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'Motherhood and Otherhood' – gendered citizenship and Afrikaner women in the South African 1914 Rebellion

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Little historiographical analysis exists on women and citizenship, and very little has been written on women's historical relationship to the state in South Africa. Significant new inroads have been made, however, and this article seeks to contribute to this growing body of literature by using the 1914 Boer Rebellion as a lens through which gendered processes of citizenship and identity may be observed. Although no women engaged in active military service, there were women who considered themselves to be 'rebels'. The article examines their role during the Rebellion and in its aftermath, a mass demonstration. The demonstration was couched in traditional, patriarchal discourse, but it was a radical development, an event solely engineered and participated in by women. It signifies an often-forgotten role of women in conflict, which is difficult to contain in simple stereotypes. The post-rebellion mass demonstration, was pro-active, women-lead, and was predicated on an ideology of 'republican motherhood'. The discourse enabled some women to mobilise their domestic experience into a powerful political statement, allowing them to extend their culturally-sanctioned role to incorporate new – albeit constrained – public responsibilities. Just as in other contexts, this rhetoric and imagery of motherhood, as both a socially redemptive and politically persuasive concept, became a fundamental validation. It was an uneasy and ambivalent 'republicanism' – no call was made for female suffrage, their demands were couched in terms of their relative position to men – as wives, mothers and daughters of the state. The demonstration reflects the significant, although limited, role of Afrikaner women in the political arena. Their role was pro-active, vigorous involvement – an action difficult to contain in the one-dimensional dichotomy of 'cheerleader' or 'anti-war Other'.

In 1914 there was an ill-fated uprising by Afrikaans-speaking rebels against the newly-forged South African state.[1] In the rural south western Transvaal and northern Free State, farmers and sharecroppers who were alienated by the state's failure to relieve the economic recession went into rebellion. They turned to their traditional leaders, the Boer generals, to

1 My thanks for the intellectual generosity and insight of Cathy Burns, Robert Morrell and Albert Grundlingh, Sarah Duff, F.A. Mouton, S.B. Spies and the anonymous reviewer. Some paragraphs draw on S. Swart, '"Men of Influence" – The Ontology of Leadership in the 1914 Boer Rebellion', *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 17, 1 (Mar. 2004), 1–30.

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re-establish a republic. Eleven thousand Afrikaner men rose against the state for varying reasons, ranging from desperate poverty to a nostalgic yearning for the old republican lifestyle.[2] In a telling vignette, Hendrik de Wet – the youngest son of one of the rebel leaders – although still in short pants at the outbreak of the Rebellion, nevertheless expressed his desire to join the rebels.[3] Believing him to be too young, his father, General de Wet, was reluctant. But the general's wife, Cornelia 'Tant [Aunt] Nelie' de Wet, famously insisted on sending her son to war, saying publicly to her husband: 'My old husband, if your life is not too good to offer up for your people, then neither is Hendrik's.'[4]

Cornelia de Wet self-consciously linked her discourse to a tradition of martial motherhood.[5] It has been noted that the tradition of militarised citizenship, of which Boer republicanism was part, has promoted a narrative in which women are either 'mirrors to male war' (as civic cheerleaders) or a 'collective Other', embodying higher virtues and softer values, and as such, were either simply anti-war or, at least, subversive of *realpolitik*.[6] Certainly in the Boer Rebellion, some women acted as 'mirrors' and some, while sympathetic to the rebel cause, called for an end to violence. There was, however, another, and separate, dimension to their participation.

Analyses of citizenship are generally tacitly masculine, the body politic normally male and

2 For an exploration of the gendered masculinity – nostalgically reinvented by rebel leaders, see S. Swart, '"A Boer and his gun and his wife are three things always together": Republican Masculinity and the 1914 Rebellion', *Journal of Southern African Studies,* 24, 4 (1998), 737–751. For analyses of the Rebellion, see J. Bottomley, 'The South African Rebellion: The Influence of Industrialization, Poverty and Poor Whitism', African Studies Institute, University of the Witwatersrand, Seminar Paper, June 1982; N.G. Garson, 'South Africa and World War I', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, VIII (1979), 1; A.M. Grundlingh, 'Die Rebellie van 1914: 'n Historiografiese Verkenning', *Kleio*, xi, 1–2 (1979), 18–30; and S.B. Spies, 'The Rebellion in South Africa, 1914–1915' (MA dissertation, Witwatersrand University, 1962); Swart, 'A Boer and his Gun',: and S. Swart, '"Desperate Men": The 1914 Rebellion and the Politics of Poverty in the 1914 Rebellion', *South African Historical Journal,* 42 (2001), 161–175.

3 H. Oost, *Wie is die Skuldiges?* (Johannesburg, Afrikaanse Pers, 1958), 265. General and Mrs de Wet had seven sons and sons-in-law, all of whom participated in the Rebellion.

4 Translated. Oost, *Skuldiges*, 265.

5 This ideal has been epitomised by the Spartan ideal: a mother who lost five sons but, instead of lamenting, gave thanks to the gods that Sparta won the battle. Plutarch wrote of another mother whose son was the sole survivor of a catastrophic battle, and whom she subsequently killed herself for his obvious cowardice. Plutarch, *Moralia* III, (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1931), 459, 463. This trend is hardly limited temporal-spatially: there are many examples. One vignette epitomises an experience from the metropole: A. Bradford, for example, was a national heroine a 'true patriot' in Britain in the 1950s as she sacrificed three of her four sons in WWI – in her obituary, only one sentence was devoted to her, the rest were about her boys. Quoted in 'Home Truths', *The Guardian*, 30 Mar. 2000.

