March 4, 1944.

<sup>72</sup> Diary of Gert Spencer Dreyer, December 14, 1943.

## Writing Home

Whereas diaries tended to portray a different and more personal aspect of men's experiences as they were largely intended for the individual only, letters written for an outside audience i.e. those not directly involved in the war, were somewhat different in their content. The letters used here to illustrate the various themes are by D.W. Geddie, a major in the Union Defence Force, stationed in both East Africa and later North Africa. I draw upon Geddie's letters here as they tie in with many of the themes that appear in accounts drawn from other sources aimed at an external audience such as autobiographies and interviews. One of the remarkable features in many instances in these letters was the absence of war. One of the issues that stand out here is of personal relationships between the soldier on the front and those at home, particularly his longing for his spouse or his family, which makes for poignant reading:

Well darling the first year is completed, at least it will be at 4 p.m. tomorrow but I hope it is a birthday which won't have to be repeated. Perhaps that is being over-optimistic but it would be too ghastly if a second birthday came round without my seeing you. Don't let us think of such a thing sweetheart. I've been thinking of you such a lot in the last few days and recalling the eve of my departure from South Africa. Despite having been separated from you, the year has passed quickly as there has been so much to do but latterly time has dragged a bit with the easing off of work and I've been very lonely at times. You have had the worst end of it darling as women always do and you've been just marvellous. Stick it out old girl and one of these days things will come right and you'll have me back with you. I've missed you terribly my dear...<sup>73</sup>

Other than his desire to be reunited with his wife, there exists also the image of the stoic, dutiful wife – a theme to which I shall return later in this chapter – where she is without the distractions, excitement and dangers of war and is left to pine for him on the home front. A further theme to which I will return later was the fear on the part of both him and his wife of being unfaithful. It was a common occurrence both on the home front and the war front where men and women were separated from each other for long periods of time. As a major he found that such incidences were common but remains reassured of his wife's fidelity and assures her of his own:

I agree with you that it is criminal for women to flaunt their unfaithfulness to their men up here but these comprise the majority of the cases I have to deal with. One can only appeal to their sense of decency and such love as they have for their men folk. By yesterday's mail I had a reply from my batman's wife, a most contrite letter in which she appeals to me to help her to keep straight by sending her husband home. This is beyond my power but I think my appeal to her has had some effect. She obviously loves her husband and that's what I can't understand about such conduct. I'm afraid I'm very old fashioned darling. Sweetheart there's no need for you to tell me that you wouldn't let me

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<sup>73</sup> Letters of Douglas Walton Geddie to his wife Lorna Geddie. June 9, 1941. Personal Collection.

*“...it was a different way of life altogether...”*

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down. I know it just as well as I know that I wouldn't let you down so we won't even discuss the subject.<sup>74</sup>

Here the emphasis was not on the fidelity of men but on women, and a subsequent disdain for those who did not fulfil the stoic role of the loyal wife, and were hence not considered “decent”, while men were away making the far greater sacrifice. Whereas he does reassure his wife of his own fidelity evident in, “I wouldn't let you down”, the emphasis of his letter is on the woman who was unfaithful to her husband, taking advantage of his absence and, on a deeper level, placing her personal needs above duty and good citizenship as personified by her husband on the front lines. This reveals an aspect of relations between soldiers and their wives which is significantly more complex than that of the soldier leaving his wife and family and the loyal wife waiting eagerly for news of him. These were the images propagated both by Kodak – which I will discuss subsequently – as well as propaganda.

A significant theme in the letters was the description of new experiences which Geddie wished to share with his wife. However these experiences concentrated on travel and tourism – the exotic places he visited and the natural scenery which were described in an incredibly vivid manner – which mirrored the tourist images that I have discussed earlier on:

It was a beautiful drive [to Tripoli], the road running close to the sea through olive groves and picturesque little villages with ruins of Crusader castles and Roman temples. The mountains above us were still snow-covered and the wild flowers were wonderful. At one point where the mountains fall sheer into the sea the road goes through a tunnel about 500 yards long. It was a lovely afternoon and the Mediterranean had resumed its deep colour...the area from the Syrian/Palestine border down to the Jordan area was the most wonderful part of all. Scarlet poppies, large anemones of the same colour, blue and purple lupins, yellow and white daisies, salvias, marigolds and a hundred other flowers in as many different colours – literally miles and miles of them.<sup>75</sup>

His descriptions in terms of his use of colour take on an almost visual aspect focusing, as on the photographs earlier, on historical monuments and natural beauty. His experiences of war were presented as almost idyllic where the conventional images associated with war were noticeably absent. Even when the war itself made itself unavoidably visible such as with the fall of Tobruk in 1942, the letter written to his wife was reassuring and full of confidence that the Allies would soon recover, “Don't worry darling, we've got the measure of this bloke Rommel now and I have a feeling he will have his tail twisted before long.”<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Letters of D.W. Geddie. August 8, 1942.

<sup>75</sup> Letters of D.W. Geddie. April 2, 1942.

<sup>76</sup> Letters of D.W. Geddie. August 8, 1942.

## Personal Photographs and Memory-Making

Where these photographs differ from the ones discussed earlier, is that the former are drawn from the archive and have largely been divorced from their context. This context has been given by the oral recollections evident here. Interestingly enough, the absence of war was mirrored in these photo albums created by soldiers. However this may also have stemmed from the way in which Kodak – the most ubiquitous brand of camera in this period – marketed the personal camera in the early part of the twentieth century. It was responsible for a certain kind of personal war photography in the First World War, where personal photography converged with a seminal human experience in the form of war. The First World War was a hitherto unique experience in human history – the first industrial, mechanised war. The extent of the destruction was on a scale which had never been seen before, reducing notions of individual heroism and glory to rubble in the face of the trenches, tanks, and gas warfare. The visual record in terms of media representations and official images however was silent, and did not communicate the horrors of the war to the public. Society on the home front was thus unaware of the experiences of the war, and the First World War became an inexpressible experience, confined to those taking part:

We can find evidence of the incommunicability...in the official and press photos produced during the war, remarkable mainly for what they *don't* tell about combat, suffering, disillusionment, and death.<sup>77</sup>

The personal photography advocated by Kodak operated on a similar level in terms of its lack of information about the actual experience of war. Nancy West argues that, by using stereotypical images in their advertisements of men saying goodbye to their families, women and children sending photographs to men on the frontlines and individual or groups of soldiers looking at family photographs sent to them, Kodak reduced the experience of war to a cliché, de-emphasising its negative aspects, such as the disruption to the family and the horror on the frontlines, to idealised visions of the family, “patriotism and pride”.<sup>78</sup> The war itself is invisible. Soldiers on the front looking at family photographs suggest the transference of domesticity to the front, isolating the individual and his family from the larger repercussions of war. In this way, the grand narrative of war and its implications for human experience gave way to the personal:

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<sup>77</sup> Nancy Martha West. *Kodak and the Lens of Nostalgia*. (Virginia: The University Press of Virginia, 2000) p188.

<sup>78</sup> West. *Kodak and the Lens of Nostalgia*. p191.

Here war gets collected as a subject for the family album, an episode in the narrative of domestic life, presumably along with the wedding, the baby's first steps, the graduation, and family vacations. Kodak thus allows war to be domesticated...<sup>79</sup>

Kodak's notions of what was appropriate to capture in the personal photograph and to be preserved in the family album, evident in their advertisements, had repercussions beyond the First World War, ultimately influencing the personal photographs taken by soldiers. Rarely do personal photo albums reflect the actual conditions of war – emphasis is instead on travel images and male camaraderie. Thus, although the subject is able to assert a particular kind of identity particularly through the personal photograph, this identity is shaped by accepted ideas of what is “proper” to show in terms of war experience. For Godfrey Herbert, whose descriptions of life in an Italian POW camp were harrowing, a reticence was evident in his personal images of the war. Combat, in a similar vein to many other images, was confined to the portrayal of wrecked machinery such as the destroyed tank and plane in the images on the far left below. Even as a POW, the images were posed photographs of those with whom he came into contact, showing human relations rather than being a description of experiences. A photograph of him with two other men was described simply as, “That's me as a prisoner of war with two other prisoners of war”.<sup>80</sup> An interesting feature here is the important role played by narrative in the photo album; his images were only given context by his accompanying oral description. For instance, the almost mundane photograph on the far right is seen in a new light with the associated narrative:

...we went to see this man...who was a Grand Signore with a big, beautiful house, lovely villa and he built a room under a haystack and we lived in there during the daytime and we came out at night like cockroaches...the fascists and the Germans were getting very nasty now and they'd heard about these rooms under haystacks and they were machine-gunning the haystacks and they were beating up the *padrones*, the men who helped us, you know, these people...I couldn't do anymore so I said farewell – he got beaten up afterwards...a lovely man, he and his wife.<sup>81</sup>

This image takes on a new charged note with an added poignancy when it has been identified as that of an Italian man who had been sheltering the POWs and was eventually caught and assaulted by the authorities. The image itself is silent about this brutality. Thus both images below – of the destroyed armaments and the Italian friend – share in common their silences, with neither one portraying the death and injury with which these images were associated in the memory of the photographer. Like the written sources then, these photographs contain within

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<sup>79</sup> West. *Kodak and the Lens of Nostalgia*. p191-192.

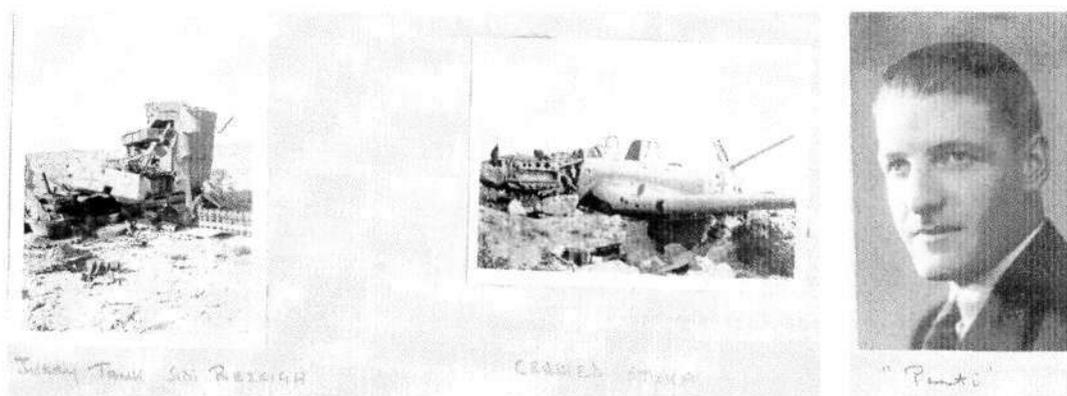
<sup>80</sup> Interview with Godfrey Herbert.

<sup>81</sup> Interview with Godfrey Herbert.

*"...it was a different way of life altogether..."*

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them silences based on what they do not show, what is omitted from the photograph. These are silences reflected in the written accounts but not necessarily in the memory of those remembering. These photographs then focus on the destruction of machines but not of human bodies, omitting the human violence of the war and focusing instead on mechanical destruction or, in the case of the image on the far right, a portrait of a man without the context of physical violence with which the image is associated in Herbert's memory.



Images taken from private collection of Godfrey Herbert

Yet, simultaneously, these photographs, despite the silences, functioned as an aid to memory as well as a validation of the experiences of war, working to create some form of narrative order within which the war was remembered. Interviews with both men and women were invariably accompanied by a photo album which the respondent used to accompany the narrative, providing a visual aid to the memory, as a means of asserting one's own place in the narrative as well as serving as proof of the experiences of war to those who were not there, "And he [fellow POW] was a helluva nice chap, I hadn't got a pic with him, I mislaid his picture, I must find it."<sup>82</sup>

As I have discussed previously in this chapter, male camaraderie was a significant theme during the war, in many instances offsetting the worst effects of combat, leaving many soldiers in an ambiguous position regarding their war service. Unsurprisingly this perception of camaraderie as a positive effect of war was highly evident in personal photo albums with the images showing groups of smiling men in and out of uniform on the beach, hunting or engaged in some other form of sport. These images emphasised youthful exuberance and vitality in the face of death and destruction.

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<sup>82</sup> Interview with Godfrey Herbert.

“...it was a different way of life altogether...”



Images taken from Photo Album 2 of Donald Murray, 11 Motor Ambulance Company (MAC), and Photo Album 3 (unknown) respectively, courtesy of Documentation Centre, Department of Defence Archives

Yet, despite the positive portrayal of war particularly for the audience on the home front, as the war progressed there was a shift away from the patriotic and self-sacrificing attitudes that had provoked many to enlist in the first place. According to Bernstein, as the war drew to a close, the army in North Africa was left without direction, turning to trading on the black market and subsuming the collective good – a cornerstone of duty – for individual gain.<sup>83</sup> The army was left without a purpose and, as men were being sent back home, the strong ties of camaraderie forged in combat began to disintegrate, evident in Bernstein’s account:

Bonds of solidarity were dissolving as men left separately for home and their units were being rolled together into ad hoc formations. In these new and temporary formations men scarcely knew one another or their officers, and the officers did not stay long enough to get to know the men. Esprit de corps and all sense of unity was going.<sup>84</sup>

On a more personal level, the experiences of war itself and its duration, created a generation of men weary with war. Guy Butler, who had begun the war with a sense of purpose in terms of defeating the fascist threat, found the imminence of victory anticlimactic in the face of the death and destruction:

War is a loathsome affair. It is only the stoicism of the chaps that makes it human at all. We are going to win and soon; but I can work up no enthusiasm for victory when I see dead Germans, or hundreds of dog-tired men who have endured much, driven to surrender; or burnt-out homesteads smoking among spring-green fields; or hearing the bellowing of wounded cattle. Maybe it’s because I’ve had a safe war, but there’s no triumphing over my enemy in me at all, no hatred, only an over-riding pity for human weakness. Everybody is tarred with the same brush.<sup>85</sup>

The death and violence of war had ultimately belied the idealism with which he had enlisted. The outpouring of patriotism and a desire to serve in late 1939 had become weariness after six

<sup>83</sup> Bernstein. *Memory Against Forgetting*. p82.

<sup>84</sup> Bernstein. *Memory Against Forgetting*. p81.

<sup>85</sup> Butler. *Bursting World*. p293.

“...it was a different way of life altogether...”

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years of fighting and Bernstein and Butler, initially more introspective due to the latter's pacifist upbringing and the former's communist affiliations inclining him to take a more cynical view of the South African state, were only too ready to return home to some semblance of normality.

### **Fighting for Equality**

What of those who were auxiliary to the war effort, yet found themselves facing similar dangers on the front lines? The war provided the perfect venue for South African black men to prove themselves in a conflict which had both national and international repercussions. White South African troops, as well, found themselves fighting alongside black troops from around the world for a common cause. Yet, in a similar manner to the First World War, September 1939 found black men in South Africa highly ambivalent towards the war. This is evident in the autobiography of Naboth Mokgatle, a radical South African involved in union activities, who stood in opposition to the liberalism espoused by Smuts' supporters:

I decided to stay away from them [the Communists] and support the war, though I hated the South African army because Africans were not allowed to join as real soldiers, not allowed to be trained or to carry arms. I was sure that if Hitler won, fascism in South Africa would have won. To me Smuts was nothing but another Hitler in a different form. He hated Hitlerism in Europe but liked it when he practised it in South Africa himself.<sup>86</sup>

For Mokgatle the equation of Smuts with Hitler suggested virulent racism and dispossession on the home front, drawing attention to the irony of fighting a war for the ideals of liberty overseas. It was what he perceived as this hypocrisy that alienated him from the war effort. Mokgatle, later to become a Communist Party supporter when the CPSA changed its support for the war after Germany reneged on its pact with the Soviet Union and attacked the country,<sup>87</sup> encapsulated the feelings of many black South Africans over supporting a war against fascism and actively volunteering for that conflict. This volunteerism came when they were not extended the full democratic rights on the home front for which the war was ostensibly being fought. Even once they had volunteered, they were faced with the prospect of engaging in highly limited roles due to prevailing attitudes and fears about arming black men, which I have discussed in a previous chapter. A meeting held by the Natives' Representative Council called for the removal of restrictions placed on black men serving in light of “the growing menace of unprovoked

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<sup>86</sup> Naboth Mokgatle. *The Autobiography of an Unknown South African*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971) p213.

<sup>87</sup> Mokgatle. *The Autobiography of an Unknown South African*. p233.

aggression by some of the great Powers”.<sup>88</sup> These restrictions had been legislated in the Defence Act of 1912 “which had ruled that only citizens of European descent could be listed as combatants and carry weapons<sup>89</sup>. The government’s response in the form of the Secretary for Native Affairs, D.L. Smit, was that such a change to the form of black men serving was not required at that moment in time.<sup>90</sup>

However there remained a strong desire to play an equal part in the war. In the same meeting, R. Godlo of the Cape who had made the original motion, called for equal participation in the Union Defence Force. His request was based on a point that had made an appearance as early as the South African War, and that was to be re-iterated time and again, the importance of combat and defence of the home which was seen as integral to masculinity:

If there is danger, we as full-blooded men do not wish to sit around like women and children with our arms folded while others defend our country. Our loyalty is beyond question. Since war has broken out every African organisation that has held a meeting has expressed its unswerving devotion to the King and to his Government in the Union...As the co-inhabitants with the Europeans of this country, we feel that we can offer an important contribution to its defence, and that we should not be prevented from making that contribution.<sup>91</sup>

Godlo’s words, recounted in the radical ICU (Industrial and Commercial Workers’ Union) leader Champion’s *Asalibele*, contrast the role of men in war with that of women and children, conventionally the non-combatants. There is a clear overlapping between white and black understandings of the place of women in war which was seen as a masculine occupation. To be relegated to the status of women and children was thus an attack on the very definition of masculinity in war. Moreover, Godlo equated equal service with a demonstration of loyalty to the state and crown, with black men having an equal stake to their white counterparts in the welfare of the country, where they were “going to suffer as much as the whiteman” should fascism triumph.<sup>92</sup> Once again, as in the previous chapter, parallels were drawn with the conditions overseas, particularly in the United States, where “Negroes could be trained for service,” with little hint of a realisation of white fears of arming black men. This was partly used

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<sup>88</sup> KCAL. A.W.G. Champion. “Black Soldiers and War” in *Asalibele*, p12. KC29615. *Asalibele* is a booklet penned by Champion and is the response of the Native Representative Council on the question of the participation of African men in the war.

<sup>89</sup> Independent Newspapers Archive. Shelagh McLoughlin. “The Forgotten Force – The Way We Were”, in *The Natal Witness*, November 19, 1997.

<sup>90</sup> Champion. “Black Soldiers and War”. p13.

<sup>91</sup> Champion. “Black Soldiers and War”. p13.

<sup>92</sup> Champion. “Black Soldiers and War”. p15.

to argue that these fears in South Africa were unjustified.<sup>93</sup> Godlo’s testimony as well as that of other black soldiers, unlike the sources for white servicemen, is drawn from secondary or indirect sources due to the dearth of primary accounts penned by black soldiers. While part of this stems from a language, and to an extent, literacy barrier, it is largely due to the nature of autobiography itself which, as I have mentioned earlier, favours the elite in terms of race and class – those with the means and opportunity who believe their stories are worth telling and historically significant.

For Alfred Jimmy Davis who joined the First Battalion Cape Corps Fighting Unit, participation in the Second World War was a mixture of patriotism, a desire for combat and a curiosity to experience war:

I felt that I had this other energy. I was a person who wanted to run all the time and I wanted to see blood but where I’m going I want to prevent that to happen to our people and for the country, keep the enemy away, that was my point, that’s why they took me in so many different, different trainings I did...I was supposed to be in the frontline, I wanted to see how do you do it, I wanted to do it myself but I couldn’t get there, I got discharged.<sup>94</sup>

Evident in his words was a desire to fight yet to fight to protect those on the home front. This corresponded once again to the idea of the “noble warrior”, where the ideological construction of the noble warrior is not a taker of life but a preserver of it. Along with the justification of war by the countries involved as “fighting for freedom”, comes the equally powerful rhetoric of defending the homeland.<sup>95</sup>

Through a twist of fate he was, along with other men in his group, bound for the war theatres in East or North Africa when he was ordered to remain on the home front by his superior officer and the ship, which the remainder of these men boarded, was subsequently torpedoed and sank. His feelings towards serving in the military were ambivalent due to the gratitude at the stroke of good fortune which saved his life juxtaposed against his own disappointment at being left out of an opportunity to serve.<sup>96</sup>

Davis’ training experience prepared him for combat as well:

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<sup>93</sup> Champion. “Black Soldiers and War”. p14-15.

<sup>94</sup> Interview conducted with Alfred Jimmy Davis by Marijke du Toit and Suryakanthie Chetty, March 3, 2005.

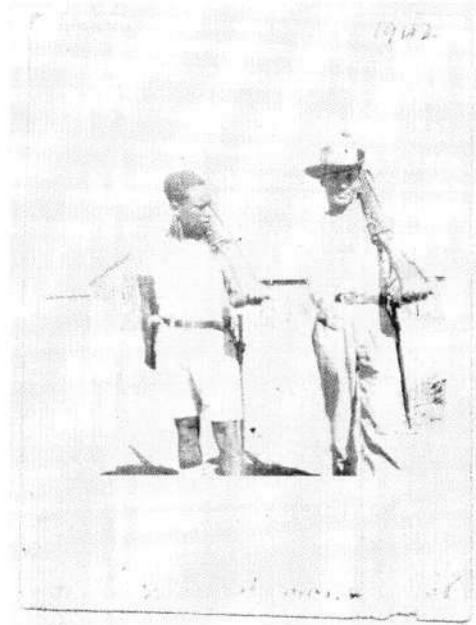
<sup>95</sup> Elshstain. *Women and War*. p224.

<sup>96</sup> Interview with Alfred Davis.

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I had a bayonet – fixed bayonet training which means you have a belt with a *schepsel* they call it, it's got a bayonet on it. When you go you charging a enemy, you got no more bullets, you leave the gun, you use the bayonet, put it on the gun and start fighting with the bayonet because you got no more bullets, that's why we were there, that's what all it was... I remember when they took us for – at, at Ladysmith Blood River where the 1914 war started, that's where they were training people. They took us there for training, how to kill a enemy, how to chase him, how to catch him, how to capture him and make him a prisoner so we went over there.<sup>97</sup>



Photos courtesy of Alfred Jimmy Davis

Davis' perceptions of his own wartime experiences, evident in his personal photographs, were of the conventional armed soldier posing with the gun he had little cause to fire. However his training ultimately counted for little as he remained in South Africa guarding German prisoners of war or working as a clerk keeping track of soldiers' kit and equipment. His photographs however emphasise the idealised combatant rather than the clerk.

Equal participation in the war, particularly in the form of combat, was linked to the notion of equal rights and citizenship which was unequivocally articulated by the African National Congress:

What Black South Africa believes is its inherent right and due is summed up by the quotation: 'I fight as a subject of King George for a place in his household, and I will not be content with a place in his stables'.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Interview with Alfred Davis.

<sup>98</sup> A.W.G. Champion. "Claims of African National Congress Outlined" in *Asalibele*, p17.

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One of the duties and rights of citizenship was to bear arms in defence of the country which was not lost on the ANC in its call for “Place as Citizen”:

A place as a citizen in the defence forces of the country, not merely as a labour contingent, but in every capacity in defending the territorial integrity of his country. This policy had been followed by France and America, as well as England in the East African territories.<sup>99</sup>

For black men, in particular those involved in political activism, military service was inextricably linked to citizenship rather than solely to masculinity and duty – although these were factors as well. This explains the importance of being allowed into combat on the part of black soldiers and the equally vehement denial by the state of equal participation being accorded to black men of the Non-European Army Services.

Inevitably the narratives of these men in the war were coloured by their negative post-war experiences and their greater subjection under apartheid, making many bitter, despite initially acknowledging the allegiance to the country which compelled them to serve. This is evident in interviews conducted with these men for newspapers in the late twentieth century after the country’s transition to democracy. These newspapers formed a public arena of remembrance, attempting to acknowledge the contribution of these men which had been ignored for fifty years:

“My father spoke of loyalty to the country,” says Ian Xaba, explaining why Abednigo Xaba, a former city educationist, volunteered for service in WW2. Abednigo, a sergeant, and his two brothers, who also volunteered, were each rewarded at the end of the war with a bicycle and a khaki suit for their efforts. “We were let down very badly,” says Simon Xaba, one of the brothers.<sup>100</sup>

Yet, despite the state’s adamant refusal to arm black men, more than 120 000 men volunteered for the limited, auxiliary roles available to them, out of a sense of loyalty, duty, fear of the triumph of fascism, a desire to protect their families and, on a more pragmatic level, economic remuneration. The political connotations of their participation and their desire to prove themselves worthy citizens provided the only distinction with their white counterparts.

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<sup>99</sup> Champion. “Claims of African National Congress Outlined”. p17-18.

<sup>100</sup> McLoughlin. “The Forgotten Force – The Way We Were”, in *The Natal Witness*, November 19, 1997.

