

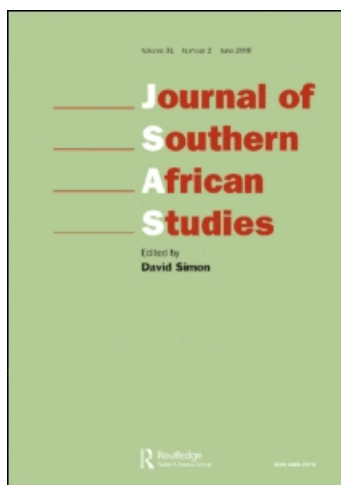
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### 'A boer and his gun and his wife are three things always together': republican masculinity and the 1914 rebellion

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## *'A Boer and his Gun and his Wife are Three Things Always Together': Republican Masculinity and the 1914 Rebellion<sup>1</sup>*

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*In 1914, there was a rebellion against the young Union government by some 11,000 Afrikaans-speaking men. This social movement has primarily been understood as an Afrikaner Nationalist phenomenon. This article focuses on the gendered identity of the rebels in order to illuminate the Rebellion in a different light. In 1912, the introduction of the Defence Act threatened the identity of Boer men who had come to have their masculinity encoded and reinforced in the Republican commando system. The Defence Act was not a rarefied piece of legislation, but a law that touched people at the level of their religion, their language and their identity. Hardest hit was the Boer Republican self-conception of masculinity. The main focus of this article is on the period after 1912, when the Defence Act imposed modern training methods, uniforms, ranking system, disciplinary codes and promotional norms. In the build-up to World War I, Afrikaans-speaking males living on the periphery of the new locus of central state power began to turn to alternative authorities to express their grievances. In the western Transvaal and the northern Free State, farmers and bywoners who were alienated by the state's failure to alleviate the economic recession and increasingly anxious over issues of class and race, went into rebellion, with the hope of re-establishing a republic. Cultural images of commando may have corresponded little with the reality of warfare, but seductive imagery propagated by rebel leaders helped fuel the Republican nostalgia that centred on a particular understanding of Boer masculinity. The Defence Act was introduced into a context of anxiety over urbanisation, loss of control over black labour and social upheaval. Fear about the loss of manhood and its manipulation, was not the sole reason for rebellion: for some it was a prime cause, for others a final straw, a justification, or an articulation of otherwise inexpressible feelings. But the Act further distanced some Boer men from the new state and severed their already tenuous allegiance to the legislature. The 1914 Rebellion was the last battle for a threatened manhood in the complex of ideas and institutions that characterised industrialising society.*

In 1914 a handful of men in the rural backwaters of the south-western Transvaal and north-eastern Free State tried to overthrow the newly minted South African state. Immediately after the uprising, the burgeoning Afrikaner Nationalist movement subsumed the

<sup>1</sup> This paper was presented in a modified form at the Conference of Gender and Colonialism, University of the Western Cape, January 1997 and at the Colloquium on Masculinities in Southern Africa, at the University of Natal, July 1997. Many thanks to Robert Morrell for editorial advice and guidance, to Catherine Burns of the University of Natal, and to Lt Col Ian Van der Waag of the Department of Military History, University of Stellenbosch.

Rebellion and popular understanding of this rebellion has come to be in terms of an Afrikaner Nationalist movement.<sup>2</sup> The story of the Rebellion is simple, but the stories of the rebels are manifold. One of these stories is about a sense of Boer manhood and how it was used as part of the Rebellion's *raison d'être*. In the first decades of the twentieth century, Boer masculinity was based, in part, on a Republican ideal.<sup>3</sup> This paper focuses on this facet of Boer masculinity, which was inextricably bound up in a sense of Republicanism and which found expression and legitimisation in the traditional commando system. The gendered identity of the Boer male was threatened by the changes wrought by the modernising state, epitomised by the Defence Act, 13 of 1912. This paper shows how a sense of gendered identity and its manipulation can contribute to a movement as powerful as a rebellion against the state.

There is no homogenous masculinity, no universal sense of what it means to be a man. Afrikaner masculinity at that time was encoded and institutionalised in the Republican commando system, which functioned as a practical and symbolic mode of masculinity of Boers, who, by the turn of the century, were coming to consider themselves as constituting Afrikaner society. The commando system extended into politics, culture and social mythology, a phenomenon that was to continue into the late twentieth century.<sup>4</sup> *Kommando* was part of the social machinery in the construction of Afrikaner manhood, carrying a wealth of symbols and a strong republican ideology.<sup>5</sup> *Kommando* remained part of the popular masculine culture, reflected in the names of products like brandy and cigarettes.<sup>6</sup> Ethnographic studies of commando life are rare, but it would appear that enrolling in the commando was a rite of passage. A contemporary magazine noticed this phenomenon: 'In South Africa a man unwilling to serve in the defence of Land and People would hardly be regarded as a man.'<sup>7</sup> *Kommando* was then a system for assigning status and was important in early socialisation of the young Boer: the manner in which he acquitted himself in the commando would affect his status as a man in the community and his status in the social realm would in turn decide his authority in the commando.<sup>8</sup>

The commando system provides a window into the symbolic and ideological as well as the chronological structure of the Boer Rebellion. The commando lay at the heart of Boer society's sense of identity, simultaneously representing defence of freedom and the structure of authority.

2 There has been no previous analysis of the Rebellion in terms of gender. It has largely been understood as a manifestation of embryonic Afrikaner nationalism, by both the liberal and Afrikaner nationalist schools. John Bottomley, 'The South African Rebellion: the Influence of Industrialisation, Poverty and Poor Whiteness' (African Studies Institute, University of the Witwatersrand, Seminar Paper, June, 1982). T. R. H. Davenport, 'The South African Rebellion', *English Historical Review*, 78 (1963); N. G. Garson, 'South Africa and World War I', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* VIII (1979); G. D. Scholtz, *Die Rebelle, 1914-1915* (Johannesburg, Voortrekkerpers, 1942); and S. B. Spies, 'The Rebellion in South Africa 1914-1915' (MA thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, 1962).

3 The self-conception of Boer men has not received historiographical analysis. The identity and role of Boer women has been analysed: see, for example, Elsabe Brink, 'Man-made Women: Gender, Class and the Ideology of the *Volksmoeder*', in Cheryl Walker (ed), *Women and Gender in Southern Africa to 1945* (Cape Town, David Philip, 1990).

4 P. H. Frankel, *Pretoria's Praetorians, Civil-Military Relations in South Africa* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1984).

5 A commando system is a method of military organisation in which an army is divided into units by drawing soldiers from a particular place and then using them in that area largely. *Kommando* refers to the commando system, with its socio-political implications. The term 'republican' is used to refer to a broad definition of the ontology of the state; 'Republican' here refers to specific Boer Republican ideology.

6 Interestingly, it was also the name of *Paratus*' predecessor, the official monthly magazine of the South African Defence Force.