6 J. Elshtain, *Women and War* (New York, Basic Books, 1987), 58. Elshtain has traced the relationship between gender and war through discourse analysis.

the narratives of nationalism are usually told by male voices.[7] As Virginia Woolf famously declared, 'As a woman I have no country. As a woman I want no country'.[8] Just as the metropolitan suffrage movement was connected to a long tradition of sometimes radical protest, and militants used the language of constitutionalism to support their case for active citizenship, the *volksmoeders* rebelled in a time of both imperial and colonial questioning of the category of 'citizen' as necessarily white, male and middle-class.[9] As noted, the literature on 'nationalism' and 'citizenship' rarely addresses gender integratively.[10] However, some scholars have begun opening up the ways in which gender and categories of ethnicity/nationality/race affect each other, and which explores their causal inter-connections. It is to this historiographical project that this paper seeks to contribute.[11] Walby has suggested that there are five major ways in which women have been involved in national processes: as biological reproducers (literally 'mothers of the nation'), as reproducers of the 'boundaries' of ethnic/national groups; as being involved in ideological reproduction (transmitting 'culture'); as signifiers of difference (symbols in ideological discourse) and lastly, as participants in national (military, political and so on) struggles.[12] Historiographical analyses are now being made on women and citizenship, and although very little has been written

7 For an exploration see Special Edition on 'Women and the State', *Journal of Women's History,* 13, 4 (2002); for the reasons why liberal, socialists, and even radical feminists have not dealt to any great degree with theories of citizenship as they relate to the state, see M.G. Dietz, 'Context is All: Feminism and Theories of Citizenship', *Daedalus,* 116 (Fall 1987), 1–18. See also Special Issue on 'Women and Citizenship', *Australian Feminist Studies*, 19 (Autumn 1994); and J. Hoff, 'Citizenship and Nationalism', *Journal of Women's History,* 8, 1 (1996), 6–14.

8 In Woolf"s view, rising Nazism and fascism in Germany and Italy were akin to the trends lurking in the heart of the British patriarchy. She urged women to reject the militaristic world of men in favour of an all-female 'Outsiders' Society.

9 For example, it is argued that suffrage campaigners viewed their citizenship as an active process and saw resistance to state power, expressed through militancy, as a key component of 'engaged citizenship'. Furthermore, these issues were debated during the South African War/Anglo-Boer War (1899–1902), with questions about when resistance to 'constitutional' power might be justified. The war inspired discussion about the nature of citizenship, to which suffragists reacted in diverse ways: some used a gendered model of 'service' and argued that British women should have a role in politics because they would try to save black South Africans from the Boers. Pro-Boers contended that if the state was prepared to go to war over the question of political rights for the *Uitlanders* (literally 'outsiders'; people of non-republican citizenship) then indubitably women had the same right to resist a government that did not recognise them as citizens. See Laura E. Nym Mayhall, *The Militant Suffrage Movement: Citizenship and Resistance in Britain 1860–1930* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2003). See also S.S. Holton, *Suffrage Days: Stories from the Women's Suffrage Movement* (London, Routledge, 1996) and H. Kean, "'Searching for the past in present defeat": The Construction of Historical and Political Identity in British Feminism in the 1920s and 30s', *Women's History Review*, 3, 1 (1994), 357–80.

10 S. Walby, 'Woman and Nation', in Gopal Balakrishnan, ed., *Mapping the Nation* (London, Verso, 1996), 235. There are significant exceptions: see, for example, K. Jayawardena, *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World* (London, London, Zed Books,1986) and N. Yuval-Davis and F. Anthias, eds, *Woman-Nation-State* (London, Macmillan, 1989).

11 See C. Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics* (London, Pandora Press, Harper/Collins, 1989); and Yuval-Davis and Anthias, *Woman-Nation-State.*

12 Walby, 'Woman and Nation', 237.

on women's historical relationship to the state in South Africa, significant new inroads have been made.[13] Manicom, for example, has called convincingly for analyses of women's changing roles in relation to our understanding of the historical development of the state.[14] Joan Scott notes that Western historians in the field of women studies began with descriptive work, but now look increasingly for theoretical formulations, as the surge in empirical case studies in women's history now requires theoretical synthesis.[15] Antithetically, historians of Boer women and, Walker suggests, of South African women in general, often reflect the dangers of trying to be relevant and merely repeating the formulaic conceptions of gender.[16] This article offers a case-study as a contribution to the ongoing dialogue, using the Rebellion as a lens through which gendered processes of citizenship and identity may be observed. It examines the (female) body politic, to ask how gender lends meaning and materiality to such fundamental notions as citizenship and national identity. Unpacking such early manifestations is important in explaining why ethno-national projects in Afrikaner nationalism in South Africa and other places represented a celebration of these traditional gender codes.[17] This paper looks at the ways in which women gave a physical dimension to their political agency, through the idioms of both femininity and republican freedom. They thus simultaneously *demanded* and *performed* citizenship.

MOTHERHOOD AND OTHERHOOD

The public 'performance' of republican womanhood was predicated largely on the discourse of civic 'motherhood'.[18] Grayzel and others have demonstrated the wide – trans-temporal and spatial – discursive pre-eminence of 'motherhood' as the standard of women's gender role and national identity. Maternalist discourse has persistently connected women's

13 There are examples of gendered analyses. See, for example, A. McClintock, "'No longer in a future heaven": Women and Nationalism in South Africa', *Transition*, 51 (1991), 104–23. Moreover, Wells, for example, has shown that some black women resisted more militantly than their men in anti-pass demonstrations under the apartheid state, in what was essentially a struggle against full proletarianisation. J. C. Wells, 'Why Women Rebel: A Comparative Study of South African Women's Resistance in Bloemfontein (1913) and Johannesburg (1958)', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 10, 1 (1983).

