

**GENDER, COMMUNITY AND IDENTITY: WOMEN AND AFRIKANER NATIONALISM IN THE  
VOLKSMOEDER DISCOURSE OF DIE BOEREVROU (1919-1931)**

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## ABSTRACT

As a feminist exploration of the problematic relationship between Afrikaans women and Afrikaner nationalism, this thesis is primarily concerned with the construction of the social identities of Afrikaans women between 1919 and 1931, the crucial formative years of Afrikaner nationalism.

The relationship between women and Afrikaner nationalism is thus addressed by an investigation at the level of intellectual history. The emergence of Afrikaner nationalism at the beginning of the 20th century was accompanied by the articulation of a distinctive gender discourse, the study of which is central to this thesis. Within this discourse, which may be termed the "volksmoeder" discourse, a new identity and new roles were contrived for Afrikaner women. We first investigate the social and historical context in which the discourse was generated and then analyse the "volksmoeder" discourse itself by focusing on texts from Die Boerevrou, a women's magazine launched by Mabel Malherbe in 1919. Rather than taking the Die Boerevrou-texts for granted or seeing them as simple reflections of reality, they are investigated as **constructions**. The questions of why these particular constructions had appeared in that specific context and what ends they achieved are posed. Rather than simply taking the discursive constructions at face value they are construed as "answers" to certain underlying social and historical issues. On a theoretical level the problem of the construction of gender and ethnic identities is informed by recent work in the field of discourse analysis, while the imagining or invention of nation-communities is discussed with reference to the work of Benedict Anderson, Ernst Gellner, Eric Hobsbawm and Tom Nairn.

The investigation of Die Boerevrou-texts as particular articulations of the *volksmoeder* discourse shows how the social identities of Afrikaans women were socially constructed in the *volksmoeder* discourse. It suggests that the social subjectivities of Afrikaans women were by no means simple or transparent. In the texts of Die Boerevrou it becomes clear that even while being shaped by Afrikaner nationalism, women themselves were active in the shaping of Afrikaner nationalism. While they were constituted as subjects in the anti-feminist discourse of Afrikaner nationalism, they remained mobile within this discourse: always negotiating, planning, creating and articulating new identities and roles for themselves. The image of women as passive victims of a male Afrikaner discourses is thus denied. However, it is asserted that the *volksmoeder* discourse as a gender discourse can and should be severely criticised from a feminist perspective.

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## PREFACE

Although when setting out to write a thesis, I planned to investigate Afrikaner social identity, I narrowed my focus to the social identity of Afrikaner women when, in 1989, I discovered Die Boerevrou, an Afrikaans women's magazine published between 1919 and 1931. I was intrigued and fascinated. At first I was merely intrigued with the letters, articles and editorials with their incredibly detailed descriptions of the everyday lives and thoughts of ordinary Afrikaans women. But soon what was behind the letters and articles became even more interesting: Why were these letters written? Who published these letters? Why were they published at this time? Who were reading these letters?

It was because of these intriguing questions that I decided to make Afrikaans women, and more specifically Afrikaans middle-class women in Die Boerevrou, the focus of my study. It was also these questions that inevitably led me to Mabel Malherbe, the editor of Die Boerevrou. As a feminist and Afrikaans-speaking South African it became important for me to give Mabel and the Afrikaans women of her time a voice. But it also became important to, by investigating the construction of a *volksmoeder* discourse and a *volksmoeder* identity in the pages of Die Boerevrou, question the essentialist and naturalist terms in which Afrikaans-speaking women were and are linked to Afrikaner nationalism and motherhood. More generally, it is a project in which the apparent transparency of the social subjectivity of women is questioned and challenged by looking at a very specific historical project. Thus this work should not be read as an attempt to write a history of Afrikaner women.

Once I moved my focus to Afrikaans women my biggest problem was to limit myself. Die Boerevrou itself was such an incredibly rich source that even though I used this magazine as my primary source, there was no way in which I could exhaust the material. Mabel Malherbe herself justifies a biography. I chose to concentrate on one woman and one project, but there were many others: Johanna Brandt and the "kappie-kommando" and the Women's National Party, Elize van Broekhuizen and the Bond van Afrikaanse Moeders, Mrs General Joubert and her role in the wars, the history of women's marches in South Africa, the stories from the concentration camps, the problem of child birth, contraception and Afrikaner women, the *huishoudskole* or Housecraft schools, Afrikaner women and domestic work...the list of topics in which the complex construction of the social identities of Afrikaans women could have been traced is endless.

The remarkable Mabel Malherbe kept me fascinated throughout my research and writing. The thesis starts with a brief account of her life, not only because her story illustrates that women can claim a fuller subjectivity than history has offered them thus far, but also because the story of Mabel in fact contains the contradictions inherent to the stories of Afrikaans middle-class women. Because hers is the story of a woman confined by the structures of patriarchal Afrikaner society, but the story, nonetheless, of a woman actively moving around in this space, always negotiating and articulating and creating new alternatives for herself as a woman. Mabel Malherbe was a powerful, impressive woman who was not well-liked by her contemporaries. Although she was a well-known woman, there were few people who knew her intimately. Those who did, for instance her daughter-in-law Donsie, loved her but never felt completely comfortable with her. Her best friends called her a bully and described her as intimidating. Admiration for her was usually combined with a little fear. Although always correct and caring, she was reserved and inhibited.

Apart from Donsie's recollections, the only sensitive accounts of Mabel as a person can be found in the personal correspondence of the well-known author M E Rothmann (MER). To give the reader some impression of Mabel, I want to briefly refer to one particular narrative contained in a series of letters written by MER to her daughter. It is the simple story of a 1952 visit of Mabel - but a

story which contains much of my own impressions, second-hand as they may be, of Mabel. At first MER, as a token of respect, decided to give up her own bedroom for Mabel ("nog net een vir wie ek dit gedoen het"/there was only one other person for whom I had done this). In the next letter, however, she had changed her mind: "Ek wou haar eers onder sit, maar dit is te moeilik...en wat, sy is jonger as ek en moet maar trap klim." [I first wanted to put her downstairs, but it is too difficult...and she is younger than I am and can climb the stairs.] At this stage Mabel was 73 and MER 77 years old! Mabel arrived in a big car with a black chauffeur, causing quite a stir in Rothmann's household and the small town of Swellendam. Thus Mabel was always active and always remained controversial. MER further wrote:

Een middag moes ek dorp toe...toe staan Mabel daarop Petrus neem my. Petrus maar te bly. En as die kar voor die winkel stilhou (ek sit agter) vlieg Petrus uit, maak die deur oop, wag, maak weer toe, die Duchess of Fife walks out. As ek weer inklum, net so - staan so pikswart en groot in sy spierwit manel en hou die deur vir die D oop. Moenie praat hoe Willie van Eeden hom verkyk het nie...Ek het Mabel bedank vir die ondervinding, seker enig vir my. Mabel speel graag Duchess. Nog die koninklike bloed. Sy moes eintlik Kommissaris se vrou in London gewees het. Sy sou vir ou Queen Mary haar ewebeeld gewys het. [One afternoon I had to go to town...Mabel insisted that Petrus should take me. Petrus very glad. And when the car stops in front of the shop (I sit at the back) Petrus flies out, opens the door, waits, closes the door again, the Duchess of Fife walks out. When I get back in, the same - he stands there pitch black and big in his white tails and holds the door open for the Duchess. Don't mention how Willie van Eeden stared...I thanked Mabel for the experience, unique for me. Mabel enjoys playing the Duchess. It is the royal blood. She should have been the wife of the Commissioner in London. She would have shown Queen Mary her double.]

If this story paints the picture of a sophisticated and aristocratic, even snobbish Mabel, MER in the same series of letters described a Mabel that I did not come across elsewhere:

Sy lyk nog net so, maar baie gebroke deur Boetie se dood, lyk of sy snags huil die oë lyk so kapot...Mabel sal nooit daarvoor kom nie: daar was 'n baie sterk band tussen haar en Boetie. Hy was 'n mens wat met die waarheid omgegaan het, en so iemand het Mabel broodnodig, want sy kan haarself iets wysmaak en is nooit heeltemal seker van haarself nie - want sy streef ook die waarheid na...Maar sy is gesond en sterk, 72, en sal nog wat uitrig.

[She still looks the same, but devastated by Boetie's death; seems that she cries at night her eyes look so tired...Mabel will never get over his death: there was a strong bond between her and Boetie. He was a truthful person, and Mabel needs such a person, because she could convince herself of things and is never quite sure of herself - because she always seek the truth...But she is healthy and strong, 72, and will still achieve a lot.]

This Mabel seems vulnerable and softer, but this was the Mabel that few people knew. Although few people ever referred to this vulnerability, most people who knew her agreed with MER that she was, in the words of her cousin Betty Malherbe, "a woman of tremendous integrity". Not only was she a honest and truthful person, but she was always rooting for the underdog, concerned about the poor and the destitute.

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I would like to point out some terms and concepts that are problematic and that was thus used in specific ways. The word "Afrikaner" is only used to refer to Afrikaans-speaking people who possess some degree of nationalist consciousness. In all other cases I refer to "Afrikaans-speaking people" or "Afrikaans people". While the word "Afrikaner" is used to indicate some ethnic identity, the word "Boer" is used descriptively to refer to Dutch/Afrikaans-speaking Transvalers and should not be understood as implying any ethnic consciousness. I have used the term "Boer woman" to refer to the Dutch/Afrikaans-speaking women of Transvaal - this term should also not be understood as implying an ethnic consciousness. However, with the articulation of a nationalist discourse, the term *boerevrou* was invested with ethnic and gender significance and when this term is used in the text, it should be understood as such. While the Afrikaans word "kaffer" was translated into "kaffir", we translated the word "meid" into "maid" or "servant-girls" - words which definitely do not have the same intonation as the word "meid" in Afrikaans.

At the cost of making the thesis much longer and probably much clumsier, I have quoted from Die Boerevrou in great length. Not only was this necessary because of the theoretical approach of discourse analysis (which will be explained in Chapters one and two), but I also considered it to be important to let the women "speak" for themselves. The original Afrikaans quotes are also included as the language used is often revealing and quite remarkable - Professor Edith Raidt of the University of the Witwatersrand based much of her study on Afrikaans as a woman's language on the Afrikaans used in Die Boerevrou.

A few notes about the translations are necessary. Although all Afrikaans words, phrases and paragraphs have been translated, some Afrikaans words such as *volk* (nation) *volksmoeder* (mother of the nation) *boerevrou* (Boer woman or wife of the Boer) *bywoner*, *kappie* (bonnet) were used, but printed in italics. Although these words can be translated, the original Afrikaans words have specific intimations which get lost in literal translations. Other translations are indicated with square brackets [] or slash / (when the quote is already in brackets). The original Afrikaans appears in inverted commas or is indented.

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I worked on this project in Cape Town, Johannesburg and Boston: 18 months full-time and two years part-time, with a year of leave of study in between. Writing this thesis has been an enriching and wonderful experience. But it was also a difficult and trying experience and I have to thank many people and institutions who in various ways supported and helped me during the almost three and a half years.

Firstly, the thesis would not have been possible without the financial support of the Human Sciences Research Council, the University of Cape Town and the Harry Oppenheimer Institute for African Studies.

Libby Downes at the Social Sciences Faculty Office at the University of Cape Town has been particularly helpful, accommodating and patient. The librarians at the Stellenbosch Document Centre of the University of Stellenbosch helped me to trace all references to Mabel in the collections at the centre and showed much interest in my project.

Sheila Meintjies read the early drafts of the thesis and apart from making valuable suggestions, her interest in the project helped me to believe that it was worthwhile. Elsabe Brink's work on Afrikaans women inspired me in many ways and I also had a valuable discussion with her. Isabel

Hofmeyr took me to the archives for the first time, showed me around and was always interested and helpful when I approached her with problems. Maryke du Toit, who is also working on Afrikaans women, and I had wonderful discussions about Mabel and MER and their contemporaries.

I have to thank Donsie Malherbe, daughter-in-law of Mabel, most sincerely for sharing with me her memories of Mabel and her time. Apart from becoming a very special friend, Donsie showed me photographs, shared painful and happy memories and honestly expressed her feelings and opinions of Mabel. So little is really known about Mabel, so many people know of her, but very few knew her and it was Donsie, with her vivid descriptions, books, photographs and pictures, and even an expedition to the house in which Mabel grew up, who transformed Mabel into a real woman. Two other prominent Pretoria women, Margaret Lessing and Lillian Solomon, also granted me interviews and shared with me their impressions of Mabel and her time.

My friends (in Cape Town, Johannesburg and Boston) proved to be an invaluable support network during the writing of the thesis and helped me in various ways. Everyone continued to ask about the thesis and were always willing not only to listen to complaints, but also to stories about Mabel and her magazine. Andries du Toit, who started his MA at the same time as me was a wonderful study companion during the writing of this thesis. Beatrice Roberts was, as always, a supportive friend and a sounding board for all my frustrations. In the context of this thesis I cannot help but to remember and value once again our (also including Hedwig van Coller) first explorations into the new world of feminism. Much of my feminist consciousness can still be traced back to our enthusiastic celebration of Women's Day in 1986 and our first feminist organisation at the University of Stellenbosch. In Boston the interest that David Ellison and Isabel Karpin showed in my work meant a lot to me. I am grateful to both of them for exciting discussions, wonderful ideas and for reading my work when they both were very busy themselves. Jody Freeman in Boston also read parts of the thesis. Her rigorous criticism, editorial comments and insightful suggestions proved to be invaluable and is highly appreciated. I would also like to mention the names of other friends who have helped me in different ways during the writing of this thesis: Jonathan Fox lent me his printer for six months; Barbara Thompson and Stuart Mathews helped with research, John Solomon drove me around; Beth van Heerden lent us her car and read parts of the thesis at an early stage; and Nancy and Warren Davis cared and cooked for me during the last week of proof-reading and crises in Boston.

Lomin Saayman translated all the Afrikaans quotations in this thesis, but to his dismay and my regret a whole pack of translations were stolen from his car before he could send them to me. I appreciated the time and energy he spent on this work more than he could ever imagine. In the end product he is responsible for most of the translations in Chapters one, four and five. Danie Hough in Boston was kind enough to do the rest of the translations, with no prior notice, two weeks before the due date and so helped me to bypass the crisis of the stolen translations.

My brothers, each one in a special way, also inspired me, kept me company and helped me while I was writing the thesis. John listened critically to my ideas and made many suggestions. Also in the process of writing a thesis, he was most sympathetic when I had the "thesis blues". Just starting his thesis, Tindall worked with me for a while and made several long working nights bearable. Louis, who is just starting his academic career, ran errands for me, endlessly tore computer paper and was a valuable companion during my stay in Kuilsrivier.

My parents cannot but have been part of this thesis for it was they who had taught me the joys

of reading and learning in the first place. They also supported me in various ways during the writing of this thesis, financially, but also emotionally: my father believed in this project when everyone else gave up the hope that it will ever be completed and my mother remained interested in Mabel and concerned about me throughout.

Professor Andre du Toit was in more than one ways a remarkable supervisor. Apart from always making time to see me (even on the day before Christmas!), he also had to deal with the traumas of long-distance thesis writing: faxes, courier services, early morning telephone calls, lost manuscripts and translations and taking the night-train from Washington DC to Boston to collect the thesis. Despite his extremely busy schedule he read and reread every part of this thesis, paying attention to the finest details and the most basic assumptions. It was because of him that writing this thesis has been the best learning experience I have ever had. Whatever the end product, the discussions, conversations and correspondence with Professor Du Toit during the course of writing this thesis has made it a worthwhile project for me. I consider myself very fortunate to have been granted the opportunity to work so closely with such a committed teacher.

I dedicate this thesis to Ockie Dupper, who also lived with Mabel and her contemporaries for the duration of this thesis. He endured their presence in our house and for many months assumed the roles of sole-breadwinner, sole-housekeeper, proofreader, critic and "technical assistant". Moreover, his sustained enthusiasm for this project, his ideas and criticism and his own academic work always served as inspiration for my work. For Ockie's support and patience and love in a time when I was under immense pressure I could never thank him enough.

This thesis is also in memory of my wonderful grandmother, Maria Malherbe, who was a young Afrikaans woman during the time of the construction of the so-called "volksmoeder" discourse, but who, like Mabel Malherbe, never really became a *volksmoeder*.

At the end of one such conversation during which the two of us puzzled and wondered, trying to reconstruct the remarkable Mabel and the time she lived in, Donsie remarked that Mabel would have loved to be there to help: "I can hear her saying, 'No my child, that is not quite how I remember it'".

### Memories of Mabel

Hierdie drie, Sara<sup>1</sup>, Mabel, Marguerite<sup>2</sup>, het vir my geword, elk op sy wyse, 'n vervulling: 'n vervulling van 'n droom, sou ek kon se, was dit nie dat ek nooit die moed sou gehad het om so 'n droom te droom nie.<sup>3</sup>

[These three, Sarah, Mabel, Marguerite, had to me become, each in (her) own way, a fulfilment: a fulfilment of a dream, I could say, if it was not that I would never have had the courage to dream such a dream.]

Mabel Malherbe became a part of my life in her typical bossy way and now, in retrospect, I would agree with MER who said about a forthcoming visit of Mabel: "Ek sien uit na die kuier, hoop darem dit sal nie te lank wees. M kan uitput."

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<sup>1</sup> Sara Niemeyer (Rood).

<sup>2</sup> Marguerite Pienaar (Niemeyer). Mabel Malherbe's cousin and Sara Niemeyer's sister-in-law.

<sup>3</sup> Rothmann MER, op cit, p202.

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION: THE PROBLEMATIC RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN WOMEN AND AFRIKANER NATIONALISM

But what you read is not all you get, and what is not on the page is often as important as what is.

-Corinne Squire<sup>1</sup>

Any women's history has to be alert to the blanks, the omissions and the halftruths. It must listen to the silences and make them cry out.

-Rosalind Miles<sup>2</sup>

#### 1.1 Introduction

Through legends of barefoot women crossing the Drakensberg and tales of silent suffering in the Boer War concentration camps, women have obtained an important place in Afrikaner nationalist mythology. Still, there is also a pervasive silence about the role of women in Afrikaner history and in shaping Afrikaner nationalism itself. While, in Afrikaner historiography, Afrikaner men are portrayed as active historical agents, instrumental in the mobilisation of the Afrikaner nation, women tend to feature mainly as symbols - inspiring, justifying and supporting the actions of the male agents of Afrikaner nationalism. In the words of Dunbar Moodie:

If the Afrikaner man was indeed the instrumental agent who worked out God's will in Afrikaner history, the woman provided a deep well of moral fortitude which complemented and even surpassed her husband's more practical exploits.<sup>3</sup>

As a powerful symbol, the Afrikaner woman thus represented purity, innocent suffering and patience, even while the active historical roles of Afrikaans women was passed over in silence. This silence about women's role in Afrikaner history, even while extolling her symbolic

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<sup>1</sup> Squire C, Significant differences. Feminism in psychology, p113.

<sup>2</sup> Miles R, The women's history of the world, p13.

<sup>3</sup> Moodie T D, The rise of Afrikanerdom. Power, apartheid and the Afrikaner civil religion, p17.

Moodie's thesis is that Afrikaners' ascendance to power before 1948 was motivated by a civil religion (which was both Christian and Calvinist); that the Afrikaner nation with its distinct language, culture and history, was projected as a chosen people for which God has a divine plan. In The rise of Afrikanerdom he tries to understand the symbols which Afrikaners used to interpret and eventually shape their reality. It is in this context that women are portrayed by Moodie as central symbols in the Afrikaner version of their "sacred history".

significance, is not only characteristic of nationalist accounts of the emergence and growth of Afrikaner nationalism, but equally of critics of Afrikaner nationalism, including Moodie. However, closer investigation reveals many stories which suggest that women were in fact more than mere symbols: they, too, were active agents in the mobilisation of the *volk*. One such a story is the story of Mabel Malherbe (see below 1.2).

This thesis will be concerned with the problematic relationship between women and Afrikaner nationalism. It will attempt to redress the silence about women's role in Afrikaner history by investigating the active part which women like Mabel Malherbe played at crucial stages of the construction of Afrikaner nationalism itself. It will reconstruct the process which made the Afrikaans women into a powerful symbol in the mythology of Afrikaner nationalism even while negating the actual roles of Afrikaans women as historical agents. It will be particularly concerned with the contribution by women like Mabel Malherbe to this double process. More specifically, the thesis will investigate the *volksmoeder* discourse as articulated from 1919 to 1931 in the pages of the magazine Die Boerevrou, of which Mabel Malherbe was the editor.

The remainder of this Introduction will provide a general motivation for our investigation of the relationship between women and Afrikaner nationalism through a brief survey of the existing literature, in particular the relevant studies by feminist historians (1.3.1), an indication of the underlying theoretical problems regarding the constitution of the social subjectivity of women (1.3.2) and a preliminary account of the methodological approach to be adopted for the purposes of our study (1.4). But first, there will be a biographical interlude: the story of Mabel Malherbe (1.2). It may be a somewhat unusual procedure to deal with such biographical particulars at this stage of the investigation but this serves definitive purposes. If we are to move from the level of the Afrikaans women as powerful symbol in the mythology of Afrikaner nationalism and recover the roles and contributions of Afrikaans women as historical agents then it will have to be firmly anchored in the concrete and personal particulars of their actual lives. Although this thesis will be concerned with a general analysis of the features of the *volksmoeder* discourse in the wider context of Afrikaner nationalism, and it will attempt to raise and explore the complex theoretical problems of the discursive constitution of gender and ethnic identities, a basic priority must be to do justice to the concrete historical agency of individual women. And so it is to the story of Mabel Malherbe that we must turn before continuing to state our problem in more general terms.

## 1.2 The story of Mabel Malherbe

The story of Mabel Malherbe is a complex one with many contradictions and gaps. She was, in a way, a Cinderella of Afrikaner nationalism. All the odds were against her becoming a nationalist, but, during a crucial time in the formation of Afrikaner nationalism, she was responsible for one of its most successful and powerful projects. The leading role that she played was even more remarkable because she was a woman at that specific time in history. However, not surprisingly, she soon disappeared from the Afrikaner nationalist scene and for all practical purposes was left out of the chronicles of Afrikaner nationalism - but for a few random mentions in women's publications.