## Heroism and Adversity on the Front Lines

For me, the case of Job Maseko which I discuss further on in this section, is symbolic of the role of black men in the war, particularly in terms of the actions he took as a prisoner of war to assert himself as a patriotic soldier and a man. This placed him on par with white soldiers, showing that there was a common perception of masculine behaviour in war and shared ideas of honour, courage and duty. By his actions Maseko wished to prove himself a worthy soldier and citizen. That he is not considered a war hero like Quentin Smythe was due to the silencing of the contributions of black men, the racial prejudices of white society which ran deep and, although this is changing now, the privileging of the freedom struggle's heroes by the post-1994 government over those men who had served so valiantly in the Second World War.<sup>101</sup>

The chaotic nature of warfare on the frontlines meant that the distinction between combatant and non-combatant was more than a little blurred. E.G. Malherbe admitted that his coloured driver was armed both for protection and in order to defend Malherbe himself, key to this being the level of trust between the two, “Both my driver, a Coloured man, and I were armed with rifles. I also had my service revolver. I was convinced that my driver would, in time of danger, defend me as I would defend him.”<sup>102</sup> Martinus Jansen, another coloured servicemen who had been taken prisoner on two occasions, in an interview conducted more than fifty years later for a newspaper article, established that this was indeed the case despite the official allocation of non-combatant roles:

Blacks were assigned to non-combatant duties such as stretcher-bearing and driving. Practically this was not always possible in combat areas, and Jansen confirms that he and other men of colour did bear arms.<sup>103</sup>

And these situations did indeed arise as I demonstrated elsewhere<sup>104</sup>, for instance, during the battle of Sidi Rezegh in North Africa, two NMC, described only as Johannes and Ambrose, avoided an approaching German tank by hiding in a trench. However they were spotted and, as

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<sup>101</sup> As I have discussed previously the one black man given great attention by the white media during the war was Lucas Majozi who, unlike Maseko, was the idealised non-combatant and thus non-threatening to conservative elements of white society.

<sup>102</sup> Malherbe. *Never a Dull Moment*. p229.

<sup>103</sup> McLoughlin. “The Forgotten Force – The Way We Were”, in *The Natal Witness*, November 19, 1997.

<sup>104</sup> Suryakanthie Chetty. “Gender Under Fire: Interrogating War in South Africa, 1939-1945.” University of Natal Durban: Unpublished MA dissertation, 2001.

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the German commander alighted to search for them, the two got hold of Italian rifles and Johannes fired at the German officer, either injuring or killing him. The two then escaped.<sup>105</sup>

Black troops also had the opportunity to demonstrate heroism based on the notions of self-sacrifice and bravery that were central to military tradition which did not necessarily include combat. A striking feature of the role played by these troops classified as “non-European” is these many incidents of heroism, which Ian Gleeson narrates in his book *The Unknown Force*.<sup>106</sup> Key to Gleeson’s agenda here is to acknowledge the bravery of these men for the purposes of the historical record – as such he relates experiences of individual acts of courage for which these men were officially recognized by the awarding of decorations for bravery. In one instance, during the advance of a convoy into Abyssinia where troops of the Indian and Malay Corps (IMC) played supporting roles as drivers, the officer in charge was saved from drowning by Private Bushney of the IMC in disregard of his own personal safety.<sup>107</sup> In addition, support roles also included that of stretcher-bearers. John Radebe of the Native Military Corps (NMC) attached to the Royal Durban Light Infantry (RDLI), was awarded a medal for bravery for performing his duty whilst under enemy fire. He:

...worked unceasingly and tirelessly in full view of the enemy and under concentrated artillery, mortar and machine-gun fire, attending to the wounded and arranging the evacuation of the serious cases. He ceased his efforts only when the advancing enemy was 200 yards away, successfully withdrawing the stretcher-bearers under his command.<sup>108</sup>

Despite the view of non-combatant roles as “supportive”, these men and their white counterparts faced strikingly similar situations during the course of battle. They faced the same risks from enemy fire as they worked as stretcher-bearers or drivers of convoys, and death was a very real possibility.

During the battle of Keren in East Africa much praise was heaped on the coloured drivers drawn from the Cape Corps:

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<sup>105</sup> Ian Gleeson. *The Unknown Force – Black, Indian and Coloured Soldiers Through Two World Wars*. (Rivonia: Ashanti Publishing, 1994). p142. Gleeson’s account is derived from the SADF Archives, Union War Histories (UWH), Box 127.

<sup>106</sup> Ian Gleeson. *The Unknown Force – Black, Indian and Coloured Soldiers Through Two World Wars*. (Rivonia: Ashanti Publishing, 1994).

<sup>107</sup> Gleeson. *The Unknown Force*. p123-124. This account is derived from a secondary source, N. Orpen. *War in the Desert*. (Purnell, 1971)

<sup>108</sup> Gleeson. *The Unknown Force*. p178. This account is derived from SANMMH, Citations, MM.

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The Coloured drivers have won the respect, indeed the gratitude, of the whole Sudan striking force for the tireless tasks carried out throughout the battle of Keren. They came north with one ambition, to excel the record of the Cape Corps of yester war. The typical remark of their officers is that they cannot speak highly enough of them and everybody's respect for them grows daily. They have played a man's part in winning the war in Eritrea.<sup>109</sup>

These troops were portrayed by Gleeson, in his attempt to acknowledge the sorely neglected roles of black soldiers, as being part of a tradition of service by the Cape Corps dating from the First World War. Their contribution was not something new or unique to the Second World War but as a part of proud service when the need arose. In addition, although their role as drivers was classified as “supportive”, their work won them the admiration of their white officers and they were now thought of as “men” for their efforts. The classification “men” therefore may not only be applied to white combatants however, it was essential in being part of the baptism of fire – of playing a part in the war effort.

Like white combatants, the proximity of black troops to the battlefield meant that they were subject to the same dangers of war – being injured, killed or being taken prisoner. When taken prisoner of war black troops had to face the additional burden of racism. In a poignant description of the experiences of South African troops taken prisoner after the battle of Sidi Rezegh and then taken on the “Thirst March” by German and later Italian troops, the heat and lack of water experienced by all troops was exacerbated in the case of the Native Military Corps (NMC) and Cape Corps who were denied even the meagre rations of water given to the other men:

It was after prisoners had begun sitting down and refusing to walk another step that a truck loaded with food and another with a tank of water came up from behind and travelled in front of the column – like a tantalising carrot. The exhausted prisoners lurched to their feet and staggered on after the trucks until they stopped about one o'clock for the guards to dish out half a biscuit and 150 millilitres of water each to all but members of the Cape Corps and Native Military Corps, who received only the half-biscuit each and no water; they had been made to wait until last, by which time the water had run out.<sup>110</sup>

While being subjected to inferior treatment on the part of the Axis, black men faced additional discrimination on the part of their own countrymen and fellow POWs, who were reluctant to be housed together as evident in the relation of an incident by Rommel in a war diary:

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<sup>109</sup> Gleeson. *The Unknown Force*. p128-129. This account is derived from primary material at the SADF Archives, WD, Box 270.

<sup>110</sup> Maxwell Leigh. *Captives Courageous – South African Prisoners of War, World War II*. (Johannesburg: Ashanti Publishing, 1992) p33.

While the overflowing POW cage on the airfield was being set up, South African officers demanded to be segregated from the blacks. This request was turned down by the C-in-C. He points out that the blacks are South African soldiers too – they wear the same uniform and they have fought side by side with whites. They are to be housed in the same POW cage.<sup>111</sup>

Yet remarkably, in spite of the additional adversity experienced by these men in terms of racial discrimination – or perhaps because of it – their reaction to being taken prisoner was similar to that of white troops and characterised by numerous escape attempts and, in at least one incident, a case of sabotage. Job Maseko, a Lance-Corporal of the NMC, had been taken prisoner at Tobruk along with almost two thousand black South Africans and nine thousand white soldiers. Being forced to work at a harbour in North Africa under the Italians, Maseko managed to get hold of a radio allowing him and his fellow prisoners to obtain news of the war, and perhaps assist in escape. Simultaneously, the harsh treatment meted out to these men by the Italian guards provoked in him a desire to make a mark in the war. Using his skills obtained from his service in the Daggasfontein mine in South Africa, Maseko fashioned a rudimentary explosive device which he placed in a boat which they were unloading in collaboration with two other men from the NMC as well as another from the Cape Corps.<sup>112</sup> They were rewarded for their efforts a few hours later as evident in Maseko’s account appearing in Gleeson’s book:

I first saw smoke appearing. I could, however, not see the harbour and exactly where the smoke came from. I then heard a succession of explosions. Later I saw a flame while explosions continued. There was no aircraft or bombing at the time. When we went to sleep the fire was still burning. The next day we returned to the docks. The boat had disappeared. We saw drums floating on the water and a number of large planks...which we had seen on board the boat. Several German officers then asked Pte Jakob of the NMC if anyone had been smoking the previous day. He said we did not receive cigarettes. One of the officers then asked us if we had seen a large red ball (mine) floating in the water. We replied in the negative...The officers then went to the guards and we heard them scolding the guards...they were talking about the boat that had disappeared...we were afraid of showing too much interest, in case this aroused suspicion. After a while no more labour was taken from this camp for dock work.<sup>113</sup>

Ironically it was the disdain felt by the guards towards their black captives which prevented them seeing them as viable suspects for the sabotage. Maseko’s war experiences were by no means over and a few months later he and another NMC captive effected a successful escape, in similar

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<sup>111</sup> Independent Newspapers Archive. Daily News London Bureau. “Apartheid in the Desert”, in *The Daily News*, October 11, 1977.

<sup>112</sup> Gleeson. *The Unknown Force*. p100-101. Maseko’s account is derived from the SADF Archives, Union War Histories (UWH), Box 128.

<sup>113</sup> Gleeson. *The Unknown Force*. p101-102.

vein to many other black men taken prisoner<sup>114</sup>, and were subsequently picked up by South African troops. Further investigation on the part of the Allies confirmed his tale of sabotage and resistance and he was awarded the Military Medal.<sup>115</sup> Like many white South African troops taken prisoner, Maseko felt himself compelled to take some form of action, be it sabotage or escape. It served also as a means of asserting himself in the face of blatant racial discrimination which did not consider him a viable soldier. It was this very discrimination which he subverted by carrying out his activities against the Axis. Unfortunately Maseko's story has an anticlimactic ending – a letter appeared more than fifty years later where the writer, ex-serviceman Syd Jobling, stated that Maseko on his return to South Africa had subsequently vanished from the historical record. The story had only come to Jobling's attention when he had read an overseas newspaper detailing Maseko's activities as a POW and he wrote to the *Sunday Tribune* bemoaning the lack of attention given to a significant act of heroism. Needless to say Maseko's story was not highlighted by the apartheid state and, in the post-1994 era, it was lost by the emphasis on heroes of the struggle against apartheid:

As Job was not so concerned with what is known as the “struggle for independence” his actions would not be of note to some people but he, like the rest of us servicemen in World War 2, was involved in a much larger “struggle for independence”.<sup>116</sup>

The author of the letter, a white serviceman, drew parallels between Maseko's military service and his own, seeing them as comrades in a far more encompassing conflict than that of the localised fight against apartheid. Perhaps, in this light, Maseko had indeed proved himself a worthy soldier.

## **Working Together**

Another new experience for black soldiers was the proximity with which they worked with white troops under conditions of modern warfare. An integral part of black men serving was the way in which they were perceived by white troops, as the kinds of relationships that were created had the potential to be life-changing and last beyond 1945. Reactions of white soldiers ranged from disdain to a feeling of mutual respect, albeit sometimes limited. In an interview conducted with

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<sup>114</sup> Gleeson. *The Unknown Force*. p192-193. Gleeson relates the account of another group of black men captured at Tobruk that managed to effect an escape. His source for this is F. Rodseth. *Ndabasabantu: The Life of a Native Affairs Administrator*. (Nolda, 1984)

<sup>115</sup> Gleeson. *The Unknown Force*. p102.

<sup>116</sup> Independent Newspapers Archive. Syd Jobling. “What happened to our World War 2 hero?” (Letter to the Editor), in *The Sunday Tribune*, May 24, 1998. Jobling however goes on to state that Masego [sic] had not been entirely forgotten by the military institution as the navy had named a “fleet of strike craft after him”.

Godfrey Herbert, where he was asked about black soldiers with whom he had contact, he eventually gave an exasperated and disdainful reply. He emphasised the servile status of black men, creating an unbridgeable gap between them and regular white troops:

What is this thing about black? The blacks were servants I mean, they were in my day, I'm sorry but there was no freedom, you know, I think they were treated well of course but they were – blacks were servants or drivers. I think sometimes they were ambulance men, I don't know, but we had very little to see or do with the black people at war. It was completely a white thing – it was our war as far as I was concerned...<sup>117</sup>

Here, combat as the prerogative of white men remained the dominant perception of military service during the war, relegating the auxiliary work of black men to an inferior position which kept intact the notion of them as “servants”. The war was a “white man's war” as they were the key combatants, a view which both refused to acknowledge the active participation of and services performed by black men as well as the sacrifices. It simultaneously put paid to the latter's hopes for equal citizenship based on their war work. Herbert's description of the Second World War as “our war” creates a sense of belonging and of community defined by race from which black men were excluded.

For other white combatants however, the interaction between the two groups was more ambiguous. In Blamey's descriptions of the black auxiliaries attached to their company and, in particular, his own batman David Kedshi, the perception of black men as childlike dominated:

We had a mixed lot of native batmen and stretcher bearers, including three or four Zulus. During those air-raids they always became wildly excited and it amused us to listen to their running commentaries. This was specially the case the night when two Jerry planes got caught in the beams of our searchlights. Their screams and yells of delight were quite fantastic as they watched the two invaders, twisting and weaving, with ack-ack shells bursting all around them. One night, during the heat of all this excitement, I quietly tossed a large stone into a fig bush behind the natives. This immediately caused a minor stampede as they tore off and jumped into their funk-holes, like rabbits with a pack of hounds behind them!<sup>118</sup>

Here, the impression is given of the calm and collected white veteran that is contrasted with the childlike black men, animated yet terrified by their proximity to conflict, leaving them susceptible to practical jokes. This patronising tone continues in his teasing of David for perceived cowardice when the latter twisted his knee in his rush to get into his trench upon the arrival of two Italian aircraft.<sup>119</sup> At the same time David is portrayed as looking to Blamey for protection,

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<sup>117</sup> Interview with Godfrey Herbert.

<sup>118</sup> Blamey. *A Company Commander Remembers*. p83.

<sup>119</sup> Blamey. *A Company Commander Remembers*. p107.

keeping intact his subservience, “He [David] was full of confidence and said that all would be well so long as I was there. I was often touched by his blind confidence in me.”<sup>120</sup>

Yet, while seeing David as both childlike and a figure of ridicule, evident here too is the way in which Blamey acknowledges loyalty and bravery on the part of David. In one instance when David had been left behind as Blamey went to the front lines, his reaction was one of misery at not being taken along into the danger. He was unhappy at not being there to dig a trench for Blamey, as it was his duty to protect him. In addition his observation of the heavy fire to which Blamey and his men were subjected, led him to exhort the remaining troops to go and assist: “Why are you all sitting back here like a lot of women when you can see that the Nkosi and other members of “C” Company are ahead and in much trouble?”<sup>121</sup> David was thus not simply a figure of ridicule, as apparent in the impression given by Blamey, but appeared to the reader to be instead motivated by a complex interaction of duty, courage and loyalty. The protection offered was not solely on the part of Blamey and David, too, felt he had a role to play in protecting his commander’s life. In addition, not fighting and not being subject to the danger of enemy fire was viewed as the realm of women, where real soldiers had no place. This ambiguity in Blamey’s portrayal of David as both a heroic and ridiculous figure is emphasised in a subsequent account:

The faithful David (batman) had nearly completed digging my slit trench but it had not gone down to the required depth. With much trepidation David too had seen his pet aversions, the bombers, but he nobly stood back for me to take refuge in the trench. I ordered him to take cover in it which he immediately did without a second invitation. I then jumped in, practically on top of him. The planes dropped their eggs close to us and, after seeing that they had veered off, I stood up and said: “It’s all right, David, they’ve gone.” To my amusement he whispered: “Tula nkosi, u nga kulumi” (keep quiet, Sir, don’t talk.)<sup>122</sup>

David’s courage in first offering the shelter of the trench to Blamey in spite of his great fear of bombers was offset by his belief that the sound of Blamey speaking would carry to the aircraft overhead and hence indicate their hiding place, which evoked amusement in his commanding officer. However, when David is allowed the opportunity to voice his own motivation for playing a part in the war, the effect is of a man motivated by duty in the face of adversity: “I am still physically A.1 and further military demands made upon me will still be met with

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<sup>120</sup> Blamey. *A Company Commander Remembers*. p120.

<sup>121</sup> Blamey. *A Company Commander Remembers*. p135.

<sup>122</sup> Blamey. *A Company Commander Remembers*. p159.

spontaneous courage. In other words I am prepared to see this beastly business through.”<sup>123</sup> Yet this last reference to David in his autobiography was read by Blamey in terms of David’s use of a “scribe” to pen the letter due to his own illiteracy as well as his request for a food parcel from Blamey’s wife, making the ridiculous figure ascendant.<sup>124</sup>

The relationship between Blamey and David in a sense replicated that of the Boer on commando and his loyal *agterryer*. Many African men in a manner similar to their submissive status on Boer farms, accompanied their Boer masters on commando as *agterryers*. These *agterryers* were akin to servants in the field performing domestic chores and assisting Boer men during battle by loading rifles.<sup>125</sup> Although close relationships were sometimes formed between Boer and *agterryer*, there remained a distance based on the Afrikaner ideology of superiority, which went hand-in-hand with their perception of blacks as inferior creatures, fit only for manual labour, thus the bonds of loyalty were mediated by those of subservience and inequality.<sup>126</sup>

An ambivalent portrayal of black men in military service is further evident in Quentin Reid’s description of Piet Voelstruis, an approximately eighteen-year-old coloured driver in a Motor Transport Company.<sup>127</sup> Along with a description of his capability and skill, was a description of his irresponsible drinking habits and gambling. However, his endurance, courage and collected behaviour under fire made him an ideal soldier, with little of the farcical associated with Blamey’s David:

Day after day and often through the night Piet nursed his truck over rough trails, across rivers and through swamps until he was almost dropping with fatigue. But once a halt was called, he would service his vehicle, feed himself, and a few minutes later you would hear the strings of his guitar twanging softly in the darkness while he drew on his inexhaustible fund of humour to keep his comrades amused...Shells and bombs did not scare him. Throughout the fiercest actions he kept on with his job, always with a cheerful grin on his face, a cigarette dangling from his lips, and a light-hearted curse when Jerry slung an extra amount of heavy stuff at us.<sup>128</sup>

Despite being a non-combatant, Piet was given heroic status with his death after being hit by a shell while transporting ammunition.<sup>129</sup> His role as an auxiliary did not detract from his bravery

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<sup>123</sup> Blamey. *A Company Commander Remembers*. p175.

<sup>124</sup> Blamey. *A Company Commander Remembers*. p175.

<sup>125</sup> Fransjohan Pretorius. *Life on Commando During the Anglo-Boer War, 1899-1902*. (Cape Town: Human and Rousseau, 2000) p283-284.

<sup>126</sup> Pretorius. *Life on Commando*. p287.

<sup>127</sup> KCAL. Quentin Reid. “Piet” in *Inside Information*, p82-83. KC2281.

<sup>128</sup> Quentin Reid. “Piet”. p84.

<sup>129</sup> Quentin Reid. “Piet”. p84.

and sense of duty under adversity and, in Reid’s portrayal, the enigmatic Piet was as significant a hero as a white combatant.

Furthermore, in E.G. Malherbe’s account, he emphasises the loyalty of his coloured driver, while simultaneously acknowledging the necessity of arming these men on the front lines as they could better defend themselves as well as their comrades. “Both my driver, a Coloured man, and I were armed with rifles. I also had my service revolver. I was convinced that my driver would, in time of danger, defend me as I would defend him.”<sup>130</sup> Although making explicit the race of his driver as well as him being armed, which was contrary to the position held widely in white South Africa, Malherbe nevertheless emphasises the role of his driver as a man whom he could trust in the most adverse of circumstances. The interaction between white men and the black auxiliaries with whom they served was thus complicated, ranging from disdain to patronisation and a grudging acceptance and, more positively, recognition of their shared bravery, loyalty and honour.

For the black soldiers themselves, the interaction with white troops was an ambivalent experience, evident in a letter of complaint written by a coloured soldier which came to the attention of the Army Education Services and was reproduced in their newsletter:

I am attach [sic] to S. African R. Coy., they are not treated us on the right way. They call us the N.E’s and they even try to issue us with second hand clothes while they are wearing new clothes and if we refuse to take it then they tell us what they think of the coloureds...**We as South Africans prefer to fight side by side with the South African whites**, but unfortunately our colour is badly against us. As far as we are concerned there is no sign of liberty we are fighting for nothing. I’m for ever disappointed since we are attach to the South African Units, and also **we came to discover [sic] that a coloured man was not wanted in this war**, the way we are treated every fool can notice that we are not wanted. I was attach to the Imperial Forces for 12 months during that period I never thought that I was a segregated race. I work my name to the higher with the Imperial Troops, now that we are with our own troops they class us with the natives. We though [sic] before we sign on for a struggle that we sign on for the so-called united freedom...<sup>131</sup> [emphasis in original]

The letter serves as an indictment of the double standards of the Second World War where black troops mobilised on the basis of patriotism and a desire to play their part in the fight for democracy yet found themselves discriminated against in various ways. This was a discrimination which belied state propaganda efforts as well as their own expectations.

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<sup>130</sup> E. G. Malherbe. *Never a Dull Moment*. (Cape Town: Howard Timmins Publishers, 1981) p229.

<sup>131</sup> KCAL. E.G. Malherbe Collection. Army Educational Services. Officers’ Information bulletins 1942-3. KCM 56974(783) File 441/5.

Moreover, there is an indication that he had experienced greater opportunities for equality when serving with imperial troops as a whole, but found himself subject to the vagaries of intolerance when reassigned to a South African unit, heightening his discontent. The response of the Army Education Services to this letter was to encourage its white officers to demonstrate greater tolerance towards their black troops, with an idealistic vision of racial equality brought about by war service, “In the face of death we don’t think of insignificant differences like language or colour: we welcome every ally irrespective of such things; MUST we be disunited and hostile in the face of life?”<sup>132</sup> The ultimate aim was to ensure the loyalty of black South Africans for their white “Trustees”, thus maintaining the racial hierarchy.<sup>133</sup>

White South African troops also came into contact with black men from other Allied countries who were not given restricted roles in the war but, instead, served equally as combatants. Their perceptions of these black soldiers drawn from the various parts of the British Empire were similar in a sense to the ambiguous way in which these men were viewed by the British with whom they fought alongside or – in some instances – against:

...in the eyes of his British officers he [the Indian soldier] was a natural warrior drawn from races that pride themselves in warlike skills...[yet] given the imperial traditions of the British army, it’s part in the conquest of India and its role in sustaining the *raj*, it was all too easy for all ranks to see themselves over the country and its people.<sup>134</sup>

Along with the respect and admiration of their “warlike” ability, was the inevitable inequality and discrimination of a ruling class towards a subject people. Moreover leading these men provided the opportunity for British officers to demonstrate, not only their ability to lead and control, but worked as a metaphor for the benevolent rule of the British Empire:

Local forces in disturbed regions were always under the command of a British officer, about one for every 100 tribesmen...Such commands were a test of leadership, which often justified the claim that even the wildest tribesmen anywhere could learn to respect and follow a British officer because of his spirit and courage...The young British officer, a sportsman and a gentleman, winning the admiration and devotion of untamed tribal warriors was a microcosm of the whole British Empire.<sup>135</sup>

Historically, British relationships with the subject soldiers of Empire allowed for mutual understanding and esteem, but were defined by inequality and subservience, preventing true

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<sup>132</sup> Army Educational Services. Officers’ Information bulletins 1942-3. KCM 56974(783) File 441/5.

<sup>133</sup> Army Educational Services. Officers’ Information bulletins 1942-3. KCM 56974(783) File 441/5.

<sup>134</sup> Lawrence James. *Imperial Rearguard: Wars of Empire, 1919-85*. (London: Brassey’s Defence Publishers, 1988) p33.

<sup>135</sup> James. *Imperial Rearguard*. p45.

equality and serving to entrench British rule. This ambiguity towards black combatants was evident when South Africans came into contact with black combatants.

Major Blamey served alongside Indian Gurkhas and Sikhs, viewing the former as ideal and effective combatants:

...I had a great admiration for the Gurkhas and the Sikhs. The former, small in physical stature, were really tigers in military combat. Their modus operandi in the field of battle engagement when not otherwise poised behind a rifle or machine-gun was progress by stealth of movement and camouflage – taking the enemy unawares and chopping his head off with his main weapon of attack, a heavy curved knife called the kukri.<sup>136</sup>

While the Sikhs were similarly acknowledged as good fighters, Ryan found them less than masculine due to some of their behaviours such as “walking about off parade arm-in-arm with fellow compatriots”, which suggested a “touch of effeminacy”.<sup>137</sup> Thus, although black men could be acknowledged as being effective warriors and given equal combatant roles, cultural differences and lack of understanding had an impact on the way in which white soldiers perceived these men in terms of the latter’s notions of masculinity. Moreover, the efficacy of Indian, West Indian and even Japanese troops in combat did not lead to a questioning on the part of men like Ryan of the logic behind the limited roles given to South African black men in the Union Defence Force.