7 Central Archives Bureau (SAB) A 139, 'Burgher Service', *Blackwood's Magazine*, February 1914, p. 271.

8 Frankel, *Pretoria's Praetorians*, p. 24.

## The Commando System

The first armed militia controlled by whites in southern Africa was established by the Dutch East India Company. At first the Company had no large garrison and therefore relied on a few soldiers supplemented with local farmers and the indigenous people – who volunteered or were forced to join a *kommando*. In the nineteenth century *trekboer* communities, the commando system became the dominant military mode. Members of the commando were expected to provide their own mount and saddlery, rifle and 30 rounds of ammunition. The commando was made up of mounted marksmen, without uniforms and formal training. Formal disciplinary codes did not exist.<sup>9</sup> Within this regulated system, discipline was based on normally acceptable mores of the family and leaders developed idiosyncratic forms of control – one Boer general, for example, used *sjambokking*.

The commando was explicitly egalitarian in principle and was democratic in the sense that officers were elected and a council of war voted on battle plans. General Ben Viljoen, an Anglo-Boer War hero, wrote a chapter in his memoirs on 'The Fighting Boer and his Officer'.<sup>10</sup> He noted the chasm of class between British officer and his men – while 'no social distinction' existed in the Boer commando: a 'boer owning ten farms may occupy the same rank as a *bywoner*'.<sup>11</sup>

## Myths and Social Reality

The commando system was conceived as a white force, but in reality, from earliest times people of other races could be commandeered and were still in 1914, albeit in a non-combatant capacity. The *kommando* was supposed to be the great social leveller in which all men were equal. Recent research, however, shows this to be untrue. Denoon has argued that during the Anglo-Boer War, the National Scouts, who aided the British forces, consisted of poor whites and *bywoners*, while the *bittereinders* tended to be landowners that had something to lose.<sup>12</sup> Investigation does show that the majority of the rank and file joiners were of the recently urbanised or labour tenant class.<sup>13</sup> For example, 72 per cent of a National Scout unit analysed, were landless.<sup>14</sup> Complete egalitarianism was also a myth. During the Anglo-Boer War, there was a move to limit the election of officers and to restrict the popular Councils of War.

The myths about commando functioned not only in the past, but also in the contemporary period, in the lead up to the Rebellion. The anthropologist Malinowski argued that myths were pragmatic charters of extant institutions, corresponding to social arrangements. A myth is 'not merely a story told, but a reality lived. ... It expresses, enhances, and codifies belief; it safeguards and enforces morality; it ... enforces practical rules for the

9 Christiaan Grimbeek, 'Die Totstandkoming van die Unieverdegingsmag met Spesifieke verwysing na die Verdedigingswette van 1912 and 1922' (DPhil thesis, University of Pretoria, 1985), p. 7.

10 Ben Viljoen, *My Reminiscences of the Anglo-Boer War* (Cape Town, C. Struik, 1973), p. 309.

11 This was the case in theory – but very few Boers with ten farms or more would be found below the rank of *veldcornet*. See Stanley Trapido, 'Reflections on Land, Office and Wealth in the South African Republic, 1850–1900', in Shula Marks and Anthony Atmore (eds), *Economy and Society in Pre-Industrial South Africa* (London, Longman, 1980).

12 Donald Denoon, *A Grand Illusion* (London, Longman, 1973), pp. 17–18; D. Denoon, 'Participation in the "Boer War": People's War, People's Non-War or Non-People's War?', in B. A. Ogot (ed), *War and Society in Africa* (London, Cass, 1972). This is a little simplistic: for example, Piet De Wet, a landed farmer, was not only a *hendsopper* but also a *joiner*, and leader of the Orange River Colony Volunteers.

13 Albert Grundlingh, 'Die Vrystaatse en Transvaalse Burgers wat die Republikeinse oorlogspoging vanaf 1900 versaak het: Hulle rol en posisie gedurende die tydperk 1900 tot 1907' (MA Thesis, University of South Africa, 1976); 'The Handsuppers', *Military Historical Journal*, 3, 1 (1974).

14 Albert Grundlingh, 'Collaborators in Boer Society', in Peter Warwick and S.B. Spies (eds), *The South African War – The Anglo-Boer War 1899–1902* (London, Longman, 1980), p. 272.

guidance of man.<sup>15</sup> Myths about masculinity were used to mobilise support, maintain law and order, maintain social stability and ensure social solidarity. The myths worked like the French Honour Code, helping to overcome 'social and cultural distinctions [dividing] men ... into different social, political, and cultural categories, each with its own codes and criteria of manly comportment'.<sup>16</sup> *Kommando* myths served to fuel Republican nostalgia.

### Reviving the Myths

Leadership, the claim to authority by an individual or individuals, was a critical feature of the commando system. It was largely a public projection of the relations of the domestic realm. The paternal relations of commando had reflected patriarchal societal relations – uncles and nephews, fathers and sons. 'The nephews and brothers are placed under the control of an older family member, the corporal.'<sup>17</sup> Public expressions of loyalty were made in terms of the father and son relationship: at Steyn's funeral, for example, in the year following the Rebellion, the rebel and war hero Christiaan De Wet noted: 'All the burghers know that in the last war Marthinus Theunis Steyn was the father of Christiaan de Wet and the respect he felt for him was that of a child for his father'.<sup>18</sup> The commando system derived much of its power by reflecting the domestic situation. The system was re-activated in 1913 industrial action. After 1913, and in the build up to World War I, leaders of the Rebellion invoked the familial nature of commando, the band of brothers, to inspire rebellion. At the meeting following a war hero's death, De Wet said:

I think of our deceased brother. We are used to saying 'burgher' or 'brother'. If there is someone here present who is not a brother, let him leave.<sup>19</sup>

Boer family life was patriarchal. Patriarchy can assume an amorphous quality causing some theorists to refuse use of the term.<sup>20</sup> Although the term is abused and often ahistorical it is necessary for the advancement of analysis. This study requires a term that describes the Boer family structure, with a father figure at the head of the house. Commando structure and the paternalism of domestic life accustomed men to follow their 'father's' word. The leaders were often seen as community fathers, operating on the same domestic principles extended in the public arena. The *veldKornets* from whose ranks many rebel leaders came had operated as a link between people and state. Elected by his community, he gathered the desires and fears of his neighbourhood to transmit to the state government. But he was more than a government man, he was a father-figure. He was law-enforcer, military leader, decision-maker and community protector. Only men could fill the positions: it was an important masculine leadership role.

When one reviews the political economy of the early twentieth century from an ethnic and gendered position the motive for the republican revival by rebel leaders is explained. The distinctions between Boer men were increasing as industrialisation gained momentum. Boer society was fissured through with class and regional divisions. It was precisely this wide social divergence that led the rebel leadership to resuscitate old republican notions of masculinity to paper over the economic and political cracks.

Following the Anglo-Boer War there was an increasing reliance by wealthier white

15 Bronislaw Malinowski, *Magic, Science and Religion and Other Essays* (Glencoe, 1948), p. 79.

16 Robert Nye, *Masculinities and Male Codes of Honour in Modern France* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 215.