### 1.2.1 The Marais family

Hulle was nie Afrikaners gewees nie, laat ons nou maar reguit praat.<sup>4</sup>  
 [Let us be frank, they were not Afrikaners.]

Mabel Malherbe's ancestors cannot be regarded as having been a typical Transvaal family of the time. Her maternal grandparents, the Marais' (who would feature prominently during her childhood years), although considered to be important members of Pretoria society, were in many ways regarded as outsiders by the Boer community of the Transvaal. Originally from the farm "Nektar" near Stellenbosch, Jan Christiaan Nielen Marais and Catharina Marais moved to Pretoria in 1868.<sup>5</sup> Here they mixed mainly with English-speaking people, ex-Capetonians and a couple of the more cultured Transvalers. The cultural milieu of the Marais family is perceptively described by Leon Rousseau in his biography of the Afrikaans poet Eugene Marais:

In die omgang praat (hulle) soms Afrikaans, soms 'n baster Hollands, wat deftiger en Nederlandser word sodra hulle vername besoekers ontvang. Engels praat hulle vlot en graag, deels om hul meerderwaardigheid te toon, deels uit heimwee na die ou Kaap.<sup>6</sup>  
 [In their social dealings (they) sometimes speak Afrikaans, sometimes a kind of *Hollands*, which becomes more dignified and more like Dutch as soon as they receive important visitors. They speak English fluently and eagerly, partly to show their superiority, partly out of nostalgia for the Cape.]

The Marais family did not get along well with the Transvalers. Paul Kruger was looked down upon because of his "wild" appearance and for being a "Dopper" - a member of the Reformed Church.

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<sup>4</sup> The words of Hannie Preller, wife of Gustav Preller, when commenting about the lack of understanding between Eugene Marais and his sisters.  
 Rousseau L, Die groot verlanje, p392. .

<sup>5</sup> ibid, pp1-2.

<sup>6</sup> ibid, p4.

"Mother thought of him as a servant, and treated him as such. She wouldn't put a quilt on his bed," one of the Marais daughters said.<sup>7</sup> But the former president of the Transvaal, Thomas Burgers, was very popular with the Marais household. As an educated and liberal person, they supported him and his politics.

Jan and Catharina Marais had thirteen children of whom ten, six daughters and four sons, lived to be adults. The youngest son, Eugene Nielen Marais, later became a prominent Afrikaans poet and writer.

### 1.2.2 The Rex household

Gezina Constantia (Jess) Marais, Mabel's mother, was the Marais sister thought to be particularly pro-English. She married Frans Christopher Muller (Frank) Rex, a descendant of George Rex of Knysna. The wedding in 1874 was a major social event culminating in a ball at the house of Magistrate Skinner's house with President Burgers as one of the important guests. The Rex couple's only daughter, Mabel Catherine, was born on 9 August 1879. She had two brothers, Percy and Herbert, both of whom died as young men.

Frank Rex had a drinking problem and was seldom at home, even in the very early years.<sup>8</sup> He left Jess Rex soon after the last of the three children was born and moved to the Karoo.<sup>9</sup> He was a journalist and, although English-speaking, became editor of one of the first Afrikaans newspapers in the Karoo. Mabel herself said about her father that in her love for journalism she was very much like him. "I have ink in my veins," she used to say. She felt, however, that she had not inherited his talent.<sup>10</sup>

Jess Rex was a strong woman. After her husband left, she supported herself and her three children by keeping a boarding house and running a small dairy. As a single mother she was known to be independent of mind and tenacious of character. According to legend, and to the dismay of Pretoria society, Jess became the lover of the English author H Rider Haggard during Shepstone's

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid, p8.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, p10.

<sup>9</sup> Interview Donsie Malherbe, 12 March 1990.

<sup>10</sup> Loc cit.

annexation of the Transvaal (1877-1879).<sup>11</sup>

Jess Rex and the other Marais sisters (Mabel's aunts) probably played the most important role in Mabel's formative years. They were strong, proud women, and the young Mabel was brought up strictly. There was always a tense relationship between Mabel and her mother - this tension would manifest itself in certain nervous afflictions that Mabel suffered as an adult.<sup>12</sup> Even in her English father's absence, Mabel grew up in a thoroughly English environment. Her home language was English and she was sent to the prestigious English high school for girls in Cape Town, Rustenburg High.

In light of this background, it seems unlikely that Mabel Rex would later become a fervent Afrikaner nationalist. The Pretoria and Cape society in which she grew up had a very different cultural milieu from that supposed to be typical of the Boer republics, and her home language and schooling was definitively English, not Afrikaans. Indeed Afrikaner nationalism could not have come "naturally" to her. It needs to be explained. We have to ask how and why it happened that Afrikaner nationalism could become one of the passions of someone with this kind of social and cultural background.

### 1.2.3 The young Mabel Rex

After school, Mabel Rex, because of her strong interest in journalism, arranged a job for herself at an English daily newspaper in Cape Town. Mabel Malherbe would remember in 1929:

Hoe goed onthou ek dat, toe ek so pas 18 jaar oud was, ek die geleentheid had om by 'n vername koerant werk te kry, met die belofte van die redaksie om my as joernalis op te lei. My moeder was so ontsteld daaroor dat ek in 'n kantoor sou moes werk (en dit nogal in 'n koerantkantoor!) dat ek per telegram huis toe gebied is!<sup>13</sup>  
 [How well I remember that, just after I turned 18, I had the opportunity to work at an important newspaper, with the promise from the editorial staff to be trained as a journalist. My mother was so upset that I would have to work in an office (and a newspaper office at that!) that I was summoned home per telegram.]

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<sup>11</sup> Rousseau L, op cit, pp10-11.

<sup>12</sup> She suffered from asthma, but her asthma disappeared with her mother's death. She consequently believed that the asthma was psychosomatic. Interview Donsie Malherbe, 12 March 1990.

<sup>13</sup> Die Boerevrou, July 1929, p2. See also Neethling-Pohl A, "Mev Mabel Malherbe" in Die Huisgenoot, 1 June 1945, p33.

At the age of eighteen she was back in Pretoria. She kept herself busy by writing the occasional story for the local newspaper and also became responsible for teaching English to Mrs Piet Grobler, wife of Paul Kruger's private secretary.<sup>14</sup> It was probably at this stage of her life that she met Kruger (about whom she would much later write with admiration and respect) and other prominent Boer leaders.

With the outbreak of the South African War in 1899, Mabel Rex became a member of the Red Cross and served the organisation as a nurse. After the occupation of Pretoria her family moved to Gordon's Bay, where they stayed for the rest of the war.<sup>15</sup> Mabel, with the help of Mrs Koopmans-De Wet, a prominent figure in Cape Town Afrikaner circles, left South Africa for Holland, where she studied nursing at the Diakonnessehuis in Haarlem for three years.<sup>16</sup> These early developments in the career of the young Mabel are significant: it is clear that even as a young woman she was determined to qualify herself for a professional career, even if it was not the norm for women. When her plans to become a journalist failed, she became a nurse with the help of the distinguished Mrs Koopmans-De Wet.

#### 1.2.4 Mabel Rex becomes a Malherbe

Mabel Rex married Kenne Nicolaas de Kock Malherbe on 13 April 1904 in Pretoria.<sup>17</sup> By doing this she became a member of an important and influential family in Pretoria, a family that was closely connected to Kruger and his republicanism. Kenne's father, Nicolaas Samuel Malherbe was treasurer-general of the South African Republic (SAR) since 1898 and left for Europe with President Kruger after the annexation of Pretoria.<sup>18</sup> Kenne Malherbe was an active soldier in the Boer army until the end of the war<sup>19</sup> and, together with his friend Toti Krige, was among the first Boers on Spioenkop.<sup>20</sup> Both of Kenne Malherbe's brothers were prisoners of war at Ceylon.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Neethling-Pohl A, op cit, p33.

<sup>15</sup> Beyers C J (ed), Suid-Afrikaanse biografiese woordeboek, p362.

<sup>16</sup> Neethling-Pohl A, op cit, p33.

<sup>17</sup> Malherbe G H, Stamregister van die Malherbes in Suid-Afrika, p168.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, p167.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, p168.

<sup>20</sup> Interview Donsie Malherbe, 12 March 1990.

After the war Kenne Malherbe started practising as a lawyer in Pretoria. M E Rothmann (MER), celebrated Afrikaans author and close friend of Mabel Malherbe, would later describe Kenne Malherbe as an "knap prokureur met veelsydige aanknopings en belange" ["able lawyer with versatile relations and interests"].<sup>22</sup> The couple mainly socialised with Pretoria intellectuals: people such as Tielman Roos (lawyer en Hertzog-supporter), Gustav Preller (journalist en editor) and Willem Malherbe (Kenne Malherbe's brother and editor of Die Brandwag) counted among their closest friends.

Kenne and Mabel Malherbe had a good relationship. He admired her deeply. Significantly, he often said, even if in jest, that he was Mr Mabel Malherbe.<sup>23</sup> She clearly was the more dominant personality of the two. Kenne Malherbe was a kind and warm-hearted person and, if slightly amused by all her endeavours, supported Malherbe unconditionally.<sup>24</sup> After his death MER remarked that Malherbe relied more on Kenne than she herself realised.<sup>25</sup>

The Malherbes had two children, Martha or "Martli" (born 19 March 1905) and Nicolaas Samuel or "Boet" (born 3 September 1906).<sup>26</sup> The family spoke English at home and both children were sent to English-medium schools. Donsie Malherbe, Mabel Malherbe's daughter-in-law, cannot remember ever speaking Afrikaans to Mabel Malherbe. Neither Mabel Malherbe, nor Kenne was religious and the family only attended church on occasions like weddings and funerals. However, the Dutch Reformed Church was later regarded as "ons kerk" (our church) and Kenne, Mabel and Boet Malherbe would later be buried from this church.<sup>27</sup>

Mabel Malherbe could not be regarded as a typical housewife or mother of her time. She did not do needlework, could not knit and was not domesticated in any way. Malherbe cared very much

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<sup>21</sup> Malherbe G H, op cit, pp167 and 168.

<sup>22</sup> Rothmann M E, My beskeie deel, p205.

<sup>23</sup> Ironically Mabel almost always referred to herself as Mrs Kenne Malherbe.

<sup>24</sup> Interview Donsie Malherbe, 12 March 1990.

<sup>25</sup> Rothmann M E, M E Rothmann collection, University of Stellenbosch Document Centre, 55.KF.7 (129), personal letter to her daughter dated 13 April 1952.

<sup>26</sup> Malherbe G H, op cit, p168.

<sup>27</sup> Interview Donsie Malherbe, 12 March 1990.

In many ways, then, the household in which Mabel and Kenne Malherbe brought up their children, was also not the kind of typical Afrikaner household which one would expect from a champion of Afrikaner nationalism.

### 1.2.5 Mabel Malherbe and the volksmoeder ideal

Paradoxical as it might seem, after the founding of the National Party in 1914, Mabel Malherbe developed into a staunch nationalist and a champion of the Afrikaner cause. The origins of these Afrikaner nationalist sentiments in a woman who hardly ever spoke Afrikaans, seldom went to church and whose family had been almost completely anglicised and certainly had no nationalist inclinations requires explanation. From one story that she liked to tell it is clear that she did not consider herself a "born" Afrikaner: there had been a turning point in her life where she finally realised that she was an Afrikaner. This story was about her attending the Dingaans' Day celebrations at Blood River in 1920. She was to stay in the tent of Mrs Piet Lavras Uys. It was cold and wet and she felt slightly alienated, until she arrived at the tent of Mrs Uys, who welcomed her warmly. The story continues:

Daardie aand het mev Malherbe op 'n yslike bultak in die tent geslaap en na die fees is sy na die Uys-plaas. Daar het die gevoel in haar opgestyg: Hier is ek tuis. Hier is my mense.<sup>36</sup>

[That evening Mrs Malherbe slept on a large feather mattress in the tent and after the festival she went to the Uys farm. There she developed the feeling: I am at home here. These are my people.]

Mabel Malherbe was an avid admirer of Hertzog and supported the National Party since its inception in 1914, although as a woman she could not join it for the first 16 years of its existence. When 3 000 Afrikaans women marched to the Union Buildings on 4 August 1915, demanding the release of the leaders of the rebellion, Mabel Malherbe was among them. With the launch of the Women's National Party (WNP), also in 1915, she became a founding member.<sup>37</sup> Significantly her children regarded her nationalism to be "a pose", and Martli, her daughter, thought her nationalist politics to be a contradiction of everything else she was and believed.<sup>38</sup> Her fascination (almost infatuation) with General Hertzog might have been significant in this regard, although it can hardly be regarded as explaining the commitment of a lifetime.

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<sup>36</sup> Behrens L, "Mabel Malherbe - Die 'boervroutjie' wat nou promoveer" in Sarie Marais, 15 April 1953, p15.

<sup>37</sup> Beyers C J, op cit, p362.

<sup>38</sup> Loc cit.

Perhaps Malherbe's commitment to nationalist politics, paradoxically, had to do with her deep-seated beliefs in the power of women and her continuous concern for their plight. The fact that she at first concentrated on nationalist projects for women might not have merely been a reflection of her nationalist beliefs, but might suggest that she saw nationalism as an ideology that had specific advantages for women. It is also possible that she realised that Afrikaner nationalism was to become a major force in South African politics, especially in the lives of Afrikaans-speaking South Africans and that she wanted to make sure that Afrikaans women would make the best of this inevitable process. Many of Mabel Malherbe's activities had to do with Afrikaans women. She was a member of the *Suid-Afrikaanse Vrouefederasie* [Federation of South African Women] (SAVF) and served on this organisation's executive in 1917. She was a founding member of the *Bond van Afrikaanse Moeders* [Union of Afrikaans Mothers], an organisation established in 1919 to help women to give birth safely and to educate midwives. In the twenties she founded the *Pretoria Afrikaans-Hollandse Leesunie* [Pretoria Afrikaans-Dutch Reading Union], a book/reading club for Afrikaans women. Mabel Malherbe always was in favour of suffrage for women and her name is one of the few Afrikaans names that appear in the suffragette magazine, The Woman's Outlook. She raised the issue of women's suffrage at her first ever meeting with Hertzog in 1919<sup>38</sup>, and was also reported to have brought up the issue at various congresses of the Women's National Party.<sup>40</sup> Through all of these activities she was struggling to improve the quality of women's lives and to explore and create new roles that they could play in society.

In March 1919 Mabel Malherbe embarked on the project for which she would eventually be best known: she launched the first Afrikaans magazine for women, Die Boerevrou, "n maandblad vir die Afrikaanse vrou" [a monthly journal for the Afrikaans woman]. This magazine would become a significant Afrikaner nationalist project, the more so for being directed at a very specific audience. In Die Boerevrou Malherbe combined her two main interests: Afrikaner nationalism and women. However, this combination was by no means an obvious or unproblematic one, especially for someone like Malherbe who, as we saw, was no nationalist to begin with and actually came from an atypical social and cultural background. In retrospect Malherbe said that the idea for the magazine originated when she was office bearer in both the WNP and the SAVF. In these positions she not only received many letters from rural women, but in her many visits to the rural areas as representative of these organisations, she was also exposed to the problems and needs of these women. Die Boerevrou, Malherbe said, was created to help these women and give them advice

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<sup>38</sup> Neethling-Pohl A, op cit, p33.

<sup>40</sup> Van Rensburg A P, Moeders van ons volk, p120.

about child care, housekeeping, health and other daily problems.<sup>41</sup> Die Boerevrou may thus be seen in the first place as an expression of Malherbe's concern for women. However, Malherbe deliberately chose to present the help and advice for women readers within a distinct Afrikaner nationalist framework. She thus created a well-illustrated and carefully edited women's magazine that was nationalist, religious and very conservative.

Die Boerevrou was not a successful business enterprise nor was it undertaken for commercial reasons. As editor-in-chief and owner of the magazine, Mabel Malherbe never made a cent from it. On the contrary, Kenne Malherbe often had to help the magazine financially.<sup>42</sup> For Malherbe the magazine was her vocation and she often expressed her commitment to her readers and the project as a whole. Rothmann described this attitude:

Vir Mev Malherbe was Die Boerevrou tot baie groot plesier. Ek sien haar nou nog by haar lessenaar sit met die maand se stukke voor haar, besig om die "dummy" op te stel - artikels, "Koffietafel" briewe, stories, versies, illustrasies, dekorasies, bladvullings. Ek sien haar elke stuk, elke brokkie en krummel met die genoeë hanteer waarmee 'n jong moeder haar enigste dogtertjie aantrek en linte in die hare bind. Die aanknopings wat die blad bewerk het met so 'n menigte vroue, gretig vir hierdie leesstof, was ook vir haar sielsvoedend...Daarby was sy ook keurig besorg oor die kwaliteit van wat sy gegee het: dit moes onbesproke wees.<sup>43</sup>

[Die Boerevrou gave Mrs Malherbe great pleasure. I still see her sitting at her desk with the month's material in front of her, busy preparing the "dummy" - articles, "Coffee table" letters, stories, bits of poetry, illustrations, decorations, page-fillers. I see her treating every piece, every bit and crumb with the pleasure with which a young mother dresses her only daughter and puts ribbons in her hair. The links the magazine established with so many women, eager for this reading matter, nourished her soul. In addition thereto, she was also very concerned about the quality which she gave: it had to be impeccable.]

Malherbe herself would later stress the creative aspect of her project:

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<sup>41</sup> Malherbe M, "Ek sien haar win" in Sarie Marais, 6 July 1949, p30.

<sup>42</sup> Rothmann M E, op cit, p207 and Hiemstra L W, "Aanrakingspunte met MER" in Botha E, MER. 100, p61. Both Rothmann and Hiemstra's descriptions of the financing of Die Boerevrou leaves one with a similar impression of Kenne Malherbe. "Kenne moes meer as een keer aan die einde van die maand 'n tekort aansuiwer - kamma al klaend, maar steeds gewillig om sy Mabel te help aan haar plesier in haar Boerevrou," [Kenne often had to help with money at the end of the month - he pretended to complain about doing this, but he was always willing to help his Mabel to have her pleasure with her Boerevrou], MER said. Hiemstra described the situation as follows: "...haar man moes, goedwillig brommend soms, die sinkende skip maar telkens weer met 'n toelae vlot maak" [her husband had to, goodheartedly complaining sometimes, keep the sinking ship afloat with his contributions].

<sup>43</sup> Rothmann M E, My beskeie deel, p206.

indicated a preference for the relatively more inclusive and liberal policy of the NCW.<sup>46</sup>

At the same time Malherbe became more active and visible in the public sphere, the sphere traditionally reserved for men. In 1927 she became a member of the Pretoria City Council where she served the city for six years. Malherbe was elected mayor of Pretoria in 1931 - the first woman mayor ever of a South African city.<sup>47</sup>

In June 1930 white South African women were finally enfranchised. The last issue of Die Boerevrou appeared in December 1931 and in the same year Mabel Malherbe declared that the role of women had changed, indicating that Afrikaans women too should no longer be *volksmoeders* in the traditional sense of the word:

En die Afrikaner-vrou, sowel as haar susters die hele wereld deur, die pas haar aan by die veranderde toestande - verbasend handig pas sy haar daarby aan. Waar sy in haar wese bedees, sag en huisliwend is, werp sy haar nou in die stryd en deur haar vindingrykheid en moed sal sy weet om selfs in die veranderde toestande ook weer vir haar 'n waardige leefwyse te skep...<sup>48</sup>

[And the Afrikaner woman, as well as her sisters throughout the world, adapts to the changed situation - surprisingly skilful she adapts to it. While her nature is soft, timid and domesticated, she now throws herself into the struggle and through her ingenuity and courage she will know, even in the changed situation, how to again create a dignified way of life for herself...]

Malherbe herself certainly acted on her own advice. With the fusion of the National Party and the WNP in 1931, she became an executive member of the Transvaal National Party. In 1933, three years after the enfranchisement of women, she was one of four women being elected member of parliament. As member of parliament she represented the constituency Wonderboom for five years. She also became a member of the Transvaal Provincial Council in June 1933. She was most concerned with issues like health, housing and education and was especially determined to improve the position of the so-called "Coloured" in these regards.

After Mabel Malherbe's election to parliament, M E Rothmann (MER) wrote in Die Burgeres, the magazine of the Women's NP:

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<sup>46</sup> The South African Woman's who's who, p489.

<sup>47</sup> Beyers C J (ed), op cit, p362.

<sup>48</sup> Malherbe M, "Die Afrikaner-vrou" in Oost H (ed), Ons land en ons volk. 'n Nasionale jaarboek, p30.

Deur die toetrede van Mev Malherbe is die *Ewig Weibliches* ook in die politiek gebring.<sup>49</sup>  
 [With the entry of Mrs Malherbe, the *Ewig Weibliches* was also brought into politics.]

However, Malherbe's parliamentary career was not a particular success. She made many enemies in parliament, among them Hendrik Verwoerd, who was later to become prime minister of South Africa. Eric Stockenstrom, in his nationalist history of the struggle for women's suffrage, said about Malherbe's years as member of parliament:

Een (van die eerste vroue in die parlement) het voor haar verkiesing beroemdheid verwerf op sosiale gebied in verband met sake wat aan die Vrouefederasie verwant was. Sy was ook eens burgemeester van Pretoria, en het in daardie hoedanigheid veel uitgerig. As lid van die Unie-Volksraad het sy egter niks presteer nie. Sy het dit trouens self besef dat die parlement nie haar aangewese werkkring was nie, en sy het haar diensengevolge ook onttrek.<sup>50</sup>

[One (of the first women in parliament) had, before her election, become famous in the social sphere in connection with matters related to the *Vrouefederasie*. She had also been mayor of Pretoria and accomplished much in that capacity. As member of the Union parliament, however, she did not excel at all. She herself realised that parliament was not her designated position, and consequently withdrew.]

As a loyal Hertzog-supporter Mabel Malherbe, with the fusion of the National Party and the South African Party in 1931, joined the new United Party.<sup>51</sup> Here her way departed from the more committed nationalists such as her friend MER, who joined Malan's "Gesuiwerde" [Purified] National Party.