Yet, to an extent, the home front where white women and black men were both considered auxiliaries, allowed for a limited questioning, as is apparent in Betty Addison’s testimony:

...of course the Blacks were not allowed to bear arms but we had a guard at the gate at Brighton Beach [laughs] with an assegai. Honestly. Well, I suppose it was okay if it was just an ordinary robber but it wouldn’t have been much good against the Japanese would it? [laughs]<sup>138</sup>

Black men armed with assegais were used for guard duty on the home front in the light of fears of arming black men with modern weapons. The use of assegais also drew upon the traditions of the Zulu in order to recruit and train them for these limited roles. However, the irony and unequal treatment meted out to black soldiers by arming them with assegais in the face of the modern weaponry used by the Japanese, is not lost on Betty Addison, whose secret work in radar made these radar installations an important target should the Japanese have invaded. A further irony, indicative of deeply entrenched racialism and historical fears of the “Swart Gevaar”, is

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<sup>136</sup> Ryan. *Thru Times and Places*. p174.

<sup>137</sup> Ryan. *Thru Times and Places*. p174.

<sup>138</sup> Interview with Betty Addison conducted by S. Sparks and S. Chetty, 29 May, 2004.

struck by white South Africa's perception of black men as being the greater enemy when a very real threat existed from both Germany and Japan, while simultaneously using black men to protect important installations in South Africa. There is thus a strong theme of the loyalty of black soldiers who nonetheless remain in a subservient position.

For some auxiliary women such as June Borchert, the very inclusion of black men in the military implied equality due to both groups being allocated similar non-combatant roles, with the army serving as a homogenizing force:

No trouble about who you were and what you were – once you were in the force, you were a body in the force and that didn't matter, you know, what your language, what your colour, what your age, what your religion – you were just one group and it was good. It was good to be like that.<sup>139</sup>

In an idealistic sense the military uniform created a sense of equality, bringing together diverse groups motivated by a common goal. Yet this account ignored the tensions occurring within these groups, between black and white men over limited roles, as well as the different motivations and aspirations that lay behind black men joining the Union Defence Force. One of the issues that evoked tension on the home front in a manner reminiscent to the experiences of African American GIs – which I have addressed in Chapter Two – was the racial discrimination preventing black men access to public spaces. This was a restriction which was ironically not extended to Axis prisoners of war, as related by Mokgatle:

Large numbers of Italians were captured in East Africa, and as prisoners of war they used to walk the streets of Pretoria and other cities and towns of the country with more dignity, respect and pride than we non-Europeans. They entered hotels, restaurants, cafes, cinemas, and enjoyed outdoor life in the parks, all denied to us. Africans who served them were ordered to call them “master”. Because of Smuts' doctrine of white superiority, the master-race concept, they lived in South Africa far better than we did.<sup>140</sup>

Mokgatle resented this discriminatory treatment where those considered the enemy were placed in a superior position, gaining access to the benefits of white South Africans, while the same was not extended to men who had proved themselves loyal both on the home front and on the battlefield. Mokgatle's views suggest that black men were not necessarily persuaded by this idealistic notion of military service as creating a “homogenized” and equal South Africa. Inequality and contradictions persisted which could not be explained away that glibly, making the experience of black men in the military a complex and ambiguous one.

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<sup>139</sup> June Borchert in an interview with May Kirkman and June Borchert conducted by S. Sparks and S. Chetty, 29 May, 2004.

<sup>140</sup> Mokgatle. *The Autobiography of an Unknown South African*. p263.

## **White Women and the "Great Adventure"**

White women too, while being part of the dominant race group in South Africa but also the subordinated gender group, had many intricacies underlying both their enlistment in the military as well as the character of their military service. Like white men, written recollections of the experiences of white women in the form of autobiographies are almost solely by women who became important political figures – Mary Benson, Helen Joseph, Pauline Podbrey. This once again raises the role of autobiography as serving as a mode of recollection for those deemed historically significant. For this section this has been balanced by interviews conducted with women who did not go on to play prominent public roles.

There are significant parallels between the accounts of war experience of white women with that of white men and this section attempts to trace their narrative of war experience, comparing it to that of the experiences of white men. For women, the decision to enlist in the various branches of the auxiliary services was based on a convergence of the personal with the wider motivation circulating through society, particularly through the media of propaganda – that of duty and patriotism. For June Borchert, "patriotism" was her first response to the question, followed by a tongue-in-cheek "for King and Country", suggesting that she saw this emphasis on patriotism in an almost farcical light.<sup>141</sup> Her actual reason was less assertive, "Oh, I just joined up because I thought – you [her twin sister May] were there, Kay [their older sister] was there...it just sounded like a good idea."<sup>142</sup> For her, it was a case of following in the footsteps of her sisters, which happened to coincide with the patriotic feeling within the country. Although this implies that, in this instance, personal motivations took precedence in these women's decisions to enter the war, the boundary between the personal and the societal was blurred to some extent. This is evident in one of the reasons put forward for joining which was based on being unable to deal with the likelihood of watching men leave for "up north" and possibly never returning. This was accompanied by the idea that men were making the greater sacrifice – which I will return to later in this chapter – the corollary of which was that women had to play some part as well:

You know why I joined, because I used to get so depressed and so worried when the troop ships came in and the men were going up north. And I just couldn't take it and I thought, no, I'm going to get away from this...we used to go and we'd meet up with the

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<sup>141</sup> June Borchert in an interview with May Kirkman and June Borchert.

<sup>142</sup> June Borchert in an interview with May Kirkman and June Borchert.

“...it was a different way of life altogether...”

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chaps and we'd bring them home...while they were in port, and they'd come and have supper with us and our parents...And then they'd go off and then the next thing you hear that their ship had been torpedoed or that they...were in Dunkirk or they were in Tobruk and all these places, and it just got on top of me...<sup>143</sup>

For women, the decision to enlist was also based on following in the footsteps of other women or signing up with friends suggesting the influence of peers, “Persuaded to do so by a friend, Elsie Manley...She was joining the Signal Corps and encouraged me to do so too.”<sup>144</sup> Women who had already enlisted were influential in the decision by family members to do the same:

...Kay did, she got me up there. She was the PA to the Director of the Air Force at the headquarters and she phoned and said, they need typists up here, I've arranged for you to come, I've arranged your ticket, I've signed up, I've done everything for you, all you've gotta' do is just go and catch the train and get on the train and come to Pretoria and I'll meet you at the station and I'll take you through and you will come straight through to headquarters.<sup>145</sup>

This account suggests a strong influence of personal relationships on women joining the military, making the transition between home and the auxiliary services less of a complete break as women enlisted with friends or family, maintaining these ties and drawing parallels with the experiences of men.

Yet, there existed still individual motivation, and the strongest of these was “to take part in this great adventure”.<sup>146</sup> Betty Addison felt the war to be a key historical moment, a narrative from which women were unwilling to be excluded, and military service gave them this opportunity to participate in this historical event, the defining event of an entire generation:

...my generation were all in the war and I didn't want to be out of things, I mean – not because I was being brave or anything, I certainly didn't ever think I'd be sent up north or anything but, I mean, most of our generation were – all over the world almost all were involved and you were missing something if you didn't go into it and I've certainly never regretted it.<sup>147</sup>

This desire to partake in the “great adventure” of the Second World War predisposed many women to volunteer for service in North Africa where the war was actually being fought and May Kirkman and June Borchert were disappointed at having to serve within the Union:

Closer to the operational areas, you know, you felt you needed that to really feel that you were benefiting the whole country. But just to be and to feel more part of the whole thing was what we fancied...I mean there was still fighting in the Western Desert when

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<sup>143</sup> May Kirkman in an interview with May Kirkman and June Borchert.

<sup>144</sup> KCAL. Edith Mary Kimble Interview conducted by Joan Simpson, September 1990. KCM92/4.

<sup>145</sup> May Kirkman in an interview with May Kirkman and June Borchert.

<sup>146</sup> Benson. *A Far Cry*. p22.

<sup>147</sup> Interview with Betty Addison.

she [her sister Kay] was up there – you know that was going through Egypt and through Tobruk and all those areas which was very close to Cairo and we felt, you know, we could have been sitting in Durban typing our own little invoices out here – where we were in Pretoria...<sup>148</sup>

Well, that was...where the war was. I mean we were there to fight a war, not to sit in a base camp and must, you know, play around. You know to us, what we were doing here was mundane...We were not close enough to the actual action of what was going on and we wanted to get closer and they [Kay] were closer...<sup>149</sup>

This personal desire to play a more significant role in the war corresponded with changes in propaganda – which I have addressed earlier – where emphasis was placed on the glamorous nature of military service for women, catering for individual needs of excitement and adventure, making them little different from their male counterparts.

Once in the auxiliary services, the next step evident in these women’s accounts was training – drill, inspection and military discipline – all of which allowed these women to experience military life, albeit on a limited scale:

We did a bit of squad drills, for about two weeks when we first joined up and that was, you know, sort of intensive marching...every morning we would have a line-up and...an inspection, army inspection – look at your shoes, saw that your hair was above your collar...everything had to be tucked and everything had to be ship-shape, all neat and tidy.<sup>150</sup>

...you had to keep everything ship-shape, not a thing out of line. That was the nearest to army we got [laughs]...<sup>151</sup>

Addison also suggested the distinction between those who excelled at drill and embraced life in the military with ardour and those considered “wimps” – less physically able and subsequently seen as less capable – a distinction on par with that in the male units:

...I shared a room with another Sergeant Major who was a real Sergeant major and she was the kind you know about, she’d been trained on the parade ground [laughs] and she knew about that sort of thing. She thought I was an absolute wimp and however I got my rank, I didn’t know a thing about what she knew [laughs].<sup>152</sup>

Although the war was portrayed, in many instances by propaganda as well as those involved, as a united effort where all were equal in the fight against fascism, other distinctions nonetheless arose, particularly in the different branches of the auxiliary services. In a similar vein to the

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<sup>148</sup> June Borchert in an interview with May Kirkman and June Borchert.

<sup>149</sup> May Kirkman in an interview with May Kirkman and June Borchert.

<sup>150</sup> May Kirkman in an interview with May Kirkman and June Borchert.

<sup>151</sup> June Borchert in an interview with May Kirkman and June Borchert.

<sup>152</sup> Interview with Betty Addison.

“...it was a different way of life altogether...”

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preference of many women to working as close as possible to the front, work in the Special Signals Services allowed women to take a more active role in the war. This went beyond the mere clerical work and allowed these women to work in closer proximity to men. Moreover, the expertise required in Signals necessitated recruiting women who were highly educated. This entailed class connotations as well and all these factors were seen as making Special Signals an elite branch of the service:

I would not have joined the W.A.A.S. nor the W.A.A.F. Signals was a select unit, a specialised course. It had a sort of “snob” value – “nice” girls joined it – or that was our impression at that time. The entry qualification for the South African Corps of Signals was fairly high – originally one had to be a University graduate but later this was lowered to Matric. I had my Matric. We were very proud not to be attached to the W.A.A.S. or the W.A.A.F.s, Signals was the only women’s unit attached to a men’s unit.<sup>153</sup>

Edith Kimble’s perception of Special Signals in conjunction with the desire to serve in North Africa suggested that combat and the role of white men on active duty on the front lines were viewed as the apex of military service and other branches were ranked in a hierarchy based on their proximity to this.

### **Life in the Barracks**

In the midst of this hierarchy there also existed the potential for forming bonds with one’s peers. Life in the barracks allowed for this formation of female camaraderie. For men like Guy Butler the war allowed for the formation of male camaraderie, one of the most positive aspects of wartime experience, yet this “authentic” form of camaraderie was not extended to women and, according to Butler, “Women achieved it far less frequently – particularly if they are living with their parents, or lumped together in digs or boarding houses, or imprisoned by their children.”<sup>154</sup> Yet for young single women such as Betty Addison, living in barracks and not tied down by the accoutrements of their gender, it became possible to maintain close ties with other women which lasted long beyond their war. These ties were based on their shared experiences, even if these experiences were not as intense as that of men on the frontlines:

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<sup>153</sup> KCAL. Interview with Edith Mary Kimble.

<sup>154</sup> Butler. *Bursting World*. p152.

“...it was a different way of life altogether...”

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You got to know people better somehow or other but you see I'd been at boarding school so I know, I know what it's like but those girls who had never lived away from home must have got to know people in a much closer way than they, you do in the ordinary course of life, you know, what I mean, 'cos you work with them all day, on shift with them and then off duty with them in fact, you know, you spend your life with them in fact.<sup>155</sup>

Image courtesy of Betty Addison

Betty Addison made a lifelong friend in the form of Sheila Cleare who served with her in Special Signals, and the photograph symbolised not only their friendship but was also a representation of their youth, where they had both taken part in this “great adventure”. It captures and isolates a brief moment in time, more than fifty years ago, as evident in her remark from the perspective of the present, “You know how people change”.<sup>156</sup>

The equation of life in the barracks to that of a boarding school was a strong theme particularly in the use of propaganda to create a vision of the auxiliary services as being akin to a “finishing school”. Yet the metaphor of boarding school also implied restrictions over the movement of women who were no longer under familial control. Much of the free time of the women was occupied with organised recreational activities in the camp:

We had a library, we formed a library and we used to go in every three months and buy books and...the library would be open every day of the week and we'd take a turn on duty to run the library...Then we had a rec...we were what they call a dry camp so we didn't have any liquor...we used to have lectures...and then we had an entertainment officer and we used to do sketches and dramas.<sup>157</sup>

Those women, fraternizing with male officers and going out, were subject to stringent controls and curfews:

...we had a duty roster and we would do duty in the camps at night. There would be a sergeant and a corporal on duty and we used to have to sign all the girls who went out,

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<sup>155</sup> Interview with Betty Addison.

<sup>156</sup> Interview with Betty Addison.

<sup>157</sup> May Kirkman in an interview with May Kirkman and June Borchert.

you'd have to sign them out...they got passes – and then you'd have to wait until they came in and signed them in. And during the week you were allowed out until 10 o'clock and at 10 o'clock you drew a line underneath, anybody who came in after 10 o'clock they were put on...report and...they were charged and confined to barracks...<sup>158</sup>

May Kirkman perceived this to be for the benefit for these women, the authority exercised by the military standing in for the patriarchal authority of the family, ensuring the virtue of these young women and preventing abusive treatment and sexual violence on the part of the male companions – which the military, as I will show subsequently, was limited in its ability to do:

A lot of it was for the protection of the girls you see because, you know, they used to go out and when I worked...in the DWAF which was the Directorate of the Women's Air Force and the reports that used to come in from there, from the air stations of these girls that used to be, you know, go out with these chaps and they would be molested and raped and they would have a dreadful time, and you see this was more or less a protection. If they didn't come in then we had to find out where they'd gone and what happened to them and so on, it was a sort of a protection for us while we were there. They looked after us very well, I must say, it was very well.<sup>159</sup>

## Fraternisation

This introduces the idea of the kinds of interaction between men and women in the military – perhaps the most conventional of which is the role of women as being the pretext or the reason behind men fighting and sacrificing themselves in war. The allocation of white men to the key combatant roles where they were subject to the worst ravages of war and considered to be making the greater sacrifice evoked in women a sense of guilt. This guilt was used by the official publications like *The Women's Auxiliary* towards the end of the war to contain the empowerment experienced by many women's independence for the duration. Simultaneously there existed the stereotypical image of men going off to fight in defence of the home, of women and children, which I have discussed in Chapter One. This was a theme propagated by men themselves who subordinated service to the nation to a protection of the family and of women. A poem titled “This Round I Fought For Your” and penned by Sergeant A.C. Eason and appearing in Dreyer's diary dealing with a soldier near to death, whose final thoughts are of the woman he loved, draws strongly upon this theme:

I handed him the photograph, he thanked me with a smile  
And though the sky was overcast the sun shone for a while  
Then I felt I was intruding and made as if to go

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<sup>158</sup> May Kirkman in an interview with May Kirkman and June Borchert.

<sup>159</sup> May Kirkman in an interview with May Kirkman and June Borchert.

“...it was a different way of life altogether...”

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But he shook his head and whispered soft and low[...]

Just tell her please, pal of mine, when you leave this man made hell,  
That her loveliness eternally in my waning heart still dwell”.  
Then with his lips pressed to her picture o’er his soul sped thru the Blue  
He whispered softly: “Sweetheart this round I fought for you”.<sup>160</sup>

The imagery evoked by the poem is both powerful and poignant – the soldier, near death, and faced with this knowledge, whose last thoughts were of his fiancée as represented in a photograph. Her image is presented as the antithesis of the destruction of the front lines yet it is the same image which motivated him to fight and to make the ultimate sacrifice, even as it meant the end of their hopes and aspirations. The war is presented as being a product of the making of men as evident in “man made hell” yet, simultaneously, women are given a key role to play as the rationale for men fighting.

This was in no small part responsible for the guilt assumed by women and these repercussions were particularly acute near the front lines of battle. In May Benson’s description of her experiences as a “Waasie” in Egypt, she related the role played by women who served as a kind of haven for men, providing a welcome distraction from the experiences of war and of combat:

Whenever the fighting halted, exhausted, strained, sweating men poured into Cairo, wanting to forget what they’d just left, forget that they must soon return. Bathed and shaved, they turned up, boldly or timidly, at our barracks. When we arrived back from work in the evenings we found them waiting there, eager for female company. Even the least attractive among us was invited out night after night.<sup>161</sup>

For many women, this was the opportunity to experience an exciting social life free from the restraints of the home front, being close to the action in an exotic location and the subject of admiration by young men.<sup>162</sup> However, it was the sacrifices made by these men which provoked women into feeling that they had a sense of obligation to provide this distraction to the war: “In face of all they were enduring, it seemed unpardonable to frustrate their desire for sex...”<sup>163</sup> Benson’s reluctance to meet the insistent demands of men led to her being described as being “fit for a frigid clergyman”.<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> A.C. Eason. “This Round I Fought for You” in KCAL. *Diary of Gert Spencer Dreyer, “Prison Camp II”*. KCM 65263.

<sup>161</sup> Benson. *A Far Cry*. p25.

<sup>162</sup> Benson. *A Far Cry*. p25.

<sup>163</sup> Benson. *A Far Cry*. p26.

<sup>164</sup> Benson. *A Far Cry*. p26.

*“...it was a different way of life altogether...”*

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Generally, life in the auxiliary services and the limited independence it implied for women in uniform, suggested a new found camaraderie with men based on service to the nation. This served to alienate these women from those who had not enlisted, invoking the latter's resentment. However, serving in the auxiliary units also took on a more negative note, with the perception of these women as being “loose”. This is evident in Kirkman's account: “We had been in the WAAFS – they just thought ah, these two have been in the WAAFS, good, they are free and free for all, you know, and this is...what they thought we were...”<sup>165</sup>

On the part of men in uniform there existed a profound ambivalence in their treatment of women in uniform. As I have just mentioned, the guilt felt by women and their acknowledgement of the significant roles played by white men in combat, served to place women in the position of making their own sacrifices to ease the effects of men's experiences. At the same time, men such as Herbert had been raised in a climate where women were placed on a moral pedestal and respect towards these women was a key component of gentlemanly behaviour: “...we were brought up to look up to women, treat them like ladies...and we treated them as though they were in glass cages...we took off our hats and saluted...”<sup>166</sup> Yet, simultaneously, men were influenced in their perception of women by this equation of women in the military with loose morals and a freedom from restraint. This was evident in relatively mild incidents viewed in a light-hearted manner such as soldiers following women around singing “Kiss Me Goodnight Sergeant Major”<sup>167</sup> to the perception of these women as being sexually promiscuous, as evident in Godfrey Herbert's description of the WAVES as “We are Virgins Except Saturday”, even as he reiterated the respect with which men were expected to treat women.<sup>168</sup> For women in military service then, the notion of independence and a life of excitement and glamour perpetuated by propaganda and the sense of adventure and taking part in a great historical moment, were offset by men's use of their war experiences and the convention of them making the greater sacrifice to exert pressure on these women. The ambivalent attitude of these men towards women in uniform struck an uneasy balance between respect and viewing this same freedom and independence as being associated with promiscuity that also led, in some instances, to physical molestation and rape.<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> May Kirkman in an interview with May Kirkman and June Borchert.

<sup>166</sup> Interview with Godfrey Herbert.

<sup>167</sup> Interview with Betty Addison.

<sup>168</sup> Interview with Godfrey Herbert.

<sup>169</sup> May Kirkman in an interview with May Kirkman and June Borchert. Cf. quote at footnote 157.

With regards to black men serving overseas, there was a strong tendency to regulate their movements and activities. In a report by the Union Defence Force Institutes, responsible for providing recreation for the troops, there is a portrayal of black soldiers as being both childlike as well as needing to have their movements controlled, “...neither can the men afford to be left to their own devices, nor can we run the risk of exposing them to being victimised by men whose motives are of a commercial kind”.<sup>170</sup> Although this referred to an attempt to control their recreational activities in the Middle East, it harks back to earlier colonial views on the perception of black men as being childlike yet savage, which was played out in terms of their sexuality. As late as the 1930s for instance, due to fears of venereal disease, propaganda was used by the state to uphold a certain kind of “proper” sexuality. Here, white sexuality was specifically juxtaposed with black sexuality, evident in a guide *Facts About Ourselves for Growing Boys and Girls* written to provide advice and serve as a kind of guidebook for white adolescents:

*Facts About Ourselves* suggested that all humans had the same animal sexual instinct, but that evolutionary development had resulted in racial differentiation. Europeans had the ‘advantage of two thousand years of civilisation...with all that it means in knowledge, self-control and care for others’. Africans were less developed mentally and morally, and thus incapable of rationally mastering their baser instincts...Civilisation meant rational control of mind over body; promiscuity was primitive and implicitly African.<sup>171</sup>

The sexuality of black men took on a far more ominous note in the Second World War as a result of the attention given to extreme incidents of sexual misconduct. Ian Gleeson cites two examples where four coloured drivers were found guilty of raping a British nurse and given life imprisonment and a soldier in the NMC was sentenced to death for killing the mother of a young woman he had attempted to kidnap in Italy.<sup>172</sup> According to Gleeson, these incidents were rare and by no means confined to black, or in fact, South African, soldiers yet Gleeson’s description of them as “[leaving] their mark on the proud record of the thousands of NEAS men who served their country with great distinction,” suggests that black men as a whole were judged by the criminal actions of a few which, in turn, fed into long-standing prejudices.<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> T.R. Ponsford. *War Record of Union Defence Force Institutes (YMCA-TOCH) 1939-1946*. (Cape Town: Hortors Limited, publication date unknown) p78.

<sup>171</sup> Karen Jochelson. *The Colour of Disease: Syphilis and Racism in South Africa, 1880-1950*. (Hampshire: Palgrave, 2001) p88-89.

<sup>172</sup> Gleeson. *The Unknown Force*. p169-170. His account is derived from the SADF Archives, Union War Histories (UWH), Narep-Unfo 25 p 14855.

<sup>173</sup> Gleeson. *The Unknown Force*. p170.

## **Conclusion**

As I have demonstrated in this chapter the personal testimonies of the participants demonstrate the disjuncture between state expectations and their own aspirations and experiences where official and often societal beliefs of the idealised white male combatant, self-sacrificing black non-combatant and woman auxiliary underwent tension and revision during the course of the war. The experiences of women in the military presented a departure from that portrayed in the official sources emanating from the military, while simultaneously, in some ways, holding true to these official sources. The similarities of their experiences to the official perspective came in the form of the military playing chaperone to young, single women living away from home. It was further evident in the degree of control exerted over the movement of these women that substituted for the patriarchal authority of the home, where life in the barracks created not only the image of the boarding school, but also the control of one, with the implementation of curfews and senior female officers placed in charge of these women. Yet, somewhat ambiguously, there existed too the glamour and excitement associated with military service, particularly for those women serving “up North”. This indicated a desire on the part of these women to free men to fight but also to be close to the action and the warfront. The independence and glamour of military service for women propagated by official sources and, to an extent, experienced by women themselves, created a more negative image of promiscuity. This generated a climate of harassment and pressure placed on these women by white combatants who used their own harsher experiences of war in combat to enhance the sense of guilt felt by women. For these men too, women were the imagined and actual audience of a censored experience of war. This was evident in the reticence of men to share these experiences – a silence mirrored in their personal images – despite women being given the role of providing the motivation for men to fight. This silence was related to the importance for men to embody the idealised masculine image of the soldier for these women. In situations where that was impossible and masculinity itself was perceived to be under threat, such as the experiences of prisoners of war or even the extremes of combat, the silences helped cement this all-male world where women had little place. For men in these scenarios, the propagandistic notions of the idealised soldier were belied by their actual experiences of war. However soldiers were themselves complicit in the promulgation of these notions through these silences.