17 Translation from the Afrikaans. Grimbeek, 'Die Totstandkoming van die Unieverdegingsmag', p. 7.

18 Translation from the Afrikaans. Harm Oost, *Wie is die Skuldiges?* (Johannesburg, Afrikaanse Pers Boekhandel, 1956), p. 298.

19 Translation from the Afrikaans. J.D. Kestell, *Generaal De Wet* (Cape Town, De Nationale Pers, 1920), p. 189.

20 Judith Lorber, *Paradoxes of Gender* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1994).

landowners, the *heerenboeren*, on black labour.<sup>21</sup> For a variety of reasons, black labour was more productive than white labour and white *bywoners* were increasingly replaced by black family units. There was an ambiguous boundary between real and contrived resentment towards this phenomenon. There had been examples of the manipulation of racial fear on the part of the rebel leadership, coalescing the black labour issue with other socio-political concerns.<sup>22</sup> The rebel leader De Wet, for example, used his constituency's anxieties over the crisis on previous occasions: using grievances over black labour to gather support, simultaneously fixing fissures between *heerenboeren* and *bywoners* and lambasting the government. At the poor white settlement at Kopjes, on 22 October 1914, he referred to 'the question of the natives being allowed to roam about and not being controlled as they used to be controlled'.<sup>23</sup>

The capitalisation and commercialisation of farming affected more than the livelihood of the *bywoner* – his sense of identity was challenged. Even those men who had not owned land before felt their identities under threat. There was originally no shame in being a *bywoner*. He and his family were welcomed by landowners for a share in their crops, for their service on commando, for the status they brought. Although the complete egalitarianism of Boer society was a myth, there had been a rhetoric of equality, the form of republican *gelykheid* or equality between white adult men, purportedly unaffected by class. It was only towards the end of the nineteenth century that landlessness became a decisive determining factor in the process of class differentiation.<sup>24</sup> The status of men without land declined, not because of the land shortage, but because of the commercialisation of farming. The *bywoner* became an albatross around the neck of a capitalising farmer.<sup>25</sup> Rev. J. D. Kestell noted to the 1938 People's Economic Congress, how the position of *bywoners* had changed over time:

Our forefathers had time for *bywoners*. The children learnt to respect the *bywoner*. He ate at the same table as the landowner and he could feel that blood crawls where it cannot run.

After the [Anglo-Boer War] a new spirit was abroad, a spirit of each for himself. ... Then we had no more time for *bywoners*.<sup>26</sup>

After the war, state interventions increased pressure on small farms and *bywoners*. Some responded by turning to transport-riding or by engaging in self-employed work on the salt-pans and diamond diggings. Many were forced to abandon the countryside at a cost to their traditional life-style. Urbanisation was a part of the poor white's new life: in 1899, 2.6 per cent of people that could crudely be classified as Afrikaners lived in urban areas; by 1911, the figure had reached 24 per cent.<sup>27</sup> The trek to the cities was a journey to the mines, railways and factories where they saw themselves working at unfamiliar jobs, taking orders like black people, living in squalid conditions adjacent to black shanty towns and having to speak a foreign language – English – like a conquered race. Poverty was to have an enormous influence on the outlook and political ambitions of the rural Afrikaner.<sup>28</sup> The

21 Bottomley has theorised the distinction between *heerenboeren* and *bywoner* in 'The South African Rebellion: the influence of industrialisation, poverty and poor whiteness'. For a discussion of this phenomenon and its immediate ramifications, see Sandra Swart, 'Black Peril, White Rebel' (unpublished paper, delivered at the Biennial Conference, South African Historical Association, Pretoria, July 1997).

22 The rebel leader Maritz, for example, was prone to saying publicly that he did not want 'the land ruled by Englishmen, niggers and jews'. U.G. 10–15, p. 28, 63.

23 Union of South Africa House of Assembly, *Reports of the Select Committees (SC) 1915*, 1, p. 295.

24 Timothy Keegan, *Rural Transformations in Industrialising South Africa* (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1986), p. 20.

25 Trapido, 'Reflections on Land, Office and Wealth', p. 359.

26 Quoted in Trapido, 'Reflections on Land, Office and Wealth', p. 359.

27 Bottomley, *Public Policy and White Rural Poverty*, p. 248.

28 Bottomley makes this point well in his analysis of public policy, *Public Policy and White Rural Poverty*, p. 250.

stigma of poverty was attached to the Afrikaans family with English social discourse portraying the Afrikaner male as the backward railway worker, the crude policeman and illiterate stationmaster.<sup>29</sup> State relief measures only served to compound these stereotypes and visit further shame and resentment upon those facing such a fate. To replace this, Afrikaners had to build a new identity, a new image of themselves. Poverty meant more than merely a low self-esteem. Poverty became part of the political discourse and a powerful mobilising factor, for both National Party and for Rebellion. The notion of the regression of the Afrikaner relative to English-speakers and blacks was variously a grim prophecy, a political weapon, a social evil and a routine method of drawing an angry crowd in any rural constituency.

The rebel male was faced with the loss of his identity, through the undermining of his status as patriarch. This had resulted from his removal from the land, being forced to become an urban labourer or becoming a marginalised and scorned *bywoner* obsolete in capitalist farming, his inability to set his sons up with a farm of their own, and the apparent lack of expected aid from the state. The power of the ideology of the family has been demonstrated, for example, in work on slavery – it has been shown that slaves were incorporated as ‘the most junior members of the patriarchal family’.<sup>30</sup> The urbanisation process undermined the cultural mores, particularly undermining the sense of rural family life on both symbolic and practical levels. One commentator noted poignantly that the familiar appellations ‘Oom’ and ‘Tante’ were being replaced with ‘Meneer’ and ‘Mevrou’, if not ‘mister’ and ‘missis’.<sup>31</sup> Although often the male head of the family would move to centres like the Rand in search of work, it was frequently the unmarried female members of the family who moved first to the urban areas, further undermining the poor white father as bread winner.<sup>32</sup> Poor white men tried to resist efforts to change their life-style and that of their families. The industrial sector wished to see a proletarian work ethic instilled in poor whites. It was repeatedly bemoaned that *bywoners* were not prepared to do ‘Kaffir work’. The depressed class was still reluctant to let its daughters enter domestic labour and its sons to take up agricultural labour.<sup>33</sup>

Probably many who took part in the government schemes or trekked to the city planted their ‘sole hopes for the future in the possibility of returning to the past ...’.<sup>34</sup> This nostalgic *ubi sunt* motif was a powerful element of populist rhetoric. Many poor whites increasingly believed that a return to the Republican life-style could be achieved if smaller farmers and poor whites were re-instated on the land. It was believed that this should be accompanied

29 L. Salomon, ‘Socio-Economic Aspects of South African History, 1870–1962’ (PhD thesis, Boston University, 1962), p. 107. The stereotypes persist today in jokes about ignorant, naive ‘Van der Merwe’.