14 L. Manicom, 'Ruling Relations: Rethinking State and Gender in South African History', *Journal of African History*, 33 (1992), 441–65.

15 J. Scott, 'Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis', *American Historical Review*, 91, 5 (Dec., 1986), 1055.

16 C. Walker ed., *Women and Gender in Southern Africa to 1945* (Cape Town, David Philip, 1990), 1-32, and particularly 4–5.

17 L. Vincent, 'Bread and Honour: White Working Class Women and Afrikaner Nationalism in the 1930s', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 26, 1 (Mar. 2000), 61–98.

18 Cross-cultural definitions of maternalism within state formation, at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries, may be found in S. Koven and S. Michel, 'Womanly Duties: Maternalist Politics and the Origins of Welfare States in France, Germany, Great Britain, and the United States, 1880–1920', *American Historical Review,* 95 (Oct. 1990), 1076–1108; and M. Ladd-Taylor, *Mother-work: Women, Child Welfare and the State, 1890–1930* (Urbana and Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 1994), 3–7.

bodies to motherhood as a primary source of women's patriotism and civic role.[19] There are useful parallels with other colonial contexts: In the South African – and perhaps American (and other) – *milieu*, what has been left unanswered is the trajectory that many (Afrikaans) women followed from republican motherhood to early twentieth-century (for America, perhaps nineteenth-century) domesticity. In Linda Kerber's potent formulation, the model 'republican motherhood' allowed historians to comprehend how, in the post-revolutionary years, Americans accommodated republican ideology within the sex hierarchy.[20] Republican motherhood merged the 'domestic domain' with the new public ideology of civic virtue. Still, in both the American context, as described by Kerber and the South African (although chronologically far removed), it was a 'deeply ambivalent' ideology, with both progressive and conservative tendencies.

The flexibility of the discourse of motherhood – rather than its biological fixity – perhaps explains its mobilising power.[21] When Cornelia de Wet insisted on Hendrik's joining up, she was both *validating* and *maintaining her social location* as a civic republican mother. An Afrikaner Nationalist culture-broker, Harm Oost, noted of this incident that de Wet, known from the South African War (1899–1902) as a redoubtable Boer woman, was a laudable example for her *volk* (nation) sisters.[22] Whether as a political publicity stunt or expression of genuine sentiment, her action is significant in what it reveals of the socio-political role played by Boer women and their relationship with the state.[23] It is part of a frequently repeated theme. Kitchener, for example, who was in charge of British military operations in South Africa during the South African War, deplored '[t]he Boer woman in the refugee camp who slaps her protruding belly at you and shouts "When all our men are gone, these little Khakis will fight you…"'.[24] Afrikaans women had served an important

19 S.R. Grayzel, *Women's Identities at War: Gender, Motherhood, and Politics in Britain and France During the First World War* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina, University of North Carolina Press, 1999). Conversely, Thompson has usefully investigated the 'paternal' discourse in colonial contexts. E. Thompson, *Colonial Citizens: Republican Rights, Paternal Privilege, and Gender in French Syria and Lebanon* (New York, Columbia University Press, 2000).

20 L.K. Kerber, 'Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman's Place: The Rhetoric of Women's History', *Journal of American History*, 75 (June 1988), 9–11.

21 D. Gaitskell and E. Unterhalter, 'Mothers of the Nation: A Comparative Analysis of Nation, Race and Motherhood in Afrikaner Nationalism and the African National Congress', in Yuval-Davis and Anthias, *Woman-Nation-State.*

22 Oost, *Skuldiges,* 265. There has been no explicit unpacking of the distinction between volk *sister* and volk *mother*, the two seemed to be used interchangeably, although the latter term predominates.

23 Little has been written on the experiences of South African women at the outbreak of war. The First World War was a time of greater involvement in the public sphere for many women. See, for example, G. Thomas, *Life on All Fronts* (Cambridge, University of Cambridge Press, 1989); D. Condell and J. Liddiard, *Images of Women in the First World War* (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987); G. Braybon and P. Summerfield, *Out of the Cage: Women's Experiences in Two World Wars* (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul 1987).

24 It is not clear why she referred to the embryonic soldiers as 'khakis', as this was usually a term for British troops. In P. Warwick, and S.B. Spies, eds, *The South African War: The Anglo-Boer War 1899–1902* (London, Longman, 1980), 174, S.B. Spies suggests helpfully that the republics would be conquered and the children would become British subjects ('little Khakis').

function in the South African War. While formal fighting was a male affair, the output and distribution needs incorporated a large number of women.[25] Their tenacity was said to motivate and inspire their men. One combatant observed that after the Boer defeat by the British at Paardeberg, the despondent commandos 'went home and came back fortified by the example of the heroism shown by the women'.[26] Indeed the unyielding wall of women played a decisive political role in sustaining the republican war effort after the formal collapse of the Orange Free State and Transvaal.[27] Yet there were many examples – albeit downplayed – of women, particularly of the *bywoner* (share-cropping) class (whose male counterparts joined the British-run National Scouts), who, for example, turned to prostitution for the British troops.[28]

A decade later, women who identified themselves with the rebel side played three roles. First, many women adopted the attitude of republican 'cheerleaders', encouraging and inspiring their men to rebel. On the eve of the Rebellion, a contemporary noted that among the Boers, 'women as well as men know how to approach extremes of national inflexibility' and the 'intensely passionate patriotism' of both genders was responsible for the 1914 Rebellion.[29] He noted particularly, the power of the women's encouragement: 'How, then, could the young bloods turn a deaf ear to the seductive call of the veldt ("Freedom at hand!"), egged on as they were by the blandishments of their womenfolk's language?'[30] The converse side of this cheerleading was a 'white feather' function, in which men who refused to rebel or volunteered for active service were publicly castigated by Afrikaner women.[31]

Secondly, a small faction of women played a practical, auxiliary role in the physical rebellion itself, as go-betweens, providers of food, hoarders of weapons and maintainers of communication networks, purveyors of war news. Thirdly, a large group of women played a significant role in the post-Rebellion Women's Demonstration of 1915.