The negative experiences of war for white combatants were offset by their strong bonds of solidarity and the camaraderie forged through training and war. Each experience became an assertion of masculinity through successfully overcoming the challenge presented by it – basic training for weeding out those physically unsuited, combat for the opportunities presented for carrying out one's duty and defending one's comrades and even being taken prisoner with the onus on POWs to assert themselves in the face of tremendous odds by escape attempts and acts of sabotage. This assertion of masculinity was by no means confined to white combatants either. For black South African men the Second World War, as with previous wars, presented the opportunity to demonstrate their own loyalty to the South African state. The added emphasis of a war fought for liberty and democracy against totalitarianism created a climate for them to advocate equal rights in a post-war South Africa. In addition, their service in a non-combatant role did not preclude them from participating in the war on an active basis. The front lines blurred the boundary between combatant and auxiliary, not only in terms of the use of weapons, but also the possibility of being injured, being taken POW as well as death. For these men too, combat was a defining moment of masculinity and their exclusion the subject of contention and, when the opportunity presented itself, these men asserted themselves too in a similar manner to their white counterparts. As POWs they used escape as well as acts of sabotage, employing acts of defiance against captors who utilised harsh discriminatory measures against these men based on their race. Their exclusion from combat did not preclude them from committing acts of heroism and self-sacrifice which won them, in many instances, the respect of their white counterparts. This interaction between black and white men on the front lines was characterised by complexity and ambiguity, evoking a gamut of responses on the part of white men ranging from disdain to patronisation. There existed too some understanding of the ludicrous nature of legislation which armed black men with assegais when confronted with the weapons technology of modern warfare. There was evident as well a strong respect for the military prowess of other races, be it the Japanese or the Indians, with whom white South African troops came into contact. The Second World War thus presented a defining moment in the lives of its many participants. It evoked a range of responses with an inherent complexity and ambiguity, making state propaganda appear more than a little pedestrian in capturing these experiences of war. Propaganda provided instead a generalised grand narrative within which there existed as many personal narratives as those participating in the war.

*Chapter Five*

*...they must know what I am...what I was<sup>1</sup>*

**Remembering the Second World War**



The Second World War provided the impetus for fulfilling a vision of a new post-war world which would be defined by social and racial equality in South Africa. This was the rationale behind war-time organizations such as the Springbok Legion, which campaigned for these ideals, along with the Torch Commando, in the face of the rise of right wing Afrikaner nationalism embodied in the apartheid state. Viewed as the “last good war”, its legacy combined the euphoria of defeating fascism with the ambivalence of unfulfilled expectations. This chapter looks at the war-time unit, the Army Education Services, as well as organizations such as the Springbok Legion and the Torch Commando in conjunction with the expectations and aspirations of the men and women involved in the war after victory had been achieved over totalitarianism. The chapter takes as its starting point the significant work done by Neil Roos on these largely white war-time and post-war organizations, however I have attempted to set this within a wider gendered and racial context.<sup>2</sup>

Despite the ultimate dashing of these hopes for a new South Africa, the legacy of the war itself was not extinguished but took its place in both individual and public memory. It affected, not only those taking part, but took a hold in the imagination of generations not even born when the war occurred, achieving a kind of immortality in the public imagination which was reinforced by the various media of popular culture. Important here too was “The Living Memorial” ostensibly created by ex-servicemen, in the spirit of concretizing the ideals for which the war was fought, by addressing the health and poverty of black South Africans. Contradictorily, the memorial appeared to work as a means of ameliorating opposition to the policies of inequality of the apartheid state while simultaneously doing little to challenge separate development. This section

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<sup>1</sup> Quote taken from interview with Alfred Jimmy Davis conducted by Marijke du Toit and Suryakanthie Chetty, March 3, 2005.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. N.D. Roos. “A History of the Springbok Legion, 1941-1943”. (Unpublished MA Dissertation: University of Natal, Durban, 1989) and N.D. Roos. “From War to Workplace: Class, Race and Gender Amongst White Volunteers, 1939-1953”. (Unpublished PhD Dissertation: Mafikeng, University of North West, 2001)

thus looks at the way in which the war was remembered – through the personal images of those involved, public commemorations in the form of war memorials and, finally, the official legacy of the war in the form of *The Living Memorial* which had, embedded within it, the contradictions and inequalities of commemoration under the apartheid state.

### War-time Organisations

The Second World War provided the opportunity for serving South Africans to gain a better understanding of the world and each other. War-time organisations such as the Springbok Legion provided an alternative vision for a post-war South African society than that which was to become the reality in 1948. According to Rusty Bernstein, South African soldiers were the least likely candidates to be influenced by the “radicalism which was spreading in the ranks” of the Allied forces in North Africa:

The South African army was not a likely breeding ground for such a body. Most of the ordinary soldiers had joined the army too young to have been trade unionists before. They were all volunteers. Their service conditions were neither as harsh nor as repressive as those of many conscript forces, and their family backgrounds were generally conservative or thoroughly reactionary.<sup>3</sup>

Yet, nevertheless, many found themselves influenced by a largely British organisation which had gained a foothold in the British army, the Soldier’s Parliament, with its emphasis on a “possible brave new post-war world”.<sup>4</sup> The Soldier’s Parliament influenced the creation of the South African version, the Springbok Legion, “It had started as a type of soldiers’ trade union concerned with conditions of army service, the welfare of their dependants, and the provisions for ex-servicemen after the war...”<sup>5</sup> Originally envisioned as a classless entity, yet still holding firm on racial exclusion, the Springbok Legion later signed up black servicemen serving both overseas as well as within the Union.<sup>6</sup> The organisation was symbolic of the changes wrought by war in the minds of those who served, the idealism and vision for a post-war South Africa permeated with the spirit of the fight for democracy and liberty:

We had our own dreams for our country. The Cape native franchise must be restored and extended to the other provinces. There must be a massive expansion in native education...The industrial colour bar must be abolished...While accepting differences of

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<sup>3</sup> Rusty Bernstein. *Memory Against Forgetting – Memoirs from a Life in South African Politics, 1938-1964*. (London: Viking, 1999) p65.

<sup>4</sup> Bernstein. *Memory Against Forgetting*. p65.

<sup>5</sup> Bernstein. *Memory Against Forgetting*. p65.

<sup>6</sup> Bernstein. *Memory Against Forgetting*. p66.

language, culture and race, the need to provide separate facilities to accommodate them, we were opposed to compulsory segregation. Instead of harping on points of difference between one group and another, South Africans should be encouraged to look for common interests and sentiments.<sup>7</sup>

Even within the confines of the military itself service people, both men and women, were sent on information courses prior to demobilisation where they were subjected to this vision of social reform and equality, which had taken hold in the Union Defence Force:

...before I was demobbed I was sent on...what they call a information course at Voortrekkerhoogte and one...of the lecturers was a lecturer from Durban University...anyway, you see the war was ending so they were trying to instill into us the kind of South Africa that they'd like to see after the war...I can remember the lecturer saying to the class, do you believe that there are some people, some races in the world who are born to hew wood and clean our shoes and cook our food and everybody said...oh no, oh no, there [would] have to be equality...this was just anybody who was in the army, who was sent on these information courses on the future of South Africa and the need to open the doors to everybody and have freedom and equality and so on and that was the theme...<sup>8</sup>

During the course of the war as well, under the auspices of E.G. Malherbe and men like Leo Marquard and H.J. Rousseau, the Army Education Services (AES) was initiated to inculcate the largely Afrikaner working class rank and file with liberal values and, in so doing, offset the growing influence of right wing Afrikaner nationalism which was a source of grave concern on the home front.<sup>9</sup> Yet, being a military initiative and hence conservative, the AES by its very nature was designed to maintain the status quo, rather than being a vehicle for creating revolutionary social change. Its key role was to reinforce and maintain support for the war effort which Afrikaner nationalism sought to subvert:

Its main function was not to instill in troops the universal values of liberalism, but to ensure their continued commitment to the war effort. Within the scheme's terms of reference this meant, above all, creating an awareness of the evils of fascism. Although this coincided with the liberal ethic, it was constrained and specific, having as its goal an Allied victory, and Nazi Germany and its supporters as its antithesis...For most servicemen the fascist menace ended with the military defeat of the fascist powers and they did not show themselves willing to associate a peacetime Afrikaner Nationalism with a wartime Nazism, continuing the battle at home.<sup>10</sup>

Furthermore, despite its ostensible commitment to equality and democracy, the AES was beset by the contradictory attitudes in white South African society towards race, which the war had

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<sup>7</sup> Guy Butler. *Bursting World – An Autobiography 1936-45*. (Claremont: David Philip Publisher (Pty) Ltd, 1983) p131.

<sup>8</sup> Interview with Betty Addison conducted by S. Sparks and S. Chetty, 29 May, 2004.

<sup>9</sup> Neil Douglas Roos. “A History of the Springbok Legion, 1941-1943”. Unpublished MA Dissertation: University of Natal, Durban, 1989. p71-72.

<sup>10</sup> Roos. “A History of the Springbok Legion”. p74-75.

brought to the fore. Its idealistic image of a South African society where “the inclusion of whites and the exclusion of blacks was not an immutable feature of South African life”, sat uneasily with its circumspection in relation to Communist Party members’ attempts to advocate a radical overthrowing of the existing racial order. Members of the Communist Party of South Africa had joined the AES, working as Information Officers, and one such member, Wolf Kodesh, was subject to military discipline for his lectures advocating the equality of black troops in the Union Defence Force, calling for them to be allowed to bear arms.<sup>11</sup>

Yet, despite its limitations, the AES represented a moment where social change was a very real possibility. According to Professor R.F. Alfred Hoernle, the Head of the Department of Philosophy at the University of the Witwatersrand and the man considered by E.G. Malherbe to be “the father of the Army Education Services”,<sup>12</sup> the role of white South Africans was to assume a paternalistic “trusteeship” or guardian role of black South Africans and implement positive material social changes as a reward for the work and loyalty demonstrated by black South Africans during the war:

...if we are to build a South Africa which is ‘better’ not only for ourselves, but also for the Africans who are, after all, the bulk of the population, we have to think, first and foremost, in terms of better housing, better medical services, better social services, better education, and, last but not least, in terms of raising their standard of life by higher wages. The field of urgently necessary progress and reform along these lines is so vast that years of effort in a spirit of genuine ‘trusteeship’ will not exhaust it. We owe it to the Africans who are sharing the sacrifices, labours and dangers of the war with us, no less than we owe it to the ideals of our own civilization, not to fail them when we build the better South Africa of our aspirations.<sup>13</sup>

Hoernle’s words also contained assumptions of inequality and difference as, by using phrases such “Africans who are sharing...with us” and “the ideals of our own civilization”, he draws a distinction between black and white society. The idea of trusteeship was thus imbued with notions of racial inferiority and patronization, albeit mediated by a philosophy of bringing about social change for the better. This spirit of permanent positive social reform as well as assuming the mantle of social guardianship for the people most subject to economic ills and discrimination, played itself out in *The Living Memorial* which I address further on in this chapter.

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<sup>11</sup> Neil Roos. “The Second World War, the Army Education Scheme and the ‘Discipline’ of the White Poor in South Africa”. Paper delivered at Workshop on South Africa in the 1940s, Southern African Research Centre, Kingston, Canada, September 2003. p9-11.

<sup>12</sup> Killie Campbell Africana Library (KCAL) E.G. Malherbe Collection. *I.C. Digest*, August 1943, p21. KCM 56974(1010), File 442/2.

<sup>13</sup> KCAL. Prof. R.F. Alfred Hoernle. “Post-war Reconstruction and the African Peoples”*I.C. Digest*, August 1943, p21. KCM 56974(1010), File 442/2.

The Information Officers of the AES conducted a survey on the men and women in the Union Defence Force in 1944 regarding racial attitudes and other aspects in order to reveal not only “public opinion [but] to stimulate troops to think more about the questions asked [in the hope] that discussion of the questions might help to make South Africans more active citizens”.<sup>14</sup> The survey is significant as it shows an attempt by authorities to assess the changes wrought by the war on the thinking of white soldiers and the possible repercussions of this for post-war South African society. As a source, “What the Soldier Thinks” goes to the heart of my argument by providing a means of understanding in the contemporary period the sense that these men and women made of their war service sans the intervention of memory. It allows too for an insight into how these understandings either contributed or provided an ineffective resistance to the rise of the apartheid state:

**“What the Soldier Thinks”<sup>15</sup>**

|                                                                                                                                                                 |     |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| “1. Natives ought to have the same chances as white men in competing for any kind of job; a man ought not to be kept out of any job just because of his colour. | 5%  |
| 2. Natives ought to be given more chances, of getting better jobs and earning more money, but this ought only to develop slowly.                                | 47% |
| 3. As things are now, natives get a fair chance to do whatever work they are fit for.                                                                           | 24% |
| 4. This is a white man’s country; natives should not be allowed any jobs except unskilled jobs.                                                                 | 20% |
| 1. Natives ought to be given the same chances of education as Europeans.                                                                                        | 11% |
| 2. Natives ought to be given education of the same kind as Europeans, but we can only expect to extend educational opportunities to them very slowly            | 45% |
| 3. Natives ought to be taught mainly how to work with their hands; they do not need book-learning.                                                              | 27% |
| 4. Natives do not need much education, and are better left alone.                                                                                               | 11% |

|                                                                                                                      |     |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| 1. There is no reason why natives should have a say in the government of the country.                                | 16% |
| 2. It is fair that natives should be represented in parliament, but I think that what they have now is quite enough. | 33% |
| 3. Natives should be given more political rights than they have now, but only slowly, as they become civilized       | 42% |
| 4. Natives should have exactly the same political rights as white men.                                               | 2%” |

<sup>14</sup> KCAL. E.G. Malherbe Collection. Survey conducted by AES Information Officers – “What the Soldier Thinks” (1944), KCM 56974(833), File 441/8. One hundred and fifty officers of the AES were responsible for carrying out the survey and choosing a random sample of soldiers for instance “every fourth man on an alphabetical role was chosen to carry out the test”. The survey was seen by the AES as an alternative to the public poll useful in civilian life and was considered to be also a means of initiating discussions among troops over these issues.

<sup>15</sup> KCAL. Survey conducted by AES Information Officers – “What the Soldier Thinks” (1944), KCM 56974(833), File 441/8.

*“...they must know what I am...what I was...”*

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What the survey revealed was that the views of the men and women interviewed were overwhelmingly moderate in terms of employment, education and political rights given to Africans. The key word was “slowly”, suggesting a gradual change over time. Yet there was also a large conservative element, calling for little or no change in the status of black people. Interestingly enough, the most radical statement, that of extending equal political rights to “natives”, had the lowest affirmative response of two percent of those taking part in the survey. This suggested that radical change in South African society post-war had little support amongst serving men and women. The AES mirrored this conservatism of white society as the survey was only conducted on white South African men and women as “the Cape Corps or Native Military Corps personnel, owing to their lack of education a large number of them would probably have been unable to either read or properly understand the questions”.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, by claiming that the survey was to help South Africans become better “citizens” and intentionally excluding black servicemen from participating, there was a clear message that citizenship remained wholly white. The survey was thus a product of the contradictions of South African liberalism which the leadership of the AES reflected.

Ultimately the failure of the AES was due to its inherent conservatism and its personification of the contradictions regarding race which was itself a feature of South African liberalism. While envisioning a more democratic post-war South Africa, and attempting to convey this vision to white troops, the AES and the Union Defence Force itself were a testimony to segregation and discrimination:

The UDF itself was strictly segregated and military authorities took steps to ensure that while on active service outside South Africa, white troops (and black troops, for that matter) did not engage in the sort of inter-racial liaisons prohibited by law or cultural sanction in South Africa. IOs [Information Officers] were all white, and only white troops were included in the programme of the AES. Juxtaposed against the fact that only white male volunteers were permitted to carry arms, the AES emphasis on rights and duties provided white troops with a very visible marker of the racial boundaries of full citizenship.<sup>17</sup>

Political and social movements such as the Springbok Legion initiated by ex-servicemen – but later dominated by the Communist Party – arose, not out of an ideological imperative, but due to more material concerns, namely the fear of white troops that their sacrifices would go

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<sup>16</sup> KCAL. E.G. Malherbe Collection. “The AES Attitude Test: ‘What Do You Think’”. KCM 56974(835) File 441/8.

<sup>17</sup> Roos. “The Second World War, the Army Education Scheme and the ‘Discipline’ of the White Poor in South Africa”. p13.

unrewarded.<sup>18</sup> The Legion played an important role in negotiating salary and pension increases for soldiers and aiding with demobilization. This was an important task when the heat and idleness of soldiers waiting to be sent back to South Africa from Egypt at the end of the war, created the potential for unrest and disciplinary problems. The Legion also played a role in aiding returning soldiers in their attempts to assimilate into society and, more importantly find work, as well as address the shortage of housing for these largely working class men.<sup>19</sup> While initially attracting a large membership of ex-soldiers who felt that the Legion was effective in addressing their material concerns, its Communist Party influences, particularly its vision “of [a] non-racial working class unity and social democracy,” began to distance it from its white working class members. These members increasingly began to advocate a racial division of labour and the preservation of white positions against the incursion of black workers.<sup>20</sup> This was in direct contradiction of the ideals of the Springbok Legion where equality in the workplace was a strong feature:

We wish to emphasise...that though the ex-volunteer hopes to return to civilian life under conditions not less favourable than his conditions can reasonably be estimate to have been if he had not enlisted, he is definitely opposed to any rehabilitation schemes which offer him advantages at the expense of any other section of the working community. The rehabilitation of ex-volunteers should therefore be treated as part of a plan to secure full employment for all...<sup>21</sup>

This failure of the Springbok Legion in maintaining the support of white troops stemmed from its own radical stance and its idealistic vision for social change. This was at odds with the needs of white ex-servicemen largely concerned with material issues. According to Rusty Bernstein, member of the Springbok Legion and the Communist Party, “The Legion’s black membership had declined as men had been discharged from the army and returned to civilian life. Its remaining membership was almost totally white and their concerns were also overwhelmingly white.”<sup>22</sup> Becoming heavily political in nature, the Springbok Legion eventually joined with the Congress of Democrats and the Democratic League to form the South African Congress of Democrats in 1953.<sup>23</sup> The Legion itself, while still in existence, turned once again to becoming an ex-servicemen’s organisation but was unable to regain the support that its radical stance had

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<sup>18</sup> Roos. “A History of the Springbok Legion”. p19.

<sup>19</sup> Roos. “A History of the Springbok Legion”. p32, 33, 38, 59-60.

<sup>20</sup> Roos. “A History of the Springbok Legion”. p64.

<sup>21</sup> Pietermaritzburg Archives Repository, (PAR), Natal Provincial Administration (NPA), 3/PMB, “Memorandum Proposed to be Submitted on Behalf of the Springbok Legion to the Natal Post-War Works and Reconstruction Committee”.

<sup>22</sup> Rusty Bernstein. *Memory Against Forgetting – Memoirs from a Life in South African Politics, 1938-1964*. (London: Viking, 1999) p107.

<sup>23</sup> Roos. “A History of the Springbok Legion”. p163.

lost, and it eventually dissolved in the mid-1950s.<sup>24</sup> It was instead the Liberal Party which “grew steadily and became the main organized expression of white progressive and liberal anti-apartheid opinion”, and much of white politics lost its radical stance.<sup>25</sup>

Another ex-servicemen’s organisation that had an impact on South African society in the immediate post-war era was the Torch Commando which sought to realise some of the democratic aims for which the Second World War was fought. As I have mentioned in previous research, the South African efforts in the Second World War, particularly in opposition to the rise of fascism both domestically and internationally, suggested that the rise of the Apartheid state would hardly be unopposed.<sup>26</sup> Many returning white ex-servicemen who had fought against fascism in the European theatre of war were not likely to support the infringements on democracy in their own country. The spark that ignited protest and led to the formation of the Torch Commando was the disenfranchisement of coloured voters in the Cape. The use of the term “Commando” as well as the organisation’s leader “Sailor” Malan who had fought with the RAF, suggested an attempt to unite both English and Afrikaans-speaking white servicemen in the creation of a post-war vision of a new South Africa. The mobilisation of ex-servicemen on the issue of coloured disenfranchisement was, however, not due to racial sympathy, but to what they perceived as an attack on the constitution of South Africa. In a speech at a rally outside City Hall in Johannesburg on May 4, 1951, the war hero “Sailor” Malan made reference to the ideals for which the Second World War was fought:

The strength of this gathering is evidence that the men and women who fought in the war for freedom still cherish what they fought for. We are determined not to be denied the fruits of that victory. It is good to see this support in protest against the rape of the Constitution and the attack on our rights and liberties as free men. In Abyssinia, at Alamein and a score of bloody campaigns we won the right to a voice in our country’s affairs...<sup>27</sup>

However, the Torch Commando did not actually take a stand against the increasingly repressive racial legislation being passed by the Apartheid state. Standing on the brink of a new way forward for South Africa, the Torch Commando became very much a product of its time when it refused to allow coloured ex-servicemen into its ranks and did not take a stand on African rights. Thus, despite a membership that peaked at a quarter of a million in 1952, the Torch Commando

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<sup>24</sup> Roos. “A History of the Springbok Legion”. p165.

<sup>25</sup> Bernstein. *Memory Against Forgetting*. p139.

<sup>26</sup> Suryakanthie Chetty. “Gender Under Fire: Interrogating War in South Africa, 1939-1945.” University of Natal Durban: Unpublished MA dissertation, 2001.

<sup>27</sup> Olive Walker. *Sailor Malan: A Biography*. (London: Cassell and Co Ltd, 1953) p162-164.

failed to create any significant change and the movement eventually passed into oblivion.<sup>28</sup> Ultimately therefore, despite the organisation being composed of ex-servicemen who had fought fascism in the war, it was the ideal of democracy rather than any particular commitment to non-racism that motivated them. However, since one cannot have a genuine democracy in the presence of discrimination and the organisation was unable to make an effective decision on the latter, it lost the potential for thwarting the path that the Apartheid state was taking. As a memorial to the ideals of the Second World War it had failed.

### **Discontent and Discrimination in Post-War White South Africa**

For the white soldiers returning to South Africa, disillusionment was the order of the day, with the perception that the government had failed to live up to its promises that it had made during the war. This disenchantment suggested a failure on the part of the Army Education Services which had, as one of its primary motives, the containment of the expectations of white soldiers.<sup>29</sup> Although, in comparison to the benefits given to African, Indian and coloured soldiers after the war, the government's provision for white soldiers which included access to housing and education was far greater, this was insufficient to prevent discontent. Many white soldiers felt betrayed by a government for which they felt that they had sacrificed so much. Thus, in contrast to the ex-servicemen's organisations such as the Springbok Legion and the Torch Commando, which played an active – though ultimately ineffective – role in opposing the rise of the apartheid state, many servicemen saw the National Party as a viable alternative in 1948 after the betrayed promises of Smuts' government:

So they came home and they had been promised...land and jobs and – because they were all out of work when they came back and those that were sort of retained by their companies, the people they had worked for, used to supplement their army pay – some of them went back. A lot of them when they got back from the army, their jobs had gone so they had nothing and they were promised...oh yes, no we will see you right, we will see that you get jobs and they never got the jobs...they never kept up with the promises that they had made so they voted Nat and this is how the Nat party first came in...<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> *Reader's Digest Illustrated History of South Africa – The Real Story*. Dougie Oakes, ed., Cape Town: The Reader's Digest Association of South Africa, 1995) p395.

<sup>29</sup> Roos. "The Second World War, the Army Education Scheme and the 'Discipline' of the White Poor in South Africa". p11.

<sup>30</sup> May Kirkman in an interview with May Kirkman and June Borchert conducted by S. Sparks and S. Chetty, 29 May, 2004.

This sense of betrayal was made more acute by those who had not volunteered for the war but had chosen instead to financially benefit from the economic boom created by wartime production. Coming face to face with men who had derived greater material gain than that obtained by patriotic service to the country caused no small amount of resentment and many men found adjustment to civilian life made difficult by the economic losses they had suffered as a result of military service:

...for the returned one's [sic] it was a case of rehabilitation in a way of life almost quite foreign to some who had left on the brink of successful business undertakings to find little compensation for sacrifices accepted and endured in the field of war service; others again had to start from scratch, from where they had left off, with the loss of promotion in absence during the intervening years, while again on the other hand were those who had left before engaging in a career and returned matured men who had to begin life anew at the bottom of the ladder. Was their's [sic] a return to civilian life befitting the welcome homecoming of national heroes?<sup>31</sup>

Small comfort was obtained with the thought that those who had benefited from remaining in South Africa and out of the war could not claim the benefits of returning home as heroes. They would also suffer the pangs of guilt over failing to carry out their duty especially when asked the question which had originated in propaganda posters, “And what did you do daddy in the war?”<sup>32</sup> According to Ryan, these ex-servicemen viewed their part in the war as being integral to securing the safety of future generations and the role they played and sacrifices they had made was thus an integral part of the historical record. This served to exclude those more concerned with material gain during the war and, in addition, the latter had not taken part in the positive experiences of war. They had little understanding of the close bonds forged between men facing the possibility of death together. This widened the gap between the two groups, with war service serving as the point of departure in the experiences of the two.<sup>33</sup>

This was cold comfort indeed when adjusting to a post-war society where the ideals of war service no longer had pride of place and, in addition, a society where Afrikaner nationalism was achieving a new dominance. Betty Addison related the story of an incident when her husband Pat Addison, an ex-serviceman initially with the Natal Mounted Rifles (NMR) and then the Royal Air Force (RAF) flying missions over Europe, along with other ex-servicemen took advantage of the opportunities for tertiary education afforded them. They were apparently discriminated against by a member of the Afrikaans Department at the university in Pietermaritzburg who

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<sup>31</sup> Major Allan Ryan. *Thru Times and Places*. (Johannesburg: Creaprint, 1977) p311.