30 R. Shell, ‘The Family and Slavery at the Cape, 1680–1808’, in W. G. James and M. Simons (eds), *The Angry Divide: Social and Economic History of the Western Cape* (Cape Town, David Philip, 1989), p. 29. ‘Patriarchal’ refers to a family structure in which fathers control the lives and labour of family members, children, slaves, servants, wives. J. E. Mason, ‘The Slaves and their Protectors: Reforming Resistance in a Slave-Society, the Cape Colony, 1826–1834’, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 19, 1 (1991).

31 G. Cronje, ‘Die Huisgesin in die Afrikaanse Kultuurgemeenskap’, in *Kultuurgeskiedenis van die Afrikaner* (Cape Town, Nasionale Pers, 1945), p. 273.

32 This reverse of the usual pattern of black migrant labour may be explained by the sexual division of labour. Control over black women’s labour within black societies by the bridewealth system meant male migrant labour could occur without the household collapsing and rural production carrying on much as before. The Boer traditional household was less flexible in the face of industrialisation. Female heads of families seldom stayed on in the rural areas. Young women would move to the towns on a permanent basis and send back a little money to their families. J. Grosskopf, *Rural Impoverishment and White Exodus*, Carnegie Commission on the Poor White Question in South Africa, vol 1, pp. 214–229.

33 The ORC Minister of Public Works told the legislature in 1908: ‘There is unfortunately a foolish pride to be met with which prevents parents from allowing their children to work’, Keegan, *Rural Transformations*, p. 32.

34 Salomon, ‘Socio-Economic Aspects of South African History’, p. 116. Quoted in J. Bottomley, ‘Public Policy and White Rural Poverty’ (PhD thesis, Queens University, 1990), p. 248.

by traditional means of relief: doles of cash and animals.<sup>35</sup> O'Connor, writing immediately after the Rebellion, noted that the majority of rebels were men who had not 'an acre of ground or a decent flock of sheep to their names', to whom "On commando" means a happy time of riding around on horseback from town to town, living on the country as they proceed'.<sup>36</sup> Many Afrikaners hankered after the Republican life-style, which they hoped could be recreated if poor whites returned to the land.

An important dimension of the rebel leaders' rhetoric was a way of fixing the fissures between *heerenboeren* and *bywoner* by appealing to their common heritage, including their sense of shared masculinity, and emphasising the threat that was presented to it by independent black labour and the depredations of the state.

### Republican Nostalgia

After the Anglo-Boer War, the Boer male had to live with the memory of military defeat and face social reconstruction. A new Defence Act was introduced in 1912, which was to change more than the national defence system. The Act was, in part, the embodiment of the threat to Republican masculinity presented by the modernising state. Certainly, there had been efforts at modernisation prior to Union, with a strong Progressive faction opposing President Kruger.<sup>37</sup> After Reconstruction and Union, however, the rate of modernisation and the extent of change increased immeasurably. The main focus of this article is on the period after 1912, when the Defence Act imposed modern training methods, uniforms, ranking system, disciplinary codes and promotional norms. This presented a challenge to the masculinity of both the Boer leadership and ordinary Boer. In the build up to World War I, Afrikaans-speaking males living on the periphery of the new locus of central state power in Pretoria, began to turn to alternative authorities to express their grievances and to gain support. In the south western Transvaal and the northern Free State particularly, farmers and *bywoners* who were alienated by the state's failure to alleviate the economic recession, turned not to the state, nor to the Labour Party, but to their old commando leaders, who for various reasons went into rebellion, with the hope of re-establishing a republic. This network of influential patriarchs, like Generals Christiaan Beyers, Christiaan De Wet and Jan Kemp were able to lead the rank and file into rebellion, using the mobilising device of 'Nostalgic Republicanism'.<sup>38</sup>

Republicanism – defined as the rule of a state in which supreme power is held by the people or its elected representatives, rather than a monarch or nobles by descent – had come to symbolise to many Boers the egalitarianism of all white men, as in the days of the old Boer Republics. In 1914, this version of Republicanism was not a neutral political ideology. Along the way, Republicanism had acquired a heroic element, especially after the atrocities and bitter economic aftermath of the Anglo-Boer War and Milner's Reconstruction Programme.<sup>39</sup> For the young Union State, Republicanism contained a potentially radical

35 Such a reclamation agenda was adopted by the Free State government: the Land Bank, established in 1908, loaned money to the landless on the security of promissory notes signed by two landowners. As many as 884 loans were granted to poor whites by 1912 when the Union Landbank was established. The Transvaal Land Bank was leery of cash loans without collateral, but did provide cattle and donkeys to those threatened by dispossession.

36 J. K. O'Connor, *The Africander Rebellion* (London, Allen and Unwin, 1915), p. 12. Many discouraged men must have remembered the old Republican days when they could receive a free rifle on receipt of a certificate of poverty. While on campaign, burghers had been fed and clothed by the state and their families received support.

37 C. T. Gordon, *The Growth of Boer Opposition to Kruger, 1890–1895* (Cape Town, Oxford University Press, 1970).

38 At the same time, a number of Boer leaders used those same patron-client relationships to keep their 'clientage' out of Rebellion. One must be careful not to overstate this portrayal of the old republics – they had begun to embrace modernity, albeit tentatively, as they recognised the imperial threat posed by Britain.

39 Annette Seegers, *The Military in the Making of Modern South Africa* (London, Tauris, 1996), p. 10.



threat to the new parliamentary system.<sup>40</sup> Republicanism itself was not monolithic. There was, for example, a dichotomy between constitutional republicanism, espoused by General Hertzog, versus revolutionary republicanism, which was to be favoured by the rebels.<sup>41</sup>

The inherent tension between the ideal 'classless society of rural patriarchs' and the powerful leaders and wealthy oligarchy which emerged, was maintained into the Reconstruction era, 1902–1910. The modernising state presented a political, economic and social threat to the Boer way of life, both real and mythic. In part, the Rebellion was a movement built by men on nostalgia for a past only recently faded and yet already re-imagined by them, a past nostalgically represented as a 'Golden Age'. Nostalgia for a republic that had never really been and the desire to be once more the men that ran it, proved strong.