25 There were, however, isolated reports of women fighting. See Warwick and Spies, *South African War*, 163.

26 Captain F.P. Fletcher-Vane, *The War One Year After* (Cape Town, South African Newspaper Company, 1903), 7.

27 H. Bradford, 'Gentlemen and Boers: Afrikaner Nationalism, Gender and Colonial Warfare in the South African War', Rethinking the South African War Conference, UNISA, 1998, published as H. Bradford, 'Gentlemen and Boers: Afrikaner Nationalism, Gender, and Colonial Warfare in the South African War', in G. Cuthbertson, A.M. Grundlingh and M-L. Suttie, eds, *Writing a Wider War: Rethinking Gender, Race and Identity in the South African War, 1899–1902* (Cape Town, David Philip, 2002), 37–66.

28 B. Nasson, The South African War, 1899–1902 (London, Arnold, 1999), 258.

29 F.V. Engelenburg, *General Louis Botha* (Pretoria, JL Van Schaik, 1928), 298.

30 Engelenburg, *General Louis Botha,* 299.

31 At the same time, in Britain women were literally handing out white feathers to young men still in civilian clothes. Perhaps this icon was drawn from the once popular sport of cock-fighting: a white feather in a fighting-cock's tail was believed to be a sign of weakness or non-combativeness in the bird.

A WOMAN'S PLACE?

Historiographically, broad consensus exists among historians of southern Africa that there was a strong tradition of Boer women's involvement in the political realm, although without formal rights.[32] The historiographical schools differ only on the weight they grant this involvement. There has been a grudging acknowledgement of their political role by the liberal school, which concedes that Boer women exercised a 'petticoat influence' on their men.[33] The Afrikaner nationalist historians have argued much the same, but in more depth, creating the idealised *volksmoeder* with her origins in apologetic Dutch-South African historical writings of the nineteenth century.[34] Van Rensburg, who has articulated this ideology in a hagiographical work, notes that:

> [T]he noticeable womanliness with which they served their spouses and loyally stood by so that they could live their lives as volk leaders; loyal as housewife, perseverant as nurse, earnest in prayer, sensible in advice, brave in danger. *That's where their meaning lies* [italics added].[35]

Western suffragette feminism was not purportedly part of the Boer woman's intellectual environment. Merriman noted that 'Oddly enough in South Africa the women have always exercised a great influence. I say "oddly", because they are so utterly opposed to the modern view of "women's rights"'.[36] Van Rensburg noted that Boer women would not assimilate overseas feminism, but did play an influential role in times of national crises.[37] The Zuid-Afrikaansche Christelijke Vrouwen Vereniging (ACVV) had been formed in the Cape to uplift poor whites in the wake of the South African War and promote language issues, but was opposed to female suffrage. There were some Afrikaans-speaking women in the Vrouwen Kiesrecht Liga/Women's Enfranchisement League.[38] The ACVV resolved in 1906

32 S.B. Spies, 'Women and the War' in Warwick and Spies, *The South African War*, 161–185 at 162.

33 E. Walker, *History of Southern Africa* (London, Longman, 1962), 200. There is a curious obsession with these undergarments from all schools, contemporary and historiographical. It seemed an appropriate title as it is redolent with contemporary images: H. Walpole referred to Mary Wollstonecroft as a 'hyena in petticoats' in the 1790s; Hendrina Joubert was called the 'General in petticoats'; and Johanna Brandt organised the 'Petticoat Commando' during the South African War.

34 A.P. van Rensburg, *Moeders Van ons Volk*, (Johannesburg, Afrikaanse Pers-Boekhandel, 1966). L-M. Kruger, 'Gender, Community and Identity: Women and Afrikaner Nationalism in the *Volksmoeder* discourse of *Die Boerevrou*, 1919-1931' (MA dissertation, UCT, 1991). The ideology has been articulated frequently, see for example, Dr Okulis, *Die Boervrouw: Moeder van Haar Volk* (Bloemfontein, De Nationale Pers, 1918). There has not been a similar concern with the creation of a *volksvader.* See Albert Grundlingh, 'Die Mite van die Volksvader', *Vryeweekblad*, 5 Apr. 1991. E. Brink, 'Man-Made Women: Gender, Class and the Ideology of the Volksmoeder' in Walker, *Women and Gender*, 273–292, at 275.

35 '... die begrypende vroulikheid waarmee hulle hul eggenote gedien en getrou bygestaan het sodat hulle as leiers van hul volk hul hoe roeping kon uitleef; trou as huisvrou, teerhartig as verpleegster, ernstig in gebed, verstandig in raadgewing, moedig in stryd. *Daarin lê hul betekenis*': van Rensburg, *Moeders,* 26.