In Pretoria Mabel Malherbe was gradually marginalised from the Afrikaner establishment. This was partly the result of her refusal to join the "Gesuiwerde" National Party, but it also had to do with the issues she took up in Parliament and perhaps her views on the role of women. An incident that illustrates this marginalisation took place during 1941. Malherbe was asked by Anna Neethling Pohl, Eldie Buurman and Christa Muller to lead the women's anti-war march to the Union Buildings in 1941. She was more than willing as she was very much opposed to South Africa's participation in the war. When Verwoerd heard that Malherbe was to lead the march, he summoned the organisers to his office and told them that under no circumstances could such a "controversial political figure" be allowed to do so. The four women had to ask Malherbe to step down. Although furious, Malherbe withdrew immediately. She still took part in the march, walking at the rear with

<sup>49</sup> Quoted by Van Rensburg A P, *op cit*, p122.

<sup>50</sup> Stockenstrom E E, Geskiedenis van die vrouebeweging an die vrouestemreg in Suid-Afrika to 1930, pp435-436.

<sup>51</sup> Rothmann M E, *op cit*, p217.

her daughter-in-law, Donsie Malherbe.<sup>52</sup> Despite this, in a pamphlet to commemorate the march of 1940, Mabel Malherbe's name appeared at the end of a list of "ander volksmoeders wat hulle steun gegee het deur die versoekskrif te onderteken, die komitee met advies te bedien of as eregaste op te tree" [other *volksmoeders* who gave their support by signing the petition, by advising the committee or by acting as guests of honour].<sup>53</sup>

It will be suggested later in this thesis that Malherbe did not see the *volksmoeder* ideal as an end but used it for other purposes. This is strongly suggested by the fact that Malherbe's whole life was a contradiction of the *volksmoeder* ideal. Also, by the end of the twenties Malherbe very subtly tried to introduce new possibilities and new views to the readers of Die Boerevrou (the magazine carried articles about a wide variety of women's organisations, the editors prompted her readers to discuss the issue of working women and finally, in 1930, even the issue of women's suffrage was discussed) and by 1931 she did not only abandon Die Boerevrou, but also publicly expressed alternative views on the role of women.

The story of Mabel Malherbe thus presents us with a complex set of problems with regard to the relation of women to Afrikaner nationalism. In the first place her story indicates that women like Mabel Malherbe did take an active part in the construction of Afrikaner nationalism. Once we break the silence, there is ample evidence of the ways in which women actively contributed to the nationalist project as historical agents in their own right and indeed appropriated this project and suited it to their own ends. But, in the second place, the story of Mabel Malherbe raises major questions as to how and why a woman like herself did come to contribute in this way to the construction of Afrikaner nationalism at all. She did not come from a typical "Afrikaner" social and cultural milieu, she did not use Afrikaans as her home language, she was secular and progressive in her general outlook, and in general she did not have the kind of prior ethnic identity which could find "natural" expression in a nationalist movement. And above all, as a strong woman active in public life and much concerned with the cause of women, it is difficult to understand why she would actively have supported a nationalist movement which was, in general terms, decidedly anti-feminist. More particularly, it seems a basic paradox that she should have done so much to articulate a conservative gender discourse such as the *volksmoeder* discourse when her entire life was a contradiction of the *volksmoeder* ideal. The story of Mabel Malherbe must thus, at the very

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<sup>52</sup> Interview Donsie Malherbe, 12 March 1990.

<sup>53</sup> Die vroue-optog van 22 Junie 1940, no page numbering.

least, raise a number of questions regarding the relation of women to Afrikaner nationalism. It is, of course, possible that her case was entirely exceptional and could be explained in terms of various personal idiosyncracies and confusions.<sup>54</sup> Although recognising that Malherbe's case was special, we would argue that at this time we found (not coincidentally) a number of other strong women who in different ways also contributed to Afrikaner nationalism and women's organisations, notably MER and Johanna Brand<sup>55</sup>, and that the exceptional story of Mabel Malherbe contains the contradictions inherent to the lives of many Afrikaans women. The evidence thus points to the need to revise some of our basic assumptions about the relationship between women and nationalism and the necessity to revise the historical record in this regard. Starting with the story of Mabel Malherbe, and focusing on her contribution to the articulation of the *volksmoeder* discourse in the pages of Die Boerevrou, it will be the aim of this thesis to reopen the problem of the relationship between women and Afrikaner nationalism in general through an investigation of the historical evidence regarding this crucial formative period.

In the remaining parts of this introductory chapter we will first deal with the problem of the silence

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<sup>54</sup> For instance, she grew up in a female-headed household and was continually in the company of her aunts, the strong Marais women; she married a remarkably supportive and open-minded man and she had a very strong personality.

<sup>55</sup> M E Rothmann (MER), one of seven children of a Swellendam wagon builder, graduated from the University of Cape Town. After a bitter divorce she reverted to her maiden name and went on to excel as journalist, writer, sociologist and welfare worker. As a career woman, nationalist activist and single mother she was far ahead of her times. Johanna Brandt (Van Warmelo) coined the term "kappie-kommando" in her autobiographical account of the spy activities of women during the South African War. She launched the Women's National Party in 1915 and was, by profession, a dedicated and well-known naturopathic practitioner. As spiritualist, she also launched the World Harmony Movement and published a number of spiritual books, the most interesting of which was The paraclete, or coming world mother, a book in which she claimed that God is a woman. There were many other women who were perhaps a bit more traditional, but whose lives nevertheless bring to question the conventional beliefs about the relationship between women and Afrikaner nationalism: Elize Eloff, granddaughter of President Kruger, who helped to organise a protest march for women in 1915, was very active in the Women's National Party and who, in compassion for the suffering of women at child birth, founded the *Bond van Afrikaanse Moeders*; Mrs Lenie Liebenberg-Boshoff, author, political correspondent for various newspapers, member of the WNP, the SAVF and very active in social welfare and missionary work; Mrs Leila Reitz, first South African woman to become member of parliament; Mrs M E Neethling, active in various charities; Mrs Heloise Greenlees, member of the Pretoria City Council from 1927 to 1930 and again between 1930 and 1933, active in the Women's SAP and the National Council of Women; Mrs Henriette Armstrong, founder of the Armstrong-Behring Home for unmarried mothers and president of the SAVF for eight years; Mrs H van Tulleken, author of the popular cookery book, Practical cookery book - all women who justify biographies, but women who do not feature at all in Afrikaner history.

of women in the historiography of Afrikaner nationalism as well as with some more recent attempts by feminist historians to begin to redress that silence. Next we will attempt to deepen the problem of the relation of women to Afrikaner nationalism from a feminist perspective,<sup>66</sup> bearing in mind the special paradoxes apparent in the story of Mabel Malherbe. Finally we will give some account of the methodological approach to be adopted in this study.

### 1.3 The silence of women in the history of Afrikaner nationalism

The story of Mabel Malherbe evidently refutes the contention that women only functioned on a symbolic level in Afrikaner nationalism. Hers is the story of a woman who, in her own right, made a significant contribution to the articulation and development of modern Afrikaner nationalism at a crucial formative period. Her story also contains the many nameless women at whom her work was aimed and who, in turn, played a crucial role in the mobilisation of the Afrikaner nation. Yet, the story of Mabel Malherbe does not figure in the annals of Afrikaner nationalism. More generally, there is a silence about the active role of women in the shaping of Afrikaner nationalism: Mabel Malherbe, and women like her, have, in fact, been left out of Afrikaner history.

This major silence is not a problem unique to Afrikaner history. In most societies women have been excluded from historical accounts. This is partly due to the fact that mainstream history tends to be concerned mainly with the public sphere. The spheres in which women actually were involved either do not count as part of "history", or are trivialised. Gerda Lerner remarked:

The recorded and interpreted record of the past of the human race is only a partial record in that it omits the past of half the humankind, and it is distorted, in that it tells the story from the viewpoint of the male half of humanity only.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> For the purposes of this thesis we will provisionally define feminism as the elimination and prevention of domination based on the biological categories of sex or social constructions of gender by the radical transformation of existing discourses and institutions and the construction of new discourses and institutions. Such transformations and constructions require a radical change in the social, political and economic order.

It should be stressed that this is merely a working definition. Defining feminism is not such a simple task as feminism is not only fragmented in its origins, but also in its development - there are many differences and much diversity within feminism. In defining feminism as above, however, we do explicitly want to exclude "liberal feminism" or "women's rights feminism" which simply strives to gain equality for women with men in all spheres of society and for giving women access to all rights and opportunities enjoyed by men in the institutions of that society.

<sup>67</sup> Lerner G, The creation of patriarchy, p4.

Lerner's point is that any history marked by such major silences about the role of women cannot be adequate. Similarly, there can be no adequate understanding of Afrikaner nationalism if the response and contribution of half of the Afrikaans population is concealed by sexist history-writing.

At the beginning of the 20th century Afrikaans women were only marginally involved in "formal" politics and were therefore not regarded as political actors. This understanding of women has, until very recently, been maintained in all the histories (Marxist, nationalist and liberal) written about Afrikaners.

The silence about women, of course, is not the only silence in Afrikaner nationalism. For instance, until the eighties, Afrikaner workers did not feature as significant agents in the history of Afrikaner nationalism. This silence has been forcefully addressed by Marxist historians, such as Dan O'Meara. By highlighting the importance of the economic movement and the "assault" on the trade unions in the development of Afrikaner nationalism, O'Meara "listened" to a silence and made it "cry out".<sup>58</sup> Unfortunately, by ignoring working women, workers' wives and the female constituent of the petty bourgeoisie, O'Meara's work still perpetuates another silence, that of women. Even if one accepts his rigorous materialist analysis, one has to criticise the silence of women in his work.

Like O'Meara, most historians writing about Afrikaner nationalism before 1985 excluded women from their historical accounts and analyses.<sup>59</sup> On one level, there is simply a lack of information

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<sup>58</sup> O'Meara, in the introduction to his marxist analysis of Afrikaner nationalism, explains the importance of the silences (ie what is not given) in Afrikaner nationalism in marxist terms:

The analysis of ideology then should not fall into the same trap by remaining at the level of the "what is given" of everyday experience. Rather it should penetrate beyond the given to establish, firstly, the ensemble of prevailing underlying conditions which make the "what is given" of everyday experience possible, and secondly, the forms and trajectory of social struggles which lead such conditions of existence to assume one ideological form rather than another.

O'Meara D, Volkskapitalisme. Class, capital and ideology in the development of Afrikaner nationalism 1934 - 1948, p13.

<sup>59</sup> See the section on Afrikaner nationalist historiography (pp1-5) in Gaitskell D, Kimble J and Unterhalter E, Historiography in the 1970s: a feminist perspective. Even F A van Jaarsveld, who has been termed the most prolific writer on South Africa and who has never paid any attention to the question of women and Afrikaner nationalism, in 1981 briefly remarked that the woman and the child have been "skromelik verwaarloos" [abjectly neglected] in Afrikaner history. This remark appears in a section of five pages on "leemtes" [gaps] in the history of the Afrikaner in which Van Jaarsveld, ironically, also asks:

on women: historians have not told us what Afrikaans women said and what they did. On another level, however, one can say that, until recently, Afrikaner history has not been analysed in gender terms. The history of the Afrikaner has been analysed in class and ethnic terms; it has been explored in terms of capital, in terms of labour and in terms of the state; historians have focussed on the military, constitutional and political struggles that motivated and sustained the history of the nation. However, before the mid-eighties there were few attempts to look at the development of Afrikaner nationalism in terms of gender relations, gender identity and gender roles.

### 1.3.1 Feminist historians: addressing the silence

A few South African historians, and particularly feminist historians, have in recent years gone to some trouble to address the problem of the silence about women in Afrikaner history. However, even these feminist historians have not really addressed the general problem of the relation of Afrikaans women to the nationalist movement, focusing instead on the special cases of certain exceptional groups of women. Nor have they explored the possibility that Afrikaans women were not merely passive victims of what the nationalist movement made of them, but themselves actively contributed to this process.

The emphasis of the new feminist historiography, at first, fell on women who were "progressive" and who were active as agents against Afrikaner nationalism. Consequently, the Afrikaans women who initially received the most attention were the extraordinary women workers of the Garment Worker's Union (GWU).<sup>60</sup> From a feminist point of view, Elsabe Brink's innovative work about the working and home lives of the women of the GWU is particularly important. On her own account her study had originally been inspired by a more general interest in "the role and

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Afrikanerhistorici het deur die jare versuim om die Afrikaner se vorming, eie-aard of identiteit grondig te bestudeer...Hoe het hy hom in die verlede self gesien? Watter voorstellings het hy oor sy verlede gemaak?]

Afrikaner historians have through the years failed to make a thorough study of the formation, character and identity of the Afrikaner...How did he see himself in the past? Which representations did he make about his past?] (My emphasis.)

Van Jaarsveld F A, Wie en wat is die Afrikaner?, p69.

<sup>60</sup> See Brink E, The Afrikaner women of the Garment Workers Union, 1918-1939 (1986); Nicol M, A history of the garment and tailoring workers in Cape Town, 1900-1939 (1984); Touyzs B M, White labour and the social democratic movement in the Transvaal - The South African Labour Party, the South African Trades and Labour Council and the Trade Union Affiliates, 1930-1954 (1984) and Witz L, Servants of the workers: Solly Sachs and the Garment Worker's Union (1984).

contribution of white Afrikaner women in the shaping of South African society".<sup>61</sup> But her specific topic became the women of the GWU rather than the larger question of the role of women in Afrikaner nationalism. Brink's explanation for this departure from her initial theme is revealing. She cites Herman Giliomee's claim that, besides the material conditions, white women and the churches were the most important influences in the making of Afrikaner society.<sup>62</sup> Intrigued by this claim, she set out to investigate the role white Afrikaans women played in the shaping of Afrikaner society. She reports, however, that her preliminary research into the organisations of Afrikaans-speaking women were disappointing: it tended to reinforce the view of Afrikaans women as basically apolitical - a view expressed by A P van Rensburg in his Moeders van ons volk:

In wese is en was die Afrikanervrou nog nooit 'n politieke mens nie. Waar sy tot haar reg kom is op die liefdadigheidsterrein, met welsynwerk, in die opvoeding.<sup>63</sup>  
 [In essence the Afrikaner woman has never been a political being. Where she comes into her own is in the field of charity, welfare work and education.] (Brink's translation.)

Brink, too, found that these Afrikaner women's organisations merely "strove for the spiritual, moral, intellectual and material preservation of the Afrikanervolk" and "any overt political involvement in the shaping of South African society was remarkably lacking".<sup>64</sup> In her feminist quest for Afrikaans women who did "more than work in apolitical charitable organisations",<sup>65</sup> Brink thus chose to focus instead on the women workers of the GWU, an organisation which displayed more overt political involvement.

Despite her laudable aim to break the silence on Afrikaans women, this particular outcome of Brink's project is problematic in various respects. Firstly, we may question the generalised conclusion about the apolitical role of Afrikaans women on the basis of the ostensible objectives of some Afrikaans women's organisations. We should not so readily conclude that Afrikaans women had no political interests or roles. Even though their involvement in formal politics has never been more than marginal, this is by no means the whole story. From time to time there were historical incidents suggesting a very different and much more active political interest on the part of Afrikaans women. I will cite only three examples. The women's deputation that in 1843

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<sup>61</sup> Brink E, op cit, pix.

<sup>62</sup> Loc cit.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, px.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid, pix.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid, px.

demanded the independence of Natal from Henry Cloete, can only be described as a political deputation. In 1915 3 000 Afrikaans women marched to the Union buildings to demand the release of the leaders of the Rebellion - clearly a public and political act. Also in 1915 the Transvaal Women's National Party was established. This organisation was unequivocally political and existed for 15 years.<sup>66</sup>

But secondly and more importantly, we may question some of the assumptions inherent in Brink's argument. She continues to assume that work in the "traditional" women's spheres has no political importance. Brink simply takes it for granted that, as such, women's welfare organisations are not "political". She does not consider the possibility that women, by assuming the roles of mothers, wives and housekeepers in the private sphere of the household, may in some relevant sense be playing an important and indeed a political role. There are thus two more basic issues to be questioned in this pioneering feminist attempt to break the silence on women in Afrikaner history: the explicit claim that women's traditional involvement in welfare organisations such as the Afrikaanse Christelike Vroue Vereniging (ACVV) and the Suid-Afrikaanse Vrouefederasie (SAVF) were apolitical and the implicit assumption that being mothers, wives and housekeepers in the private sphere of the household has no political dimension.

More recently there have been further advances by feminist historians working in this field, though these also continue to be problematic in important ways. Brink herself later rescinded some of the views expressed in her dissertation on the GWU. In a subsequent essay published in 1990, Brink acknowledged that Afrikaans women working in welfare organisations such as the SAVF, did play a role in "the growth and security of the nation" and "the shaping of South African society".<sup>67</sup> A similar position is taken in a recent essay, entitled "Afrikaner women and the creation of ethnicity in a small South African town, 1902-1950", by Jeffrey Butler. He compares the women of the ACVV to Gramsci's organic intellectuals in creating a "homogeneity and an awareness in the social and political fields":

Acting outside the explicitly political realm, (Afrikaner women) frequently played an important part in defining Afrikaners as a self-conscious ethnic group in an urban environment and in meeting many of the needs of Afrikaner poor whites who had recently

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<sup>66</sup> These events will be discussed in detail in Chapter four.

<sup>67</sup> Brink E, "Man-made women: gender, class and the ideology of the 'volksmoeder'" in Walker C (ed), Women and gender in southern Africa to 1945, pp285-288, 290.

left the land.<sup>68</sup>

Brenda Eisenberg, in a study of the Transvaal-based SAVF, similarly argues that the SAVF was "a great champion of Afrikaner nationalism"<sup>69</sup> and that its philanthropic activities were motivated by political ideals.<sup>70</sup> As members of the SAVF the women "worked devotedly" for the realisation of nationalist objectives.<sup>71</sup>

This recent work by Brink, Butler and Eisenberg go some way towards correcting the first and explicit claim that Afrikaans women's involvement in welfare organisations such as the ACVV and SAVF was "apolitical". But it continues to be premised on the second and implicit assumption that being Afrikaner mothers and wives in the private sphere of the household had no political dimension. Women do not have to belong to nationalist welfare organisations to be agents for nationalism. Afrikaans women with nationalist inclinations could, even in their roles as mothers, wives and houseworkers, also fulfil important functions as agents for nationalism. Indeed, it could be argued that it was in those stereotypical female roles that Afrikaans women made their most important contributions to Afrikaner nationalism. This subtle but vital aspect of women's contribution to Afrikaner nationalism was first highlighted by Isabel Hofmeyr in a relatively early essay, entitled, "Building a nation from words: Afrikaans language, literature and 'ethnic identity'". Tracing the development of an Afrikaans literary culture "through the contours of a broader political, economic and social geography",<sup>72</sup> she takes us right into the household where the Afrikaner woman had internalised an Afrikaner identity by reading Afrikaans books and magazines, visiting her Afrikaner friends and involving herself in Afrikaner women's organisations. Even if Afrikaans women controlled the domestic sphere only, this had important political repercussions. Hofmeyr points out that (i) although many Afrikaans-speaking workers during the first two decades of the century subscribed to the political culture of the more political Labour Party, "these men

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<sup>68</sup> Butler J, "Afrikaner women and the creation of ethnicity in a small South African town, 1902-1950" in Vail L, The creation of tribalism in southern Africa, p56.

<sup>69</sup> Eisenberg B Y, Gender, class and Afrikaner nationalism: the South African Vrouefederasie, p33.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid, p34.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid, p96.

<sup>72</sup> Hofmeyr I, Building a nation from words: Afrikaans language, literature and "ethnic identity", 1902-1924, p1.

returned to a household with at least a few Afrikaner trappings";<sup>73</sup> and (ii) "bits" of the internalisation of an Afrikaner identity by the women must have been conveyed to the children which they were raising.<sup>74</sup>

These important suggestions by Hofmeyr have been taken further by Debora Gaitskell and Elaine Unterhalter in a 1989 essay entitled "Mothers of the nation: a comparative analysis of nation, race and motherhood in Afrikaner nationalism and the African National Congress".<sup>75</sup> In analysing different representations of Afrikaner motherhood and their relation to different stages in the development of Afrikaner nationalism, Gaitskell and Unterhalter bring out the central importance of Afrikaans mothers to Afrikaner nationalism. Afrikaners in the 1920s and 1930s, by emphasising the mothering role for women "hoped their homes would be a maternal powerhouse of ethnic mobilisation".<sup>76</sup>

One can go even further. As mothers, even and especially in the private sphere of the household, women did not only serve nationalism by being the transmitters of the culture; they also served nationalism by biologically reproducing the nation. And as wives of Afrikaner men they also, in the private sphere of the household, reproduced the boundaries of their ethnic group.

We may thus conclude that women were active agents of Afrikaner nationalism on three different, but related, levels. They firstly served the nationalist cause in organisations and actions of an explicitly political nature. In the second place they were instrumental to Afrikaner nationalism as the active members of public women's organisations, even if these were not explicitly political organisations, but welfare organisations or cultural groupings. Thirdly, on a much more basic level, as mothers, wives and houseworkers, they also contributed to Afrikaner nationalism in the private sphere of their own households.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid, p35.

<sup>74</sup> Loc cit.

<sup>75</sup> Gaitskell D and Unterhalter E, "Mothers of the nation: a comparative analysis of nation, race and motherhood in Afrikaner nationalism and the African National Congress" in Yuval-Davis N and Anthias F (eds), Women - Nation - State, pp58-78.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid, p63.