In the difficult times following the Anglo-Boer War, during the Reconstruction period and the changes wrought by Union, the old 'people's democracy' of Kruger's Republic suggested itself as a model for many who had no faith in the new socio-economic and political policies that accompanied British liberal democracy. Complete egalitarianism in Boer society was a myth propagated by later nationalist discourse, and *Volkseenheid* or 'national unity' was a teleological imposition, born out of the need for political unity at specific times. Quite the opposite of this mystical unity existed: the group was historically prone to factionalism, divided on lines of class, region, province, ideology and personal ambition. Republicanism was an assemblage of contradictions, both in theory and practice. The same paradoxical understanding that allowed the slave-owning Thomas Jefferson to consider himself a republican, held in the Boer Republics.<sup>42</sup> The practical working of this democracy was circumscribed, and there were certainly neo-feudalistic limitations, but the emphasis on participatory *volkswil* or 'the will of the people' and the regular elections were republican. There were contradictions within this form of republicanism: there was a devotion to strong leaders and a tendency to rely on the hereditary principle.<sup>43</sup> The rhetoric of populism was strong, however, serving to mask a nepotistic spoils system, favouritism and corruption.<sup>44</sup>

It is hard to establish to what extent burghers insisted on, or were even cognisant of, their republican rights. Literate men certainly kept abreast of *Volksraad* action through *De Republikein*, *Land en Volk* and *De Volksstem*. W. A. Kleynhans has researched the role of petitions and has found people to have been conscious of their rights of sovereignty. He provides numerous examples in which people referred to themselves as '*het volk, de Koningstem des landes*' – the people, the sovereign voice in the land. A gulf existed between being listened to and being heeded, but it was the former that served to satisfy most men that considered themselves Republican.

But in the years following the Treaty of Vereeniging this Republican spirit played little

<sup>40</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> B. Lanz, 'Hertzog and the Leaders of the 1914 Rebellion' (BA Honours thesis, University of Natal, 1976).

<sup>42</sup> C. Louis Leipoldt asked a bushveld farmer the same question over the coffee cups. The farmer was 'a violently Anti-Botha man' who held that if Botha had only declared the independence of the Transvaal in 1914 there 'would now have been a republic embracing the whole of Africa south of the Zambezi'. Leipoldt asked: 'But, Uncle, you know a republic means liberty ... [a]nd equality ... and brotherhood. Are these possible when three-quarters of your citizens are natives?' The farmer explained: 'You do not understand, Doctor. We were a republic in the old days ...'. Leipoldt countered this: 'Scarcely that, Uncle. You were an oligarchy ... a state of whites ruled by an executive committee elected by the whites alone.' The old man replied that: 'the native cannot be a citizen. He must be a ward [because] [y]ou would not give burghership to children [and the native] ... would not grow up in the lifetimes of his children, nor his children's children's'. C. Louis Leipoldt, *Bushveld Doctor* (Braamfontein, Lowry, 1980, 1937), p. 147.

<sup>43</sup> For example, *Kommandant-Generaal* A. H. Potgieter was replaced upon his death in 1854 by his son. Andries Pretorius was succeeded by his son, M. W. Pretorius who was later elected to the position of Transvaal president. This remained evident well into the twentieth century and was, Ian Van der Waag notes, to a certain extent entrenched by the Broederbond. Personal communication.

<sup>44</sup> J. S. Marais, *The Fall of Kruger's Republic* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1961), pp. 11–21, 19–21.

role in public politics. One searches in vain for references in political speeches. Hertzog went so far as to maintain that the 'feeling was non-existent until the expedition against German South West' with regard to the Free State.<sup>45</sup> It was still part of the discourse, but it had gone underground. Republican talk could be punished as sedition.<sup>46</sup> Republican rhetoric had moved from the election trail and public podium to the kitchen table. In private, over coffee and rusks, Republicanism survived, with Republican prayers offered within the home.<sup>47</sup>

To the older generation Republicanism meant as much about themselves and their former positions as a way of running a state. Republicans objected to the modernising state – not just its Anglicisation and economic effects, but also for its impact on their identity as men. Smuts introduced a whole new regime, ignoring Republican protocols. He had never been popular: as a young man he could not disguise his lack of proper respect for the old men, which engendered resentment. On one occasion, the older generation of men even compelled him to leave Kruger's *Volksraad* because he was wearing a grey suit – they promptly sent him home to get into regulation black.<sup>48</sup> He did not retain the old republican practices; he did not have the patience.<sup>49</sup>

### The Defence Act of 1912

The Selborne Memorandum of 1907 and the Conference of 1908 opened the way for the National Convention and by 31 May 1910, the Union of South Africa was established.<sup>50</sup> During the Reconstruction years, the Imperial forces decreased, reaching 10,500 by 1909. This led to the need for volunteer forces. The idea of colonial volunteers was related to Lord Kitchener's notion that by this method he could decrease the numbers of Imperial troops and the country would acquire its own, indigenous defence system.<sup>51</sup> On 14 July 1912, the Defence Act was implemented and eight days later the first committee was appointed.<sup>52</sup>

The Union Defence Force provided for a small permanent force of 2,500 Mounted Police and Artillery supplemented first, by some 25,000 men enrolled in UDF regiments either as volunteers or, if necessary, as conscripts between the ages of 17 and 25 drawn on lot on a district basis, and secondly, by men serving in rifle organisations, virtually the commandos traditional to the countryside, who were free to make their own rules and choose their officers subject to ministerial approval. Unless parliament said otherwise, blacks were barred from military service.<sup>53</sup> The new system was to be modelled on the Swiss.<sup>54</sup> There were essentially four parts to the defence scheme:

1. A permanent force of mounted riflemen and attached artillery
2. A trained Active Citizen Force on a temporary basis

45 Union of South Africa House of Assembly, *Reports of the Select Committees*, 1915, (SC) 1, p. 295.

46 Oost, *Wie is die Skuldiges?* p. 35.

47 Scholtz, *Die Rebellie*, p. 15 and F. V. Engelenburg, *Generaal Louis Botha* (Pretoria, J. L. Van Schaik, 1928), p. 218.

48 H. C. Armstrong, *Grey Steel* (London, Arthur Baker, 1937), p. 50.

49 As Prime Minister, Botha did keep the older protocols, but with his increasingly poor health and his concentration on other issues, it was mainly Smuts as Minister of Defence who dealt with military issues. Mrs Williams-Wynne, a member of Smuts's secretarial pool, has made this facet clear. She describes him as cold, with little capacity for casual friendship. Personal interview with Williams-Wynne, 15 March 1996.

50 L. M. Thompson, *The Unification of South Africa* (Oxford, 1960).

51 B. G. Simpkins, *Rand Light Infantry* (Cape Town, 1965), p. 1.

52 *Staatskoerant*, G.K. no. 1, 31 May 1910; 871, 22 July 1912.

53 Act 13 of 1913.

54 South African Defence Force Archive. DC group, 26, Smuts's Portfolio, file no. 1(a) 530: Some notes on the condition of service in the Swiss army.

3. Rifle Associations, especially for older men

4. A cadet corps

Between 2 and 15 January, every young man of European descent who was to turn 17, 18, 19, 20 or 21 in the coming year, was required under penalty of up to £25 pounds or three months' imprisonment to register with a magistrate, police station or [except in Natal] with a *veldkornet*. Exemption was allowed only if one were studying, required at home, or because of one's religious beliefs, professional duties, lack of access to training facilities due to geographical isolation, bodily or mental unfitness.