36 J.X. Merriman quoted in Warwick and Spies, *The South African War*, 162.

37 Van Rensburg, *Moeders*, 110.

38 J.C. Steyn, *Die 100 jaar van MER*, (Cape Town, Tafelberg, 2004), 110–111. See M. du Toit, 'Women, Welfare and the Nurturing of Afrikaner Nationalism: A Social History of the Afrikaanse Christelike Vroue Vereniging, c. 1870-1939' (DPhil thesis, University of Cape Town, 1996), 120.

to ask that parliament not give women the vote.[39] An outline has been sketched of Afrikaner women's limited but purportedly morally powerful role in the political realm. A much cited 1843 deputation of Afrikaner women asked the British High Commissioner of Natal: 'that in consideration of the Battles in which they have been engaged with their husbands, they had obtained a promise that they would be entitled to a voice in all matters concerning the state of this country. That they now claimed this privilege ...'[40] The women threatened to walk 'barefoot over the Drakensberg [a formidable mountain range]' rather than capitulate. A similar image of martyred Boer womanhood came from the white concentration camps of the South African War, in which 26 000 inmates (mainly women and children) are believed to have died. This image of Afrikaner womanhood – the *volksmoeder* – was further articulated and promoted through the erection of the Nasionale Vrouemonument in Bloemfontein (National Women's Monument) in 1913, on the eve of the Rebellion. The monument represented the graphic icons of Afrikaner suffering: the emaciated child, incarceration in the concentration camps, ruins of burnt homesteads.[41] The iconography drew heavily on the ideology martyrdom, stoicism, and loyalty.[42]

Revisionist and radical South African scholars, however, like Louise Vincent, Elsabe Brink and Andrea Van Niekerk, have questioned the hegemony of the *volksmoeder* ideal, demonstrating that Afrikaner working class women did not automatically accept their prescribed role, and that battles over class and gender relations were inextricably connected to the creation of Afrikaner identity.[43] Brink and Vincent show the very different trajectories of ideology between working-class and middle-class women. The role of the *volksmoeder* as part of the identity of Boer women in civil conflict is further explored. There is a new cognisance of gendered nature of historical agents in South African historiography. Helen Bradford, for example, has demonstrated that the omission of women from the examination of historical events may distort the very fabric of the South African reality.[44] Brief summaries

39 E. Cloete, 'Afrikaner Identity: Culture, Tradition and Gender', *Agenda*, 13 (1992), 42–56 at 51.

40 Walker, *Women and Gender*, 318.

41 The promotion of a middle class, almost Victorian, domestic womanhood identity perhaps arguably helped to prevent early Afrikaner affiliation with the Labour movement.

42 For a discussion of Afrikaner iconography, which includes a brief analysis of the Women's Monument, see L. van der Watt, '"Savagery and civilisation": Race as a Signifier of Difference in Afrikaner Nationalist Art', *De arte* (1997), 55; and more particularly L. van der Watt, 'The Comradely Ideal and the "Volksmoeder" Ideal: Uncovering Gender Ideology in the Voortrekker Tapestry', *South African Historical Journal*, 39 (Nov. 1998**)**. For an analysis of Afrikaner festivals see A. Grundlingh and H. Sapire, 'From Feverish Festival to Repetitive Ritual? The Changing Fortunes of Great Trek Mythology in an Industrialising South Africa, 1938–1988', *South African Historical Journal*, 21(1989),19–37.

43 E. Brink, 'The Afrikaner Women of the Garment Worker's Union, 1918–1939' (MA, University of the Witwatersrand, 1986); Kruger, 'Gender, Community, and Identity'; A. van Niekerk, 'The Use of White Female Labour on the Zebediela Citrus Estate, 1926–1953' (MA, University of Witwatersrand, 1988); L. Vincent, 'A Cake of Soap: The *Volksmoeder* Ideology and Afrikaner Women's Campaign for the Vote', *The International Journal of African Historical Studies,* 32, 1 (1999); Brink, 'Man-Made Women'.

44 H. Bradford, 'Women in the Cape and its Frontier Zones', Paper presented at Bi-annual South African Historical Society Conference 1995.

that exist about immediate post-rebellion nationalist developments, concentrate on the rise of the Helpmekaar (help one another) movement to alleviate poverty, and the electoral gains of the National Party, but neither may be understood without tracing the ambitions and actions of women. Even gender sensitive scholars have not recognised the large civic space for women in civic unrest.

In discussing the Boer tradition, Walker observes: 'The political culture that developed in the white settler societies of southern Africa was a thoroughly male one ... Settler society rested on a military foundation and war was the province of men.'[45] But war was not solely the province of men in the militarised republican state. The social historian, Meintjes notes that 'At a time when European women had few rights and little say, the Boer woman had exceptionable privileges which she had earned through fighting side by side with her menfolk.'[46] This is hyperbolic, as women usually adopted non-combative roles, but it was not necessarily a passive role. The hagiographer of the *volksmoeder*, Van Rensburg, for example, has drawn on the simplistic and teleological formula of past to present: 'In truth, the Afrikaner woman is not, and has never been a political person'.[47]

WOMEN'S ROLES DURING THE REBELLION

The primary physical role of women during the Rebellion was supportive and infrastructural. Just as in the South African War, women 'kept the farms going', while attempting to provide both physical and spiritual sustenance. Morale was kept high by symbolic acts, like the waving of hand-sewn *vierkleurs* (republican flags) at public gatherings and writing petitions against the war.[48] Interestingly, explicit links were made and articulated by the women themselves between the rebels and previous Boer 'martyrs'. Christina Joubert, of Frankfort, after having had her house searched by government troops, wrote to her husband:

> Now, my husband, don't worry. The almighty God will protect me and my children. Whatever happens to you, yes, even if you die, like the five heroes of Slagtersnek, like Gideon Scheepers .... and all the martyrs who gave their lives for our beloved nation, then you will die like a man. I know you always fought and struggled like a man ... I will struggle even if I have to die, with my children.[49]

45 Walker, *Women and Gender*, 317. She does qualify her statements with the suggestion that Boer women were not excluded from community affairs and played a strong role in holding society together; Van Rensburg, *Moeders*, 317.