<sup>32</sup> Ryan. *Thru Times and Places*. p311-312.

<sup>33</sup> Ryan. *Thru Times and Places*. p312.

failed all the ex-servicemen taking the Afrikaans exam necessary to obtain their law degrees. The men retaliated by writing a letter of protest – penned by Pat Addison – to the chancellor, E.G. Malherbe, who had played such a significant role in the Army Education Services. Malherbe’s reply displayed his own helplessness in addressing the situation in which ex-servicemen found themselves:

Dr Malherbe wrote a nice letter saying, “I’m sorry about it, there’s nothing we can do about it until we are an independent university”, that’s what he said...whether he could have done anything more, I don’t know, but he didn’t anyway, maybe he couldn’t. But he said, “When we’re an independent university we will organise our own affairs but at the moment we can’t”.<sup>34</sup>

The outcome of the incident was that, when the ex-servicemen wrote their supplementary exams, they all passed with the exception of Addison, apparently in retaliation for the letter he had written Malherbe. His decision was to drop his BA degree in disgust due to his belief that, “That’s how they treated ex-servicemen”.<sup>35</sup> This perception of discrimination on the part of Afrikaner nationalists was not only confined to education, nor was it only confined to white South Africans of British descent:

...all the English-speakers were discriminated against when the Nats got in...we had some neighbours in Pretoria when we first got there and they had an Afrikaans name...But he was English-speaking and they had English Christian names, and he threw a party – he was a captain in the army, permanent force – he had a party one evening, he said, “This is to celebrate the tenth anniversary of my captaincy”, never got any promotion. An Afrikaner who spoke English was the bottom.<sup>36</sup>

## **Broken Promises**

The post-war era brought a keen sense of injustice on the part of white men – the group historically at the apex of South African society. Yet the situation was far more acute in the case of black men faced with a legacy of discrimination which became enshrined in law under apartheid. Victory and the triumph of democracy in Europe did not necessarily mean the same in South Africa and black servicemen were aware of that, tempering the jubilation of victory with a sense of ambivalence:

We heard about the victory on the radio. Oh, there was great joy, jubilation and relief. We had a nice get-together that night with a glass of beer; very heartwarming. We did

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<sup>34</sup> Interview with Betty Addison.

<sup>35</sup> Interview with Betty Addison.

<sup>36</sup> Interview with Betty Addison.

not have any special ceremonies at the time: in 1945 things were not pleasant. We all knew it was only the fighting that had finished and we had a long way to go still.<sup>37</sup>

During the war, as in the case of white troops, Smuts promised the black men who served in the military that the roles they had played would not be forgotten, “...we shall do everything in our power to ensure that the men who served South Africa, as you have done, shall have such a reward as it is in the power of your country to give you.”<sup>38</sup> This somewhat qualified promise was not kept and returning soldiers were embittered by their reception. This is evident by Norman Middleton who had a difficult experience in the war after being taken prisoner and held in a camp for ten months, “‘It was not at all worth it,’ he says of his war-time experience. ‘I came back furious.’ On his return he was given a bicycle, a ‘few shillings’ and some medals...”<sup>39</sup>

The theme of broken promises was a strong one:

When we were in the army we were told when they were building those houses there [in Montclair], they building it for us when we come back. They were given to us. I came in 1941, 1941 we were given a weekend – we came here to Jacobs, we started looking all the houses – they were still building – I chose mine too, it was alongside the bush, and when we went back Smuts dies because the army – Smuts was the one who was controlling it – General Smuts, ya, when he died all those things that we were promised died – Afrikaner took over so all the promises – we went for it, they said your boss died so you got nothing, we not interested. They gave it all to the whites. Those are not ex-servicemen, those are now staying in Montclair, all individual people, supposed to be ex-servicemen. Finished, we didn’t get nothing.<sup>40</sup>

According to Davis, Smuts was the catalyst, the means by which war-time promises aimed at black servicemen as a reward for their loyalty would be kept. His death and, prior to that, the rise of the apartheid state spelled the end to black aspirations, where their war-time service served instead as a badge of dishonour:

I wanted to save our country from the, from the enemy from coming in. I thought if I’m there I’ll also do my part to save our country but that did not make any difference to the government. We were still dogs. Many of times I went to the government and produced my papers, my army papers, which I’ve got but say, that was Afrikaner man – no, no, no, it was the English people but now it’s the Afrikaner now, we don’t worry about them, they don’t consider us. We as the army people, government has got no interest in us.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Independent Newspapers Archive. Fraser Jansen. “A Day of Ecstatic Relief and the Beginning of a New World” in *The Daily News*, May 11, 1985.

<sup>38</sup> Independent Newspapers Archive. Graeme Hosken. “Ex-servicemen Go Unrewarded” in *The Daily News*, February 17, 2000.

<sup>39</sup> Independent Newspapers Archive. Shelagh McLoughlin. “The Forgotten Force” in *The Natal Witness*, November 19, 1997.

<sup>40</sup> Interview with Alfred Jimmy Davis.

<sup>41</sup> Interview with Alfred Davis.

"...they must know what I am...what I was..."

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There is a sense of bitterness, humiliation and, above all, sadness now at the lack of recognition given to them for their service more than sixty years ago. The opportunity of the Second World War had been tempered and all but forgotten by the grim reality of the apartheid state.

The parades and the accolades at the end of the war when the victory was still fresh formed the basis of the limited recognition given to these men. In October 1945 a parade was held in Johannesburg for the NEAS, presided over by Jan Smuts, and all the recipients of medals of bravery were re-invested with the awards.<sup>42</sup> In addition, a Victory Parade was held in London in June 1946, and consisted of thirty thousand servicemen and women drawn from all the Allied countries. Among them were eighteen members of the NEAS, a further 204 men from the regular Union Defence Force and nineteen women drawn from the South African Auxiliary Services.<sup>43</sup> As the three distinct groups marched together it seemed the beginning of a new era in South Africa where the contributions made by the NEAS in the war were given the recognition they deserved.

This however was not to be. Once the parades had ended and the accolades given out, emancipation was not sure to follow for the thousands of African, Indian and coloured ex-servicemen. They returned to poverty and unemployment with meagre benefits in comparison to white servicemen. In Don Mattera's autobiography, in which he explicitly writes the story of racial subjection, he relates the story of his Uncle Willie's bayonet, which Mattera used in a fight with a rival gang. His uncle demanded its return as it was:

...his trophy, his only reward for having fought against the Nazis. He had fought and been wounded, returned home unsung and forgotten, and watched in silent envy while the white veteran soldiers were decorated and recompensed for their valour in facing the enemy – an enemy no different from the one who would someday give the order to destroy our home.<sup>44</sup>

Ultimately his Uncle Willie became a victim of the forced removals as their home in Sophiatown was demolished. Mattera's use of the bayonet in a gang war was almost a symbol of resistance as gangsterism and street violence rocked Johannesburg in the 1950s. The use of the bayonet – a symbol of his uncle's role in the war – in a gang war, which is ultimately in opposition to the forces of law, order and control, can be seen as a small act of defiance against the treatment of the men of the NEAS upon their return home. The situation was made even more poignant in a

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<sup>42</sup> Ian Gleeson. *The Unknown Force*. (Rivonia: Ashanti Publishing, 1994) p258.

<sup>43</sup> Gleeson. *The Unknown Force*. p260-261.

<sup>44</sup> Don Mattera. *Gone With the Twilight – A Story of Sophiatown*. (London: Zed Books Ltd., 1987) p62.

“...they must know what I am...what I was...”

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further incident related by Mattera where, as the people of Sophiatown were being racially classified in preparation for their forced removals and subsequent allocation in racially specific designated areas, a war veteran, Thomas Wentzel, who had served with the Cape Coloured Corps during the war “was also reclassified as Native when he approached the authorities to ask why his son William had been reclassified”.<sup>45</sup>

Not only was there a lack of recognition apparent on the part of the state, the same was true for the communities to which these men returned. The climate was one of growing hostility towards blatantly discriminatory policies on the part of the government. Within this context, the reception of men who had served the state with little to show for it was indifferent or worse, contemptuous:

“A lot of coloured people said ‘what the hell did you do that for?’” says Middleton, while Jansen<sup>46</sup> adds that “people here were battling themselves. It was hard for us to fit in”. Recognition has declined further as those who might have understood have died off...“The local community didn’t give us some support,” says Jansen, describing with bitterness how his van, used for delivering food parcels to dependants of ex-servicemen, was stolen.<sup>47</sup>

In the place of a vision of a new and better world, came social and economic inequality with unemployment and the accompanying problems of poverty. This was compounded by discriminatory legislation. In the midst of this economic deprivation there was a growth in criminality and gangs, particularly prevalent in large urban areas such as Johannesburg.<sup>48</sup>

Moreover, according to Davis, the army itself did not provide the skills training or provision for career opportunities for black servicemen after the war as it did for their white counterparts who had access to tertiary education and housing facilities. This suggested that the limitations were there from the very outset:

You see if you hadn’t, if you didn’t have any trade or left anything that you were doing to improve yourself, you want the army to improve yourself, they will not do that. See I’m, my uncle – he was a shoemaker, I wanted tools for shoemaking because I used to help him to make saddles for horses, saddles and reins for horses then I knew the trade so I wanted that so they said you can’t have it because you didn’t have it... So alright, give me painting equipment, you know, like a ladder, stepladder, what have you, brushes and

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<sup>45</sup> Mattera. *Gone With the Twilight*. p26.

<sup>46</sup> Marinus Jansen, like Norman Middleton, were both members of Coloured Corps and were taken prisoner on a number of occasions during the war. Information taken from McLoughlin. “The Forgotten Force” in *The Natal Witness*, November 19, 1997.

<sup>47</sup> McLoughlin. “The Forgotten Force” in *The Natal Witness*, November 19, 1997.

<sup>48</sup> Mattera. *Gone With the Twilight*. p99.

all. They said no, you're not a painter. They wouldn't give me anything, wouldn't give me anything.<sup>49</sup>

For Davis, his experience of the war was bittersweet. Along with the pride at taking part and demonstrating his loyalty, there was an acknowledgement that his efforts were not reciprocated by the state. He felt a strong sense of disillusionment, leading him to sell his medals and badges at the end of the war due to him having “lost interest”. This disillusion was aided, in part, by having little financial or employment opportunities by the end of 1945, making the selling of these important mementoes of his service a financial necessity. In a twist of irony he sold them to white men who were collecting these as souvenirs.<sup>50</sup>

Yet, to an extent, many black ex-servicemen had been changed by their experiences, developing a new understanding of the world outside South Africa and becoming radicalized by the inequalities which abounded:

The army opened my eyes. In South Africa we weren't allowed the same benefits as whites but we saw other countries where things were different. Here all the officers were white but other countries had generals who were black. I thought to myself, 'If that can happen there, why not here?'<sup>51</sup>

Jansen's understanding of the social conditions in South Africa had been enhanced by his war-time experience and he devoted his life to trade union activity, encouraging workers to campaign for rights in the workplace.<sup>52</sup> This social activism was a feature in the creation of “The Living Memorial”, dedicated to improving the health of black South Africans. It is addressed in the work of Alan Jeeves, Shula Marks and Vanessa Noble that I discuss further on in this chapter.

### **Women Working for a New South Africa**

This radicalization was by no means confined to the men who took part in the war – white women too found their conventional understanding of the status quo in South Africa challenged by their war-time experiences. In the case of women like the activist Helen Joseph there was the sense that her life had little meaning prior to her signing up and was based on ambiguity

The contradictions of my life continued; I was beginning to make a small personal stand on the question of discrimination against Indians, and at the same time I was enjoying myself enormously in the white community as a grass widow, a life of night clubs,

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<sup>49</sup> Interview with Alfred Jimmy Davis.

<sup>50</sup> Interview with Alfred Jimmy Davis.

<sup>51</sup> McLoughlin. “The Forgotten Force” in *The Natal Witness*, November 19, 1997.

<sup>52</sup> McLoughlin. “The Forgotten Force” in *The Natal Witness*, November 19, 1997.

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parties, bridge. But once again I changed my life. One morning I read of the call for university women to join up as welfare and information officers...I telephoned to tell my husband, and within a few days I was on my way to Pretoria and the WAAF.<sup>53</sup>

There was the perception that the war gave her a sense of purpose and it also helped resolve a contradiction. During her time as an information officer she gave lectures to fellow women on liberal issues:

Our first official mandate was “to inculcate a liberal and tolerant attitude of mind”...I lectured on a wide range of subjects: local and parliamentary institutions, Nazism, democracy. I studied all sorts of subjects: the franchise, division of land, housing, malnutrition, education – and the discrepancy between what was being spent on White and non-White education. How could I help but come at last to the realisation of the inequalities of this land?<sup>54</sup>

Her work during the war influenced her activism for equal rights, in which she was to engage after the war. It helped resolve the contradiction between the white middle class woman and the campaigner for equality. At the same time, there was a sense that the mobilisation initiated by the government was not solely within the government’s control. Her lectures on democracy led to her questioning the situation in her own country. At the end of the war she did not return to her pre-war existence but began a new life as a result of this mobilisation. She divorced her husband and embarked on a life of political activism:

The end of my marriage had nothing to do with the political convictions that had grown in me during the war, but I think their development might well have caused a break at a later stage, for I doubt that Billie would have gone all the way with me.<sup>55</sup>

The opportunities afforded her by the war created a permanent change in her life and her empowerment did not simply cease in 1945.

Simultaneously however, military service for women did not necessarily play a major role in their later decision to engage in political activism. Following the end of the war, Mary Benson joined a unit in Germany responsible for overseeing refugees, those whose lives had been uprooted by the war such as concentration camp survivors as well as those children whose parents had been killed during the conflict.<sup>56</sup> Coming into contact with the worst repercussions of the Second World War had a tremendous impact on her, and she was unable to continue her work, feeling herself to be “inadequate [and] ineffectual”.<sup>57</sup> Yet, despite this, it did not dawn on her to draw

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<sup>53</sup> Helen Joseph. *Tomorrow's Sun – A Smuggled Journal from South Africa*. (London: Hutchison and Co., 1966) p34.

<sup>54</sup> Joseph. *Tomorrow's Sun*. p36.

<sup>55</sup> Joseph. *Tomorrow's Sun*. p36.

<sup>56</sup> Mary Benson. *A Far Cry*. (London: Viking, 1989) p41.

<sup>57</sup> Benson. *A Far Cry*. p43.

parallels between the repercussions of the Nazis' notion of the “superior race” and the situation in South Africa where blacks were discriminated against on the same basis. This only came with hindsight:

While working for the UNRRA it never occurred to me that millions of my fellow-citizens were treated like Displaced Persons in the country of their birth. When it came to racial prejudice I remained a typical white South African, little changed from my nineteen-year-old self travelling by Greyhound bus from Kansas City to Albuquerque and furious when a Negro had the ‘cheek’ to sit beside me. Or the twenty-year-old in Cape Town disgusted by the sight of Maori officers dancing with white girls.<sup>58</sup>

Benson's radicalization came from a different source, largely through her friendship with Alan Paton and, through him, the anti-apartheid activist and Anglican priest, Michael Scott.<sup>59</sup>

### **The Modern Woman?**

The Army Educational Services too suggested that women's service in the Second World War only emphasised a trend in emancipation that was already under way. However the radicalisation of women was presented as equivalent to that which had occurred during the First World War, evident in an educational booklet published by the AES:

The last war brought about the emancipation of women in all the Western civilised world. Of course the process began some time before that, but it happened much faster after 1914. War does not initiate many changes, but it speeds up processes that are already under way. Women wore trousers, or made their skirts shorter and shorter, cut their hair Eton-crop wise to look like boys, cut their clothes like bags till they had neither breasts nor hips, smoked cigarettes, and, in the enthusiasm of their emancipation, tried to pretend that they had no sex at all. This war has produced no such extravagant effects. Although many women are doing work that is normally regarded as men's, they have not in general become more masculine in clothes and manners than they were before. That change is over and done with, and is not likely to go any further...<sup>60</sup>

Whereas the changes undergone by women in the Second World War were deemed by the AES to not be as visible as post-World War One, which went to the extreme of being presented as a denial of their femininity, there were nevertheless changes in women's roles brought about by their war experiences. These changes, according to the AES, were largely related to their interaction with men which allowed women to be the “equals and companions” of men. A woman could be “a responsible adult, who can have a will of her own, and can be expected to look after herself” and enjoy freedom of movement rather than falling under the guardianship of

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<sup>58</sup> Benson. *A Far Cry*. p43.

<sup>59</sup> Benson. *A Far Cry*. Cf Chapters 3 and 4.

<sup>60</sup> KCAL. E.G. Malherbe Collection. “When We All Get Home” Booklet No. 6 of AES Basic Series, p17. KCM 56974(803) File 441/7/1.

their husbands or parents. Women too were “expected to enjoy physical passion” within the confines of her marriage on equal terms with men. Yet the AES tempered this notion of the “modern woman” with a certain degree of conservatism, “The modern woman expects to be at least as much a wife as a mother, and to share in her husband’s pleasures and thoughts, in addition to doing her household work”.<sup>61</sup> The AES was advocating, not truly independent, self-sufficient modern women, but rather idealised companions to their husbands. This was a role which they took on in addition to their work in the home as mothers. Key to this was the image of women remaining in the home as wives and mothers, rather than becoming autonomous career women. Nor was South Africa unusual in this sense as the return of women to the home, taking up once again the mantle of wives and mothers, was mirrored in the United States and Britain as well. In Britain, for instance, after war-time promises of “equal education and equal pay”, the end of the war marked a return of women to the home.<sup>62</sup> This was due to a number of reasons – young women forced into work by conscription did not view work as liberating as their feminist predecessors had. The adverse effects of the war on the family mean that women, “took up the stand that only one sex could really comprehend the ‘mystery’...of housewifery”.<sup>63</sup> Not least of which was the role played by British propaganda in applying pressure for women to return home:

Propaganda that had so successfully manipulated women into wartime jobs now changed direction to persuade them to stay at home. The same broadcasts and magazines that had earlier told them how important it was for them to work now told women how important it was to be at home with their children. Magazines, whether aimed at the housewife or working girl, concentrated on clothes and cosmetics, the ‘ideal’ home, and the contented, well-fed family and happy husband. There was a successful post-war government campaign to increase the birth rate and there was much discussion of the psychological damage to children whose mothers went out to work.<sup>64</sup>

In South Africa a major theme in the last issues of *The Women’s Auxiliary* was the belief that men in combat had made a far greater sacrifice, enduring the truly horrific experiences of war to which women were not exposed, and this was a view shared by women participating in the war. For some of these women, the war was a temporary deviation. It was life changing in terms of the experiences they had had but did not mean that their lives in the post-war era were transformed in any way that would have been different had they not been in military service.

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<sup>61</sup> KCAL. “When We All Get Home”. KCM 56974(803) File 441/7/1.

<sup>62</sup> Ruth Adam. *A Woman’s Place: 1910-1975*. (London: Chatto and Windus, 1975) p150.

<sup>63</sup> Adam. *A Woman’s Place*. p160-161.

<sup>64</sup> Caroline Lang. *Keep Smiling Through: Women in the Second World War*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) p43.

When asked about the nature of her own experiences of the Second World War, Betty Addison's response was to foreground instead the experiences of her husband Pat:

Not at all for me. It must have been terrible for Pat...he kept things to himself very much...you know he was in a camp of an airfield...in Lincolnshire. He said one night they had this hut with four pilots sleeping in it. They went out on a raid one night...and he was the only one to come back. The other three had all crashed, probably been killed...they had terrible losses...he must have been very terrified every time he took off I should think...<sup>65</sup>

Despite her husband's silence on his emotions during the battle, Betty surmised his fear and later blamed the onset of Parkinson's disease on the tension which he had been subjected to during the war. At the end of her war service she and Pat Addison were married and, while she worked for a while after that, once her children had been born, she refrained from work until they were older and had gone off to boarding school. Thereafter she returned to her tertiary studies which she had abandoned in 1939, earning a postgraduate degree. Throughout this period however, family obligations and her role as mother and care-giver predominated, "...my mother was ill and when the children came home, I stopped working..."<sup>66</sup> Her war work itself – the independent life she had led away from family, the camaraderie she had experienced and the skills she had learned – was still portrayed within a framework of patriarchal control. She emphasised that their roles were limited in comparison to men and that these women were not "aggressive" as women tend to be at present:

...none of the girls were among the qualified officers who looked after the radar sets and was in touch with the powers that be and so on. No, we were all humble people, all of us, even the officers. I mean we [were] really only officers over our own sex if you know what I mean. That's how things were. It's very different now. In fact I think women have become a bit too aggressive now, they've gone to the other extreme which is typical of human nature of course...<sup>67</sup>

For Betty Addison the work done by white women in the military during the Second World War was thus necessary in the spirit of patriotism and to prevent the evil of Nazism. It was not however necessarily seen as a stepping stone towards greater independence and a change in gendered roles for women. This had parallels with the role of women in earlier wars. For instance, Afrikaner women in the South African War who played active roles within the war, did this within an already existing idea of the *volksmoeder*, motherhood in patriotic service and defence

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<sup>65</sup> Interview with Betty Addison.

<sup>66</sup> Interview with Betty Addison.

<sup>67</sup> Interview with Betty Addison.

of the nation – as I have discussed earlier in this dissertation.<sup>68</sup> Placing their war work within an already existing paradigm meant that little would change for these women at the end of the war. Internationally, the war work of women during the First World War was widely believed to have given women some recognition leading to the great majority of women becoming enfranchised by 1920. Citizenship was the reward for their contribution in the war. Yet, in Britain for instance, the image of women in the years between the wars was hardly empowering, “In the inter-war years only one desirable image was held up to women by all the mainstream media agencies – that of the housewife and mother.”<sup>69</sup> Thus South African women were following an already existing tradition of war work and a return to the home by the end of the Second World War. Even for women like May Kirkman and June Borchert who did not have the benefit of a tertiary education and had to take up waged labour at the end of the war prior to getting married, waged labour was seen as a temporary situation until they took up their rightful positions as mothers:

...you went from one job to another in those days, it wasn't like today. No, you only left when you had babies... You got married and then you just kept on working then you fell pregnant, you resigned, you know.<sup>70</sup>

However at the end of the war both women were involved with the Torch Commando, attending meetings and supporting the ideals of democracy:

...we joined up and we went to listen to the talks and the reasons they were holding the torch parade...and they against the apartheid era...and the sanctions, of the way the Nats were doing. And maybe like the Ossewabrandwag, this was the way they felt that they could fight the Nats and just through blocking the odd thing and strengthening the things which they thought was right and seeing that those things got through...they had seen what real war was like and they had seen what the Nats were doing was not right and they were trying to make them see things in a different light.<sup>71</sup>

This involvement with the Torch Commando was the extent of their participation in political activism in the post-war era and, for many of that organisation's members, this participation ended with the failure of the Torch Commando to successfully thwart the path taken by the apartheid state. The immediate post-war era was thus characterised by a failure to implement the ideals for which the war was fought in South Africa. This failure was based upon the disillusionment of white and black soldiers due to the unfulfilled promises of Smuts' government

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<sup>68</sup> Cf. Lou-Marie Kruger. “Gender, Community and Identity: Women and Afrikaner Nationalism in the *Volksmoeder* Discourse of *Die Boerevrou* (1919-1931)” (University of Cape Town, Cape Town: Unpublished MA dissertation, 1991) and Marijke du Toit. “The Nurturing of Afrikaner Nationalism: A Social History of the *Afrikaanse Christelike Vroue Vereniging* ca. 1870-1939”. (University of Cape Town: Unpublished PhD dissertation, 1996).

<sup>69</sup> Deirdre Beddoe. *Back to Home and Duty: Women Between the Wars, 1918-1939*. (London: Pandora Press, 1989) p8.

<sup>70</sup> Interview with May Kirkman and June Borchert.

<sup>71</sup> May Kirkman in interview with May Kirkman and June Borchert.

“...they must know what I am...what I was...”

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and the lack of a united and effective front opposing the rise of the apartheid state. The material needs of the returning ex-servicemen took precedence over democratic ideals. Permanent social change was thus not apparent in terms of ending racial discrimination or leading to a shift in the status of white women. These women, in most instances, returned to a pre-war way of life, and conservatism and right wing nationalism became the defining feature of South African society from 1948. The conservatism of South African state and society after 1948 marked a point of departure – the rest of the world, inspired by the democratic ideals of the war, moved towards greater inclusion and movements for equality:

...apartheid was elaborated directly after the Second World War, just as the triumph over fascism was being celebrated and as the principles of universal human rights were endorsed by the Atlantic Charter. Moreover, the implementation of apartheid in the 1950s and 1960s coincided with the anti-colonial struggle in Africa and Asia as well as the civil-rights movement in the United States. Apartheid therefore ran against the tide of international opinion, and South Africa became a pariah state as a result.<sup>72</sup>

The Second World War in South Africa, no longer a concrete force, was thus relegated to the realm of memory – official, public and personal.

### Visualising Memory



“Walter” – image taken from private collection

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<sup>72</sup> Saul Dubow. *Racial Segregation and the Origins of Apartheid in South Africa, 1913-36*. (Hampshire: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1989) p178.