Several attempts at English-Boer integration were made. *The Daily Telegraph* called several of the appointments 'frankly racial', the government's passion for equity taken to an 'absurd extent'.<sup>55</sup> The fifty Staff Officers for training were equally divided between Dutch and English-speakers. Smuts had included Beyers, who, though a member of *Het Volk*, often spoke in public with a decidedly nationalist bent.

There was much rhetoric surrounding the law.<sup>56</sup> It was portrayed as a vehicle for 'The two great white races in friendly unifying work to unite for communal aims'.<sup>57</sup> There was much emphasis laid on the notion that men come together as one who fight together. There was the hope expressed that will bring 'the young men of Dutch and British origin together in a spirit of brotherhood'.<sup>58</sup> In 1912, after a course in Bloemfontein, a core of 51 military officers filled the positions at the new UDF headquarters in Pretoria and the fifteen military regions countrywide. In opening the Bloemfontein training school Botha sent a message to be read; he argued that the nation wanted a 'real Army, not only capable of coping with a little Kaffir war, but also able to defend South Africa against any odds, wherever they came from'.<sup>59</sup>

The immediate origins of the Rebellion, according to the rebel leader Jan Kemp, were to be found in 1912 in a dormitory in the Military School in Bloemfontein. The men who were to become part of the core of rebel leaders, Ben Bouwer, Manie Maritz and Kemp, shared a room and Jacques Pienaar was in the room next door: 'We were to be the leaders of our military units and already we shared out the roles to be played when the day came to take revenge against the robber empire'.<sup>60</sup> The officers undergoing the course were kept close to the residence – which was irritating for married men and perceived as denigrating. The British press referred to one of the 'most dashing' of the younger Boer commanders in the war, who was said to object to the plain khaki uniform *sans* decoration:

Not content with reducing a man of his years and position to the status of a schoolboy, the people at the college actually want to put him in a uniform which will make him *prima-facie* inferior to any policeman with one stripe on his sleeve ...<sup>61</sup>

Uniform itself also proved a problem. Usually on commando, the Boer had served in ordinary dress, in soft-rimmed felt hats for protection against the sun, with a cartridge-filled bandoleer. Boer soldiers had often appropriated bits of British uniform. But there was a difference between appropriation and imposition. The new UDF uniform was Bedford cord of a khaki shade, with dark green collar and pipings, and the letter 'V' or 'U', for union, on each arm. Many Boers refused to wear khaki. The colour of the British army during the

55 'South African News', *The Daily Telegraph*, 6 August 1912.

56 Attempts to popularise it included the short and alarmingly dull film 'A Day in the Life at Potchefstroom Training Camp', 1916.

57 Translation from the Afrikaans. 'De Onderwerp – Krygswet', *Die Volkstem*, 13 February 1912.

58 'The Defence Force', *Evening Standard*, 25 January 1913, SAB A139.

59 'The South African Defence Act', *The Morning Post*, 2 July 1912.

60 Translation from the Afrikaans. J. C. G. Kemp, *Die Pad van die Veroweraar* (Johannesburg, 1946), p. 108.

61 'South African News', *The Daily Telegraph*, 20 August 1912.

Anglo-Boer War, khaki had come to be invested with much symbolism; indeed, 'Khaki' was a shorthand reference to a British soldier. There was even an Anti-Khaki Movement in the Citizen Force. Reference was made to Gideon Scheepers shot for wearing khaki in the Anglo-Boer War. The Minister of Justice hotly denied the ACF's contention: the colour of the uniform was 'not khaki, but drab'.<sup>62</sup> Stellenbosch students protested and drew up a petition.<sup>63</sup> Awkward questions were also raised in the House of Assembly on the purchase of uniforms made in England. On short notice, only a London manufacturer could produce uniforms in such bulk – although South Africans were permitted to tender for 16,000 pairs of knickerbockers.<sup>64</sup> Some Boer soldiers had grown used to dressing in highly personal ways. De Wet, for example, ordered his habitual grey suits from Garlicks, Kemp dressed with idiosyncratic flamboyance and Beyers affected a Germanic headdress and glittering medals. But, as Major Molyneux, a major in the Durban Light Infantry, observed to the Commission: 'If you have a large number of people in plain clothes, you get very little discipline'.<sup>65</sup> Uniform and all it symbolised about the state's imposition of hierarchy, was clearly a factor immediately prior to the Rebellion. In a telling incident, on the day Martial Law was declared, Lieutenant Louw's stars were torn from his shoulder by Sergeant-Instructor Kruger and trampled under foot.<sup>66</sup>

The icons of Republicanism were important in mobilising rebellion. In one dramatic public incident, for example, Maritz undid the brim of his hat which was up on the left and refastened it on the right – in the Republican manner.<sup>67</sup> Another icon was the Republican flag. A committee of women had made a 'Vyfkleur' – a combination of the Transvaal and Free State flags – during the Anglo-Boer War.<sup>68</sup> This De Wet had kept and used to draw people as he recruited rebels.

Age was important in the Boer construction of masculinity; leadership was by a patriarchy of old men. Hence beards were important for their dual symbolism of age and manliness, as iconic representation of Republican masculinity. Descriptive work on the Anglo-Boer War made much mention of Boer beards, whereas the archetypal British soldier was clean-shaven.<sup>69</sup> A common image in Boer descriptions of commando life is 'By day with the sun warm upon us and the dust thick upon us, we sit with our ...wild, uncombed beards ...'.<sup>70</sup> In the days leading up to the Rebellion, Smuts' son noted that 'The English were loyal and impatient, but bearded men talked open sedition'.<sup>71</sup> With the Defence Act, facial hair came under the control of the state. In terms of the King's Regulations and orders for the army, 1912:

The hair of the head will be kept short. The chin and under lip will be shaved but not the upper lip. Whiskers, if worn, will be of moderate length.<sup>72</sup>

62 HAD, 1914, col. 1289. It is interesting that in the early 1920s there was a move to introduce a green uniform for the UDF units, but a suitable dye proved elusive until 1930. A green veld uniform was worn in the 1930s but phased out between 1940 and 1942 in a return to khaki.

63 Oost, *Wie is die Skuldiges?*, p. 156.

64 HAD, 1913, col. 350.

65 *Report of Select Committee*, 1912, Second Session, vol II, SC 7–12, p. 13.

66 SC 1–15, Testimony of Sub-Inspector Alfred Ernest Trigger, p. 47. Leipoldt found several rebels in the Transvaal bushveld. Anyone in uniform was highly suspect: the nurse dubbed a 'government woman', had her equipment attacked and her hair pulled. Leipoldt, *Bushveld Doctor*, p. 86.

67 Oost, *Wie is die Skuldiges?*, p. 89.

68 Oost, *Wie is die Skuldiges?*, p. 265.

69 Ben Viljoen, *My Reminiscences of the Anglo-Boer War* (Cape Town, C. Struik, 1973), p. 302.

70 Translation from the Afrikaans. Transvaal Archives Bureau, TAD W 90 DS Van Warmelo, 'Kommando en Guerillalewe', 1899–1902, p. 91.