46 J. Meintjes, *The Commandant-General* (Cape Town, Tafelberg, 1971), 14.

47 Translated: 'In wese is en was die Afrikanervrou nog nooit 'n politieke mens nie.': Van Rensburg, *Moeders,* 99.

48 Steyn, *MER*, 110.

49 Translated. Gideon Scheepers was shot during the South African War for wearing khaki (British uniform). Oost, *Skuldiges,* 318. Scheepers was executed by a British firing squad after being found guilty by a British military court of murder, arson and train-wrecking.

And it was not only immediate family but *any* rebel that received support. A rebel, Harm Oost, noted an oft-repeated phenomenon. After being separated from de Wet after a rebel – government clash at Mushroom Valley, he sought refuge in a local homestead at Doornfontein. He approached the woman who appeared to be in charge, saying with a defiance born of desperation: 'I am a rebel. And you all?' Martha Wolmarans replied simply: 'We too.'[50] She was a woman who had lost a child in the concentration camps, and she would not tolerate ''n kakie' (a man wearing khaki uniform) in her house, be it Englishman or government soldier. In this incident, which anecdotal evidence suggests was not out of the ordinary, she looked after the rebel, although he was a stranger, with a strong emphasis on his being part of a collective (ethnic/republican)'family'.

Some women left their homes and joined the rebellion actively, though in a non-combative role. A Mrs van Alten, for example, was an interesting – if shadowy – figure during the Rebellion. She appears to have run a small-scale smuggling operation for the rebels, providing food and basic necessities. She helped one rebel escape to the relative safety of Natal, by supplying him with a train ticket and a pair of false spectacles. She also visited captured rebels in gaol, urging them to write down their thoughts. The support network of women extended into the post-Rebellion world. With their husbands in gaol., they smuggled food and medicine, cooked newspapers into cakes, and carried messages.[51]

Eight years after the Rebellion, during the 1922 Strike on the Witwatersrand, women joined in the urban commando movement, assaulting the police and disciplining strike-breakers bodily.[52] The Rebellion, however, saw few such incidents of physical violence by women. A 'petticoat commando' of rebellious women tried to disturb the peace in Bloemfontein, but a single fire engine hose was sufficient to dispel them.[53] Government troops reported only one incident of a woman brandishing what they thought was a gun.[54] Women did, however, initiate action that was not purely passive and supportive.

THE WOMEN'S MASS DEMONSTRATION

General de Wet was sentenced by the state to six years imprisonment and a fine of £2 000 for his role in the Rebellion. Two days after the pronouncement of sentence, two well-known Afrikaner women, Hendrina Joubert and F.G. 'Nettie' Eloff published an open letter in various newspapers calling for the women of all four provinces that made up the Union,

50 Translated. Oost, *Skuldiges*, 315.

51 Oost, *Skuldiges*, 49.

52 Women used their gender to protect their men against the state. J. Krikler, 'Women, Violence and the Rand Revolt of 1922', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 22, 3 (1996). See also B. Hessian, 'An Investigation into the Causes of the Labour Agitation on the Witwatersrand, January to March 1922' (MA dissertation, University of the Witwatersrand, 1957).

53 *The Friend*, 12 Jan. 1914 and *Des Vriend*, 12 Jan. 1914.

54 Oost, *Skuldiges,* 319.

to take part in a 'monster vrouwenbetoging' [mass women's demonstration] during which the governor-general would be asked to set aside de Wet's sentence. The opening address was to the 'fellow-sisters and daughters of South Africa'.[55] In the letter the image of the *volksmoeder* is clearly articulated, with an iconical account that was doubtless intended to reflect the identity of a proto-*volksmoeder*: She is described as being 'the first Afrikaner blood to flow on the breast of South Africa'. She purportedly 'helped make bullets' in the fight against the 'barbarians' (the black majority). She 'knew the land when you could not leave your wagon without a gun'. She helped maintain 'Boer manners'. She helped 'exterminate the wild animals to help prepare the way for civilisation'. She was often 'the only woman in the war lager'. More than once she was able to 'give a soldier coffee and food, and care for his wounds'. She saw the 1881 war (the first liberation war against the British) through from 'beginning to end'.

The ideology of the young nation was being formed by actions and models such as these. The Mass Women's Demonstration of 1915 was an active, women-led demonstration against the state. It is hard to correlate it with the simple dichotomy of cheerleader or Other. The women who organised the demonstration were powerful, older women, who formed part of a leadership network that paralleled that of the men's. Indeed age was explicitly mentioned in the first sentence of the open letter.[56]

The leaders of the demonstration were not average Boer women. It would be too bold to impute a regnant world view, predicated on their iconic position; theirs was not a demotic *weltanschauung* and they cannot be read as a sociologically representative slice of Afrikaner womenhood. Instead they represented the 'first families of the land'.[57] This leadership network was an old guard of Boer matriarchs, wives of generals for the most part. They did not have a clearly articulated network like that of their male counterparts in the commando system, but women had begun to organise in a number of ways.[58] The previously mentioned A.C.V.V., for example, was established in 1904 for the 'preservation of our nation, of our language and the support of our church.'[59] The Suid-Afrikaanse Vrouefederasie (South African Women's Federation, S.A.V.F) was initiated a month later in 1904, by the wife of Louis Botha, president of the young Union of South Africa. The wife of South African War leader Steyn started the Oranje Vroue-Vereniging in Bloemfontein in 1908. The

55 '[m]ede-susters en dogters van Suid Afrika', *Die Spectator*, Aug. 1915. Quotes included: 'die eerste Afrikaner bloed op die bodem van Suid Afrika ... vloei'.

56 'The older of the two of us who write this letter will be 85 in a few months.' Translated, *Die Spectator*, Aug. 1915.