When I was a child growing up in Durban, there was a woman I knew, an octogenarian<sup>73</sup>, who had a photograph of a young man in a sailor’s uniform placed under the glass of her dressing table. This was her nephew Walter, killed at the age of seventeen during the Second World War, while enlisted in the British Navy. This image served as a daily reminder to her and she would often relate the story of his death when the Japanese attacked his ship in the Pacific. For me the photograph had a special fascination as well – the image of boy staring out not much older than I and the idea of him dying at such a young age. It continued to have a strong impact on me and became more poignant as I grew older, with the realisation that he would always remain the same, achieving a kind of immortality in my memory sixty years after his death and after everyone who had known him had died as well. The photograph thus functioned both as a means of remembrance and as an indication of mortality, isolating a boy at a specific moment in time and making him eternally young, even as it serves as a reminder of his death.

One of the conduits of personal memory of war is the photograph, which functions on two levels. In Roland Barthes’ seminal work *Camera Lucida* he suggests that the photograph contains some truth and bears some relation to reality through its association with the referent. Unlike art or language, for the photograph to exist, the referent itself has to have existed at some point in time:

...Photography’s Referent is not the same as the referent of other systems of representation. I call “photographic referent” not the optionally real thing to which an image or a sign refers but the necessarily real thing which has been placed before the lens, without which there would be no photograph...in Photography I can never deny that the thing has been there.<sup>74</sup>

In addition by drawing attention to its chemical processes in terms of the way in which the camera operates to take the photograph, Barthes strengthens the connections between the photograph and the referent. As the camera makes use of the light rays radiating from the referent to create the image, the image itself then contains traces of the referent. Thus, by looking at a photograph, the viewer has a tangible connection with the subject portrayed in it.<sup>75</sup> Furthermore the photograph is symbolic of death – it isolates an instant from the flow of time

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<sup>73</sup> This was Mrs L.A. Geddie who was nursed by my mother until she passed away in 1989. I have made use of letters written by her husband stationed in North Africa to her during the war in the previous chapter.

<sup>74</sup> Roland Barthes. *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. (London: Fontana, 1984) p77.

<sup>75</sup> Barthes. *Camera Lucida*. p81.

and captures an image in a particular moment in the past without a future. When looking at an image of a person one is confronted with that person's mortality:

By giving me the absolute past of the pose (aorist), the photograph tells me death in the future. What *pricks* me is the discovery of this equivalence. In front of the photograph of my mother as a child, I tell myself: she is going to die: I shudder, like Winnicott's psychotic patient, *over a catastrophe which has already occurred*. Whether or not the subject is already dead, every photograph is this catastrophe.<sup>76</sup>

These two aspects come together in personal war photographs, particularly those representing close family who have been killed in the war. Marianne Hirsch is powerfully moved by the photographs belonging to her neighbour of family members killed during the Holocaust.<sup>77</sup> She then considers the significance of the family photograph in its representation of both life and death where she analyses Barthes' reaction to a photograph of his deceased mother. Here the photograph signifies life in that it is a direct “trace” of the person once living yet, simultaneously, it highlights the viewer's distance from the person depicted in the photograph, be it in terms of lost youth or, in the case of Walter, the death of a boy who remains forever immortalised in memory and the image, outside the passing of time. For Hirsch, quoting Susan Sontag, “Photographs state the innocence, the vulnerability of lives heading toward their own destruction and this link between photography and death haunts all photos of people.”<sup>78</sup>

If Walter's photograph made such an indelible impact on me born a generation after the war had ended, the importance of such images to those who had experienced the war itself can only be imagined. Some clues exist, as I have mentioned in the previous chapter, where the photographs worked as an aid to as well as a validation of memory and invariably accompanied oral narratives of the war. Images of comrades and acquaintances brought to mind, not only the events for which they were remembered, but served as an additional reminder of youth and the changes wrought by the passage of time. These photographs confronted people with their own mortality, evident, for instance, in Mr Davis' descriptions of his photographs as a young soldier.<sup>79</sup> Thus, whereas the personal photographs serve as a concrete remnant of the individual experience of war, functioning as the medium through which those who served can remember their own experiences as well as share them with others, the memorials function as a public

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<sup>76</sup> Roland Barthes. *Camera Lucida*. p96.

<sup>77</sup> Cf. Marianne Hirsch. *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative and Postmemory*. (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1997)

<sup>78</sup> Marianne Hirsch. *Family Frames*. p19-20.

<sup>79</sup> Cf. Chapter Four.

commemoration of war while simultaneously bringing to mind the actual personal experiences of the veterans visiting them. Both the photographs and the memorials are the visual expression of the commemoration of service in war.

### Remembering the Unknown Soldier

In central Durban there is a war memorial commemorating both the First and Second World Wars. Flanked by two stone statues of snarling lions, a stone figure of a man wearing a greatcoat lies with his hat upon his breast and, above this, is a rendition of a figure being lifted up by two angels. The inscription reads:

Except a corn of wheat  
Fall into the ground and die  
It abideth alone.  
But if it die  
It bringeth forth much fruit.

On days of remembrance, wreaths are placed at its foot and the monument itself is indicative of a common theme – the glory of a life lost in battle fighting for freedom and the greater good. When visiting dignitaries arrive, for instance when the head of the Commonwealth, Queen Elizabeth II came to Durban, a ceremony was held at the memorial and wreaths were laid at its foot, serving to cement ties between South Africa and the Commonwealth. However the monument itself, while depicting the nobility of self-sacrifice, is at the same time a poignant, albeit sanitized, reminder of the cost of war, a common feature of war memorials post-World War One, “These two motifs – war as both noble and uplifting and tragic and unendurably sad – are present in virtually all postwar war memorials...”<sup>80</sup> Religious connotations are evident in the ascension of the figure which portrays the dominant message of optimism and salvation,<sup>81</sup> once again following a convention of war memorials reflecting the religious aspect of self sacrifice, “wartime imagery stressed the spiritual nature of the struggle...soldiers were portrayed as heroes sacrificing themselves for their country; a sacrifice which was likened to that of Jesus Christ.”<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Jay Winter. *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning – The Great War in European Cultural History*. (Cambridge: University Press, 1998) p85.

<sup>81</sup> Winter. *Sites of Memory*. p93.

<sup>82</sup> Lloyd. *Battlefield Tourism*. p26.

In South Africa, with its conflict-ridden past, commemoration of the fallen had a long history. By the South African War at the beginning of the twentieth century, records were kept of the men killed in action until the chaotic nature of the war led to errors in record-keeping.<sup>83</sup> The South African War marked a change in the way in which the fallen were interred. There was a shift from the mass, anonymous graves that were eventually to be forgotten to, “The growing acceptance of the need to commemorate and remember the fallen.” The aim was “to ensure that the individual memory of the soldiers who had fallen on the battlefield...should be as imperishable as their fame would be.”<sup>84</sup> This suggests the importance of giving recognition to these soldiers who had died in war. Following the cessation of hostilities, the “Loyal Women’s Guild of South Africa” was established “to mark, compile a register of, and care for the graves of soldiers who had died”.<sup>85</sup> Money was raised by this organization to place iron crosses on graves to indicate the position of fallen soldiers. On the British side, the Royal Engineers were responsible for keeping track of the graves of British soldiers who had been killed in the war.<sup>86</sup> Subsequent associations consolidated the work begun after the South African War and, in many instances, monuments were erected or headstones purchased by the regiments involved or family members.<sup>87</sup> In 1956 the South African War Graves Board became responsible for the maintenance of war graves and this was subsequently replaced by the National Monuments Council in 1982. In post-1994 South Africa the South African Heritage Resources Agency and the Burial Sites Unit took the place of the National Monuments Council.<sup>88</sup> For the South African soldiers involved in the First and Second World Wars, and who were buried on foreign soil, the South African government had “a special arrangement [with] the Commonwealth War Graves Commission” where these graves would be tended.<sup>89</sup>

The historical maintenance of war graves both by individuals, volunteer associations as well as the state, demonstrate the emotional investment in the men who had been killed in war, fighting in defence of their loved ones and for their country. The maintenance and pilgrimage to these graves and the commemoration of the fallen serves as an expression of gratitude to those who

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<sup>83</sup> Pietermaritzburg Government Archives. G.A. Chadwick. “War Graves, Registers, Monuments, Headstones and Crosses”, 1980, p3. NAB Accession 1554.

<sup>84</sup> Lloyd. *Battlefield Tourism*. p22.

<sup>85</sup> Chadwick. “War Graves, Registers, Monuments, Headstones and Crosses”. p4.

<sup>86</sup> South African Heritage Resources Agency. “Burial Grounds and Graves” <http://www.sahra.org.za/burial.htm> Accessed April 5, 2006 16:35.

<sup>87</sup> Chadwick. “War Graves, Registers, Monuments, Headstones and Crosses”. p4-5.

<sup>88</sup> South African Heritage Resources Agency. “Burial Grounds and Graves”.

<sup>89</sup> Chadwick. “War Graves, Registers, Monuments, Headstones and Crosses”. p6.

had made the ultimate sacrifice. In post-apartheid South Africa, according to the Burial Sites Unit who pay particular attention to the apartheid era liberation conflicts, war graves and memorials function as a means of remembrance and of “transcending” the enmity of past conflict:

Military activity, the conduct of war and armed conflict/liberation struggles have long played a significant role in South African history. Remembrance of human loss it causes is part of the contemporary landscape. Graves, burial sites, war memorials and monuments are tangible and symbolic reminders of our turbulent history. Graves are architectural examples of space where we transcend the historical past.<sup>90</sup>

A form of memorialisation intrinsically linked to the personal memory of individuals is that of war graves and cenotaphs. The graves of fallen soldiers in particular functioned as a concrete remnant, serving as a site of remembrance for surviving soldiers who returned time and time again, both to remember and to pay their respects. After South Africa became a Union in 1910, the focus of memorialisation – on the part of the white Afrikaans-speaking segment of the population – was the South African War and, in particular, the sufferings of Afrikaner women during the war. Photographs sent by readers to the magazine *Die Huisgenoot* depicted in large part these monuments dedicated to Afrikaner women:

If all photographs are *memento mori*, these pictures with their tight focus on memorial structures...constituted a mournful double inscription of loss. Moreover, even as they reminded visitors of the absent beloved, the stone monuments were meant to assert the permanence, at least, of collective commitment to their memory.<sup>91</sup>

The South African War has been a key focus in the country’s attempts at memorialisation. For instance, the Free State province alone has “13 battlefield sites, 8 military monuments, 2 war museums and 3 war and concentration camp cemeteries” dedicated to the conflict which have, in the present, been marketed as sites of pilgrimage for tourists.<sup>92</sup>

This focus on commemorating the South African War was continued by the apartheid government as late as 1979 which is when the Burger Memorial on Wagon Hill in the then province of Natal was erected. A mass grave with the bodies of the more than three hundred Boer men killed in Natal during the South African War was accompanied by a monument:

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<sup>90</sup> South African Heritage Resources Agency. “Burial Grounds and Graves”.

<sup>91</sup> Marijke du Toit. “Blank Verbeeld, or the Incredible Whiteness of Being: Amateur Photography and Afrikaner Nationalist Historical Narrative” in *Kronos*, November 2001, No 27. p92-93.

<sup>92</sup> “Travel and Stay in South Africa – Free State”. <http://www.travelandstayinsa.co.za/south-africa-accomodation-prov-free-state.php?id=Free%20State>. Accessed April 7, 2006 10:53.

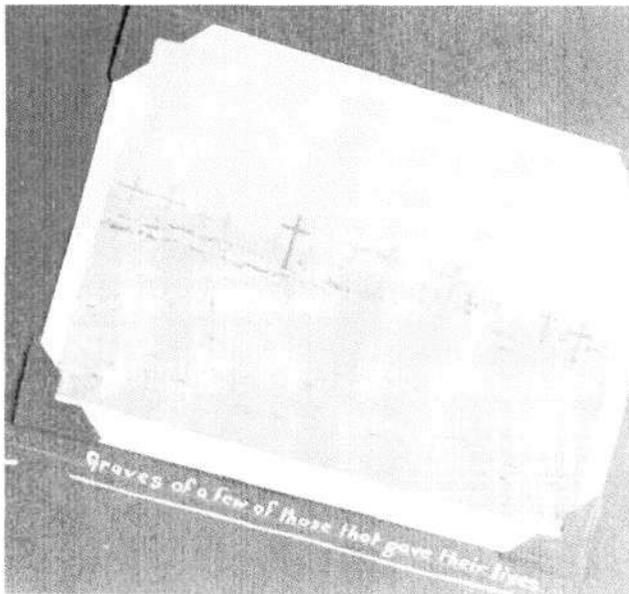
*“...they must know what I am...what I was...”*

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The monument consists of seven stylized “hands” reaching out from underground and pointing to the different battles that took place around Ladysmith, viz. Talana, Elandsplaagte, Nicholsons Nek, Colenso, Spioenkop, Vaalkrans, Pieters and Platrand/Wagon Hill. The hands symbolize fear, grief, courage, strength, undauntedness and suffering. The names of the casualties are listed on the wrist or palm of each of the hands belonging to a relevant battle site.<sup>93</sup>

A poem written by Ernst van Heerden is emblazoned on the memorial and uses similar imagery to the Durban war memorial that I have discussed previously, where the death of a soldier is for the greater good, “...the blood spilled on the ground made the earth fertile to bring forth freedom from oppression”.<sup>94</sup> The erection of this monument in 1979, so many years after the end of the South African War, signified the apartheid state’s commitment to commemorating this conflict – a commitment that was not necessarily extended to the Second World War.

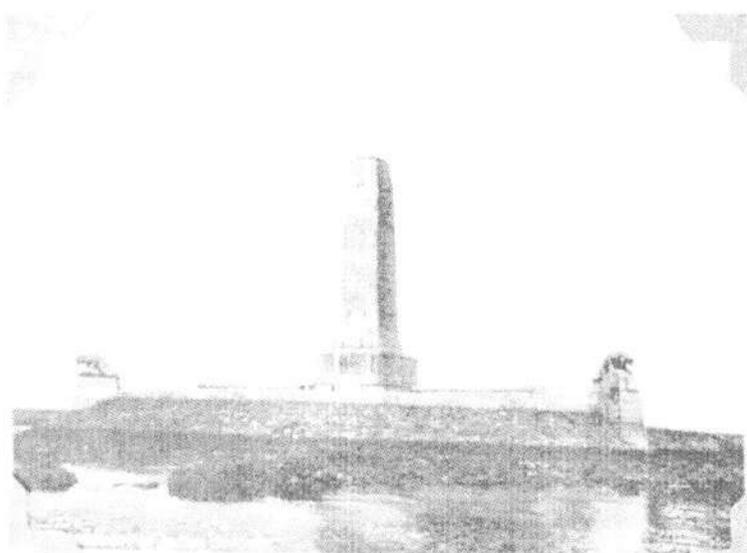
In the personal photo albums of South African soldiers serving overseas during the Second World War, while depictions of the dead were a nonentity, there were nevertheless numerous photographs of graves and cenotaphs, depicting the war dead.



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<sup>93</sup> “Ladysmith’s Monuments and Memorials”. <http://ladysmith.kzn.org.za/ls/24.xml>. Accessed April 7, 2006 10:33.

<sup>94</sup> “Ladysmith’s Monuments and Memorials”.



Clockwise: “Monument to Indian Soldiers killed in defence of Canal”; “To Lieut. Winston”; “Graves of a few of those that gave their lives”. Images taken from Photo Album 1 of Donald Murray, 11 Motor Ambulance Company (MAC), courtesy of Documentation Centre, Department of Defence Archives

The men taking these photographs followed a trend set by allied soldiers in 1940 soon after the outbreak of the Second World War where, during the lull before actual hostilities got under way, they made pilgrimages to the memorials and cemeteries of men killed in Western Europe during the First World War. Their reactions to these material remains of men who had died in war were manifold. On the one hand there existed a sense of following in a tradition of sacrifice and living up to the examples set by these men, “One soldier wrote a poem as he stood in a war cemetery in which he prayed that he might be ‘a worthy follower of these my comrades’”.<sup>95</sup> Yet there also existed a fear of dying of which these cemeteries and cenotaphs were concrete symbols:

The shadowed turf and the mouldering granite cross  
The wind on the wold, and the smarting sense of a loss  
That breaks into perpetual step with the regular dawn:  
So, confirmed in my mind by such things, incredulity shorn  
Of its questioning, wondering damnable doubt  
Will I too be snuffed out?<sup>96</sup>

Men like Guy Butler who followed the Commonwealth convention of visiting these cemeteries found himself confronting daily the messiness of death. For him the neat rows of white crosses commemorating the fallen was almost antiseptic, silencing the way they had died. This rendered them the anonymous casualties of modern warfare and overpowered all notions of individual

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<sup>95</sup> David W. Lloyd. *Battlefield Tourism – Pilgrimage and the Commemoration of the Great War in Britain, Australia, and Canada, 1919-1939*. (Oxford: Berg, 1998) p222.

<sup>96</sup> David W. Lloyd. *Battlefield Tourism*. p222.

glory and heroism. It gave little idea of the actual experiences of war and did an enormous injustice to those that had fallen:

...when on our return we stopped at Alamein cemetery, and saw thousands of graves with white crosses, we felt that the tidy and decency of the place was a travesty of the way the blokes died. Out in the desert we had come across a shot-up vehicle, a broken gun, and a tin helmet riddled with holes, and a group of crosses, close together, seeking comfort from the loneliness; or an airman's grave with a propeller blade stuck in it with his name on it. Such graves do retain a little of the pathos, even the glory, of death by battle. But when the bones are exhumed, dressed by the right, when the graves are numbered, divided into plots, white-washed – well, it takes even that little aura of glory away, and leaves one with only a blank sea of secondhand beds in the tidy wards of the hospital of death; where relatives come and look on one grave among thousands exactly the same, except for the name.<sup>97</sup>

However these uniform graves, originating with the First World War, were envisioned with a very specific purpose in mind namely, “the common purpose, the common devotion, the common sacrifice of all ranks in the Empire.”<sup>98</sup> They thus served to obliterate class distinction and create the vision of men from diverse backgrounds dying for a common purpose.<sup>99</sup> Needless to say, by subsuming all these men under the category of selfless sacrifice in the service of the nation, the individual identity of each soldier, his motivations and experiences of war is obliterated in the face of homogenisation.

For many, when the wreckage of war – the crashed planes, the burnt-out tanks and the bullet-ridden trucks – had been cleared away or reclaimed by the sand of the desert leaving little trace, all that remained to mark the fallen were the cemeteries dedicated to the fallen with their neat rows of white crosses. These became sites of pilgrimage, not only for families, but for South African and international ex-servicemen who return year after year to commemorate the fallen at these sites of recollection:

Ex-servicemen who became pilgrims not only returned to visit the graves of their comrades; they also searched for or were confronted by an imagined past. It was a quest either to ensure that their experiences or the individuals that they once knew were not forgotten or, if the nightmare experience could not be forgotten, an attempt to defuse the memory.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Guy Butler. *Bursting World – An Autobiography 1936-45*. (Claremont: David Philip, Publisher (Pty) Ltd, 1983) p188.

<sup>98</sup> David W. Lloyd. *Battlefield Tourism*. p124.

<sup>99</sup> Lloyd. *Battlefield Tourism*. p124.

<sup>100</sup> David Lloyd. *Battlefield Tourism*. p147.

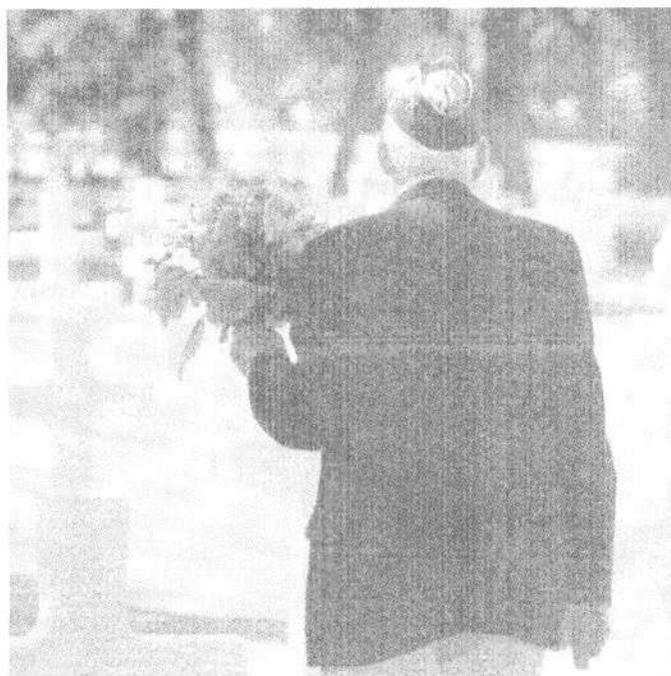


Image of Ex-Serviceman John Burnes at the American war cemetery in Coleville sur Mer in Normandy taken from *The Sunday Tribune*, June 6, 2004.

The image above was taken during the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of D-Day – the invasion of Normandy in June, 1944. This decisive event which shaped the outcome of the war was marked by horrendous casualties on the part of the Allies as they drove the Germans back. The image itself is poignant as the veteran in the autumn of his own life confronts the rows of crosses – his comrades who had fallen in their youth whose premature demise had rendered them eternally young. In addition the graves of the fallen became sites of pilgrimage for those wishing to connect with loved ones who had fallen overseas. In the case of Kevin Aloysius Kelly, the young pilot who was shot down over Austria in 1944 at the age of 22<sup>101</sup>, almost fifty years later the family were still intent on discovering the circumstances of his death and the nature of his experiences at war, as well as the site of his grave as they were planning on visiting it for the first time since the 1950s. All that they had received of Kelly were his clothing and a diary sent by the RAF to them during the war and, after more than four decades, they still desired closure and his life, his death and his final resting place were not forgotten.<sup>102</sup>

In addition to the graves of fallen soldiers, important sites for commemoration are war memorials. A space that combines the grave of the fallen soldier with the war memorial is the

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<sup>101</sup> Cf the preceding chapter.

<sup>102</sup> Killie Campbell Africana Library (KCAL). Letter by Joan M. Simpson to the Director, Royal Air Force Museum. KCM 55127-55129.

Tomb of the Unknown Warrior. Initiated by Britain in 1920 and later, the other countries involved in the First World War, a soldier's body was chosen to represent the Unknown Warrior. Removed from one of the battlefields where thousands lay interred, the body was transported in a moving ceremony to England where thousands of Britons viewed the procession to pay homage to the fallen soldier.<sup>103</sup> The emotional impact of the soldier's body was due to its very anonymity, making it emblematic of every soldier who had been killed in the service of the British Empire, “...when generations come to pass the shrine every head should be bared and every heart humbled at remembrance of his greatness as a man and a comrade, the silent symbol of 700, 000 who gladly died that Great Britain might live.”<sup>104</sup> On a more personal level, for the thousands of survivors or for the people that had lost a loved one to the war, the anonymity of the soldier served a more poignant role which was emphasized by the state itself, “The Government deliberately created an aura of mystery around the Unknown Warrior, so that it was possible for all the relatives of the missing to believe that this was the body of their son, husband, brother or lover.”<sup>105</sup> Like the role of war graves in general, pilgrimage to the Tomb of the Unknown Warrior allowed for a sense of closure, “enable[ing] the nation to bury symbolically in England all those ordinary soldiers who had died,” which played a significant role in nation-building where all came together to pay homage to the fallen.<sup>106</sup> Like war memorials in general it continues to play a significant role in the process of remembrance and acknowledgement of those who gave their lives, believing it was for a higher purpose.

In South Africa, as with the other commonwealth and European states, Armistice Day commemorating the end of the First World War went on to incorporate the commemoration of the Second World War as well:

Common British, Canadian, South African and ANZAC traditions include two minutes of silence at the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month because that was the time (in Britain and France) when the armistice became effective. The two minutes recall World War I and World War II; before 1945 the silence was for one minute.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Lloyd. *Battlefield Tourism*. p65-69.

<sup>104</sup> Lloyd. *Battlefield Tourism*. p64.

<sup>105</sup> Lloyd. *Battlefield Tourism*. p65.

<sup>106</sup> Lloyd. *Battlefield Tourism*. p82.

<sup>107</sup> “Remembrance Day”. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Remembrance\\_Day](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Remembrance_Day). Accessed April 7, 2006 10:49.

“...they must know what I am...what I was...”

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In South Africa specifically, the largest Armistice Day events occur at the Cenotaph in Johannesburg, as it has for more than eighty years, as well as at the War Memorial in Pretoria at the Union Buildings.<sup>108</sup>

Another kind of war memorial was initiated by Field Marshal Smuts soon after the end of the Second World War in 1947. This was the South African National War Museum which had been modelled on the British Imperial War Museum. According to Smuts, in his speech at the inauguration of the museum:

...We are gathered here today to open what may not unfairly be looked upon as a memorial to the greatest united effort our country has ever been called upon to produce. Memorials, of course, have more than one use. They serve to remind us of what is past, of great deeds of heroism and sacrifice; they also serve as a pointer, and sometimes as a warning to the future.