<sup>77</sup> This may be compared to the five possible functions identified by Nira Yuval-Davis and Floya Anthias: (i) as biological reproducers of members of ethnic collectivities; (ii) as reproducers of the boundaries of ethnic/national groups; (iii) as participating centrally in the ideological reproduction

But even if feminist historians such as Brink, Eisenberg and Gaitskell and Unterhalter are now contributing to a feminist understanding of Afrikaans women by addressing their roles in Afrikaner nationalism at all three of these levels, their accounts remain premised on certain basic assumptions which are deeply problematic. These assumptions have to do with the theoretical underpinnings of their feminist understanding of women's role in general. The presence and nature of these assumptions in the work of these feminist historians may be illustrated by quoting a few relevant passages. Brink calls her essay: "Man-made women: gender, class and the ideology of the 'volksmoeder'". She uses formulations such as: "One of the means by which men in male-dominated societies control women is by giving them a well-defined but circumscribed position..."<sup>78</sup> and "What is striking about this early period is the near-total absence of female voices...in the construction of Afrikaner womanhood."<sup>79</sup> Gaitskell and Unterhalter likewise say that the image of Afrikaner motherhood is "shaped by male cultural entrepreneurs, the women themselves as silent as in their stereotypical portrayal".<sup>80</sup> And Eisenberg claims that the "influence of the state and the patriarch combined to mould the nature of the contribution made by women to the Afrikaner nationalist struggle".<sup>81</sup> According to her, ideal womanhood "was appropriated by a certain sector of the population in the 20th century...this sector of the population...consisted of the male members of the Afrikaans middle class".<sup>82</sup> She also states that "(s)ince economic activity was almost exclusively based in the male domain, it can be said that

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of the collectivity and as transmitters of its culture; (iv) as signifiers of ethnic/national categories; and (v) as participants in national, economic, political and military struggles.

Yuval-Davis N and Anthias F, "Introduction" in Yuval-Davis N and Anthias F (eds), Woman - nation - state, p7.

As has been indicated throughout the above discussion, women fulfilled different functions for nationalism depending on the levels on which they were active. Women in the ethnic group, simply by choosing to be mothers and wives of men also belonging to the ethnic group, fulfilled functions (i) and (ii) for the nation in the private sphere of the household. Function (iii) could be fulfilled either in the private sphere of the household or in public women's organisations. Function (iv) could be fulfilled on all four levels, while function (v) usually would be fulfilled in public organisations.

<sup>78</sup> Brink E, op cit, p273.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid, p281.

<sup>80</sup> Gaitskell D and Unterhalter E, op cit, p60.

<sup>81</sup> Eisenberg B Y, op cit, p10.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid, p18.

men were the impelling force behind the phenomenon of Afrikaner nationalism".<sup>83</sup>

Even while addressing women's contributions to Afrikaner nationalism at different levels, these feminist historians thus remain primarily concerned with stressing that such women's activities, organisations, roles, and finally their identities, were functions of nationalism or determined by nationalism. In effect their accounts suggest that women acted, joined organisations and assumed certain roles and identities in society only and simply because these actions, organisations, roles and identities were useful to Afrikaner nationalism. Moreover, their accounts are explicitly based on the further and problematic assumption that nationalism, and specifically Afrikaner nationalism, is a male discourse, shaped by males to serve the interest of males.

In short, while setting out to break the silence about women in the history of Afrikaner nationalism, the accounts provided by these feminist historians continue to assume that women's actions, organisations, roles and identities are, in the final instance, determined entirely by men. Therefore there is still, inherent in their analyses, a denial of women's subjectivity and active agency. Insofar as they are seen as literally shaped by male interests, Afrikaans women are thus once again written out of history. This paradoxical result of the feminist historiography on Afrikaner nationalism is by no means unprecedented. Sally Alexander claims that this is a common feature of radical feminist history:

"Little girls become women because of what male dominated institutions tell and compel them to do. History is simply one long death knell of women's independent activity and consciousness. There were witches, but men killed them; women were sensual, erotic and adventurous but men used and abused them; women loved each other, but men forbade that love to be spoken; women were wives and mothers, but only because men wanted them to be; women were workers, but men seized their skill, etc, etc. Men have much to answer for, but the envy and fears and desires of one sex cannot carry all the determinations of history. If they can, then we are again in a world where women's identity, action, speech and desires are all explained in terms of something else, in this case, the male psyche. Women are subordinated and silenced because they live in a world shaped in the interests of and dominated by men."<sup>84</sup>

Such feminist history is marked by a basic contradictory tension: while setting out to break the silence about women's role in history these feminist histories in fact stress the ways and extent to which women's identities, roles and actions are ultimately determined and moulded by men.

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<sup>83</sup> Eisenberg B Y, op cit, p55.

<sup>84</sup> Alexander S, "Women, class and sexual differences in the 1830s and 1840s: some reflections on the writing of a feminist history" in History Workshop. A journal of socialist and feminist historians, Issue 17, Spring 1984, p128.

Thus it can be shown that in all three essays the authors contradict themselves on this score. Whatever their assumptions about "man-made women" etc, their accounts in fact suggest women's active role in initiating certain actions, organisations, roles and identities. Brink strongly suggests that women of the SAVF and GWU chose the image of the *volksmoeder*, and did so for intelligible reasons: it legitimised their roles in society, and gave them "a sense of stability and purpose in a rapidly changing world".<sup>85</sup> Following Hofmeyr, Gaitskell and Unterhalter likewise point to the agency of women when they suggest that there was "a community of interest between the Afrikaans women seeking to enhance their importance and status within both the domestic sphere and the limited public arena open to them in the women's welfare and political movements" (my emphasis).<sup>86</sup> And Eisenberg sets out to show how women in the SAVF asserted their independence from men and resisted "attempts by men to violate the degree of autonomy which they enjoyed". In doing so, she points out that in the activities and aims of the SAVF, there is an "oscillation between conformity to the expectations of the broader, male-dominated community, and (the members') independent aspirations as women".<sup>87</sup> Eisenberg thus strongly suggests the independent agency of women when she says that "(t)he SAVF was both product of Afrikaner nationalism, and a creator of nationalism".<sup>88</sup>

However, these very compelling suggestions concerning women's agency in their relation to Afrikaner nationalism remain in conflict with the premise of "man-made women". There is, in the final analysis, a general failure in all three of the essays to take their own suggestions seriously and work through their consequences. If feminist historians really are to put women back into history and understand their importance as active agents, they will have to show not only how women co-operated with men in formulating roles for women, but also adapted, shaped and articulated (and sometimes even rejected) these roles - as the story of Mabel Malherbe so clearly illustrates. As we have seen, Malherbe, in her capacity as editor of *Die Boerevrou*, made a major contribution to the articulation of that *volksmoeder* discourse which was so influential in shaping the identities and roles of Afrikaans women during a formative period of the nationalist movement. Though her own life was directly in conflict with the ideal of the *volksmoeder*, and though she herself was no typical "Afrikaner", her concern for women led her to make the articulation of this

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<sup>85</sup> Brink E, *op cit*, p291.

<sup>86</sup> Gaitskell D and Unterhalter E, *op cit*, p62.

<sup>87</sup> Eisenberg B Y, *op cit*, p11.

<sup>88</sup> Eisenberg B Y, *op cit*, p28.

conservative gender discourse her own project. She also abandoned the project when it did not seem to be important any more. In the words of Yuval-Davis and Anthias:

...we find it vitally important to emphasise that the roles that women play are not merely imposed upon them. Women actively participated in the process of reproducing and modifying their roles as well as being actively involved in controlling other women.<sup>89</sup>

To break the silence of women in Afrikaner history and to address their active agency in shaping, as well as being shaped by, Afrikaner nationalism, has some important implications: it means to question the political innocence of women.<sup>90</sup> And it also shows that women's historical agency actually involved countless repudiations of a common sisterhood of women by women.<sup>91</sup> What this indicates, also, is the need for a more general reflection on the basic processes of the constitution of women's subjectivity. We thus have to identify and address the problems of gender and ethnic identity at a theoretical level as well.

### 1.3.2 Social subjectivity and the Afrikaner woman

Central to the shortcomings of these recent attempts by feminist historians to write women back into history is the fact that not enough attention has been paid to the constitution of social subjectivities. How do we account for the fact that in particular historical circumstances women find their social identities by being and acting as "Afrikaners" or "Afrikaner mothers"? Too often these processes are simply assumed to be relatively transparent. Thus feminist historians suggest that women's choices to be active agents of Afrikaner nationalism is determined by factors such as their search for legitimacy, stability and purpose (Brink), their desire for importance and status (Gaitskell and Unterhalter) and finally their demand for independence and autonomy (Eisenberg). They do not adequately explain, however, how or why Afrikaans middle class women, came to assume the identity offered by Afrikaner nationalism as opposed to other possible identities (eg

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<sup>89</sup> Yuval-Davis N and Anthias F, op cit, p11.

<sup>90</sup> This point is very powerfully illustrated by Claudia Koonz's work on women in Nazi-Germany. To put women in the picture was also to expose them as important agents for Nazism. Koonz C, Mothers in the fatherland. Women, the family and Nazi politics.

<sup>91</sup> For instance, Cheryl Walker in her essay about the women's suffrage movement in South Africa illustrates how the white middle-class women of the movement "rarely question the unspoken assumption that the community of 'women' on whose behalf they laboured was a community of white women".

Walker C, "The women's suffrage movement: the politics of gender, race and class" in Walker C (ed), Women and gender in southern Africa to 1945, p341.

those offered by the socialist discourse of the labour movement or by gender discourses such as those of the feminist or the suffragette movements). It is not self-evident how or why Afrikaans women became Afrikaner mothers, wives and houseworkers. Neither is it self-evident how or why they belonged to nationalist women's organisations such as the SAVF and the WNP - there were various other women's organisations available and they could have created other organisations. There is no self-evident or transparent link between Afrikaans women, Afrikaner nationalism and mothering.

In short, social identities are not simple, obvious or determined. The constitution of social subjectivity is a complex social and historical process. It is only by a full investigation of the process in which certain identities and roles were constructed for Afrikaans women that an adequate understanding of women's role in nationalism will become possible.

At this point it is becoming clear that the problem of the constitution of women's subjectivity is indeed a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it is indeed true, as so many feminist historians have stressed, that within nationalism certain identities and roles have been devised for women. Afrikaner nationalism, too, has shaped and moulded the subjectivity of Afrikaans women in pervasive and decisive ways. On the other hand, the relation between Afrikaner nationalism and Afrikaans women was by no means a one-way relationship. Women in their various roles, activities and organisations in turn also helped to shape Afrikaner nationalism. Therefore, if Afrikaner nationalism created certain ethnic and gender identities for women, women themselves must have had an active part in constructing those identities. This is not to suggest that women were "free" agents making "free" choices in a "free" society - this would also have been a simplification of social subjectivity. We are rather suggesting that within the specific socio-economic and political context of the time women were actively involved in the articulation and rearticulation of their identities. We will show that while, in this process, they were making certain choices and taking certain actions, these choices and actions were always fundamentally constrained and limited by the discourses and institutions of society.<sup>92</sup>

Any critical feminist exploration of the relationship between Afrikaner nationalism and Afrikaans

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<sup>92</sup> The notion that women played an active part in the construction and reconstruction of their identities and roles is of course extremely controversial in feminist circles. It should be emphasised that this is not just another way of "blaming the victim". This attempt to complicate and problematise social subjectivity should rather be seen as a way of rethinking the notion of women as passive victims: women were clever, original, resourceful and active rather than silent and passive.

women should thus take into account a double problem. Firstly, why and in what respects was it important for Afrikaner nationalism to create and encourage certain gender roles and gender identities for women? Secondly, why and how did women themselves contribute to a movement like Afrikaner nationalism, a movement which was also geared to their subordination as women?

This thesis will investigate the double problem of the relation of women to Afrikaner nationalism in terms of the contribution by women like Mabel Malherbe to the articulation of a distinctive gender discourse which accompanied the emergence of Afrikaner nationalism. In and through this discourse, which may be called the *volksmoeder* discourse, a new identity and new roles were contrived for Afrikaans women in the pages of Mabel Malherbe's Die Boerevrou. At a theoretical level the question is thus how gender and ethnicity are related in the social identities of women constituted in and through the *volksmoeder* discourse.

#### 1.4 Methodological approach

There are different levels on which the relationship between Afrikaner nationalism and Afrikaans women could be investigated. The question can be approached purely theoretically as a question of the conceptual relationship between gender and ethnicity. However, because the problem of gender and ethnicity here specifically concerns Afrikaans women at a certain time in South African history, some form of historical analysis is required. The central problem, that of the relationship between women and nationalism in Afrikaner nationalism, compels the writing of a history rather than the pure analysis of concepts. But just what would that involve in the present case?

The most obvious way to investigate the historical relationship between Afrikaner nationalism and Afrikaans women is to attempt a systematic reconstruction of the major social and economic determinants of the roles that women played in Afrikaner nationalism. Such a social history would be concerned with the full range of empirical factors and material forces relevant to for instance the WNP, the SAVF, the role of women as mothers in the household etc. This is a valid approach and relevant to the concerns of this thesis, but it will not be the primary or exclusive methodological approach for our purposes.

One can also investigate the relationship of women to Afrikaner nationalism at the level of intellectual history. An intellectual history is concerned with the ideas and conceptions that shape social reality and vice versa. These ideas and conceptions are investigated not to find out how representative or widely shared they are, but rather to analyse the intellectual constructs that they

constitute.<sup>83</sup>

Andre du Toit distinguishes between two possible ways of writing intellectual history.<sup>84</sup> In the first place one can write the intellectual history of the actual beliefs of, and views held by, specific individuals and groups at different times. In our case we may then investigate the views and beliefs concerning women and the Afrikaner nationalism of specific cultural entrepreneurs such as Totius, Willem Postma and Mabel Malherbe, tracing how their views and ideas developed over time. It would, also, of course be highly relevant to establish to what extent the views and beliefs of these individuals were representative of and impacted on significant social groups.

The second approach to intellectual history, and the one that will be used in this thesis, involves a study not of the ideas and views of specific individuals or groups but rather of the emergence and development of distinctive discourses as collective undertakings. What place did the discourse of Afrikaner nationalism allocate to women, and what were the functions of a gender discourse such as that of the *volksmoeder*? How and why did such discourses arise, and what contribution did Afrikaans women make to them even as they were shaped by them? Rather than simply taking discursive constructions at face value they may thus be construed as "answers" to the underlying social and historical issues. It is in this latter contextual sense that the concerns of social history remain relevant to the kind of intellectual history to be undertaken here.

The central problem of this thesis - the relationship of women with Afrikaner nationalism - will thus be pursued through an investigation of how the issues of gender and ethnicity were addressed in the discourse of Afrikaner nationalism, and more specifically in the *volksmoeder* discourse. But it will be very much part of our enterprise to interpret such discourses not merely in their own terms but to construe them as addressed to underlying social and political issues. It is thus part of our approach, but only a part, to discern how these underlying issues were made salient by certain

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<sup>83</sup> Du Toit A B, "Workshop on research in intellectual history: 19th century discourse on nationality, religion and language at the Cape - or how to get one hand clapping in time" in Nel B F, Singh R and Venter W M (eds), Focus on quality. Selected proceedings of a conference on qualitative research methodology in the social sciences, pp198-199.

<sup>84</sup> Du Toit A B, "Taal, religie en nasionaliteit, 1824-1886" in Du Plessis H and Du Plessis T (eds), Afrikaans en taalpolitiek. 15 opstelle, pp61-62 and Du Toit A B, "Workshop on research in intellectual history: 19th century discourse on nationality, religion and language at the Cape - or how to get one hand clapping in time" in Nel B F, Singh R and Venter W M (eds), Focus on quality. Selected proceedings of a conference on qualitative research methodology in the social sciences, pp198-199.

contextual factors such as British imperialism, Union, industrialisation, capitalism, urbanisation and feminism.

As an intellectual history of the relation of women to Afrikaner nationalism this thesis will thus primarily be concerned with the discursive constitution of the gender and ethnic identities of Afrikaner middle class women. This problem will be approached through a historical study of emergent discourses. The structure of the thesis itself follows from this approach and definition of its subject matter. It is clear that before one can look at how the issues of ethnicity and gender are dealt with in the *volksmoeder* discourse in particular, some basic understanding of the more comprehensive and complex discourse of Afrikaner nationalism itself will be required. However, this study can and will deal with the broad phenomenon of Afrikaner nationalism but will focus on the very specific implications for women, as part of the nationalist discourse was a new emphasis on specific gender roles for Afrikaans women. Conversely, it will also address the underlying question of why and how gender issues acquired prominence at this time, and brought Afrikaner nationalists to articulate a distinctive gender discourse. The distinctive gender discourse concerned is that of the *volksmoeder* which will be investigated through a case study of Mabel Malherbe's Die Boerevrou.

While the first half of this thesis is concerned with the emergence of these two discourses, ie the more comprehensive discourse of Afrikaner nationalism and the specific *volksmoeder* discourse, the rest of the thesis focuses more specifically on the particular texts of Die Boerevrou. In these sections I will look in detail at how specific gender issues and ethnic issues generated the discourse of *volksmoeder* and how these issues were then addressed in the discourse, by specifically referring to the texts of Die Boerevrou.

Some preliminary justification for the choice of Die Boerevrou-texts may be required at this stage, though the full justification can only be provided in the course of the actual analysis itself. The magazine Die Boerevrou is of particular relevance for our topic of the emergence and development of the *volksmoeder* discourse; it was explicitly concerned with the construction of the gender and ethnic identity of Afrikaner women. As the name of the magazine suggests (*boer* + *vrou*/ethnic category + gender category) there are two sets of issues at the basis of all these texts, gender issues and ethnic issues. For our purposes these texts (be it an advertisement, the table of contents or an article about *volksmoeders*) may thus be studied and interpreted as distinctive "answers" to the underlying gender and ethnic issues which were at the basis of the *volksmoeder* discourse.

This approach to the texts of Die Boerevrou as a case study in the construction of the gender and ethnic identities of Afrikaner women must be differentiated from the aims of a more general social history. Die Boerevrou would indeed have been an inadequate choice of texts if the intention was to write a general social history. The difference between the aims and approach of an intellectual history of this kind with those of a more general social history may be explained by reference to LaCapra's distinction between an investigation of the "work-like" aspects of texts and "a documentary approach to the reading of texts". LaCapra explains this distinction by saying that "while the documentary marks a difference, the work-like makes a difference".<sup>96</sup> Writing a social history ie to attempt to reconstruct the past, would have entailed "a documentary approach to the reading of the texts".<sup>97</sup> For the purposes of a general social history Die Boerevrou could function as a partial and problematic source of factual information about the past. The texts, in such a documentary reading are treated as documents, utilised by the historian as sources of factual information.<sup>97</sup> In the case of this thesis Die Boerevrou would then have been used to reconstruct the history of the relationship of Afrikaans women to Afrikaner nationalism. However, as a potential source of factual information, even about this particular topic, Die Boerevrou is evidently of limited value and untrustworthy. For it to be used in this way, it will have to be read in combination with many other documents. Even if this is done, one would have to be cautious as a large part of the contents of Die Boerevrou can be considered to be "subjective opinions, partisan versions and unfounded speculation".<sup>98</sup>

Utilised in a different way, ie for writing an intellectual history, however, Die Boerevrou-texts become extremely valuable. If one approaches these texts in their "work-like" aspects, they can be considered as literary or intellectual works rather than documents.<sup>99</sup> As such, a text is "critical and transformative, for it deconstructs and reconstructs the given, in a sense repeating it but also bringing into the world something that did not exist before in that significant variation, alteration, or transformation".<sup>100</sup> Using LaCapra's formulation but bearing in mind the specific problem of

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<sup>96</sup> LaCapra D, Rethinking intellectual history, p30.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid, p32.

<sup>97</sup> Du Toit A, op cit, p195.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid, p202.

<sup>99</sup> Du Toit A, "Taal, religie en nasionaliteit, 1824-1886" in Du Plessis H and Du Plessis T (eds), Afrikaans en taalpolitiek. 15 opstelle, pp64.

<sup>100</sup> LaCapra D, op cit, p30.

this thesis, one can say that as a document, Die Boerevrou would have "marked" a connection between ethnicity and gender, while as a literary or historical work its relevance is precisely in the extent and way in which it "makes" this connection.

It will be clear that a historical study of this kind involves a number of basic theoretical problems around the constitution of the social subjectivity of Afrikaans women, and more particularly their ethnic and gender identities. Before embarking on the discussion of the actual discourses, some of the most important theoretical considerations that inform this thesis are briefly discussed in **Chapter two**. The key concepts of gender and ethnicity are introduced, while the importance of the concept of discourse is also investigated. Central to this thesis is the constitution of the social identity of the individual and this process is discussed with reference to the work of discourse analysts such as Ernesto Laclau and Chantalle Mouffe. The specific kind of communal identity propagated in Afrikaner nationalism also receives some attention with reference to the work of Benedict Anderson, Ernest Gellner, Eric Hobsbawm and Tom Nairn.

**Chapter three** deals more generally with some aspects of the emergent discourse of Afrikaner nationalism. An attempt is made to give a short overview of the development of the discourse itself in the context of a developing and industrialising South Africa. The chapter is concluded by discussing the issues that became important within the discourse and in turn contributed to the generation of the *volksmoeder* discourse. By the turn of the century the processes of industrialisation and urbanisation also led to significant changes in South African households. Not only did the household lose its primary function as a unit of production, but women also gradually became excluded from the production process. In **Chapter four** we will investigate what the consequences of these changes were for Afrikaans women. This, coupled with other socio-political factors led to the issues of gender identity and gender roles becoming salient.

Part and parcel of the general discourse of Afrikaner nationalism was the *volksmoeder* discourse, a distinct and coherent discourse identifiable by the 1920s. The content of this discourse is discussed in detail in **Chapter five**. By analysing specific texts in Die Boerevrou as articulations of the *volksmoeder* discourse, the identities and roles that were constructed for women within Afrikaner nationalism are explored. Specific attention will be paid to how women themselves became subjects of the discourse, not only by shaping it, but also by identifying with it.

In **Chapter six** and **Chapter seven** texts from Die Boerevrou are used to gain some understanding about the connection between gender and nationalism. More attention is thus paid to the

underlying factors that generated the *volksmoeder* discourse. In **Chapter six** we will discuss the *volksmoeder* discourse as a response to the issues that became important in the general discourse of Afrikaner nationalism. We ask why the construction of the *volksmoeder* discourse was in the interest of Afrikaner nationalists (men and women). In **Chapter seven** we investigate why Afrikaans women as women contributed to the articulation and re-articulation of the discourse and why, as women, they came to identify with it. The *volksmoeder* discourse is thus discussed as a gender discourse. We will discuss how the *volksmoeder* discourse was not only part of a nationalist response to the issues raised in Chapter three, it was also a more specific response to the underlying gender issues discussed in Chapter four.