71 J.C. Smuts, *Jan Christiaan Smuts*, (Cape Town, Cassel, 1952), p. 137.

72 I am indebted to Major-General Philip Pretorius, Director of the South African National Museum of Military History, for a copy of the regulations.

One of the post-Rebellion experiences which fuelled nationalist momentum was the humiliation of prison – when the Boer populist prophet Van Rensburg had his beard forcibly shaven off.

The new law affected more than just the soldiers. Military institutions comprise ‘more than uniformed men’ – they encompass the state itself and their influence permeates the society.<sup>73</sup> There was immediate public response to the new law. The Act provoked a great deal of dissension. The English press was for it: *The Pretoria News* noted that the Act was ‘constructive and desirable’.<sup>74</sup> An open letter to Smuts, however, warned that no Englishman would comply with Dutch orders.<sup>75</sup> There was mild concern that other races were excluded.<sup>76</sup> There was a limited degree of concern over the inclusion of lower class men in regiments because of conscription.<sup>77</sup>

The MP for Roodepoort, C. H. Haggart, in discussing the Rebellion, made explicit mention of the Defence Act – saying that people were not ready for it.<sup>78</sup> A letter by ‘Ouvale’ (‘Old Transvaaler’) in *Die Volkstem* argued that there had been too short a period of study (November 1911 – 7 February 1912) before the law had been created and the Volksraad members had not yet had a chance to talk it over with their constituencies.<sup>79</sup> There was concern that too few details had been released.<sup>80</sup> It was felt that the system was too European and not South African enough. ‘Ouvale’ noted that the old Transvaal and the Free State Commando laws had been marginalised. It was particularly worrying that the old officers of the Transvaal artillery had offered to give their advice, but had been ignored by Smuts.<sup>81</sup>

The shift to a distant, parliamentary style of politics, where politicians talked and constituents listened, also offended. So much of the politics of the time was also personal: Smuts did not have the old forms of Republican statehood – he would not patiently listen to any burgher over coffee, in the manner of Kruger and Botha. Republican practices were neglected and this rankled. It was noted that

if Smuts or Botha addressed a meeting, and one of our simple farmers ... happens to contradict them, then it is tried in every possible way to shut him up. He is simply shouted down. That aroused feeling amongst the people.<sup>82</sup>

Republicanism meant the ritual of treating all men as equals. A contemporary noted: ‘there is almost not an Afrikaner alive who at the bottom of his heart has not the slumbering illusion that one day we would again be a free “volk”, under our own elected president with whom we can sit on the veranda and drink a cup of coffee’.<sup>83</sup>

There was much concern about the powers of the Governor-General, who was appointed by the British government. The Governor-General would name the *Kommandant-Generaal*. In the old ZAR, the burghers had chosen the *Kommandant-Generaal* themselves. This was a loss of control over something of tremendous, if symbolic, importance. At a meeting in Brakfontein at the beginning of February 1912, with General Beyers present, there was a

73 Barton C. Hacker, ‘Military Institutions and Social Order: Transformations of Western Thought since the Enlightenment’, *War and Society*, 11, 2 (1993).

74 *The Pretoria News*, 30 November 1911.

75 *The Pretoria News*, 2 December 1911.

76 ‘Voice of the Native’, *The Star*, 2 January 1912.

77 Robert Morrell, ‘White Farmers, Social Institutions and Settler Masculinity in the Natal Midlands, 1880–1920’ (PhD thesis, University of Natal, 1996), p. 129.

78 HAD, 1915 col. 361.

79 ‘Besware teen die Wet’, *Die Volkstem*, 22 February 1912.

80 Volksraad debates, 29 February, 620 and 23 February, 491.

81 Volksraad debates, 26 February, 1912, 517.

82 SC 1–15, Testimony of Senator A. D. W. Wolmarans, p. 326.

83 Translation. TAD, Accession W/87/4, Jan-Petrus, ‘Die siener van Lichtenburg’ 22 October 1914.

general outcry against the extended powers of the Governor-General, as an intrusive anglicisation anti-republican factor.<sup>84</sup>

Beyers, who was in charge of the new Defence Force and who was to become one of the rebel leaders, was particularly critical because Smuts had not consulted with the old officers of the former Republics. English officers and government men were consulted – but even then, the Act was already in existence. Beyers also wanted the Act explained in a series of meetings to the People, in the Republican manner, but this was not done. There was also general concern about holding the military camps in and nearby cities. This was for several reasons. The cities were argued to be a breeding ground for social ills, but more importantly it would increase the likelihood of English becoming the language of instruction.<sup>85</sup> Broadly speaking all the regiments in the industrial areas used English and the rural regiments used Dutch.<sup>86</sup> There was anxiety that the General Staff would not be bilingual and that the highest positions would go to unilingual Englishmen.<sup>87</sup>

In the commando system there had been no formal military training. Van der Merwe notes romantically: Man, horse and gun meant military preparedness.<sup>88</sup> It was a common observation that ‘the Boers never drill’.<sup>89</sup> This was part of the mythopoeic image – that no training was necessary, that the Boer lifestyle would suffice in teaching him equestrian skills, riflery and stalking skills. Now, however, training was enforced, with training courses in Bloemfontein.

The Boer military system maintained a very different relationship with the state in comparison with the British army. Its discourse was that of the equality of men and the importance of individual contribution. The British army was integral to society; but the Boer commando system was integral to every man. The two systems were based on different ideologies and had different symbolism. Harm Oost, editor of *Het Volk* and a rebel, made the distinction explicit. The British army, he wrote, purports to be the ‘servant of the state’; in Republican terms, a people’s army was the state itself – every man and boy from 16 years up was involved in the defence of the state, choosing their own officers, who exercised both military and civil duties.<sup>90</sup>

In the Anglo-Boer War, children of school-going age had served in the military.<sup>91</sup> But the introduction of compulsory cadets caused much dissension. Cadets had long been in existence in English-speaking schools in South Africa. The 1912 Act introduced the system into the educational mainstream. Cadets were to be drawn from the 13–17 age bracket: physical exercise, target shooting and signalling were to be taught.

There was great division on the issue. The English press was for it: *The Pretoria News* urged that cadets be compulsory.<sup>92</sup> Aston noted at a school prize-giving that the repeatedly raised spectre of militarism was just a scare tactic.<sup>93</sup> However, within the Dutch-speaking community the idea was met with distrust. This concern over cadets was part of a wider fear over the implications of the Anglicisation of Boer children. Milner’s ham-fisted

84 ‘De Krygswet’ and ‘Bezware teen die Wet’, *Die Volkstem*, 22 February 1912.

85 ‘Bezware teen de wet’, *De Volkstem*, 22 February 1912.

86 ‘Territorial Movement in South Africa’, *The Morning Post*, 22 October 1913.