It is in these senses that the South African War Museum may be regarded as a Memorial. It will remind us, I hope, not only of the part we played in the recent great struggle to save civilization, but also of the horrors, the loss of life and the devastation, and serve as a warning to us to create a world in which we shall never have to use again the weapons of death and destruction we see here today, or those dreadful weapons to follow them...<sup>109</sup>

However, while Smuts was speaking of the Museum as a monument of the Second World War, this was not to remain the case. In 1975 it became the South African National Museum of Military History, widening its focus to embrace all South African military encounters. Although its special status as a Second World War memorial was lost under apartheid, in the present it remains a site at which war veterans gather to share their experiences.<sup>110</sup>

The emphasis of monuments dedicated to fallen soldiers, is not on the harsh reality of war – painful, inglorious and often messy death – or, in fact, an acknowledgement of the soldier as aggressor, but focuses instead on the role of the soldier as noble defender. The soldier’s contribution does not lie in victory over the enemy but in making the highest sacrifice of all – his life, be it for the nation or for his compatriots:

...he [Man] constructs himself as one who places highest value not on *killing* but on *dying* – dying for others, to protect them, sacrificing himself so that others might live.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> “Remembrance Day”.

<sup>109</sup> The South African National Museum of Military History. <http://www.militarymuseum.co.za/welcome.html>  
Accessed April 6, 2006 14:33.

<sup>110</sup> The South African National Museum of Military History.

<sup>111</sup> Jean Bethke Elshtain. *Women and War*. (New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1987) p206.

“...they must know what I am...what I was...”

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Ultimately they functioned as a space where grief could be expressed at the loss of soldiers to war, while simultaneously acknowledging that their sacrifice served a higher purpose. This ostensibly offered some small measure of comfort to those left behind and gave recognition to the efforts of men dying horrendously on the battlefield, “They were built as places where people could mourn...At the time, communal commemorative art provided first and foremost a framework for the legitimation of individual and family grief”.<sup>112</sup>

According to David Lloyd, war memorials inevitably take on a gendered aspect where the fallen are the soldiers killed in war and those that mourn at these memorials are the women who have lost husbands, fathers or sons.<sup>113</sup> Yet veterans gather here to pay their respects to their fallen comrades and the sites also then become one of remembrance of the events of the war from which women have been excluded. And, despite their anonymous portrayal of male sacrifice, they take on a racial cast as well. In South Africa separate memorials were constructed for the different units making up the Non-European Army Services, memorials for the Cape Coloured Corps or for the Indian troops of the Second World War. Yet, it is in keeping with the overall disillusionment of these ex-servicemen, that their memorials designed to recognize and honour their role played in war were subject to vandalism and lack of acknowledgement: “The annual parade on September 18 past the Square Hill memorial in Woodlands commemorating a victory by the Cape Corps in Turkey in WW1 no longer happens and the memorial has been vandalized.”<sup>114</sup>

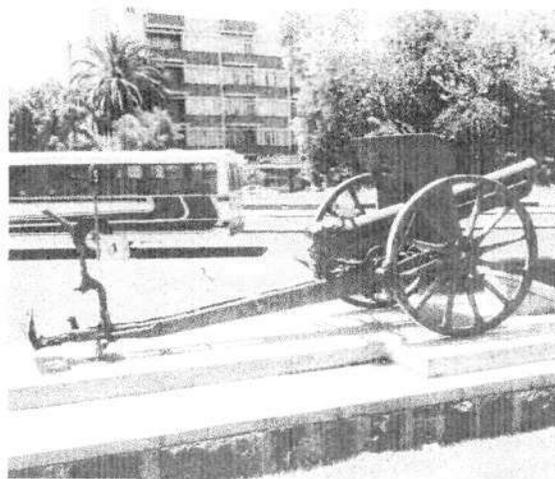


Photo of Square Hill Memorial taken from Ian Gleeson. *The Unknown Force*. Rivonia: Ashanti Publishing, 1994

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<sup>112</sup> Winter. *Sites of Memory*. p93.

<sup>113</sup> Lloyd. *Battlefield Tourism*. p46.

<sup>114</sup> Independent Newspapers Archive. Shelagh McLoughlin. “The Forgotten Force – The Way We Were” in *The Natal Witness*, November 19, 1997.

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The pattern continued in 1996 when Indian veterans requested the movement of the Indian War Memorial from Grey Street to a better site due to the lack of respect with which it had been treated:

We often visit the memorial to lay wreaths in memory of those who were killed. It is heartbreaking to see the area littered with garbage, rotting vegetables and even human faeces. Members of the legion [Natal Indian Ex-Servicemen's Legion] are now in the twilight of their lives. Our only wish is for the War Memorial to be moved to a place where it will be treated with the respect and dignity it deserves.<sup>115</sup>

The Indian War Memorial was given an almost animate aspect, evident in the words of the Kamalnain Maharaj, a World War Two veteran, and hence needed to be treated with “respect and dignity”.<sup>116</sup> It appeared to symbolize the aspirations of those whom it represented and the vandalism visited upon the monument was therefore an attack on their sacrifices made in war. This vandalism heightened the disillusionment they had already experienced fifty years later under the apartheid state and served, not only as a site of remembrance and commemoration, but one of neglect and silence. Ultimately for veterans of the war, both black and white, remembering their role in war was to acknowledge them, “We all like to be remembered because to be remembered is to be valued. If you fail to remember others, you rob them of their significance”.<sup>117</sup>

The tone was set for this lack of commemoration of the Second World War far earlier. The victory of the National Party in 1948 brought to power those who did not merely oppose South Africa's participation in the war but, in some instances, actually supported the forces of fascism. The focus of South Africa's commemoration was on the South African War, evident by the numerous monuments and cenotaphs dedicated to the conflict that are still marketed as tourist sites today. Other sites of commemoration were those focusing on colonial conflict with indigenous groups such as the Blood River Monument or the memorials on Isandlwana Hill in KwaZulu-Natal.<sup>118</sup> Even the South African National War Museum was made to broaden its scope – as I have discussed earlier – so that its focus was not only on the Second World War. The apartheid government's lack of interest in the commemoration of the Second World War

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<sup>115</sup> Independent Newspapers Archive. Nelandri Pillay. “WW2 Veterans Want a Better Site” in *The Sunday Tribune*, October 27, 1996.

<sup>116</sup> Pillay. “WW2 Veterans Want a Better Site” in *Sunday Tribune*, October 27, 1996.

<sup>117</sup> Independent Newspapers Archive. Toni Younghusband. “To be remembered is to be valued and at last the world remembers SA's D-Day soldiers” in *The Sunday Tribune*, June 5, 1994.

<sup>118</sup> “Battlefields Travel Guide”.

<http://www.wordtravels.com/Travelguide/Countries/South%20Africa/Regions/Battlefields>. Accessed April 7, 2004 11:02.

was compounded by the country’s withdrawal from the commonwealth in 1961,<sup>119</sup> affecting the country’s official ability to engage in commonwealth commemorations.

The post-1994 era has not really rectified this lack of commemoration either. Work by the South African Heritage Resources Agency–Burial Site Unit concentrates on addressing the commemoration of liberation struggles against the apartheid state – as I have discussed earlier in this chapter. In terms of official recognition and memorialisation, the Second World War is in an unenviable position. The apartheid state’s focus on commemorating key moments in Afrikaner nationalist history and the democratic state’s focus on liberation movements has left little space for the war. Its commemoration has been confined to veterans’ organizations – to those who took part in the war. Yet, even the memories of the war’s participants were coloured by what came after 1945. The Second World War was inevitably viewed through the lens of apartheid, contradictorily making its legacy in South Africa the apartheid state.

Yet memorials such as the war memorial in central Durban – which I have discussed above – which commemorated the actions of white servicemen also served as points where all servicemen gathered to commemorate important anniversaries of the war:

Whenever we are called we go because they, they put it in the paper or in the TV. I still go down to the City Hall as you saw there, I was going to – with all the servicemen... we were going there – the City Hall through West Street... They [his friends who had died] not on the stone, they not on the stone. Most names that I have found there, it’s whites – 193- because the war started in 1939 – mostly it’s whites – I wouldn’t know now if they’ve placed any of the blacks there because a lot of blacks died also, a lot of them. Still with all that I still go – when we are asked to go, I go, I go.<sup>120</sup>



Photographs courtesy of Alfred Jimmy Davis

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<sup>119</sup> Ronald Hyam and Peter Henshaw. *The Lion and the Springbok: Britain and South Africa Since the Boer War*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) p269.

<sup>120</sup> Interview with Alfred Jimmy Davis.

The desire to acknowledge the sacrifices made in the war and feel part of the larger experience of war and its commemoration was tempered by the racially exclusive nature of the memorial. Yet, nonetheless, the images reflect a sense of ceremony with the grey-haired, well-dressed veterans and their regimental flag proudly marching through the streets of Durban, which makes the process of exclusion not as clear-cut. It indicates too a respect for those who had made the ultimate sacrifice in war, regardless of race. This suggests that fighting a war against fascism in a sense was more highly esteemed by its black participants now than personal or political considerations of equality.

### ***The Living Memorial: A New Society***

The official legacy of ex-servicemen in the war was enshrined in the film created by the State Information Office, *The Living Memorial*.<sup>121</sup> Here, the tensions and contradictions exposed by war-time experience, were papered over into a system of social welfare reform to buttress the fledgling apartheid state. This was a direct contradiction of the aims of post-war movements such as the Torch Commando. The film detailed the work of the “War Memorial Fund for Non-European Health Services” which was conceived of as a new kind of memorial, commemorating the troops of the Second World War:

When the war in Europe ended, there was much talk again about War Memorials. We also did our talking and thinking. If we stopped a Springbok in the street, and asked him, ‘What sort of War memorial shall we have?’ he would answer, as likely as not, ‘Well, we don’t want a lump of stone’.<sup>122</sup>

The conventional war memorial, an inanimate “lump of stone” which served as a commemoration of the dead, was perceived to be an insufficient legacy to the living, particularly in a society where so many inequalities abounded. The idea of a “living” memorial, “health services for the non-Europeans, an institute for the training of non-European health officers, or clinics, or a hospital” had its origins in the AES.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> National Film Video and Sound Archives (NFVSA) *The Living Memorial*. State Information Office, 1953. GCIS. FA 1825.

<sup>122</sup> KCAL. E.G. Malherbe Collection. “A War Memorial Fund for Non-European Health Services”, p4. National War Memorial Fund. Newspaper reports and other miscellaneous. 1944-5. KCM56974(607), File 439.

<sup>123</sup> KCAL. “A War Memorial Fund”. p4.

But why then a memorial concerned with the welfare of "non-Europeans", especially since their contributions had by and large been ignored by the war memorials erected commemorating the sacrifices of white men in the conflict? The answer lay in a mixture of ideas of Christian charity as well as notions of "trusteeship" where the "benefits of Christian civilisation" in the form of health care for all, as well as the creation of a new post-war South Africa, were key factors:

It really looked as if we had learnt, in the years between the wars, and during the war that the welfare of each depends on the welfare of all. We had spoken repeatedly of the responsibility of those who enjoy power and wealth, towards the needy and backward peoples. Here was a first opportunity to demonstrate our faith, and to give a lead to the civilians – amongst whose number we happily hope soon to include ourselves in creating the new South Africa of our ideal.<sup>124</sup>

Moreover, the War Memorial Fund was portrayed in the media as an example of good "citizenship to the whole of South Africa" led by the military. This was a new take on the idea of military service and citizenship where, in this instance, citizenship was defined by social responsibility to those most in need of aid.<sup>125</sup>

And those most in need of aid were black South Africans and responsibility for their high infant death rates, lack of adequate nutrition culminating in starvation as well as venereal disease lay at the feet of the white "rulers in South Africa" due to the latter's disregard.<sup>126</sup> This concern with the health conditions of black, and particularly African South Africans, dated from prior to the war where medical care for the poorest sections of the South African population were in an appalling state:

White doctors, many of whom were not prepared to carry out their services in rural areas where the poor could not afford to pay, left health services for blacks to a small cadre of missionary doctors scattered throughout remote rural areas. An unequal distribution of services was provided not according to people's needs, but according to their ability to pay, where the poor (who needed them most) were the most poorly supplied.<sup>127</sup>

Key to a reform of health care and social medicine were the figures of Henry Gluckman and George Gale. As head of the National Health Services Commission (NHSC), Gluckman began a policy of extending health care for all South Africans where the NHSC suggested a complete overhaul of the existing health care system.<sup>128</sup> George Gale worked with Gluckman and was appointed "Secretary of Health" and "Chief Health Officer of the Union" and the two

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<sup>124</sup> KCAL. "A War Memorial Fund". p2, 4.

<sup>125</sup> KCAL. "A War Memorial Fund". p7.

<sup>126</sup> KCAL. "A War Memorial Fund". p5.

<sup>127</sup> Vanessa Noble. "A Labour of Change": A Critical Study of the Durban Medical School and its Community Health Experiment, 1930-1960". (Unpublished MA Dissertation: University of Natal, Durban, 1999) p38.

<sup>128</sup> Noble. "A Labour of Change". p98.

“envisaged a chain of health centres stretching across South Africa to take health care into the myriad of rural and urban communities.”<sup>129</sup> These visionary men considered a national health service that was far ahead of its time in terms of its outlook of delivering health services to rich and poor alike and almost unique in its adoption of social and community medical practices. It was, however, this very extremism which served to alienate white South Africa, ultimately bringing it to an end.<sup>130</sup>

In 1941 Gluckman initiated a National Health Services Commission that “[recommended]...the establishment of a national health service that would reach all the people of South Africa, regardless of colour, and which would be paid for out of a health tax that would be assessed as part of general taxation according to means”.<sup>131</sup> For the next fifteen years Gluckman was an ardent proponent of “an active policy of social medicine and community health in South Africa”, setting himself up against the greater majority of the medical profession and the increasing refusal on the part of the South African state to support the project.<sup>132</sup> Yet, by the end of the war, when the tide had irrevocably turned in favour of the allies and maintaining the promises made during the war was not as high a priority, there was a reluctance on the part of the state to implement Gluckman’s proposal. The coming to power of the apartheid government in 1948 was the final nail in the coffin, “...it was certainly not part of the Nationalist Party’s brief in the 1950s to worry unduly about black health”, and the “poor white” crisis of two decades earlier had largely been ameliorated.<sup>133</sup>

It is within this context of the efforts of the visionary Gale and Gluckman that the War Memorial Fund came into being and Gale’s statistics on venereal disease, as well as the malnutrition of children evident in the Bantu Nutrition Survey of 1938, are mentioned in the

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<sup>129</sup> Noble. “A Labour of Change”. p101.

<sup>130</sup> Noble. “A Labour of Change”. p104.

<sup>131</sup> Shula Marks and Neil Andersson. “Industrialization, Rural Health, and the 1944 National Health Services Commission in South Africa” in *The Social Basis of Health and Healing in Africa*. Steven Feierman and John M. Janzen, eds. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992) p154-155.

<sup>132</sup> Maya Ruth Scholtz. “Mervyn Susser and Zena Stein: Pioneers in Community Health and their Jewish Identity as an Orienting Factor in their Contribution”. (University of Natal, Durban: Unpublished Honours Dissertation, 1999) p27. Marks and Andersson. “Industrialization, Rural Health, and the 1944 National Health Services Commission in South Africa” p157.

<sup>133</sup> Marks and Andersson. “Industrialization, Rural Health, and the 1944 National Health Services Commission in South Africa” p156-157. Cf. Shula Marks. “The Silent Scourge”: Silicosis, respiratory disease and gold mining in South Africa”. <http://wiserweb.wits.ac.za/PDF/%20Files/international%20-%20marks.PDF>. Accessed March 23, 2006, 09:06.

War Memorial Fund’s reasoning behind focussing on black South Africans.<sup>134</sup> However, this War Memorial Fund was largely the initiative of white liberals and those at whom it was aimed were not included in the policy-making process. Moreover, it did not demonstrate the radicalism of equality advocated by the National Health Services Commission. It was instead a product of the ambiguities of white liberalism.

Funds were donated for the Memorial by serving troops compromising two days pay which was overseen by Major-General F.H. Theron, Major-General W.H.E. Poole, Lieutenant-Colonel C.H.S Runge and Lieutenant L. Kuper, and the War Memorial Fund for Non-European Health Services came into being with its key aims being to:

- a) To establish as a lasting and living memorial to the South Africans who have given their lives during the war, an Institute of Hygiene, Hospitals or Clinics, or in some similar way to make a substantial contribution towards the improvement of the health of the non-European races in South Africa, the prevention of disease and the healing of the sick.
- b) To endeavour to secure that Freedom of Disease, as well as Freedom from Want, for all races, shall be realised in our country.<sup>135</sup>

It is with these ideals in mind that the film *The Living Memorial* was created in 1953 in order to detail the work of the War Memorial Fund. *The Living Memorial* begins with a description of the ideals for which the war was fought, a quote taken from John Donne “no man is an island...” is accompanied by the idealistic notion of the war in terms of “saving democracy and making the world a better place”.<sup>136</sup> The two came together in the aforementioned National War Memorial Health Foundation touted as the legacy of the servicemen who were killed during the war, serving as a concrete symbol of the sacrifices of these men in service to their country.

The film champions a vision of social control for the country in reaction to the societal ills plaguing society where white men were bearing the financial brunt of South Africa’s health problems, “In South Africa the tremendous financial, moral and manpower burden of looking after its 14 million people is borne almost entirely by its mere two and a half million Europeans”. The other racial groups were termed the least healthy based, not only on less access to education compounding the poverty level, but also to “racial customs and taboos”.<sup>137</sup> This paternalistic approach, saturated with ideas of inequality and racial distinction, viewed the plight of Africans,

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<sup>134</sup> KCAL. “A War Memorial Fund”. p5.

<sup>135</sup> KCAL. “A War Memorial Fund”. p1.

<sup>136</sup> *The Living Memorial*.

<sup>137</sup> *The Living Memorial*.

Indians and coloureds as being due to their inability to take care of themselves thus requiring the aid of their white benefactors.

Images of poverty and squalor were portrayed as integral to unplanned communities. The informal shanty towns and squatter camps which were dens of disease and vice also created an environment that allowed for the mingling of races, leading to overall degeneration. This was juxtaposed with images of order and respectability of well-laid out, state sanctioned, European ex-servicemen communities as well as black townships, providing a visual justification for segregation – a concern that was raised before the war. This also suggested the fears of the growing urbanization of Africans which had begun in the 1920s, brought about by the poor economic conditions on the reserves and their subsequent migration to urban areas in order to find employment. This urbanization dramatically increased during the Second World War when influx control was relaxed. This, compounded by poverty, led to the creation of large slum areas with overcrowding and lack of sanitation.<sup>138</sup> From the earliest years of the twentieth century African urbanization had been seen as a threat the white standards of living in the urban areas:

Since at least the turn of the century, successive government commissions had documented 'the distressing conditions under which Natives lived in our urban centres, conditions of squalor, misery and vice, which were a standing menace to the health of the whole population'.<sup>139</sup>

The work of the National War Memorial Health Foundation thus worked within a context of concern towards black urbanization and the social, health and economic ills associated with it. The Foundation itself propagated the socially acceptable ideals of the family, using not only feeding schemes such as "mobile soup canteens" to alleviate the worst effects of poverty, but organized youth activities where sport provided a "healthy outlet for the vigour of youth – vigour which all too frequently finds an outlet in crime and prostitution."<sup>140</sup> The emphasis on the stability of the family was designed to promote access to state subsidies for bulk buying and cheaper food but, more significantly, it promoted family solidarity. This solidarity was believed to create a climate leading to a prevention of crime and a resistance to "subversive agitation".<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> Nigel Worden. *The Making of Modern South Africa: Conquest, Segregation and Apartheid*. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1994) p61-62.

<sup>139</sup> Deborah Posel. "The Case for a Welfare State: Poverty and the Politics of the Urban African Family in the 1930s and 1940s" in *South Africa's 1940s: Worlds of Possibilities*. Saul Dubow and Alan Jeeves, eds. (Cape Town: Double Storey Books, 2005) p69.

<sup>140</sup> *The Living Memorial*.

<sup>141</sup> *The Living Memorial*.

The film mirrored a key anxiety by both the state as well as African leaders regarding the position of the African family in urban areas:

There were multiple sites of concern but all focused in one way or another on the fate of the family. Since the late 1920s, urban native administrators echoed the concerns aired within urban African communities about the destabilization of marriage, seen to be linked to problems of crime and juvenile delinquency.<sup>142</sup>

The emphasis on social welfare in *The Living Memorial* thus served a two-fold purpose – to alleviate the social ills plaguing the country holding true to the idealistic vision of the war veterans of liberty and democracy. Furthermore and, somewhat contradictorily, it served to moderate opposition to the apartheid state as well as support the policy of separate development.

The depiction of poverty was not only confined to the “non-white races” but to working class white collar white workers. However this depiction nevertheless had a strong racial slant. White office workers, well dressed in suits and dresses, were portrayed gathered around a buffet table where food was served to combat malnourishment, providing a stark contrast to the urchin-like black children standing in lines with containers for soup. Yet the film, as it concludes, emphasises the notion of a united South African nation with a return to John Donne, “any man’s death diminishes me for I am involved in mankind”.<sup>143</sup> This idealized vision of South Africa, complete with silences about the origins of poverty as well as social and racial inequality, paints a condescending portrait of the helping hand extended by well-to-do white South Africans to their black brethren under the guise of the idealism felt by many veterans regarding their war service. It is ironic that these ideals of the Second World War with its emphasis on a fight against totalitarianism had more in common with the apartheid state, the founders of which had closer ties to the Ossewabrandwag and Nazi Germany. *The Living Memorial* thus strikes an uneasy balance between the interests of veterans as well as that of the South African state, serving as an example of the contradictory and ambiguous portrayal of the war after 1948.

By the 1950s the apartheid state had failed to implement the policies advocated by the National Health Services Commission. This was evident in the ambiguities of the National War Memorial Health Foundation which rose from the Commission, as portrayed in *The Living Memorial*. As I have discussed at the opening of this section, the National War Memorial Health Foundation was envisaged as an alternative to the conventional stone memorial and was to be symbolic

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<sup>142</sup> Posel. “The Case for a Welfare State”. p68.

<sup>143</sup> *The Living Memorial*.

instead of a more idealistic South Africa which would benefit all its people – particularly those most in need – regardless of race. The limited support given to it by the apartheid state and its ultimate end meant that there was no real lasting memorial legacy for the Second World War in South Africa, particularly as it represented the interests of black servicemen.

### **“The Last Good War”**

Even for those who did not experience the war firsthand, the Second World War continues to exert a powerful hold on the popular imagination on an international scale almost seventy years after its inception. My own perception of the Second World War falls into the category of what Hirsch terms “postmemory”:

...postmemory is distinguished from memory by generational distance and from history by deep personal connection. Postmemory is a powerful and very particular form of memory precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation...Postmemory characterizes the experience of those who grew up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth...<sup>144</sup>

For me, the Second World War came to life in the stories of the people who had lived through it – my mother’s description of blackouts, Mrs Geddie’s stories and her photographs of her husband and, in particular, her nephew Walter and, most influential, the Hollywood films which depicted the war, *The Bridge on the River Kwai*, *The Guns of Navarone* and *From Here to Eternity*. These narratives of bravery, honour and self-sacrifice dominated post-war media and indelibly shaped my perception of the conflict.

However after these war films of the fifties and early sixties, the political events of the sixties and seventies pushed the war to the background and it was perceived by succeeding generations largely through the lens of popular culture, particularly in the form of film. The increasing cynicism and social upheavals after 1968 and the wholly negative portrayal of war during the Vietnam era leading to civil protests against US foreign policy and disillusionment with government was paralleled in Hollywood through the release of films like Francis Ford Coppola’s *Apocalypse Now* and Vietnam veteran Oliver Stone’s *Platoon* and *Born on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July*. These films took a searing look at the blind patriotism evoked by war as well as the atrocities committed by both sides and ultimately condemning the military as an institution.

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<sup>144</sup> Hirsch. *Family Frames*. p22.

Through ambivalence, moral ambiguity and unrest which characterized the Cold War era, the Second World War was looked upon with nostalgia as being “the last good war”, fought against the clearly defined threat of fascism. Following the fall of the USSR and the collapse of communism in the early nineties as well as the first Gulf War, remembrance of the Second World War experienced a surge of popularity once again, catapulting it to the forefront of popular culture. Perhaps one of the reasons for this are the growing numbers of war memoirs written by veterans decades after the event where the passage of time was necessary to truly understand the impact of one’s experiences during the war and how they have shaped the individual.<sup>145</sup> In addition, Hollywood depictions of war like Steven Spielberg’s *Saving Private Ryan* and *Band of Brothers* – both achieving recognition from the film community and becoming commercial successes a well – brought a new understanding of the conflict to succeeding generations distant from the actual experience. Perhaps, in reaction to the cynicism brought about by later conflicts and the disdain with which the military was viewed in Vietnam, contemporary films depicting the Second World War foreground the notion of heroism and sacrifice while nevertheless giving an unflinching portrayal of the horror and destruction of war. The effect is to condemn war itself while nevertheless recognizing the sacrifices and bravery of those involved.