Women's active role in the shaping of Afrikaner nationalism as well as the extent to which they were shaped by it become apparent in the analysis of articulations of the *volksmoeder* discourse and specifically the Boerevrou-texts. Because the discourse was so crucial in the history of Afrikaans women, the thesis will be concluded in **Chapter eight** with a critical evaluation of the *volksmoeder* discourse from a feminist perspective.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS: IDENTITY, GENDER, ETHNICITY AND COMMUNITY

The programmatic separation of social history from a traditional history of ideas is no longer considered sufficient; sociohistorical analysis of cultures, mentalities and ideologies has drawn attention everywhere to the fact that language is more than merely a passive medium for conveying meanings. It is only apparently transparent and completely arbitrary. In fact the more one studies it, the clearer it becomes that its specific form of organisation - its discursive structure - plays a more than minor part in its "meaning", which is all too often attributed by everyday historiography to the conscious intentions of the subjects.

- Peter Schottler<sup>1</sup>

#### 2.1 Introduction

This thesis is centrally concerned with the problematic relationship between women and nationalism within Afrikaner nationalism. More specifically it will, on the one hand, investigate the role that women actually played in Afrikaner nationalist history and, on the other hand, look at how women's involvement in Afrikaner nationalism also shaped women's conceptions of themselves. At a theoretical level this involves a double set of problems: (i) how individuals are constituted as social subjects, eg as "Afrikaners", as "women", or as "Afrikaner women"; and (ii) how and when communities such as that of the "nation" come to be constructed, eg that of the Afrikaner *volk*. This chapter will briefly outline some relevant theoretical frameworks for understanding the social and historical constitution of alternative senses of **identity** and **community** in this context.

The discussion will commence with a consideration of some general frameworks for the constitution of social identities, moving from some standard positions in social psychology to the work of discourse theorists Ernesto Laclau and Chantalle Mouffe. This will be followed by brief discussions of the discursive constitution of gender identity and ethnic identity. While gender identity necessarily pertains to the constitution of the individual as a social subject, ethnic identity, as will be indicated, by definition implies some form of communal membership. The "nation" as an imagined community involves a specific sense of ethnic identity. The second section of this chapter will deal with the discursive constitution of the nation-community. This process will be discussed with reference to the work of Benedict Anderson, Eric Hobsbawm, Ernest Gellner and

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<sup>1</sup> Schottler P, "Historians and discourse analysis" in History Workshop. A journal of socialist and feminist historians, Issue 27, Spring 1989, p54.

Tom Nairn.

## 2.2 The constitution of the individual as a social subject

...it is in and through language that the individual is constituted as a subject.  
-Neville Alexander<sup>2</sup>

Conventionally, in the social sciences as well as in psychology, the prevailing concept of the individual as social subject was that of "an unproblematic, purely 'psychological' subject who is rational, unified and asocial".<sup>3</sup> In the social sciences this conception of subjectivity was expressed in the principle of methodological individualism. This principle states that "the ultimate constituents of the social world are individual people who act more or less appropriately in the light of their dispositions and understanding of their situation. Every complex social situation, institution, or event is the result of a particular configuration of individuals, their dispositions, situation, beliefs, and physical resources and environment."<sup>4</sup>

In social psychology the principle of methodological individualism found expression in Floyd Allport's 1924 declaration that "there is no psychology of groups which is not essentially and entirely a psychology of individuals". This has led to much of traditional social psychology being reductionist in that it explains the social group in terms of properties of the individual. Social psychology has thus traditionally been individualistic,<sup>5</sup> and this conception of subjectivity led to asocial and ahistorical psychological analyses of individuals and groups.<sup>6</sup>

It was in opposition to this individualism that, more recently, the social identity approach to social psychology was developed. The basic assumption within this approach is that society comprises social categories (such as the categories of nationality, age, language, gender, occupation etc)

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<sup>2</sup> Alexander N, "Race, ethnicity and nationalism in social science in southern Africa" in Sow the wind, pp142-142.

<sup>3</sup> Squire C, Significant differences. Feminism in psychology, pp3 and 9.

<sup>4</sup> Watkins J W N, "Methodological individualism and social tendencies" in Brodbeck M (ed), Readings in the philosophy of the social sciences, p270.

<sup>5</sup> Hogg M A and Abrams D, Social identifications. A social psychology of intergroup relations and group processes, p12.

<sup>6</sup> Squire C, op cit, pp3 and 9.

which stand in power, status and prestige relations to each other. The dynamics of social groups are also subject to the forces of economics and history. The social identity approach is specifically concerned with the psychological processes through which social categories become human groups or, formulated differently, it investigates the psychological processes that create psychological realities from social realities. Therefore, where social psychology was traditionally concerned with the individual in the group, the social identity approach concentrates on "the group in the individual". Its concern is with those aspects of identity that derive from group membership. As individuals belong to many different social categories they have "a repertoire of many different identities to draw upon".<sup>7</sup>

Within the social identity approach it is still argued that the psychological processes involved in self-conceptualisation and group behaviour are considered to be trans-historical and universal as "they fulfil a fundamental adaptive function for the human organism: they are processes of simplification and evaluation that serve to pattern experience and provide direction to behaviour". In the sense that the approach states that social groups are inevitable because they are functional (they fulfil individual and societal needs for order, structure, simplification, predictability etc) it has a distinct functionalist dimension. Social identity theorists stress, however, that although their functionalism prompts them to say that psychological processes ensure that groups are inevitable, psychological processes do not directly govern what **type** of groups there are, what **characteristics** they have, or **how they relate** to other groups. Psychological processes can explain why groups exist and why people subjectively also become members of the group but they do not explain the **content** and the **culture** of groups. To understand this, it is necessary to go back to historical and economic analyses and not to rely on the explanations provided by psychological processes alone.<sup>8</sup>

The social identity approach overcomes many of the shortcomings of traditional social psychology in that it investigates how social phenomena come to structure individual consciousness and thus how the individual is a product of society. Within this approach not only the construction of the social group, but also the construction of the social identity of individual persons becomes problematic. The social identity approach also acknowledges that people don't have direct or privileged access to knowledge (including knowledge about oneself) and that knowledge is socially

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<sup>7</sup> Hogg M A and Abrams D, op cit, pp16-17.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, pp17-19.

derived through social comparisons.<sup>9</sup> The approach does not, however, adequately bring out the fundamental role that language plays in social comparisons. It can thus also not adequately recognise the constitutive role that language plays, not only in our understanding of the world, but also in our understanding of ourselves. Like traditional psychology, the social identity approach lacks an elaborate model of language and discourse.<sup>10</sup>

To understand the importance of language in the social constitution of the subject, it is necessary to focus on the distinction that Saussure made between the "signifier" (sounds or written words - "utterable words"), the "signified" (concepts or "lexically definable meaning") and the "referents" (the objects themselves).<sup>11</sup> Objects cannot be identified without their defining features clearly specified in concepts. And concepts cannot be distinguished from each other without signifiers "to cut it out of the continuum of thought".<sup>12</sup> Hudson quotes Saussure as follows:

(Without language, ie apart from its expression in spoken or written words, our thought) is only a shapeless and indistinct mass...a vague, uncharted nebula.<sup>13</sup>

This means that language governs all the access a person can have to objects and experience. Thoughts and perceptions are thus always mediated by language. It is only after thoughts and concepts had been expressed in language that they can be said to exist. Objects or perceptions of objects only become comprehensible once they have been given names and have been placed in a linguistic and conceptual framework.<sup>14</sup> The meaning of every signifier is thus always open, shifting and indeterminate. If it does obtain meaning in a certain framework, the meaning is always transient, provisional and open to disruption, contestation and change.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid, p22.

<sup>10</sup> Marshall H and Wetherell M, "Talking about career and gender identities: a discourse analysis perspective" in Skevington S and Baker D (eds), The social identity of women, p107.

<sup>11</sup> Hernadi P, "Literary theory: a compass for critics" in Critical Inquiry, Number 3, 1978.

<sup>12</sup> Hudson P A, "Causality and the subject in a discourse-theoretical approach to marxism" in Studies in Marxisme, Number 7, December 1986, p4.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, p4.

<sup>14</sup> Mueller C, The politics of communication. A study of language, socialization and legitimation, pp15-16.

<sup>15</sup> Thompson J B, Studies in the theory of ideology, p132.

Thoughts on and perceptions of oneself are also mediated by language. Therefore it is also in and through language that the individual is constituted as a subject. If the natural relationship between the signifier and the signified is denied, identity (the meaning of the word "I") can also not be fixed.

Identity becomes a complex discursive construction and can neither be understood in terms of internal cognitive processes, nor can it be seen as simply the product of certain social, historical and economic processes. Even if one acknowledges the importance of all these processes in the constitution of social identity, knowledge of them are mediated by language.

For our purposes the important theoretical point is that the constitution of the individual as a subject must of necessity have a discursive dimension. To understand the construction of subjectivity, it is necessary to engage in discursive analysis. In this connection we may profitably take note of some relevant aspects of recent theories of discourse.

If discourse is defined as "structures of knowledge that are embedded in particular historical and social relations of power",<sup>16</sup> subjectivities are created in and through such structures. What does it mean to assert that subjectivity is discursively created? It means that "identities are actively negotiated and transformed in discourse and further that language is the area where strategic construction and reconstruction of self occurs".<sup>17</sup> The individual is thus both product of the discourse and constitutive of it.

Laclau and Mouffe introduce the concept of the "pluralism of subjects".<sup>18</sup> This refers to the fact that any individual in society is involved in several different discourses. The individual learns to recognise herself as the subject of these different discourses. The subjectivity of an individual can thus never be transparent: since the individual is subject of many discourses, subjectivity is "a matrix of positions discursively created".<sup>19</sup> In the words of Laclau and Mouffe: "Each individual as participant in a series of different relations is therefore the locus of a plurality of determinations to which correspond subjective positions constructed through discourses and practices with their

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<sup>16</sup> Squire C, op cit, p107.

<sup>17</sup> Marshall H and Wetherell M, op cit, p124.

<sup>18</sup> Laclau E and Mouffe C, "Socialist strategy. Where next?" in Marxism Today, January 1981, p22.

<sup>19</sup> Jeppe S, Historical process and the constitution of subjects: I D du Plessis and the reinvention of the "Malay", p5.

corresponding interests..."<sup>20</sup> This implies that the discursive subject is, by definition, multitudinous and complex, rather than simple and one-dimensional. Which subject position is dominant and whether they are in contradiction with each other depend on the matrix or the articulatory practices in which an individual participates.

It follows that the Marxist proposition that every social agent has an essential identity, "dictated by an unequivocal location in the relations of production", has to be abandoned. Laclau and Mouffe write: "Once the constitutive role of language vis-a-vis subjectivity and experience has been established, the relations of production can no longer be the source of an experience which imprints a determinate identity on an empty subject."<sup>21</sup> However, because all discourses are generated in specific social or historical contexts, subjectivity, although never transparent, is always historically specific.

The question now remains why, if univocal subjects are impossible, people very often perceive themselves to be and act as if they are unified subjects. This is because some discourses become so powerful that they are no longer recognised as discourses and are taken to be obvious, transparent, natural. Their constructive dimensions become obscured. Following J B Thompson, we can call such discourses "ideological" discourses. Thompson maintains that there is an intrinsic connection between ideology and domination. He defines ideology as the ways in which meaning is mobilised to sustain relations of domination. If the constructive dimension of a discourse has been obscured, it presents itself as a "true" reflection of reality.<sup>22</sup> In a sense it denies the meanings established in other discourses. Thompson identifies three modes by which ideology operates and mobilise meaning: legitimation (a discourse seeking to legitimate itself by appealing to rational, traditional or charismatic grounds); dissimulation (concealing its real purpose); and reification (representing something that is transient and historical as if it were permanent and natural).

Laclau has a similar understanding of ideology. He defines the ideological as consisting of "those discursive forms through which society tries to institute itself as such on the basis of closure, of the fixation of meaning, of the non-recognition of the infinite play of differences. The ideological

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<sup>20</sup> Quoted in *ibid*, p6.

<sup>21</sup> Laclau E and Mouffe C, *op cit*, January 1981, p18.

<sup>22</sup> Thompson J B, *op cit*, p130-132.

would be the will to 'totality' of any totalising discourse."<sup>23</sup> He also understands ideology to be any discourse that "attempts to fix meanings" and "attain a certain closure".<sup>24</sup>

In an ideological mothering discourse, for instance, to be a woman will primarily mean to be a mother. In this discourse, the fact that to be a mother is one of many possible meanings of being a woman, will be concealed. Mothering is presented as the natural and traditional and therefore the only legitimate identity for women. Women who are subjects of this discourse will understand themselves simply and essentially as mothers.

What implications do such an understanding of social subjectivity have? It means that the social analyst must be prepared to engage in the practice of discursive analysis. Discourse analysis focuses on the discourse itself, "as a thing to be analysed in itself and not just in terms of the thing to which it refers".<sup>25</sup> The point is to denaturalise a text or a signifier, to question its "pretense" to be referring to a self-evident reality. This can be done by asking why a specific construction has been used and what ends it achieves.<sup>26</sup> One can study discourses as narratives, one can concentrate on the argumentative structures of discourses and one can focus on the syntactic structures - in all these ways the ideological features of a discourse can be discerned.

Although a discourse is therefore not understood merely as an indicator or marker of processes in the social or historical realm but in itself becomes the focus of analysis, it is always context-specific. Any discourse is situated in a certain socio-historical context. Discourse analysis should always be accompanied by some form of socio-historical analysis.

To understand a discourse is thus a creative process. It is not simply studying language "as a pointer to some other site",<sup>27</sup> it is the analysis of linguistic constructions which are socially and historically situated. One thus asks how these constructions function, what ends to they achieve

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<sup>23</sup> Laclau E, "The impossibility of society" in Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory, Volume 7, 1983, p24.

<sup>24</sup> Norval A J, The construction of social identities and political frontiers in apartheid discourse (1958-1978), p11.

<sup>25</sup> Schottler P, op cit, p44.

<sup>26</sup> Marshall H and Wetherell M, op cit, p109.

<sup>27</sup> Loc cit.

and how do they do it in that specific context. Foucault expresses this as follows:

...one no longer attempts to uncover the great enigmatic statements that lie hidden beneath its (discourse's) signs; one asks how it functions; what representation it designates, what elements it cuts out and removes, how it analyses and composes, what play of substitution enables it to accomplish its role of representation. Commentary has yielded to criticism.<sup>28</sup>

### 2.3 Gender identity and ethnic identity

Having briefly discussed the discursive constitution of the subject in general, it is now necessary to turn to the more specific problem of the constitution of gender and ethnic identities. What does it mean when a woman says that she is a mother or an Afrikaner? What could it mean when she identifies herself as an Afrikaner mother, or even as a *volksmoeder*?

While the category of **sex** usually refers to the biological distinction of man and woman, that of **gender** refers to the social construction of males and females<sup>29</sup> or, in the words of Judith Butler, "the sculpting of the original body into a cultural form".<sup>30</sup> These "sculptings" take place when a society or a community develop a cluster of expectations, attributes, and behaviours which is assigned to the category of human being into which the child was born.<sup>31</sup> Because the process is culturally and socially constructed, gender roles differ from society to society and from community to community.

There are important senses in which gender roles and identities are discursively constituted. We need to distinguish the gender dimension of any discourse as well as specific gender discourses. Discourses always have a gender dimension. For example, there is a gender dimension to the

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<sup>28</sup> Quoted by Schottler P, op cit, pp41-42.

<sup>29</sup> This distinction should be regarded as theoretical. The distinction can only be made if it is possible to separate the social from the biological. While the distinction between sex and gender has generally been accepted in feminist discourse, there are more and more feminists who argue that it is not possible to separate the biological from the social. One of the arguments advanced against the distinction is that the fact of reproductive biology had very significant consequences for women and how they saw themselves in times when contraception was limited. Barrett M, Women's oppression today. The marxism/feminist encounter, ppxxiv-xxvii.

<sup>30</sup> Quoted by Barry K, "Biography and the search for women's subjectivity" in Women's Studies International Forum, Volume 12, Number 6, 1989.

<sup>31</sup> Eisenstein H, Contemporary feminist thought, p7.

discourse of Afrikaner nationalism and a gender dimension to the colonial discourse etc. From this it follows that any discursive subject is always a gendered subject.

There are specific discourses, however, which are centred around the issue of gender as they are mainly concerned with the constitution of gender identities. Examples of such discourses are the feminist discourse and the mothering discourse. These discourses may be termed "gender discourses". Such gender discourses are articulated in social and historical contexts where the issue of gender becomes especially salient. For example, in an industrialising society where women's traditional role in the household is becoming obsolete, it is very likely that gender discourses, negotiating new identities for women, will develop.

Ethnicity refers to the phenomenon that people affiliate or form groups with other people who share with them a common cultural descent (ie language, culture and religion or/and the biological category of race). These affiliations often lead to mobilisation towards a collective (either political or cultural or both) identity. Not only are such categories of common cultural descent established discursively, it is only in specific ethnic discourses that these categories obtain certain meanings. For example, within an ethnic discourse, to be Afrikaans-speaking and white comes to mean more than simply belonging to a race and language category.

Community and collectivity are concepts central to any ethnic discourse. Ethnic identity, by definition, imply membership of a community. An ethnic identity can never only refer to one individual except as a member of some community. It refers not only to how an individual thinks about her/himself, it has to refer also to the way in which she/he relates her/himself to the other members of the ethnic group as a community.

Gender identity is different in that, because there is a gender dimension to all discourses and because every individual is a carrier and thus subject of a different combination of discourses, gender identity is not necessarily a communal identity implying some notion of community. However, specific gender discourses, for various reasons, attempt to establish collective identities. For instance, some feminist discourses seek to establish a collective consciousness to form the basis of the feminist struggle.<sup>32</sup> It is exactly because gender identity is an individual identity that

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<sup>32</sup> Recently, some postmodern feminists have been critical of feminist discourses that articulate an ideal of community. They argue that because any communal discourse tend to suppress differences among group members and/or exclude people with whom they identify, feminists should rather develop "discourse and institutions for bringing differently identified groups together without suppressing or subsuming the differences".  
Young I M, "The ideal of community and the politics of difference" in Nicholson L J,

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it is so difficult to eliminate the kind of domination that it perpetuates.

When ethnic and gender discourses become ideological, they are similar in that they sanction domination which is based on biological categories. In these discourses the meaning of belonging to a specific gender category and ethnic category eg being a woman or being a white Afrikaans-speaker are mobilised.

#### 2.4 The construction of the community of the "nation" in a nationalist discourse

We have looked at how individuals are discursively constituted as subjects. More specifically, the constitution of gender and ethnic identities have been briefly discussed. It has been stated that ethnic identities by definition imply membership of a community and that gender identities have the potential to be communal. What has not been established, however, is how such communal communities too are discursively constructed. In this case, the establishment of the community of the "nation", specifically the Afrikaner nation, is of particular relevance. The nation is an example of an ethnic community and is constructed in a nationalist discourse.

A nationalist discourse, like any other discourse, is context-specific. As Gellner points out: "...nations, like states, are a contingency, and not a universal necessity. Neither nations nor states exist at all times and in all circumstances."<sup>33</sup> Most students of nationalism agree that nationalism is a modern development, and that it originated in times of major social changes: from agrarian/feudal to industrial/capitalist society.<sup>34</sup>

Why does the construction of a nationalist discourse only become possible after industrialisation and capitalist transformation? The rapid structural transformation brought about by these processes include the breaking down of existing institutions and traditions. This also means the decline of discourses which are no longer applicable in or adaptable to the changing situation. People have to find new ways of making sense of the world, of themselves and of others. New

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Feminism/postmodernism, p320.

<sup>33</sup> Gellner E, Nations and nationalism, p6.

<sup>34</sup> To identify a certain socio-economic context in which the nationalist discourse developed is not to establish the cause of nationalism, but rather to show which circumstances are favourable for the development of nationalism.  
Breuilly J, "Reflections on nationalism" in Philosophy and Social Science, Number 15, 1985, p71.

discourses have to be invented, imagined and constructed. These discourses have to be relevant to the new social conditions if they are to have wider and lasting impact.<sup>35</sup> Gellner shows how, in agrarian society, there are basically two "species" of communities: on the one hand there were the "city states, tribal segments and peasant communes" and on the other hand there were "large territories controlled by a concentration of force at one point".<sup>36</sup> The decline of both large empires and of small communities facilitated the construction of the nation community in particular ways.

Before we look at the decline of these two types of communities, it is necessary to introduce the concept of representation which will be of crucial importance for our understanding of nationalism. According to Benedict Anderson the nation is constructed through imagination as a community. As a community, he says, it is conceived as "a deep horizontal comradeship" (even if the reality is one of inequality and exploitation). It can be distinguished from other communities by the style in which it is imagined.<sup>37</sup> It is different in that it is imagined as inherently limited and sovereign.<sup>38</sup> Nations are limited because whatever the size of the nation, it always has boundaries. Sovereignty is the emblem of the freedom of the nation. Anderson points out that the fact that the nation is an imagined community means that the concept of representation becomes very important. Because the community is not real in the sense that members of the community know all their fellow-members, meet them, or hear of them, the community must be made possible by contact through representation. The popular novel and the newspaper consequently become

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<sup>35</sup> Louis Goldmann in his study of Kant made the point that Kant could only have been considered a great thinker because the philosophical system he developed was relevant to specific social conditions in Germany, specifically that of the German bourgeoisie. Goldmann states:

For the individual whose ideas, however correct, are in conflict with the social interests and conditions of existence of all the groups among which he lives remains a lonely "eccentric", a genius perhaps, but nonetheless a tragic and unknown figure who will in all likelihood fall victim to his lack of community with his fellow men.

Goldmann L, Immanuel Kant, p32.

In the context of Afrikaner nationalism, this quote cannot but bring President Thomas Burgers to mind.