87 The Act had provided for 201 officers and 50 drill instructors. Of these, 100 were from the former Departments of Defence of the late Colonies, of whom 38 were bilingual; 27 were from other government departments, of whom 25 were bilingual and 74 were new appointments, of whom 60 were bilingual. A large percentage of the 50 drill instructors would qualify to instruct in both languages.

88 Van der Merwe, ‘Die Militere Geskiedenis van die Oranje-Vrystaat 1910–1920’, p. 7.

89 *Daily News*, 23 June 1899, quoted in *A Dictionary of South African English on Historical Principles* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1996).

90 Oost, *Wie is die Skuldiges?*, p. 153.

91 J. N. Brink, *Oorlog en Ballingskap* (Cape Town, Nasionale Pers, 1940), p. 115.

92 *The Pretoria News*, 30 November 1911.

93 G. G. Aston, ‘South Africa and Imperial Defence’, Address to Pretoria Cadets, 19 June 1909, p. 9.

attempts at Anglicisation had left a deep impression in the years since Vereeniging. Beyers had noted in 1905, in a speech at Pietersburg: 'Lady Curzon – an English lady – wrote shortly after the peace: "Get the children and make Englishmen of them"'. Beyers used this occasion to appeal to a sense of fatherly protection of the Boer children:

Is that not a policy calculated to make us desperate and everybody knows what a Boer is capable of when he is desperate. If it goes on like that we will again have war in our country – You were men in war time. Be men also in peace-time and fight such a pernicious policy.<sup>94</sup>

Lord Methuen had done little to endear himself with the Boer faction, casting aspersions upon the manliness of those who objected to the Act:

[T]here seems to be amongst some people of the elderly spinster description a strong prejudice against lads being forced to learn how to defend their homes.<sup>95</sup>

There was the powerful fear that the Boer male child would have his masculinity replaced with an English conception of what it means to be a man. A poem written in that era by C. P. Hoogenhout, called *Vooruitgang* or Progress, illustrates this anxiety and resentment:

English! English! Everything English!  
 Those who will not believe are old-fashioned and stupid  
 Who dares oppose it, is a patriot-rebel ...  
 Even our children, when they return from the schools, oh how cold!  
 Proud, conceited, uncommunicative and stiff as pieces of wood ...  
 Father is a wine or cattle or grain farmer, but his daughter feels ashamed  
 If she is asked about it – boer is such a low name!<sup>96</sup>

## Republicanism and Armed Protest

As the state began implementing the 1912 Act and calling men to serve in the First World War, some refused to comply. The government made a list of those who refused to be commandeered and their weapons were to be seized:

Burghers who are unwilling to be commandeered may be allowed to remain, but their guns must be taken and they must be warned of the danger to which they expose themselves ... and commandants must make a list of the full names and addresses of such unwilling people.<sup>97</sup>

De Wet denounced this action: 'a Boer and his gun and his wife are three things always together'. His gun is his 'second wife, or his sweetheart'. De Wet noted that a Boer without his gun 'is a helpless creature', therefore 'do not touch his gun or his wife'.<sup>98</sup> Amidst the fear and confusion, many rebelled because of the government's intrusion. 'Over my dead body will I relinquish this gun which is my property that cost me money!' exclaimed one man during state requisitioning.<sup>99</sup>

A rebel named Fichardt held that the modern constitutional way was responsible for the Rebellion. It meant if someone smacked you in the face, you had to call a policeman rather than smack him back.<sup>100</sup> Attacked men defended their honour by striking back.

People organised their demonstration on military lines, as was the Republican custom, with generals, assistant generals, *kommandants* and *veldkornets*. Dr Krause noted: 'They

94 G. D. Scholtz, *General Christiaan Frederick Beyers* (Johannesburg, Voortrekkerpers, 1941), pp. 122–123.

95 House of Assembly, Report of Select Committee, 1912, Vol. II, p. 5.

96 My translation from the Afrikaans. D. J. Opperman, *Senior Verseboek* (Cape Town, Tafelberg, 1984), p. 56.

97 A 333 Krause Collection, p. 32.

98 A 333, Krause Collection, p. 31.

99 Translation from the Afrikaans. A 947 *Die Suid-Afrikaanse Protes 1914 – Wedevaringe en herinneringe van J. D. T. (Japie) Krynauw*, p. 2.

100 SC 1–15, Testimony of Charles Gustav Fichardt, p. 307.

talk of their veld-cornets whether it be war or no war and they organise in that fashion'.<sup>101</sup> The movement grew from that of armed protest to a republican revolution. It became an aim to proclaim a Republic, with an ill-defined goal to take Pretoria and demand the removal of the troops from German South West Africa and, if the government refused, to hoist the *vierkleur* (the old Republican flag). Republicanism and a sense of Boer masculinity were inextricably bound up in one another. Nostalgic republicanism was used as a mobilising device, as a balm for wounded identity. Contradictions were masked, the myths reinforced.

## Conclusion

The new military of the modernising state threatened to extinguish Republican masculinity. The 1912 Act imposed colonial training methods, uniforms, ranking system, very hierarchical bureaucracy, disciplinary codes and promotional norms. The new system was impersonal and old Republican protocols were increasingly ignored. The egalitarian rituals were neglected. Military professionalisation entailed overt social differentiation and hierarchy, which the commando system had formerly served to mask.<sup>102</sup> The Act also appeared too English, especially following so closely upon Milner's anglicisation policy. The Cadet Corps appeared to pose a threat to the Boer male children. Commando had been socially and politically integral, so when it was hijacked by the modernising state it alienated Republicans. The State's neglect of Republican protocol as the situation developed, with its official silence on the South West African expedition, precipitated the Rebellion. The 1912 Defence Act, and what it represented in terms of a changing state, presented a challenge to the masculinity of both the leadership and ordinary Boer. On the periphery, farmers and *bywoners* were alienated by the state's failure to alleviate the economic recession and turned to their old commando leaders, with the hope of re-establishing a republic. Cultural images of commando may have corresponded little with the reality of warfare, but seductive imagery propagated by rebel leaders helped fuel the republican nostalgia that centred on a particular understanding of manhood.

The Defence Act was received with contempt by some Boer men and received with approval by English-speaking men, as part of an Imperial project. It was perceived as a tool to anglicise and as a weapon slickly passed through parliament.<sup>103</sup> Not everyone reacted to it in the same way: for some it was the prime cause for rebellion, for others a final straw, a justification, or an articulation of otherwise inexpressible feelings. The Act further distanced some Boer men from the new state and severed their already tenuous allegiance to the legislature. The rebels sought to destroy the hated present in order to recapture an idealised past in an imaginary future. They sought a breakthrough into the past and longed for a new community in which old ideas and institutions would once again command universal allegiance. In an act suffused with mystical Republicanism and cultural despair, was the quest for a lost manhood in the complex of ideas and institutions that characterise industrial society.

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101 A 333, Krause Collection, p. 35.

102 Bengt Abrahamsson, *Military Professionalization and Political Power* (Beverly Hills, Sage, 1972).

103 Volksraad debates, 16 February to 3 July 1917, vol II.