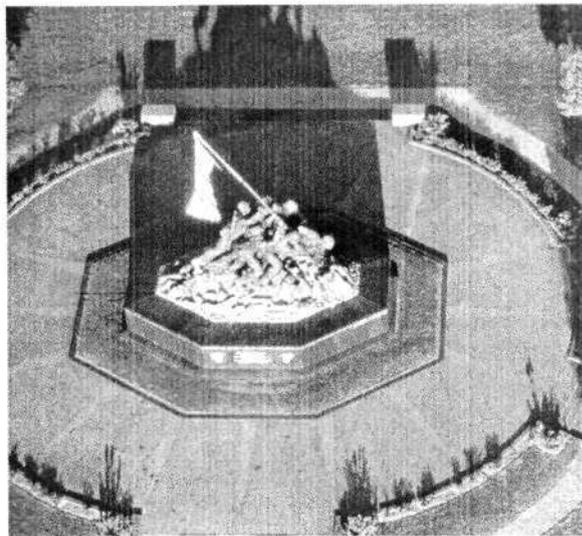
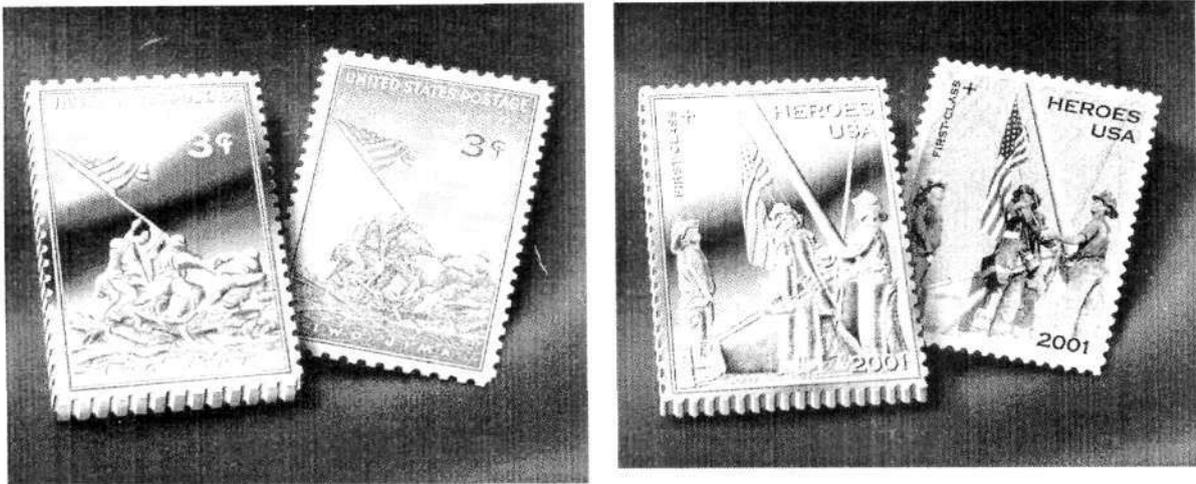
In addition, contemporary incidents of bravery such as the heroism of New York firemen at the World Trade Centre attack on September 11, 2001, are read within already existing frameworks created by the Second World War. Here, the image commemorating the event, bore strong resemblance to the Iwo Jima image of GIs raising the American flag on the Pacific Island after defeating the Japanese in a high pitched battle with heavy casualties. The actual memorial of Iwo Jima also makes an appearance in films such as *The Recruit* and *The Manchurian Candidate* when the focus is on issues such as honour and duty.

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<sup>145</sup> Samuel Hynes. “Personal narratives and commemoration” in *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century*. Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) p212.

“...they must know what I am...what I was...”

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Clockwise: *Iwo Jima* commemorative stamp issued in 1945; *Heroes USA* stamp issued in 2002; *Iwo Jima* Memorial in Washington D.C. Images taken from *Pride and Patriotism – The United We Stand Collection, 1847-2003*, United States Postal Service Official Program

Thus, with little exception, “the last good war” remains the most unambiguous in its portrayal in popular culture and memory.

## Conclusion

The Allied victory in 1945 marked a turning point in South Africa but one which could hardly have been anticipated. The spirit of liberalism which permeated the war effort was replaced by a growing conservatism, culminating in the rise of the apartheid state. Yet this conservatism was by no means absent during the war years. Perhaps, in its most visible form, it was represented by the right-wing Afrikaner nationalism exemplified by the Ossewabrandwag but, in addition, outwardly liberal initiatives such as the AES were infused with the conservatism which was a

feature of the white South African settler state. This was embodied in the visible signs of segregation which were the hallmark of the Union Defence Force. This conservatism manifested itself in the anti-apartheid movement, the Torch Commando, and was responsible ultimately for its ability to take a radical stance against the apartheid state. Yet radicalism itself, as embodied in the Springbok Legion, was not successful due to the conservatism of its members and their desire to benefit materially after the hardships of war, even if this came at the expense of black South Africans. The Second World War thus failed to achieve concrete change in South Africa and was relegated instead to the realm of public and individual memory.

Furthermore, in a somewhat incongruous manner, the legacy of the war was shaped by the state to support its policies of separate development as evident in the film *The Living Memorial* where social harmony and the wellbeing of all South Africans envisaged by the National War Memorial Health Foundation was equated with apartheid policies. International films too such as *The Bridge on the River Kwai* and *From Here to Eternity* staked their hold on memory through their depiction of the war where the ideals of heroism, duty and honour were put under the spotlight in the face of the devastation wreaked by war. However these ideals emerged largely unscathed due to the ultimate perception of the Second World War as “the last good war”, provoking nostalgia in generations facing the ambiguity of the conflicts which were a feature of the second half of the twentieth century.

For veterans and those who had lost loved ones, war memorials served as a place of commemoration and remembrance, as tangible symbols of the heavy cost of war as well as the heroism and self-sacrifice of those who took part in the war. These memorials ultimately worked as a form of public and state recognition of the men and women who served, becoming the foci for public remembrance and acknowledgement of their efforts. However, the subsequent neglect of these memorials in some instances, particularly those dedicated to black servicemen, mirrored their own position under apartheid. From 1948 their sacrifices were of little consequence to a state bent on entrenching racial discrimination. Thus, the almost wholly unambiguous portrayal of the Second World War in popular culture throughout the twentieth century was, in South Africa, tempered with a sense of disillusionment over sacrifices made in vain.

*Conclusion*

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My interest in gender and its relation to the military aptly enough started out from an image of a band of soldiers charging into a raging fire which, for me, begged the question: what would persuade these men and so many others throughout history to engage in an activity which went against all natural instinct and common-sense notions of self-preservation? Yet a consideration of the self-sacrifice so common in military folklore takes on a far more complex dimension in the South African context where it is inseparable from ideas of gender and race. To an extent, this aspect is evident in other countries as well, particularly the United States from a racial perspective, and other Allied countries in terms of a reconsideration of gender roles for the duration of the war. What makes South Africa unique, particularly in the case of the Second World War, is that at the end of the war South Africa did not simply return to a conservative status quo evident in many instances in the rest of the world, but instead took on a right-wing cast, where white citizens voted into power a government which would entrench racial discrimination for the next fifty years. This was a government whose members had been opposed to South Africa's participation in the war and, in some instances, were sympathetic to the totalitarian Nazi regime. As historians are increasingly recognising, the Second World War marked a point where South Africa stood on the verge of creating a new society.¹ That it chose an alternative path is something that can be understood partly from the experiences and the choices of the men and women participating in the Second World War.

The group considered key to the war effort were white men. These men, all volunteers, were the only group allowed to bear arms and to take part in combat, thus giving them a vital role to play in war. There was much that white men could draw on as a lens through which to perceive their war service. This thesis has demonstrated the importance of propaganda efforts that emphasised the bravery, honour and patriotism of the idealised combatant. The efforts of white soldiers were portrayed within a long-established tradition of sport which was a stalwart of war. With its origins in the public school system of Britain and the United States in the nineteenth century, it was emulated in the schooling system here and was the means by which men were expected to

¹ Cf. *South Africa's 1940s: Worlds of Possibilities*. Saul Dubow and Alan Jeeves, eds. (Cape Town: Double Storey Books, 2005)

understand their combatant roles – holding true to the ideas of fair play, teamwork and competition in war. In South Africa the use of "Springboks" – the national rugby team – to describe the white soldiers of the UDF made this connection between sport and war particularly explicit. And rugby itself served as an assertion of a white South African, and particularly Afrikaner, identity. It thus served as process of exclusion – black men were not allowed to become sporting Springboks for much of the twentieth century. This simply paralleled their exclusion from combat in the war.

Linked to sport was the imagery of hunting. Appearing in publications such as the liberal magazine *Libertas*, which I discuss in Chapter Three, the Springboks of the UDF were portrayed with wild animals which symbolised their domination of the African landscape. This was evident in the private accounts and personal photo albums of these soldiers as well, and I argue that there were similarities, in this instance, of the way in which the depictions of official sources and the soldiers' own understandings converged. Similar to the rugged adventurer depicted in the "boys own" adventure stories of the nineteenth century, the personal photographs of these soldiers depicted them crouching over slain animals in East Africa.

Other parallels between official and personal depictions of the war experiences of white soldiers were in the form of silences – a consistent theme throughout this dissertation. For the morale-building nature of the war effort, propaganda efforts both in South Africa and internationally, censored their portrayal of the death and destruction of the war, evident in Chapter One. The injured, the dying and the dead, both of the enemy and of the allied forces, were absent from the official sources. The same silences were evident in the personal photographs of these soldiers which focussed instead on travel and tourism, portrait photographs and camaraderie. Part of this stemmed from the notion of what was acceptable to show which could be traced back to the Kodak advertising campaigns that emphasised the use of the personal camera in recording the significant and happy moments of a lifetime. This left little place for unpleasantness, hence the ubiquitous "Smile" when taking a photograph. Another factor contributing to these personal silences may also be due to self-censorship. In their personal accounts as well veterans were more likely to speak of camaraderie between friends than of their experiences in battle. Yet it was combat which strengthened these bonds as men were only able to share its experiences with those who had undergone the same.

Important here was the notion of masculinity and the challenges to it. This masculinity was most tested in situations where men had little control over their world when the idealised nature of warfare in terms of glory and bravery were being challenged. This came to the fore most clearly when men were taken prisoner of war. A strong focus of this dissertation was the experiences related in diaries that depicted the harrowing nature of being taken POW, the futility, the hopelessness and the fear of being seen in such a manner by the women at home. Yet I have argued in Chapter Four that men were even able to assert their masculinity in such situations by playing an active role in escape attempts, acts of sabotage and the games of rugby to which they went to extraordinary lengths to play in the Springbok colours of green and gold.

This assertion of masculinity was by no means confined to white men either. Men such as Job Maseko felt as compelled to commit acts of escape and acts of sabotage against their captors as their white counterparts. Yet, black men remained excluded from combat, which remained a white male preserve for the duration. However ideas of black men and the stereotype of the "noble warrior" remained a presence in combat, where both official and personal sources not only drew upon a colonial past of military subjugation and victory over the "native tribes", but white soldiers also used Zulu war cries as they charged in with their bayonets which resembled assegais.

As this thesis has shown, a respect for the bravery of the "noble warrior" did little to change the conservative fears of arming black men. For the men of the Non-European Army Services, the official images of black men charging in with assegais were not only an acknowledgement of their warrior past but an indication of their limited roles in the contemporary era, serving little use in modern warfare. Where black men were portrayed positively in the war it was, as evident in the case of Lucas Majozi, by drawing on a warrior past which was subsequently equated with a non-combatant but self-sacrificing role in war.

For the African, Indian and coloured participants of the war however, combat remained a point of strong contention. I show that combat was linked to aspirations for citizenship and equal participation in the war symbolised equal participation in government. Numerous articles were written in black newspapers exhorting the government to allow black men to demonstrate their loyalty in war in the hopes that a reward for their loyalty would be their enfranchisement at war's ends. Historical parallels for this were the enfranchisement of the women of most countries at

the end of the First World War as recognition for their invaluable contribution to the war effort. For black men, the war presented the possibility for bringing about a change in their status and they used significant setbacks such as the defeat at Tobruk to argue for greater participation in the defence of South Africa. The changes occurring on the home front gave some credence to their desires for equality. Influx control was relaxed for the duration of the war allowing black men and women greater access to the urban areas and the former greater job opportunities to meet the demands of war industry. This suggested that there would be a lessening of racial inequality in South African society. It is only at the turning point of the war, when victory favoured the Allies, that a growing sense of disillusionment set in as their pleas went unheeded.

The demands and expectations of black men however belied the way in which they were portrayed, both by official sources and by the written and oral recollections of white soldiers. In the case of the latter, disdain was mediated by condescension. Where there was an acceptance of the part played by black men in the war, it was set within the limits of their role as non-combatants and loyal servants. The official magazine, *The Women's Auxiliary*, took it as self-evident that the war's participants were white, devoting very little attention to the activities of black men or women. In the propaganda films looked at in this dissertation the work of black men was largely rendered invisible in the war – relegated to the background if they were mentioned at all and always subordinated to white men, it suggests that propaganda worked to contain the possibilities of empowerment brought about by their war service. Yet the weaknesses of propaganda are evident in the exhortations by black men to allow them to expand their roles.

This weakness in propaganda was echoed by the ambivalences in liberalism itself. Those playing key leadership roles in the war effort, the supporters of Smuts' United Party, liberals such as E.G. Malherbe and his wife Janie, who played prominent roles in recruiting and Military Intelligence, symbolised the flaws within South African liberalism. Janie Malherbe in particular, in the booklet *Complex Country* aimed at international troops visiting South Africa, demonstrated the contradictions of South African society. In terms of race the booklet adopts a firmly segregationist viewpoint – separate but equal for the different race groups. Moreover it made use of stereotypes in the portrayal of African and, in particular, Indian men within the context of tension between the South African state and Indians in Natal. This tension culminated in the

Pegging Act that restricted Indian access to land in the province amidst white fears of “being swamped” by their increasing incursions into “European areas”.

I have found that, surprisingly enough, other than a warning to visiting troops to not take advantage of unmarried South African women, the booklet pays little heed to the role of women in the war, despite Janie Malherbe’s prominent position in the war effort. Working as a freelance journalist before the war, Janie and E.G. Malherbe enlisted soon after the outbreak of the war. Whereas the former was made Director of Military Intelligence, Janie enlisted as a private in the Transport Services in order to gain the most experience from the war. As a transport driver she wrote an article that appeared in *Libertas* placing the work done by these women within an already existing tradition of the Afrikaans *volksmoeder*. She was subsequently transferred to the Ic Unit of Military Intelligence where she was involved in increasing recruitment through radio broadcasts, speeches, letters to personal friends as well as recruiting drives throughout the country. These drives were designed to increase the support and enlistment of the more ambivalent-minded white Afrikaans-speaking population of the *platteland*. As such, they drew parallels between Afrikaner nationalist myth and history by using terms such as *Steel Commando* or *Air Commando* to garner support for the war.

Yet Janie Malherbe envisaged a limited role for white women in the auxiliary services of the Union Defence Force. For her, white men were key to the war effort and women’s role was to provide support as wives, mothers as well as volunteers in the military with the sole aim of returning men home safely. This was evident in an article she wrote for *The Outspan* chastising women for their desire to be given equal pay. According to Malherbe, women’s position as waged earners was a temporary aberration and subordinate to that of wives and mothers. As such, this dissertation shows that she worked within the limitations placed by official sources on women’s roles in the war. The example of Janie Malherbe demonstrated the way in which women were complicit in the representation of their “appropriate” gender roles. This was particularly evident in the case of the war where personal needs were subordinated to those of duty and loyalty to the state.

In *The Women’s Auxiliary* for instance, aimed at the volunteers of the Women’s Auxiliary Army Services, the emphasis was on recipes, hairstyles, fashion and domestic duties. This was borne out by the official images of women at war which linked femininity to war work. Yet I

show that these official sources had to take into account the needs and motivations of the women at which they were aimed as well. This was evident in 1942 which marked the lowest point of the war after the setback at Tobruk and the setting in of the malaise termed "war weariness" by *The Women's Auxiliary*. The emphasis of propaganda was no longer on the duty of supporting men in war but instead focussed on the individual desires of young women, accentuating the glamour and independence of war work. This tone was then changed again towards the end of the war when, in a manner similar to Britain for instance, women were expected to return to their pre-war status to make way for returning men who had made the far greater sacrifice.

Yet the personal accounts of women in war indicated greater nuance in their experiences of war service than that allowed for by official views. This was particularly evident in the case of women's interaction with white men which had been portrayed by official sources and by propaganda as being idealised – the two working in harmony together for the common good. However actual military policy challenged this where the military took on the duties of husbands or parents in the home by utilising curfews for women and monitoring their whereabouts in order to protect these women from "being taken advantage of" by troops. Both May Kirkman and June Borchert suggest that this was indeed the case and Mary Benson's autobiography makes it quite clear that male troops tended to "pressure" women serving overseas, while they were also subject to milder and more extreme forms of sexual harassment on the home front. For Betty Addison, this was partly due to the uniform that ultimately not only showed their independence but suggested to men their freedom from the usual constraints of decorum – sometimes with tragic consequences. Janie Malherbe was compelled to write a letter which detailed the pregnancy of a young, single woman and defended the position of these women in the auxiliary services where she felt that they were subject to similar situations than that in any position in society. Ultimately the sexuality of these women and this kind of fraternisation with white soldiers were downplayed by official sources which chose the vision of wives and mothers or the platonic interaction between the two. It is clear here that, even when the conventional gendered stereotypes were inadequate in portraying the reality of lived experience, they remained the dominant lens through which war experience was perceived.

I suggest in this dissertation that it appears as though these official perceptions of serving women held sway at the end of the war. In a situation which can be likened to that occurring in

the other Allied countries as well, women returned to the home and the ideals of domesticity in droves. They were supported in this domestic sphere by the labour of black women and men as well. This return to domesticity, of course, did not account for all women. Helen Joseph for instance felt empowered by her military service and her work with the Army Education Service, seeing the contradictions between a war fought for democracy and a society built on the inequality of its black members – a contradiction which was embodied in Smuts. Her awareness of this contradiction enabled Joseph, and women like her, to embark on a life-time struggle against the apartheid state. Yet thousands more women returned home, preferring to not “rock the boat” after the upheavals of war and believing the propaganda which stated that men had made the greater sacrifice and women owed them their fealty.

The white men and women of the Union Defence Force were exposed to democratic ideals under the Army Education Scheme that suggested a vision of a different post-war South Africa. Yet the AES mirrored the contradictions of liberal white society, holding fast to segregation within its own ranks which contradicted what it taught. The same was true for the ex-servicemen's organisation, the Torch Commando headed by the war hero “Sailor” Malan, which fought the state's attempt to strike coloured voters off the roll in the Cape. The organisation ultimately failed, as they had no real commitment to racial equality and did not allow these same coloured ex-servicemen within their own ranks. Perhaps the one war-time and post-war organisation that demonstrated a more far-reaching democratic vision was the Springbok Legion. It was however this very zeal which alienated the organisation from white members not as keen to change the status quo in the country – and the organisation faded away in the 1950s losing ground to the Liberal Party.

The disillusionment of black men was more complete and more poignant. The promises made to them during war had not been kept in the peace and their legacy was a few shillings, a suit of clothing and, in some instances, a bicycle. More concrete was their exclusion from citizenship which was rendered absolute by the rise of the apartheid state in 1948 – a state which partially came into being because white men were able to express their own disillusionment with Smuts' failed promises by voting against him. Thus, as white men were given housing grants and access to education, the contributions of black men were forgotten. This was embodied in the figure of Alfred Jimmy Davis. He had been provided with little skills training by the army and the promises of housing were not kept. He eventually came to live in a small flat in Wentworth

which had been designated “coloured” by the Group Areas Act. It would take another fifty years and the fall of the apartheid state before black men were enfranchised.

This entrenchment of racial inequality and right-wing nationalism made South Africa unique amongst the Allied countries. As Britain found herself bound to grant India independence and ultimately successful liberation movements broke out all over Africa, South Africa moved in the opposite direction. White minority rule strengthened its position as the policy of apartheid went from strength to strength, ultimately depriving African men of their South African citizenship. Smuts, unable to overcome his ambivalence towards full representative democracy, was defeated by the virulence of Malan, dying a broken man – which represented to men like Davis, the end of their own hopes.

Inevitably the memories of war were coloured by the intervening fifty years of apartheid, leading to bitterness and sadness on the part of black participants. Even the memorials erected to the sacrifice of men in war were segregated – separate monuments were erected for the different race groups. And these monuments, particularly those for black servicemen, often fell into ruin which symbolised the lack of acknowledgement given them by the state. However, Mr Davis, who acknowledged that the memorial in the Durban city centre recognised only the sacrifices of white men, nevertheless made pilgrimages to it on days of remembrance. He perceived himself to be part of the greater contribution of saving South Africa from Nazism, along with the white soldiers who were allowed to take up arms against the enemy.

For all those involved in the war public commemoration worked alongside personal memory – which took its strongest form in the photographs of people and places that formed the strongest experiences and memories of the war. These photographs were part of their narratives of the war, giving a visual and oral expression to their memories. These photographs, so many years after the event, functioned too as sites of loss – lost youth, mortality, the death of many of those depicted. The photographs of those who had died served as almost concrete remnants for the living – as I discuss in Chapter Five. This is evident in the photograph of the young casualty Walter – captured in a moment, eternal.

The Second World War, riddled as it was with contradiction and ambiguity, marked the point at which South Africa stood at a crossroads. It contained within it the possibility for a new vision

of a more egalitarian South Africa as well as the seeds for the right wing nationalism which were to bear fruit after 1945. Yet no one was able to predict the rise of the apartheid state especially those closest to the war effort. However I have argued in this dissertation that, within the war-time South African state, there existed the ambivalences of discrimination and democracy which affected the way in which people participated in the war, the expectations for their war service and their support for the apartheid state. And it was ultimately the new vision for South Africa that was pushed to the background as the embedded fears and insecurities of a white minority gained prominence and were to hold sway for the next fifty years.

This dissertation has pointed the way to the silence of the voices of black women in the South African historiography. They form the group silenced before, during and after the war. By focusing on both official expectations of the war as well as the personal experiences of its participants, my research has uncovered – largely through the absence of their voices in the official sources and secondary literature – the lack of significant attention paid to the war efforts and experiences of black women. Ignored by propaganda and by the claims made by black servicemen, the roles played by black women have been largely neglected. Even where minor instances of black women volunteering to knit and sew for troops were reported in *The Women's Auxiliary*, they were portrayed as being subordinate to the white female officers. It is an example of the way in which the aims of propaganda converged with already existing ideas on the invisibility of black women in South African society. Little is evident on the expectations of these women during the war, their actual war work and their post-war experiences.

Even in the case of black men, where there has been some acknowledgement of their participation in war, much of their role in war has been recorded through the memoirs of white officers. These autobiographies reflect the inequalities in South African society as the genre is a largely elitist one relating the lives of those who believe that their efforts are historically significant. Moreover, in the South African context, these accounts of black men have been mediated by discrimination and patronisation on the part of the white authors. Narratives written by black men of their war-time experiences are rare and this gap can only be filled through the use of oral testimony which is an imperative as it has been more than sixty years since the war came to an end and the demise of these men before their stories can be recorded is an invaluable loss.

This dissertation places itself within the international literature on war and the Second World War in particular. As with social histories of this period focusing on Britain, the United States as well as other Allied and Axis countries, this thesis considers the way in which war had the potential to bring about permanent social change in society. Its contribution to the South African historiography comes in the form of its emphasis on the Second World War, particularly as it relates to gender and race. This is an area that has been insufficiently explored by South African historians concentrating on this period. I argue here the war changed little for white masculinity, building on already existing ideas and tropes. It did, however, present the opportunities for bringing about shifts in gender roles related to the work of white women in the war. By equating war service with patriotism and loyalty and combat, in particular, with citizenship, it also offered a possibility for re-envisioning black masculinity. Yet the official discourses of the war contained also the limitations of this new vision and black men were ultimately excluded from participating as citizens.

By analysing visual sources in the form of film and official and personal photographs, this dissertation contributes to the increasing use of these unconventional media as historical sources. This is a burgeoning international field but one that is relatively new in South Africa where nothing has been published on the impact and use of this media in the Second World War. As this thesis has shown, these sources add a rich dimension to the understanding of the ordinary experiences and expectations of the war's participants. They have also provided a significant insight into the way in which the war-time state operated, reflecting the ambiguities and complexities of a growing liberalisation with an existing conservatism. I demonstrate here that the South African state was forced to tread a delicate path between maintaining support for the war, attempting to control the empowerment of war service, particularly for black men and white women, and defending its decision to enter the war to the growing opposition. Its failure to do this was evident in Smuts' defeat and the victory of Malan's National Party.

With the rise of the apartheid state in 1948 and the ultimate failure of post-war organisations to challenge the dominance of right wing nationalism, the white and black participants of the war found themselves living in world very different to the one that they believed their war-time service would bring into being. The apartheid state was a betrayal of their efforts and aspirations, a denial of their sacrifices. This was compounded by the even greater disservice done to black ex-servicemen. They returned to even greater inequality and were finally denied

citizenship of the land of their birth. These men had been defeated and disappointed by their own government, despite their significant contributions. This was no small influence on succeeding generations of political activists and freedom fighters who became increasingly radicalised and militant. This culminated in the formation of the ANC's armed wing, *Umkhonto we Sizwe*, where black men were finally able to take up arms to fight for a new South Africa.

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