57 Transvaal Archives Depot, (hereafter TAD), A 356, File 10, Dr H. van Broekhuizen, 'Ons Protesteer', 27.

58 See S. Swart, 'The Rebels of 1914 – Masculinity, Republicanism and the Social Forces that Shaped the Boer Rebellion' (MA, University of Natal, Durban, 1997), chapter 4: Men of Influence.

59 '[v]oortbestaan van ons Volk, en van ons Taal en die ondersteuning onzer Kerk', H.C. Lambrechts, 'Die Eerste Vyftig Jaar: Die Ontwikkeling van die Afrikaanse Christelike Vroue-Vereniging' (DPhil, Stellenbosch University, 1957).

organisations concentrated on welfare work, charity and education. Women, like their male counterparts, were local leaders by virtue of their class, kinship links, possession of land, age, wealth, and renown – the latter often based on the war record of their husband coupled with their own war effort during the South African conflict.

The leadership figures had biographies integral to republican struggles. Stern, bespectacled Hendrina Joubert, earned the sobriquet 'the general in petticoats'.[60] The biographer of her husband, General Piet Joubert, has noted that 'the true spirit of a Commandant-General was not in Joubert but in his wife', as Hendrina loved 'fire-arms, the bustle of horses and soldiers, commando life and the odd battle'.[61] Like her husband, Hendrina was a child of the Voortrekkers and 'nobody was allowed to forget this'.[62] She accompanied her husband and shared his war experiences, while rearing a family.[63] At the age of 85 she was redoubtable, visiting rebel leaders in gaol, bearing pancakes. During the Rebellion she had wanted to travel by ambulance and join the rebel leader General Beyers; permission was refused by the state premier, Louis Botha, himself.[64]

Similarly forceful, though more idiosyncratic, Johanna Brandt played a role, having recently had her part in the South African War serialised in the *Brandwag*. Brandt was an eccentric, a visionary, later in life she replaced conventional nationalism with millenarian feminism.[65] In 1936 she wrote *The Paraclete or Coming World Mother*, an astonishing book for its time that recast the Holy Trinity as God the Father, God the Mother, God the Comforter.[66] Another, more conventional, leader was Nettie Eloff, who was from a well-connected family and widely considered to be the former republic's President Paul Kruger's favourite grandchild.

Joubert and Eloff placed advertisements in the newspapers calling for the 'mothers and daughters of South Africa' to gather in Pretoria, to plead with the government for the release of General de Wet and his fellow prisoners. Almost 4 000 women arrived in Pretoria on 4 August, collecting in Church Square. They marched in rows of seven, silently, to the Union Buildings. Young men walked on the outskirts of the rows in case of violence. They marched, divided by their provinces, the Cape Province first, then the Orange Free State,

60 Warwick and Spies, *South African War*, 164.

61 Meintjes, *Commandant-General*, 11, shows that Piet Joubert's reputation as soldier belongs by rights to the bravery of his soldiers and the advice of his wife.

62 Meintjes, *Commandant-General,* 10 and 12.

63 The pregnant Joubert accompanied her husband on commando. She produced eight children, three of whom died young. After Piet's death in 1900, Joubert still actively engaged in public life. She aided women in the concentration camps, attempting to reveal their plight to the international world. See also J.A. Mouton, *Generaal Piet Joubert in die Geskiedenis van die Transvaal tot 1884*, (Archives Yearbook for South African History, 1935), 19.

64 TAD, A 356, File 10: Dr H. Van Broekhuizen, 'Ons Protesteer', 16.

65 Her minister husband was chairman of the Hervormde Kerk General Assembly for 20 years.

66 C. Landman, *The Piety of Afrikaans Women: Diaries of Guilt* (Pretoria, Unisa Press, 1994).

then Natal, and finally the Transvaal. They gathered in the amphitheatre of the Union Buildings, for a prayer. Then a deputation of Joubert, Eloff, Mrs Kestell, Mrs Steyn (of the Free State), Mrs Muller, Mrs Roos (of the Cape), Mrs Poen and Mrs Spies (of Natal), Mrs Armstrong, Mrs van Broekhuizen, Mrs GA Neetling (of the Transvaal) presented a petition to Lord Buxton, the governor-general. Buxton received them cordially and promised to hand the petition to the government.

In total 11 000 men took part in the Rebellion, but a proportionally astonishing 4 000 women gathered for this single march. Joubert noted proudly: 'The daughters of South Africa have awakened.'[67] Moreover, in the little towns and villages of the Transvaal and Free State, the demonstration was enacted in microcosm.[68] The rhetoric implied that women should stand by their fatherland, just as they would by their father or husband.[69] The young nationalist mouthpiece *Die Brandwag* noted:

> As a flood invades an area of land, slowly, confident that it is irresistible, so the crowd invaded the semi-circle in front of the Union Buildings and powerless, mute, the mockery and hate retreated and dared not utter a disruptive sound.[70]

The Nasionale Vrouwevereniging was created in Pretoria to stand by the rebel leaders and ease their lot, and in July 1915 the Vrouwen Nasionale Partij (Women's National Party) was established in Braamfontein, Johannesburg, by Johanna Brandt. The Transvaal committees united in October 1915 to form the Nasionale Vroueparty (National Women's Party) to work for freeing the rebels, caring for the families of the rebels, raising bursaries for children, and to support the newly created National Party, which focused more exclusively on Afrikaner political advancement. The first congress was held in 1916 in Johannesburg, with the wife of the rebel Van Broekhuizen as chairperson, and Johanna Brandt as secretary. (This functioned until 1931 when the women's and men's groups united.) The constitution of 1916 included: 'the development of our national life following the best tradition of our ancestors to guard over the national education of our children and to influence the improvement of national laws'. It was international in perspective, drawing perhaps self-consciously on shared republicanism, even sending a telegram to USA's President Woodrow Wilson, thanking him for his stand towards small nations.