<sup>36</sup> Gellner E, op cit, p13.

<sup>37</sup> Anderson B, Imagined communities. Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism, pp15 and 16.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, p15.

the technical instruments that represent the new imagined communities. Both the novel and the newspaper are aimed at anonymous audiences: writers accept that there is a cultural community as their audience, while readers become conscious of themselves as members of a community of readers. John Breuilly emphasises Anderson's understanding of the importance of representation. He says: "Representation is, indeed, a crucial modern concept with its assumption of an extensive reality which can only be understood and operated through the focusing method of representation..."<sup>39</sup> The development of print commodities like the newspaper and the novel, Anderson refers to as print-capitalism, and it was the development of print-capitalism, he says, which "made it possible for rapidly growing numbers of people to think about themselves, and to relate themselves to others, in profoundly new ways".<sup>40</sup> A certain way of thinking about oneself and relating oneself to others is at the basis of any community. While in pre-industrial communities contact and communication was mostly face to face, modern communities can be bigger and more complicated as contact and communication through representation is possible.

Anderson concentrates on the fact that the nation could only be imagined after the breakdown in the 18th century of the large cultural systems, the religious communities and the dynastic realms. These breakdowns were important in that they undermined the way in which people perceived and understood the world and each other.<sup>41</sup> One of these changing perceptions involved a new concept of time, the idea of "simultaneity" in "homogeneous empty time" - a concept which made it possible to imagine the nation, which as a solid community, moves through history.<sup>42</sup> This new idea of time, marked by temporal coincidence and measured by clock and calendar, is contrasted to an idea of time marked by prefiguring and fulfillment and "simultaneity-along-time", thus "simultaneity of past and future in an instantaneous present".<sup>43</sup> Because of these changing conceptions, three fundamental cultural ideas of pre-modern times lost their grips on people: the idea that a particular script-language offers privileged access to ontological truth; the idea that the monarchs had power because a god or divinity bestowed it on them; and the idea of

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<sup>39</sup> Breuilly J, op cit, p71.

<sup>40</sup> Anderson B, op cit, p40.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, pp19-20.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, p31.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, p30.

temporality.<sup>44</sup>

Secondly, with the advent of capitalism and industrialisation smaller and more concrete communities of face-to-face contact (corresponding with Tonnies' idea of the pre-industrial community or *Gemeinschaft*) were replaced by larger more abstract social collectivities (in Tonnies's terms *Gesellschaft* - society or "the mere co-existence of people independent of each other"). Tonnies contrasts the *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft* and holds that the *Gemeinschaft* is "more real" than the *Gesellschaft*:

*Gemeinschaft* is old, *Gesellschaft* is new as a name as well as phenomenon...all praise of rural life has pointed out that the *Gemeinschaft* among people is stronger there and more alive; it is the lasting and genuine form of living together. In contrast to *Gemeinschaft*, *Gesellschaft* is transitory and superficial. Accordingly, *Gemeinschaft* should be understood as a living organism, *Gesellschaft* as a mechanical aggregate and artifact.<sup>45</sup>

Gellner stresses the fact that these different type of communities are carriers of different types of cultures which he characterises as "wild" as opposed to "cultivated" or "garden" cultures:

No community is without some shared system of communication and norms, and the wild systems of this kind (in other words, cultures) reproduce themselves from generation to generation without conscious design, supervision, surveillance or special nutrition. Cultivated or garden cultures are different, though they have developed from the wild varieties. They possess a complexity and richness, most usually sustained by literacy and by specialized personnel.<sup>46</sup>

To summarise: it becomes possible to imagine the community of the "nation" with the advent of modern society and the decline of both large communities (empires and religions) and small communities (tribes, villages etc). With the decline of those more concrete forms of community, cultivated or garden cultures (high culture) and the discourses constituting these becomes important. Gellner states: "Modern man (sic) is not loyal to a monarch or a land or a faith, whatever he may say, but to a culture...No important links bind him to a kin group; nor do they stand between him and a wide anonymous community of culture."<sup>47</sup> In the communal discourse

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<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, p40.

<sup>45</sup> Tonnies F, *Community and society. Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*, pp34 and 35.

<sup>46</sup> Gellner E, *op cit*, p50.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*, p36.

of nationalism, culture is of central importance so much so that in some instances culture come to define the boundaries between nation communities. It is around culture that a new common discourse is constructed which makes it possible to imagine the national community.

It is important, however, to look beyond the importance that is assigned to culture in a nationalist discourse and to understand why it is that culture became so important at this time in history. In this regard one has to examine some of the underlying issues that became salient in industrial capitalist society.

Tom Nairn, in relating nationalism to capitalism, focuses on what he calls "the paradox of capitalism". While capitalism is associated with the ideal of progress and development, paradoxically, it was only with capitalism that the problem of "uneven development" manifested itself in history. Gellner points out that industrial society is the first society ever "to live by and rely on sustained and perpetual growth, on an expected and continuous improvement".<sup>48</sup> Although in previous societies there were improvements and innovations, there was neither a process of development nor any expectations of such a process.<sup>49</sup> Thus the ideal of progress and continuous improvement was a product of industrial society. But this process of continuous and coordinated progress is not achieved uniformly. Uneven development occurs and underdevelopment becomes a problem. It should be clear that it is a problem that can arise only in the context of capitalist development.

With development becoming an issue and underdevelopment a problem, various emergent discourses can be seen as different responses to this "issue" of modern society. It is in this regard that Nairn refers to nationalism as "a forced response, and what forces it is a material dilemma - the crudest dilemma of modern history... 'under-development', the fact of not having and the awareness of this intolerable absence".<sup>50</sup>

Nairn points out that it is the bourgeoisie, who experiences the problem of underdevelopment most acutely, who typically become self-appointed "leaders" of the underdeveloped. The awareness of the "intolerable absence" leads to the construction of responses. The responses have to be in terms of what is available. In the absence of material resources they thus look "inwards": all that

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<sup>48</sup> Gellner E, op cit, p22.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, p22.

<sup>50</sup> Nairn T, The break-up of Britain, p343.

is available to the underdeveloped is the resources of ethnicity: the people with their specific characteristics, language, stories and skin colour.<sup>51</sup> Nairn comments: "Nationalism works through differentiae like those because it has to". A response is constructed by the bourgeoisie by exploiting the senseless fears and prejudices of the population, they have to encourage social and psychological atavism.

Without denying the importance of Nairn's analysis, it should be added that in any *Gesellschaft* society there are, concurrent with capitalist development, other developments as well which lead to different issues becoming salient. The emergence of a nationalist discourse is a response to, and a particular way of addressing, those other issues as well. These developments, which may have direct or indirect links with capitalist and industrial development, are developments such as imperialism (which Nairn discusses in combination with capitalism), state formations, feminism, even psychological alienation. For our purposes in this thesis, it is specifically the salience of gender issues, and the fact that the discourse of nationalism is a response in ethnic terms to other issues as well, that will be investigated. Afrikaner nationalism, for instance, was also a way of addressing the changing position of women in society and the subsequent identity crises of women.

It is ironic then that a response to progress, in the case of nationalism involves regression. Nairn says that "(b)oth progress and regress are inscribed in (nationalism's) genetic code from the start".<sup>52</sup> He explains:

This ambiguity merely expresses the general historical *raison d'être* of the phenomenon. Which is the fact that it is through nationalism that societies try to propel themselves forward to certain kinds of goals (industrialisation, prosperity, equality with other peoples etc) by a certain kind of regression - by looking inwards, drawing men (sic) deeply upon their indigenous resources, resurrecting past folk heroes and myths about themselves and so on.<sup>53</sup>

But at the same time it is important to see that this regression is also an invention; contrary to its own self-understanding nationalism's turn to the past is not so much derived from it as imprinted on it. The nation is not a "real" community in the sense of Tonnies's *Gemeinschaft*. The culture it defends, is in Gellner's terms, an artificial culture rather than a garden culture. Hobsbawm would

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<sup>51</sup> ibid, p340.

<sup>52</sup> ibid, pp347-348.

<sup>53</sup> ibid, p348.

describe the nation as an "invented tradition". He uses the concept of "invented tradition" to refer to "a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual of symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past".<sup>54</sup> "Tradition", according to Hobsbawm, can be distinguished from "custom" in that tradition's bond with the past is largely fictitious, while custom's continuity with the past is real. While an invented tradition is a response to a new situation, with the response being structured in accordance to old situations (it thus displays some invariance); custom is not invariant: although it allows innovation and change, it has to show compatibility with the precedent. The nation then, is an invented tradition: the "cultures it claims to defend are often its own inventions, or are modified out of recognition".<sup>55</sup> The historical consciousness of nationalism consists of "amnesias and selections which...can be profoundly distorting and deceptive".<sup>56</sup>

Within the nationalist discourse the nation as an invented/imagined community involves "history as a legitimator and cement of group cohesion",<sup>57</sup> but as an invented tradition the nation in fact only has artificial bonds with history. Nationalist ideologues' understanding of the nation is however, that those bonds with history are real. They believe "that nations are there, in the very nature of things, only waiting to be 'awakened' from their regrettable slumber".<sup>58</sup> The nation and national identity is not an inherent attribute of society, even if in the nationalist discourse it has come to appear as such. This, Gellner suggests, is the core problem of nationalism.<sup>59</sup> Nations, Anderson says, always seem to be looming out of an "immemorial past" and "glide into a limitless future". He says that "it is the magic of nationalism to turn chance into destiny".<sup>60</sup> Within the nationalist discourse the terminology strongly suggests that the word nation refers to what is natural, to a timeless feature of reality. Anderson shows how the idioms of kinship (motherland,

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<sup>54</sup> Hobsbawm E, "Introduction: inventing traditions" in Hobsbawm E and Ranger T (eds), The invention of tradition, p1.

<sup>55</sup> Gellner E, op cit, p56.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, p57.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, p12.

<sup>58</sup> Gellner E, op cit, p48.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, p6.

<sup>60</sup> Anderson B, op cit, p19.

fatherland, mother-tongue) and home (Heimat) denote something to which one is naturally tied and therefore something unchosen: "In this way nation-ness is assimilated to skin-colour, gender, parentage, and birth-era - all those things one cannot help. And in these 'natural ties' one senses what one might call 'the beauty of *Gemeinschaft*'. To put it in another way, precisely because such ties are not chosen, they have about them a halo of disinterestedness."<sup>61</sup>

The fact that in the nationalist discourse the nation is depicted as natural, timeless and legitimised by history results in the nation commanding "profound emotional legitimacy".<sup>62</sup> Within this discourse, the nation can demand the highest loyalty, the highest respect and the highest sacrifices. This is what Anderson calls "political love".<sup>63</sup>

Because, within the nationalist discourse, it becomes important for potential members of the nation to think of themselves and others in terms of the nation, the nationalist discourse generates such issues as the unity of the nation and the transmittance of the national culture. But it also generates a different set of issues with a direct bearing on development (such as education for the nation, the accumulation of capital for the nation etc) become important. One of the vital forces of development (in the capitalist sense of the word) is capital itself. O'Meara has described how the economic movement "provided the core around which the Afrikaner nationalist class alliance developed" and he concentrates on the petty bourgeoisie's attempts to accumulate capital.<sup>64</sup> Capital alone, however, is not in itself sufficient to empower people in the modern industrialised society. There are other socio-economic factors like health and education, knowledge and skills that have to be combined with capital to make it an effective weapon in, what Nairn calls the "development war".<sup>65</sup> Ultimately nationalism thus is "a profoundly ambivalent reaction against this dominance of development, seeking at once to resist it and to somehow take over its vital

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<sup>61</sup> *Ibid*, p131.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid*, p14.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid*, p31.

<sup>64</sup> O'Meara D, Volkskapitalisme. Class, capital and ideology in the development of Afrikaner nationalism, 1934-1948, p16.

<sup>65</sup> Nairn T, op cit, p345. He says:

"Uneven development" is a politely academic way of saying "war". The process it refers to is warfare - that "development war" (as one might call it) which has been fought out consistently since the eruption of the great bourgeois revolutions.

forces for their own use".<sup>66</sup>

The bourgeoisie, while they have to arouse the ethnic consciousness of people around their nationality, also has to promote reforms aimed at educational, scientific, technological and industrial advancement.<sup>67</sup> The nation has to be literate, healthy and able to cope in a modern industrialised society. In this kind of society progress means power and development, control. It is not enough to provide an identity, a history and culture - this identity must also provide a way out of backwardness and underdevelopment. In Tom Nairn's words: "They had to contest the concrete forms in which (so to speak) progress had taken them by the throat, even as they set out to progress themselves."<sup>68</sup>

### Conclusion

In this chapter some of the theoretical considerations relevant to the problem of the relation between women and nationalism were discussed. It was claimed that the individual is constituted as a social subject in language and also that the nation as a community is discursively constructed. These theoretical arguments will become more concrete in subsequent chapters when they will be discussed specifically in connection with Afrikaans women and Afrikaner nationalism.

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid, pp340-341.

<sup>67</sup> Jayawardena K, Feminism and nationalism in the Third World, p4.

<sup>68</sup> Nairn T, op cit, p339.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE EMERGENCE OF THE ETHNIC DISCOURSE OF AFRIKANER NATIONALISM: BACKGROUND AND OVERVIEW

#### 3.1 The emergence of the ethnic discourse of Afrikaner nationalism in the Transvaal: introduction

It is possible to identify in South Africa by the 1920s a distinct and coherent gender discourse which may be termed the *volksmoeder* discourse. This discourse was specifically and centrally concerned with Afrikaans women, and it also was a discourse of Afrikaans women. In its fusion of gender and ethnic elements this distinctive gender discourse was very much part and parcel of the more general ethnic discourse of emergent Afrikaner nationalism. Therefore, to facilitate a proper analysis of the *volksmoeder* discourse, it is necessary to look briefly at the emergence of the general discourse of Afrikaner nationalism.

In this chapter there will thus, as background to a critical analysis of the specific *volksmoeder* discourse, be an attempt to describe the emergence of the Afrikaner nationalist discourse in the Transvaal. It should be made clear that such an overview cannot but simplify the complexities and subtleties of the problem of the emergence of Afrikaner nationalism. In accordance with the theoretical outline provided in the previous chapter, the emphasis will fall on the development of the discourse of Afrikaner nationalism itself and the context in which it was generated in the early years of the 1920s. The analysis will, however, start with the relative absence of an ethnic discourse and of Afrikaner nationalism, and with the context of this absence in the Transvaal up to the 1870s. As Gellner so aptly points out: "It was the dog who failed to bark who provided the vital clue for Sherlock Holmes."<sup>1</sup>

##### 3.1.1 Pre-individualism and the open frontier

By 1870 it was possible, also north of the Vaal river, to identify a distinct group of people who spoke Dutch, or a variant of it, shared a Christian religion and maintained "a fair degree of racial

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<sup>1</sup> Gellner E, Nations and nationalism, p43.

endogamy".<sup>2</sup> However, at this time no distinctive nationalist discourse had yet been articulated by these people, and although they were sometimes described or typified as Boers (and variants of the word), Transvalers and even Dutch Afrikaners,<sup>3</sup> these terms were largely descriptive and did not have a well-developed and self-conscious political content.

During the previous two centuries this group of mixed Dutch, German and French origins had migrated into and settled extensively in the South African interior. On the open frontier, which may be defined as a zone of authority crisis, successive generations of *trekboers* [pioneers] experienced little or no governmental control and a virtual absence of institutional constraints. By the 1830s the eastern frontier of the Cape Colony was finally beginning to close, but through the "Great Trek" new frontiers were opened in the Orange Free State and Transvaal, some of which would last into the final decades of the 19th century.

*Trekboer* society on the Transvaal's open frontier, characterised by its lack of a strong sense of community, had often been described by observers in terms of a prevalent "individualism", or by what may better be termed a "pre-individualism". While this term rightly identifies the absence of any communal discourse, it should by no means be confused with the existence of any individualist (in the liberal sense of the word) discourse: liberal individualism assumes the context of an articulated civil society which is precisely what was missing in the early Transvaal.<sup>4</sup> Giliomee writes that "extreme individualism, self-aggrandizement, and even anarchy" prevailed in the two republics before the late 1870s,<sup>5</sup> while Van Jaarsveld says that in the Transvaal there was faction formation, virtual civil wars and little sense of nationality.<sup>6</sup> These claims are borne out by E J P Jorissen's Transvaalsche herinneringen. 1876-1886. He made the following observations about the Boers of the Transvaal during the 1870s:

Het besef van een "vaderland" wast slechts langzaam, en tenzij dit alle hoofden en harten vervult, blijft het eigenbelang, of wat men daarvoor houdt, regeeren...De Boer woonde op

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<sup>2</sup> Giliomee H, "The beginnings of Afrikaner ethnic consciousness" in Vail L, The creation of tribalism in southern Africa, p22.

<sup>3</sup> See for instance Jacobus Stuart's De Hollandsche Afrikanen en hunne Republiek in Zuid-Afrika, published in 1854.  
Van Jaarsveld F A, Wie en wat is die Afrikaner, p9.

<sup>4</sup> Du Toit A B, discussion.

<sup>5</sup> Giliomee H, op cit , p24.

<sup>6</sup> Van Jaarsveld F A, "Die ontstaan van Afrikaner-nasionalisme 100 jaar gelede", p222.

zijn eigen plaats, vrij van alle aanraking met regeering: een koning op zijn eigen terrein. Is zijn rust gestoord en gedwongen om zich met politieke zaken in te laten, waren't niet de belangen van het land of van de staat, maar die van zijne vrienden, zijne kliek of zijne kerk, die hij ter harte nam. Eerst na, en zeker door de annexatie is het besef van burgers van een land te zijn bij de Boere wakker geworden.<sup>7</sup>

[The awareness of a "fatherland" was slow in coming. As long as the consciousness of a fatherland did not fill all hearts and minds, it might be more apt to say that self interest reigned supreme...the Boer was his own master on his own farm, free of all government, lord of his own destiny. Should his peace be disturbed and he be compelled to bother with politics, it was the interest of neither the country nor the state that moved him, but the well-being of his friends, his clan or his church which touched his heart. Only after, and probably because of the annexation the awareness that they were citizens belonging to one country was awakened.]

It was this lack of any conscious sense of community which accounts for the failure to respond to President Thomas Burger's premature attempts to articulate an Afrikaner nationalist discourse in the mid 1870s.

This "pre-individualism" and lack of any larger sense of community should be seen against the backdrop of the early Transvaal. According to Giliomee the occupation of the Transvaal was "a slow and haphazard process" and not one of systematic colonisation. In the 1850s large areas of land were still unoccupied with most white settlers dispersed as traders, hunters and pastoralists in two areas in the west and in the east. The Transvaal was an area of about 71 600 square miles and Van Jaarsveld refers to the "tremendous spaces" and "the vastness of the country".<sup>8</sup>

In such circumstances central control took long to be established. There were various regional clashes after 1845 and in the 1850s several local "republics" were created.<sup>9</sup> The Transvaal at this time was thus characterised by a marked regionalism. The authority of the South African Republic (ZAR), established in the Transvaal in 1854 as a semi-autonomous political entity,<sup>10</sup> was not

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<sup>7</sup> Jorissen E J P, Transvaalsche herinneringen. 1876-1886, "Een woord vooraf" (Preface) and pp21-22.

<sup>8</sup> Van Jaarsveld F A, The awakening of Afrikaner nationalism, 1868-1881, p130.

<sup>9</sup> Giliomee H, "Processes in development of the southern African frontier" in Lamar H and Thompson L, The frontier history. North America and southern Africa compared, p114.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, p102 and Trapido S, "Landlord and tenant in a colonial economy: the Transvaal, 1880-1910" in Journal of Southern African Studies, Volume 5, Number 1, October 1978, p26.

strong enough to exercise undisputed control over the process of colonisation.<sup>11</sup> The weak government also inevitably led to a reluctance to pay taxes, to take part in military operations and to support the state. This crisis of authority in many respects sustained the individualism and isolation.

Apart from regional divisions, bitter religious schisms also started to develop. With their move to the north in the 1830s, the *trekboers* for more than a generation had lost virtually all contact with their church in the Cape, the Dutch Reformed Church. Eventual contact was sporadic and peripheral. This meant that the church, too, exercised little or no institutional authority and control in the frontier area. When churches were established by the late 1850s, the process was characterised by factional and regional differences. Eventually three major church denominations, the Dutch Reformed Church, the "Gereformeerde Kerk" or Dopper church and the "Hervormde Kerk", were established in the Transvaal.<sup>12</sup> These church divisions were bitter and according to Giliomee, the armed civil strife of the 1850s and early 1860s "had a definite religious dimension in that the feuding factions were largely divided along religious lines and exploited religious differences for political gain".<sup>13</sup>

The family or farm as a relatively self-sufficient unit of subsistence did not for economic reasons need to establish much contact with the outside world. In the early years subsistence farming was predominant, trading was minimal and consisted mostly of barter.<sup>14</sup> There was little dependence on markets and banks or on imported labour. If there was thus little reason for the Boers to break

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<sup>11</sup> A similar situation existed in the eastern Cape after the 1770s. See Du Toit A B and Giliomee H, Afrikaner political thought: Analysis and documents. Volume one. 1780-1850, p14.

<sup>12</sup> For more details and different interpretations of the church divisions, see for instance Engelbrecht S P, Geschiedenis van de Nederduitse Hervormde Kerk in Zuid-Afrika. Deel 2, pp114-133; Giliomee H, Class, community and conflict: mobilising the Cape Dutch and the Boers in the nineteenth century, pp11-12; Kruger B R, Die ontstaan van die Gereformeerde Kerk in Suid-Afrika, pp157-214); Van der Watt P B, Deel twee. Die Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk 1834-1866; and Venter P W, Onkerksheid. 'n Sosiaal-historiese en godsdiens-sosiologies ondersoek.

<sup>13</sup> Giliomee H, op cit, p12.

<sup>14</sup> Giliomee H, "Processes in the development of the southern African frontier" in Lamar H and Thompson L, The frontier history. North America and southern Africa compared, p103.

away from their pre-individualist and autarchic independent existence,<sup>16</sup> this also meant that there was a virtual absence of shared social institutions and communal consciousness.