In 1923, similar organisations were established in the Cape and Orange Free State, to raise political awareness. The National Party politician D.F. Malan noted grudgingly of these

67 'De dochters van Zuid-Afrika zijn ontwaakt'. Van Rensburg, *Moeders van ons Volk*, 115. For revealing primary sources on Joubert in the wake of this incident see L. Rompel-Koopman, *Wat Mevrouw Generaal Joubert Vertelt,* (Cape Town, HAUM, 1915) and 'Tot Aandenken aan Mevr. Gen. P.J. Joubert, geb. Botha, overleden 8 Sept. 1916.' Pretoria, *De Volkstem*, [1916?].

68 TAD, A 356, File 10. Dr H.Van Broekhuizen, 'Ons Protesteer', 23.

69 Ibid.

70 Translated, *Die Brandwag*, 1 Sep. 1915.

efforts that there were areas, like education, health, housing and the poor white problem about which 'a women knew as much as a man'.[71] The Women's Demonstration reflects the significant, albeit highly circumscribed, role of Afrikaner women in the political arena. Afrikaner nationalism was 'imagined', to use Anderson's term, in terms of maleness: but this operated on two levels. 'All nationalisms are gendered ...' but as Enloe remarked, 'nationalisms have typically sprung up from masculinised memory, masculinised humiliation and masculinised hope'.[72] Here a burgeoning nationalism was articulated by women – admittedly only uneasily republican and certainly not egalitarian. Their positions were framed in the discourse of their role as women rather than citizens, but they were nonetheless acting in their own right. In a significant move for one category of Afrikaner Nationalist woman, she began to define her nation: 'those who call themselves rebels are my people'.[73] Significantly, nationalist icon D.F. Malan declared later that this demonstration answered the question as to whether the Afrikaner 'should persevere and stay a nation'.[74] Future research on the relationship between citizenship and Boer women, should perhaps examine the socio-familial context of her positioning as citizen: her rights as a mother, wife and daughter – relational to men rather than an individual right as citizen. A possible starting point could be an investigation of the journal *Die Burgeres* (*The Female Citizen*). Further examination could usefully focus on the women's motivations and roles, in terms of their specific social circumstances, including demographic analyses of their age, marital status, class, and their relationships with rebels, particularly as the rebellion cut across classes.[75]

Twenty five years after the Rebellion, in the midst of the Second World War, the demonstration came to life again. Linking the Rebellion with the 22 June 1940 *Protesoptog* (protest march) to the Union Buildings, 7 000 women handed a petition to the premier Jan Smuts.76 This petition noted, in the name of 'Afrikaans Mothers, Wives and Daughters', against forced military service outside the Union, and an immediate and honourable peace with the countries with which the Union was at war. The pamphlet ended with a quote from the Afrikaner Nationalist poet Jan Celliers, from a poem written about the original Women's Demonstration in 1915:

> I see her wait, patient, without word.
>
> I see her win, for husband and son and brother,
>
> Because her name is Wife and Mother![77]

Over the quarter century that had passed the rhetoric had remained the same.

71 *Vrouevolksdiens in Oënskou: Federale Kongres*, (Bloemfontein, Sentrale Pers, 1956), 116.

72 C. Enloe, quoted in A. McClintock, 'Family Feuds: Gender, Nationalism and the Family', *Feminist Review*, 44 (1993), 61.

73 'die wat hulle rebelle noem, is my mense.'

74 ' 'n volk moes bly'. Van Rensburg, *Moeders van ons Volk*, 115.

75 As done for the male rebels in Swart, 'Desperate men'; and Swart, 'Men of Influence'.

76 TAD, A 1528, *My Herinneringe*, Helena Catharina Grobler, 65–66.

77 Translated; a poem by Afrikaner Nationalist, Jan Celliers: 'By die Vrouebetoging'.

CONCLUSION

While there were no women who went on commando against the state, there were, however, women who considered themselves 'rebels'. After the Rebellion, with the m[ass] demonstration, they couched their actions in traditional, patriarchal, *volksmoeder*, suffering, martyred discourse – but their post-Rebellion actions were radical, albeit limited. The discourse of this Women's Demonstration is highly revealing. It was a specific post-rebellion development, an event solely engineered by women, largely participated in by women alone and with ramifications for the entire nationalist movement of both Afrikaner men and women. The demonstration was pro-active, women-led, and appealed, with its militant nationalism, to higher, but not 'softer' values. In essence: they had come to *free a man*.

The rhetoric used enabled some women to mobilise their domestic experience into a powerful political statement, allowing them to extend their culturally-sanctioned role to incorporate new – albeit constrained – public responsibilities. This 'vocabulary of motherhood' functioned as both a socially redemptive and politically persuasive concept. 'Motherhood' was cast in a republican mould, but it was an awkward and ambivalent 'republicanism'. No call was made for female suffrage and the women's demands were couched in terms of their relative position to men – as wives, mothers and daughters of the state. Yet, inarguably, a large group of women played a significant role in the post-Rebellion Women's Demonstration of 1915, which defies characterisation in the usual dichotomy, helping to define in a small part Afrikaner Nationalism in their own way. It signifies an often forgotten role of women in conflict, which is hard to contain in simple dyads of 'cheerleader' or 'anti-war Other'. A burgeoning nationalism was articulated by women. It was only quasi-republican and their positions remained framed by their role as women rather than their position as citizens, but they were able to lend a physical dimension to their political agency, through the idioms of both femininity and republican freedom, simultaneously *insisting on* and *performing* citizenship. Thus in an important step for the Afrikaner Nationalist woman, she began to self-consciously help to define her nation.

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