Not only was there little physical or social contact between Transvaal Boers under these conditions except in localised settings; in the absence of an established print-capitalism there was also hardly any contact through "representative" media like newspapers and magazines. After the establishment of the ZAR, the need for an official gazette led to the founding of a printing and publishing business in Potchefstroom in 1857. The industry gradually developed and while the earliest products were mostly church and government newspapers and pamphlets, a greater variety of material was published after 1873.<sup>16</sup> Even so, the fact that most of the people in the north were virtually functionally illiterate, further decreased the impact of the limited published material available.

In the Cape Colony Afrikaner nationalist discourse first emerged in the 1870s with the establishment of the *Genootskap van Regte Afrikaners* [Fellowship of True Afrikaners] (GRA) and its newspaper, *Di Patriot*. The establishment of a Dutch newspaper, *De Volksstem*, in the Transvaal in 1873 did not have the same effect. This paper, edited by J F Celliers (father of the poet J F E Celliers), was the most popular paper in the Transvaal at the time,<sup>17</sup> but circulation was small. Jorissen wrote:

Er is geen pers die de regering steunt en alzoo op het volkt werk, en al ware die er ook, zou het niet baten omdat het volk niet leest.<sup>18</sup>

[There is no press that supports the government, thus influencing the *volk*, and even had there been such a press, it would be of no avail, since the *volk* does not read.]

In the 1870s the Boers of the Transvaal was not yet a community: there was a distinct lack of a communal consciousness and no communal discourse had yet been articulated. This, in the light of the circumstances in which they lived, was not surprising. Anthony Trollope's 1878 comments summarise the isolation which was so characteristic of the trekboer lifestyle:

The people are isolated in regard to schools, churches, and all the amenities of social life.

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<sup>16</sup> See also Scott L, "Boereweerstand teen gedwonge Britse bestuur in Transvaal, 1877-1880" in Van Jaarsveld F A, Van Rensburg A P J and Stals W A (eds), Die Eerste Vryheidsoorlog 1880-1881. Van verset en geweld to skikking deur onderhandeling 1877-1884, p8.

<sup>16</sup> Buys E L, Die drukkers- en uitgewersbedryf in Transvaal 1857-1902: 'n bibliografiese studie, p(iii).

<sup>17</sup> Buys E L, op cit, p54.

<sup>18</sup> Quoted by Scott L, op cit, p10.

They cannot assist each other in the employment of labour, or create markets for the produce of one another by their mutual wants. The boorishness of the Boer is attributable in a great degree to the number of acres of which he is the lord.<sup>19</sup>

### 3.1.2 The first articulations of an ethnic discourse: the first British annexation

In stark contrast with the absence of an distinctive ethnic discourse in the 1860s and 1870s was the strong ethnic and even nationalist sentiments articulated in an official document entitled "Wie zijn wij?" [Who are we?], published in February 1881. In the following extract from this document the words *volk* and "Afrikaner" were used very self-consciously and we also see the first traces of an invented tradition:

Afstammelingen van de Hollandsche kolonisten van de Kaap de Goede Hoop, en bestaande uit zuivere Hollandsche mannen en uit nakomelingen van de refugees...Uit deze twee stammen groeide een volk op, een in geloof, een in rustigen eerbied voor de wet, maar met een gevoel van vrijheid en onafhankelijkheid...Hetzij wij overwinnen, hetzij wij sterven: de vrijheid zal in Afrika rijzen als de zon uit de morgenwolken...Dan zal het zijn van Zambezi tot aan Simonsbaai: Afrika voor den Afrikaner.<sup>20</sup>

[Descendants of the Dutch colonists at the Cape of Good Hope, the offspring of pure Dutch men and the refugees...from these two seeds there grew one tree, a *volk* unified in faith, unified in a calm respect for the law, but conscious of its freedom and independence...Whether we triumph, or perish, over Africa freedom shall rise like the sun from morning clouds...Then from the Zambezi to Simons Bay, it will be Africa: for the Afrikaner.]

What led to this dramatic change in self-consciousness? These early articulations of a nationalist consciousness should be seen in the context of a very specific historical event, namely the first British annexation of the Transvaal in 1877. Initially the annexation did not lead to much reaction from the Dutch Afrikaners. Jorissen remarked that "’t Schijnt, dat zowel volken als personen soms door ’n duiseling overvallen worden, die hen besefloos en weerloos maakt, ’n zwakke prooi voor de verkrachter. In ’n dergelijke staat blijkt de Transvaal in 1877 verkeer te hebben" [It seems that both nations and individuals are sometimes overcome by a dizziness that leaves them indecisive and vulnerable, a weak prey for the rapist. In 1877 the Transvaal found itself in this condition], while Rider Haggard stated that "the majority of the inhabitants, who would neither fight nor pay taxes, sat still and awaited catastrophe, utterly careless of all consequences".<sup>21</sup> Actually, this

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<sup>19</sup> Trollope A, South Africa. Volume 2, p22.

<sup>20</sup> Quoted by Van Jaarsveld F A, Wie en wat is die Afrikaner?, pp8-9.

<sup>21</sup> Both quoted by Scott L, op cit, pp9-10.

was hardly surprising given the lack of communal consciousness and shared civic institutions which had characterised the Transvaal until then.

However, in the following couple of years there was a remarkable upsurge of communal consciousness successfully channeled into further mobilisation strategies, all contributing to the development of a different context in which a nationalist discourse could emerge. These strategies included large and prolonged gatherings of Transvaal burghers in *volksbyeenkomste* [meetings of the *volk*], a journey through the whole of South Africa by the leaders of the ZAR and a vigorous campaign in De Volksstem, which became the mouthpiece of Transvaal resistance to British annexation.<sup>22</sup>

It was perhaps above all in the context of the *volksbyeenkomste* of 1878 and 1879 in reaction to the British annexation that we find the first expression of nationalist sentiments in the Transvaal. These gatherings were important because they were regular, they were attended in large numbers and by the representatives of many more, and they lasted for some time.<sup>23</sup> In a very real sense they provided the opportunity for a sense of community to be established. By the third gathering in Kleinfontein in April 1879, Jorissen wrote:

Nadat men daar een 14 dagen bijeengewees was...was de stemming in het lager hoogst ernstig, te midden der bezigheden en vermaaklijkheden van den dag. Die bezoekers uit Pretoria word getroffen door den algemeenen geest van eendracht, en den duidelijk uitgesproken wil om met niets minder tevreden te zijn dan met de teruggaaf van het land. Het is onmogelijk, het groot gewicht van deze bijeenkomst, die het geheele volk vertegenwoordigde en vier weke aanhield, te overschatten. Hier op Kleinfontein werd de eendracht hersteld en de samenwerking getroffen; de onderscheidene partijen, politieke en kerklijke, kwamen tot het inzicht dat er iets hoogers was dan deze kleine kringen, dat er een Vaderland was, dat alles en allen omvatten. Die invloed dezer groote bijeenkomst op de burgers...was beslissend.<sup>24</sup>

[Having been together for 14 days, the atmosphere in the lager was very solemn, in the midst of the daily chores and fun. The visitors from Pretoria were impressed by a general

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<sup>22</sup> Buys E L, op cit, p54.

The importance of De Volksstem during the time of annexation can be deduced from the fact that there were various official attempts to establish rival newspapers in this time as well as attempts to close down the paper. During the *Eerste Vryheidsoorlog* [First War of Liberation] De Volksstem was not published.

<sup>23</sup> For discussions of these meetings see Jorissen E J P, Transvaalsche herinneringe, 1876-1896, pp39-44, 49 and 60-61; Cachet F L, De worstelstrijd der Transvalers, pp495, 498, 502-503; and Scott L, op cit, pp15-72.

<sup>24</sup> Jorissen E J P, op cit, p44.

spirit of unity, and by the declared will to accept nothing less than the return of the country. Representing the entire *volk* and lasting for four weeks, the importance of this meeting cannot be over-estimated. Here at Kleinfontein unity was repaired and cooperation was achieved. The various church and political groupings realised that there was something higher than their small partisanship, that there was an all-inclusive fatherland. This massive rally had a decisive influence on the people.]

It was the direct contact established through these meetings, as well as the representative contact established through the extensive reports of these meetings in the press, that would culminate in the articulation of an ethnic discourse.<sup>25</sup> It became possible for more and more Dutch Afrikaners to think about themselves as belonging to a national community and to relate themselves to other Afrikaners in these terms. The importance of "deze kleine kringen" [these small circles] faded in the presence of "iets hoogers...een Vaderland, dat alles en allen omvatten" [something higher...an all-inclusive Fatherland].<sup>29</sup>

### 3.1.3 A time of interruption and preparation (1881-1895)

In spite of the sudden emergence of Afrikaner nationalist expressions at this time, after 1881 there was no further and coherent development of this discourse.<sup>27</sup> Some attempt was made to sustain the ethnically informed sense of community of the *volksbyeenkomst* at the annual celebrations

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<sup>25</sup> In the context of this thesis it is important to note that these meetings were reportedly also attended by women. W F Andriessen said that women were not only present, they had a large influence on the men present:

Men besprakt hier die positie, waarin men verkeerde; de een wist dit en de ander dat; de moedigen beurden de moedelosen op; de bedaarden redeneerden met de opgewondenen en hielden dezen in toom en...de Afrikaansche Boerenvroue, waarvan ieder gereed was om het voorbeeld van Martha Bezuidenhout te volgen, deed haren invloed overal gelden...zoo waren het de Transvaalsche vrouwen te Kleinfontein, die geen haarbreed wilden wijken van het besluit: "Het volk moet vrij zijn".

[They discussed the position in which they found themselves; one knew this and another knew that; the brave encouraged the despondent, the calm ones reasoned with the hotheads and kept them in check, and...the Afrikaans *boerenvroue*, everyone willing to follow the example of Martha Bezuidenhout, maintained a pervasive influence...thus it became the Transvaal women at Kleinfontein who would not budge an inch from the resolve: "The people shall be free."]

Andriessen W F, De vrouwen der boeren, p77.

<sup>26</sup> Loc cit.

<sup>27</sup> Giliomee H, "The beginnings of Afrikaner ethnic consciousness" in Vail L, The creation of tribalism in southern Africa, p37.

at Paardekraal, but even these increasingly lost their distinctive ethnic character. The nationalist discourse virtually disappeared until 1895. This interruption can be seen in the context of continuing British imperial hegemony, deepening class divisions within the ethnic group and inter-state rivalry between the Cape Colony and Transvaal.<sup>28</sup>

Apart from regional and religious schisms, the enduring lack of group cohesion was exacerbated by the fact that by the 1890s the Boer population of the Transvaal was divided into three distinct socio-economic groups:<sup>29</sup>

- \* the landed notables (or big land-owners) who were not involved in commodity production, but rather concentrated on the extraction of surplus in the form of rent (in kind and labour), from mainly black tenants;
- \* smaller landowners with tenuous land rights, who also lived off the rents of black tenants, but did not have nearly as many tenants. They were in constant struggle with the notables;<sup>30</sup> and
- \* the landless *bywoners*<sup>31</sup> who were tenants on the land of the notables.

However, before these incipient class divisions among the Transvaal Boers could consolidate into anything like a stable class order, the emergent structures of Transvaal society were overwhelmed and disrupted by the economic, social and political consequences brought about by the discovery of gold in the 1880s. The rapid influx of large numbers of *uitlanders* [foreigners] concentrated in the mushrooming urban and mining centre of Johannesburg, and the rapid processes of capitalisation which this set in train, would bring an end to rural isolation, and transform the subsistence economy and extensive pastoralism on which rural and local communities had been based. In 1930 Grosskopf, a member of the Carnegie Commission, commented:

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<sup>28</sup> Loc cit.

<sup>29</sup> O'Meara D, Volkskapitalisme. Class, capital and ideology in the development of Afrikaner nationalism, 1934-1948, p24 and Hofmeyr I, Building a nation from words. Afrikaans language, literature and "ethnic identity", 1902-1924, p9.

<sup>30</sup> Giliomee H, Class, community and conflict: mobilising the Cape Dutch and the Boers in the nineteenth century, p9 and Trapido S, op cit, pp42-43.

<sup>31</sup> Trapido says that the *bywoners* of the 19th century were, to a certain extent, respected: They provided the landowner with a share of their crops and added to his status; the landlord was able to call upon his *bywoners* for commando service and they provided his family affinal society. Trapido S, "Land, office and wealth in pre-industrial South African Republic" in Marks S and Atmore A, Economy and society in pre-industrial South Africa, p359.

Foreigners and European capital came pouring into the country. A prevailing subsistence husbandry was drawn into the modern "money economy". Big towns rose upon the bare veld, and soon railways were built towards them from the coast.

As a result of the capitalist development that accompanied the consolidation of mining in the Transvaal, many of the small landowners sold their land or went prospecting themselves, while many of the *bywoners* also moved to the cities, looking for employment. It was inevitable that a rural exodus accompanied the growth of capitalism as urban industries and commerce started supplying more and more of the commodities that the farming community used to provide for itself. According to O'Meara this process accelerated so quickly that by 1895, "almost half of the farms surveyed were owned by absentee landlords, either notables or, increasingly, mining companies".<sup>32</sup>

Despite the rapid growth of the mining towns, subsistence farming remained prevalent in many rural areas so that Grosskopf could still make the following statement in the first pages of his report, "Rural impoverishment and rural exodus":

Until the end of the 19th century, more or less every white man (sic) that was mentally and physically normal was able to make a reasonable living on farms.

It should be stressed that the processes of industrialisation and capitalisation in the Transvaal were characterised by their uneven development. In large parts of the Transvaal, although commodity production was already developing, it was not immediately accompanied by the capitalisation of agriculture. The landlords, until after the South African War, still made their money by extracting rent from black tenants rather than by producing commodities. Trapido remarks:

...households were still turning in on themselves, still only producing as much as was needed to acquire a socially necessary income...The majority of Afrikaner producers, whether large landlords or small tenant cultivators, were content to acquire their incomes, either from pastoral activities or from a variety of rents.<sup>33</sup>

In many ways these structural developments made the continuation of the nationalist discourse at a later stage possible. The socioeconomic changes were accompanied by significant advances in the political process of state formation. While a virtual crisis in authority existed in the Transvaal before 1870, by the last decades of the 19th century the government gradually started to obtain more control. Field-cornets and commandants, who were locally elected and who initially were the

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<sup>32</sup> O'Meara D, *op cit*, p24.

<sup>33</sup> Trapido S, "Landlord and tenant in a colonial economy: the Transvaal, 1880-1910" in Journal of Southern African Studies, Volume 5 Number 1, p47.

chief sources of authorities in the districts, were replaced in the 1870s by an appointed official, the *landdrost* [magistrate], who now represented the government in the rural areas. This important change was followed by a much stronger executive presidency. A distinct shift from the localities to the center can thus be discerned from the 1880s onwards. More central control also led to more social and political cohesion. It should be added, however, that the government, although relatively stronger, was by no means capable of meeting all the various demands of a growing industrial economy.<sup>34</sup>

The discovery of gold in the Transvaal also heralded the start of a flourishing period for printers and publishers. Within a very short period of time there was a rapid increase in the number of printers and publishers. Not only did the newspaper industry expand, but a great variety of other publications (books, periodicals, pamphlets and guides), covering a wide range of topics, were also published.<sup>35</sup> Print-capitalism, according to Benedict Anderson one of the most important prerequisites for the imagining of the nation, was thus established in the Transvaal.

A number of books relating the history of the Transvaal, were published during this period.<sup>36</sup> In 1875 *De Volksstem*, with reference to J H Hofstede's history of the Orange Free State, *Geschiedenis van den Oranje Vrystaat* (1876)<sup>37</sup>, wrote: "Wanneer zullen wij eene geschiedenis van de Transvaal krijgen?" [When will we get a history of the Transvaal?]<sup>38</sup> S J du Toit's well-known *Die geskiedenis van ons land in die taal van ons volk* was published in 1877.<sup>38</sup> Jorissen's *Wie zijn wij?* was the first of a series of publications in which a common history for the people of Transvaal was created. In this history Jorissen, a Dutchman, discovered the ethnic relevance of

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<sup>34</sup> Giliomee H, "Processes in the development of the southern African frontier" in Lamar H and Thompson L, *The frontier history. North America na southern Africa compared*, pp114, 116 and 117.

<sup>35</sup> For a detailed discussion of this process, see Buys E L, *op cit.*

<sup>36</sup> Some books were published before this time, but they did not deal with the Transvalers exclusively, for instance U G Laut's *De Kaapsche landverhuizers of Nederlands afstammelingen in Zuid-Afrika* (1847) and Jabcobus Stuart's *De Hollandsche Afrikanen en hunne Republiek in Zuid-Afrika* (1854).

Van Jaarsveld F A, *Ou en nuwe wee in die Suid-Afrikaanse geskiedskrywing*, p17.

<sup>37</sup> Van Jaarsveld F A, *op cit.*, p17,

<sup>38</sup> Quoted by Van Jaarsveld F A, *Die Afrikaner en sy geskiedenis*, p102.

<sup>38</sup> Van Jaarsveld F A, *The Afrikaner's interpretation of South African history*, p61.

Slagtersnek<sup>40</sup> and the "Great Trek"<sup>41</sup> for the Transvalers. This book was followed by various other sympathetic "histories", most of them written by outsiders, such as those of Dutchmen J A Rooda-Smit (Het goed recht der Transvaalsche Boeren, 1881) and F L Cachet (De worstelstrijd der Transvalers aan het volk van Nederland verhaald, 1882). Cachet referred to the *Eerste Vryheidsoorlog* [First War of Liberation] as the Boers' "strijd voor waarheid en recht, voor vrijheid en onafhankelijkheid" [struggle for truth and justice, for liberation and independence] and his book became the standard history of the Transvaal of the 19th century.<sup>42</sup> According to Van Jaarsveld this book contributed a lot to the fact that the Transvaal Boers enjoyed world attention during the last quarter of the 19th century<sup>43</sup>. C N J du Plessis, who moved to the Transvaal nine months before the war, went on commando with the Boers and was inspired to write<sup>44</sup> Geschiedenis van de emigranten-boeren en van den Vrijheidsoorlog, published in 1882.<sup>45</sup> In 1887 G M Theal's History of the Boers of South Africa was published.<sup>46</sup> De Volksstem acknowledged the nation-building function of history as follows in 1888 by saying that "t is goed voor een volk om de dappere daden van het voorgeslacht in eere te houden; het leert den jongeren de opofferingen die

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<sup>40</sup> About the Slagtersnek episode he wrote: "Weep Afrikanders! Here lie your flesh and blood! Murdered in the cruelest fashion!"  
Quoted by Van Jaarsveld F A, op cit, p38.

<sup>41</sup> Jorissen wrote: "What Afrikander is there whose heart does not miss a beat when he reflects on the reason for the exodus? Anyone who remains cool after reading of the oppression, injustice and disasters suffered by the poor Boers is unworthy of the name of Afrikander."  
Loc cit.

<sup>42</sup> After this book was published De Express commented:

Nu hebben we ook een degelijk, een standaard werk, een boek voor't nageslacht! Een boek dat elk Nederlander en Zuid-Afrikander in huis behoort te hebben indien hij de waarheid weten wil van 't wedervaren der dapperen stamverwanten over de Vaal.

[Now we also have a thorough study, a standard work, a book for our descendants! A book that every Dutchman and South African should have in his home if he want to know the truth about the experiences of our brave kin across the Vaal.]

Quoted by Van Jaarsveld F A, Die Afrikaner en sy geskiedenis, p108.

<sup>43</sup> Van Jaarsveld F A, Wie en wat is die Afrikaner?, p8.

<sup>44</sup> Van Jaarsveld F A, Die Afrikaner en sy geskiedenis, p105.

<sup>45</sup> In 1900 he also wrote Uit die geskiedenis van de Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek en van de Afrikaanders.  
Van Jaarsveld F A, Wie en wat is die Afrikaner?, p9.

<sup>46</sup> Loc cit.

hunne vaderen zich getroosten, ter wille der vrijheid, den heldenmoed waarmede sij die wisten te veroveren en te verdedigen; het ontwikkelt nationale gevoel"<sup>47</sup> [It is good for a *volk* to honour the brave deeds of their ancestors; it teaches the youth the sacrifices their fathers made for freedom, the courage with which they attained and protected that freedom; it develops nationalist sentiments] and in 1893 G A Ode was appointed as state historian of the ZAR.<sup>48</sup> Although much of this history writing was concerned with the local ethnic community in the Transvaal rather than with a more general Afrikaner nation, the myths, symbols, heroes and heroines created in these histories would become very important in the subsequent articulation of the nationalist discourse.

Thus, even if the period after 1881 saw no further articulation of the Afrikaner nationalist discourse, the stage was set for the more coherent and consistent articulations of the discourse in the following period.

#### 3.1.4 The Jameson Raid, the South African War and Union

While the immediate effects of the Jameson Raid of 1895 and the South African War (1899-1902) included the renewed articulation of an ethnic discourse, these experiences of war also had indirect and longer term consequences that would prove even more important to the emergence of modern Afrikaner nationalism. In this section we will look at the social and historical effects of the Jameson Raid and the war and how these, together with the continuation of the processes of industrialisation and capitalisation, prepared the ground for the more coherent and consistent articulations of Afrikaner nationalism from the 1910s.

In 1895 the Jameson Raid, inspired by the mining capitalists ("new men of economic and political power...unversed in the pragmatic politics of older capitalist classes...with the belief that they could do anything"<sup>49</sup>), set the scene for war and resulted in a temporary reduction in intra-Afrikaner tensions.<sup>50</sup>

The Raid inspired much writing: N J Hofmeyr's De Afrikaner Boer en die Jameson-inval (1898), C N du Plessis' Uit de geschiedenis van de Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek (1898) and J F van

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<sup>47</sup> Van Jaarsveld F A, Ou en nuwe wee in die Suid-Afrikaanse geskiedskrywing, p17.

<sup>48</sup> Loc cit.

<sup>49</sup> Trapido S, "Land, office and wealth in the South African Republic" in Marks S and Atmore A, Economy and society in pre-industrial South Africa, p361.

<sup>50</sup> Loc cit.

Oordt's Paul Kruger en de opkomst der Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek (1898).<sup>51</sup>

The South African War officially started on 11 October 1899. The war was to have profound effects on especially the lives of the Transvalers and Orange Free Staters. The war brought out the existing regional and social divisions among the Afrikaans people, but also transcended regional barriers in a national political struggle. Existing class divisions were expressed when many *bywoners* used the war "to express their feelings": one out of every five *bywoners* actively joined the British, 13% refused to take up arms for the Boers while others declared their neutrality.<sup>52</sup>

However, in many other ways the South African War facilitated the articulation of a more pronounced Afrikaner nationalism. Afrikaners from different regions found a common cause in the prolonged struggle against the imperial forces, while the defeat of the republics followed by Union brought them together within a shared polity. At the same time the shared traumas of the war provided the emergent nationalist discourse with a potent fund of symbolism. The traumatic experiences of people (eg the men on commando and the women in the concentration camps) in the war led to immense personal bitterness and grief, but also to feelings of solidarity with other Afrikaners who shared a similar fate. In due course these experiences would also provide the Afrikaner nationalist discourse with some of its most powerful symbols. Within this discourse the personal sufferings of people during the war obtained national significance and personal losses became national losses. Significantly, it was again the political context of a war that made it possible for people to relate themselves to each other in ethnic terms transcending local identities. By means of the many careful and detailed published recordings of personal experiences, these experiences were recorded as symbols of a shared fate that were not to be forgotten.

The social and economic consequences of the war also further, if indirectly, contributed to this political process. The South African War<sup>53</sup> played a major role in the devastation of Boer

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<sup>51</sup> Van Jaarsveld F A, The Afrikaner's interpretation of South African history, p61.

<sup>52</sup> Hofmeyr I, op cit, p10 and Giliomee H, Class, community and conflict: mobilising the Cape Dutch and Boers in the nineteenth century, p10. For more detail see Grundlingh A, "Collaborators in Boer society" in Warwick P (ed), The South African War, pp258-278.

<sup>53</sup> A letter from Smuts (then situated in the northern Transvaal) to Botha, dated 22 September 1900, described the process of destruction:

...whenever the enemy now appears, he carries out indescribable destruction. All houses are burned down, all fields and gardens utterly destroyed, all cattle and foodstuffs carried off and all males taken prisoner!

agriculture. As a result of British scorched earth policy about 30 000 homesteads were burned down, and livestock and crops were destroyed. While an estimated 75% of Boer livestock was lost in the Transvaal, the herds of the Orange Free State farmers were reduced by 50%.<sup>54</sup> In addition, it was estimated that about 20 villages were destroyed.<sup>55</sup> The South African War led to an acceleration in the urbanisation process as even more of the small landowners and *bywoners* were forced to the cities, due to their losses and to the fact that former landlords were unwilling to take them back. The destruction of farms and villages also meant the eradication of existing social networks, and this, paradoxically, facilitated the construction of new alliances.

The period following the South African War thus witnessed further fundamental changes in the lifestyles of the Transvalers. Commercial production and urbanisation inevitably led to the break-up of old alliances and of "the social web of authority in Boer communities".<sup>56</sup> Various Afrikaner organisations and political parties seized this gap and tried to foster new alliances, some of them directly or indirectly in ethnic terms.

The fostering of new alliances with a more pronounced ethnic component was influenced by, amongst other things, three important factors: developments elsewhere in the world, the emergence of a new leadership and the new communication networks that accompanied capitalism. Benedict Anderson states that "by the second decade of the nineteenth century, if not earlier, a 'model' of 'the' independent national state was available for pirating".<sup>57</sup> The leaders that took over after the war were more sophisticated than the pre-war leaders. They were either wealthy land-owners (such as Louis Botha, Schalk Burger or Koos de la Rey) or professional men and members of the petit-bourgeoisie (such as Jan Smuts, Christiaan Beyers, Louis Esselen and Barry Hertzog). This new generation of leaders thus included intellectuals, were relatively well-educated and usually at least bilingual. This meant that they had access to modern western culture

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Quoted by T R H Davenport, South Africa. A modern history, p141.

<sup>54</sup> O'Meara D, op cit, p25.

<sup>55</sup> Davenport T R H, op cit, p140.

<sup>56</sup> Hofmeyr I, op cit, p10.

<sup>57</sup> Anderson B, Imagined communities. Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism, p78.

and that they were familiar with the example of other nationalist struggles.<sup>58</sup> With capitalist development the leaders' efforts to keep their people in contact with each other was made easier. With capitalism came markets, roads, railways, better education and, most important for our purposes, print-capitalism. The new leaders used these new developments to establish channels of political communication with potential constituencies and between the people that they wanted to coalesce. When personal contact on a large scale was not possible, efforts were concentrated on contact through representation.

By far the most important for our purposes, however, were the political consequences of the war. The defeat of the republics facilitated the founding of a national state. The establishment of the Union of South Africa in 1910, because it focussed attention on the national political scene, made it possible for Transvalers, Cape Afrikaners etc to transcend provincial borders when they imagined an Afrikaner community. Isabel Hofmeyr states that Union with its "emphasis on white unity, citizenship, national anthem and generally its growing infrastructure of press, taxation, education and postal system, created an atmosphere propitious for the advancement of Afrikaans",<sup>59</sup> and also, as it will become clear, for Afrikaner unity.

The specific provisions of the constitution of the Union had important political consequences. As Giliomee points out, the enfranchisement of all white men meant that politically it became important for Afrikaans leaders to mobilise the white *bywoners* behind them. On the other hand, the exclusion of blacks from the voter's roll, implied that political cooperation with blacks would

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<sup>58</sup> Anderson B, op cit, p107.

Mabel Malherbe, for instance, can be regarded as one of this new generation of leaders. In December 1926, she referred to the rise of nationalism world-wide and said that she experienced it (December 1926) as a very exciting time:

Maar, mooiste en beste van alles, is die nuwe gees van broederskap, en gelykheid wat onder die mensdom wakker is, Dink net: waar voorheen gestry en bitter gely is vir die onafhanklikheid van 'n volk, daar word dit vandag sonder bloedstorting, byna sonder moeite, erken.

[But, even better, is the new spirit of brotherhood and equality that has been awakened in humanity. Just think of it: while earlier people struggled and suffered dearly to gain the independence of a *volk*, today independence is acknowledged without the spilling of any blood, almost effortlessly."]

Die Boerevrou, December 1926, p2.

<sup>59</sup> Hofmeyr I, op cit, p21.

not be necessary.<sup>60</sup>

Because of these social and political developments, the period between 1895 and 1910 was an important time in the history of Afrikaner nationalism, even if by the end of this period there were not yet any coherent and consistent articulations of the Afrikaner nationalist discourse.

### 3.1.5 Intra-ethnic class divisions among Afrikaners at the time of Union

If the impact of the South African War and the coming of Union contributed greatly in making possible a national project of mobilising Afrikaners on ethnic lines, the unity of the Afrikaner *volk* was by no means a foregone conclusion. Afrikaners at this time represented a diversity of class interests, and building the unity of the *volk* had to be constructed in political struggle taking into account and transcending these intra-ethnic class divisions. In this project it was above all the Afrikaner petty bourgeoisie who would play a prominent part in the articulation of a nationalist discourse through the Afrikaans language movement and related developments. To understand what was involved in these intra-ethnic projects and in the formation of the new political alliances which this entailed, we need first to survey the divergent class positions of Afrikaners at the time of Union.

#### (i) Rural areas: the deepening of divisions

After the war the government implemented various measures to facilitate commodity production and thus the development of commercial agriculture. The state thus supported the larger landowners, who were now to become capitalist farmers.<sup>61</sup> Landbanks were established in the Transvaal (1907) and in the Orange Free State (1908) to provide capital to farmers who possessed land as security. The poorer farmers, the *bywoners* and tenants, who were landless, were not able to borrow money from these banks. The notables also made it clear that they would not be willing

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<sup>60</sup> Giliomee H, "The beginnings of Afrikaner consciousness" in Vail L, The creation of tribalism in southern Africa, p47.

There are various examples of political alliances between the Cape Dutch and black leaders before Union. For example, the Afrikaner Bond formed electoral alliances with Jabavu in the eastern Cape during the elections of 1898 and 1908.

<sup>61</sup> The government also supported the efforts of landowners to remove African tenants from the farms in order to free land for commercial production. It was now decided that the Squatters Law should be enforced with the prime purpose of helping the notables to remove black tenants from their land in order to eliminate competition and to free the land for commercial production. O'Meara D, op cit, p25 and Trapido S, op cit, p55.

to stand surety for their tenants. Whereas the *bywoners* previously had added to the landlord's status, with the commercialisation of agriculture and with land becoming commercially viable, they became a burden. Consequently the status of the bywoner declined and his tenure became more precarious.<sup>62</sup> The rural Afrikaner community was thus characterised by a deepening schism between capitalist farmers and those smaller farmers and *bywoners* who were "driven into penury".<sup>63</sup> As the major market for capitalist production was provided by mining, it was in the

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<sup>62</sup> Trapido S, "Land, office and wealth in the South African Republic" in Marks S and Atmore A, Economy and society in pre-industrial South Africa, p357.

Trapido quotes the Reverend Kestell as saying at the 1938 People's Economic Congress:

Our forefathers had time for *bywoners*. The children learned 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 Second War of Independence a new spirit was abroad, a spirit of each for himself, then we had no more time for *bywoners*.

Loc cit.

<sup>63</sup> O'Meara D, op cit, p26.

Van Melle, in his short story "Versoening" [Reconciliation], gives a rare account of class conflict between rural Afrikaners in the first two decades of the century. The hero of the story is Paul Visage, a *bywoner*, who comes into conflict with the land-owner Ben Viljoen, when he refuses to fight against the railway strikers. The first two passages are extracts from conversations with his wife while the last passage describes his thoughts:

1. "Hy sê vanaand staak die myne en spore."  
 "As hulle jou tog maar nie opkommandeer nie," se sy.  
 "Dink jy ek sal gaan? Dink jy ek sal stakers gaan skiet?"  
 "Wat sal 'n mens maak? As die regering jou roep, sal jy maar moet gaan."  
 "Nee, ek sal weier. Dis net sulke mense as ek, ook werksmense. Ek gaan nie teen hulle veg nie."
  2. "Jy moet sê: 'Ek is teen die stakers', al bid jy in jou hart dat hulle moet wen. Jy moet saamgaan en mense gaan skiet wat ook swaarkry. Jy moet by die kapitalis staan, by die rykes, en hulle help om die arm mense nog dieper in die modder te trap."
  3. Dat die stakers verloor het spyt hom. Hy voel een met hulle, ook 'n werksman, ook 'n man wat nie sy regmatige loon vir sy werk kry nie. Hy behoort ook tot die veronregte klas. Dat die arm boere dit nie kan sien nie. Nee, hulle is daarvoor te kortsigtig; hulle sal gaan veg, hulle lewe waag...En wat kry hulle daarvoor? Hulle het dan hul plig gedoen, hul plig om die land te red van rewolusie, om die maatskappy van vandag te hou soos hy is, sodat die rykes en slimmes in weelde kan leef en die armes en dommes vir hulle kan werk.
- [1. "He says the mines and railways strike tonight."  
 "As long as you are not conscripted", she says.  
 "Do you think I will go? Do you think I will shoot the strikers?"  
 "What can we do? If the government calls you, you have to go."  
 "No, I shall refuse. They are people just like me, workers. I shall not fight them."

interest of the wealthy farmers to co-operate with the mining industrialists.<sup>64</sup>

(ii) An Afrikaner proletariat

With the wealthier farmers now moving towards commercial production agriculture became much more specialised and small subsistence farmers could not make an existence anymore and were forced to the cities. However, the processes of proletarianisation and urbanisation were complex and various other factors also played a role in the process. O'Meara points out a few of these factors: periodic depression, droughts, livestock diseases, the repeated complex subdivision of farms under Roman Dutch Law inheritance stipulations and competition from imported United States maize.<sup>65</sup> Lord Selborne, the Transvaal high commissioner, in a 1905 letter to the colonial secretary, remarked: "...The bulk of the poorer agriculturists are drifting to the towns, helping to swell the ranks of the unemployed, adding to the class of the 'poor white', breeding apathy, squalor, crime and discontent."<sup>66</sup> As a result of the large scale move from the rural areas to the cities, there was an oversupply of labour in the cities. The people who moved from the rural areas were largely unskilled and uneducated - they were by no means equipped for participating in a modern industrial economy. These Afrikaans proletarians and workers were involved in a constant

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2. You have to say: "I oppose the strikers", though you pray in your heart that they must win. You have to go along to shoot people who suffer like you. You have to support the capitalists, the rich, you have to help them tread the poor people even deeper into the mud."
  3. He is sorry that the strikers lost. He is one of them, a worker also, a man who doesn't get a fair wage for his work. He also belongs to the exploited class. Why can't the poor farmers see it? They are too myopic. They will fight, they will risk their lives...for what? For then they would have done their duty, their duty to rid the land of revolution, to keep society as it is today, to ensure that the rich and educated can live in luxury and the poor and ignorant can work for them.]

Viljoen fires Visage but is forced to take him back in the end.

From Van Melle J, "Versoening" in Keur uit die verhale van J Van Melle, pp38-53.

<sup>64</sup> O'Meara D, op cit, p26 and Hofmeyr I, op cit, p14.

<sup>65</sup> O'Meara D, op cit, p258.

<sup>66</sup> Quoted by Trapido S, "Landlord and tenant in a colonial economy: the Transvaal, 1880-1910" in Journal of Southern African Studies, Volume 5 Number 1, pp51-52.

struggle for a living wage and to win employment.<sup>67</sup> In this constant struggle they displayed "not only a considerable degree of working-class consciousness, but also a considerable degree of acumen".<sup>68</sup>

(iii) The petty bourgeoisie

The Afrikaans petty bourgeoisie (journalists, teachers, lawyers, clerics etc) of the urban areas had a particularly strategic position in this context of deepening class conflict. On the one hand they felt more and more threatened: while Kruger had threatened them by importing Dutch officials for middle range state posts, the co-operation of Afrikaner farmers with mining capital resulted in the *Het Volk* Party (which was dominated by wealthy Transvaal farmers) not taking seriously the interests of this section of the middle class. On the other hand they did have access to strategic organisational, educational and press means and thus were well positioned for political intervention.

From the point of view of the Afrikaner petty bourgeoisie political developments after the war held out advantages as well as threats. In the Transvaal the *Het Volk* Party, established in Pretoria on 28 January 1905, was evidently a key structure for political mobilisation. However, this party, under the leadership of Louis Botha, advocated a policy of co-operation based on the principles of conciliation. In practice this meant that Botha actively tried to establish some kind of alliance with English speakers and mining capital while keeping the support of Afrikaners. This kind of political co-operation with especially mining industrialists was in the economic interests of the wealthy

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<sup>67</sup> Although there was a shortage of unskilled labour, the mineowners were unwilling to employ the landless Boers. They explained this reluctance by saying that the Boer poor "having themselves been the employers of servile labour, were unsuitable for the arduous tasks of an underground worker" or because of "the innate inability of these white poor to meet the needs of the mining industry". Trapido rejects these kinds of explanations and claims that the reason for the Boer poor being unacceptable to the mineowners was that the wage they required was not only for their own subsistence, but also had to provide for a household and the reproduction of the family: "Such wages would increase the cost of labour and reduce goldmining profits." *Ibid*, p51.

According to Van Onselen a significant number of Afrikaans-speaking people in the towns and cities made a living from transport riding, brick making or cab driving. Many of them lost their jobs as a result of the arrival of the railways in the mid-1890s, the mechanisation of brick making and the introduction of the electrical tramway in 1906. This, coupled with the depression of 1906-1908 led to an intensification of the unemployment crisis in the Afrikaans community. Van Onselen C, Studies in the social and economic history of the Witwatersrand, 1886 - 1914. New Babylon, pp146-147.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid*, pp160-161.

farmers who were in control of *Het Volk*.<sup>69</sup> In the process the Afrikaner petty bourgeoisie and their particular projects were slighted. In Hofmeyr's words, "the generals soon began to slough off the irritating petty bourgeoisie"<sup>70</sup> by firstly refusing financial support for the "Christelike Nasionale Onderwys" [Christian Nationalist Education] (CNO) movement and secondly, by playing down the issue of Dutch in government and schools.<sup>71</sup>

After Union the majority of Afrikaners were affiliated to the South African Party (SAP),<sup>72</sup> a political party that came into being in November 1911 with the coalition of *Het Volk* (Transvaal), the *Orangia-Unie* (Orange Free State)<sup>73</sup> and the Afrikaner Bond (Cape province). General Louis Botha was the leader of the SAP from November 1911 until his death in August 1919, when General J C Smuts took over. The SAP, like its predecessor *Het Volk* was in favour of protecting the development of capitalist agriculture and maintaining an understanding with the mining capitalists.

It was this slighted Afrikaner petty bourgeoisie that provided the base for and took the lead in the construction of a coherent and relatively stable Afrikaner nationalist discourse. Most of the work in this construction process took place after 1910, ironically (but not surprisingly) at a time when

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<sup>69</sup> Trapido S, op cit, p53 and O'Meara D, op cit, p26.

<sup>70</sup> Hofmeyr I, op cit, p14.

<sup>71</sup> Loc cit.

<sup>72</sup> The main policy points of the SAP at its inception were the co-operation between Afrikaans speakers and English speakers, equal rights for Afrikaans and English, handling of the black question on a non-party basis, encouragement of white immigration and a ban on Indian immigration, maintaining of links with Britain and the British empire and it was opposed to the ideal of a South African republic.

<sup>73</sup> The *Orangia-Unie*, which was officially established on 3 May 1906 (Geyser O and Marais A H, Die Nasionale Party. Deel 1. Agtergrond, stigting en konsolidasie, p63) under the leadership of General Barry Hertzog and Abraham Fischer was much more anti-imperialist than *Het Volk*. (O'Meara D, op cit, p27.) Hertzog also advocated co-operation but made it clear that this co-operation should not be at the expense of the self-respect of the *volk*. (Geyser O and Marais A H, op cit, p64.) The Orange Free State farmers were worse off than the Transvaal farmers after the war and therefore the development of capitalist production in agriculture was much slower. For the time being the major threats to the farmers were their black tenants and the fact that they had no capital. (O'Meara D, op cit, p27.) Because they were not yet involved in capitalist production on a large scale, they did not have economic reasons for establishing ties with the mining capitalists. For them self-government seemed to be the evident solution to their problems and this was their first priority.

class, political and religious divisions in Dutch Afrikanerdom were sharper than ever.

In terms of their own perception of their socio-economic position, the Afrikaner petty bourgeoisie saw themselves as poor and without capital. One way out of this marginal position in a developing society was to look inwards and muster popular support from what Afrikaners shared: language, history, skin colour. This was not an easy option as class divisions were deep and bitter, the ethnolinguistic vitality of the Afrikaans-speaking group was low and the prospective ethnic constituency underdeveloped in a rapidly developing society. As a "nation" they were unskilled, uneducated and unhealthy - not equipped at all for the "development war".<sup>74</sup>

### 3.1.6 The Afrikaner petty bourgeoisie and their articulation of the Afrikaner nationalist discourse after 1910

The 1910s saw the beginnings of the serious and systematic articulation of an Afrikaner nationalist discourse. This discourse was most explicitly articulated in the texts of the so-called *Tweede Taalbeweging* [second language movement] (started operating around 1905), the National Party (NP) (founded in 1914), the *Helpmekaarbeweging* [literally the "helping one another" movement] (founded in 1915), and the *Afrikaner Broederbond* (AB) (founded in 1918). The leaders and much of the membership of all these organisations typically came from the Afrikaner petty bourgeoisie. A few remarks about these organisations and movements are in order here.

Although the activities of the so-called "second language movement"<sup>75</sup> started around 1905, it was only after the establishment of the Union that it succeeded in building up a certain momentum. The "movement" mainly consisted of journalists and writers (eg Gustav Preller, Jan F E Celliers, Totius, Eugene N Marais, Louis Leipoldt, Sangiro, Jochem van Bruggen) who took

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<sup>74</sup> See Chapter two.

<sup>75</sup> The term "second language movement" refers to the fact that it was the second movement of its kind in Afrikaner history. The "first language movement" was "a loosely related set of cultural organisations, debating societies...a language conference" (Hofmeyr I, *op cit*, p7) and publications, set up by intellectuals, mainly from the Paarl, around 1876, to promote the issue of Afrikaans. According to Hofmeyr the term "first language movement" was only coined in hindsight; it also "implies an organisational unity and smoothness that never existed in reality" (*ibid*, pp7-8). The seminal organisation in the "first language movement" was the "Genootskap van Regte Afrikaners" (GRA), which was established in August 1875. The important publications of the "movement" were the newspaper *Die Patriot* (1876), the magazines *Ons Klyntjie* (1896-1904) and *Ons Taal* (1907-1909) (Du Plessis J H O, *Die Afrikaanse pers. 'n Studie van die ontstaan, ontwikkeling en rol van die Hollands-Afrikaanse pers*, pp181-183, 328-329).

seriously the issue of Afrikaans and Afrikaner history. Hofmeyr defines the "second language movement" as "a petty bourgeoisie in search of a wider audience that could turn language and educational broking into a new professional avenue for people who sensed marginalisation lapping dangerously at their feet".<sup>76</sup> Leonord Thompson quotes Celliers to illustrate the "passionately nationalist tone" of the writings produced by leading figures in the "second language movement":

But it is clear to every Afrikaner that only our own literature steeped in the Afrikaner spirit and intelligible to Afrikaners, through and through in language and content, that only such a literature is really calculated to hit the mark here. Who wants to help us build up such a literature for our people? We have a people to serve, we have a nation to educate; we cannot wait!<sup>77</sup>

Despite the activities and the efforts of the so-called "first language movement" from the 1870s, by 1910 Afrikaans could hardly be called a respected language of international repute. The "second language movement" was to continue the work of the first movement. This movement set out to standardise, publicise and publish, organise and popularise Afrikaans. A key figure in the "second language movement" was the journalist Gustav Preller. His series of articles, "Laat 't ons toch ernst wezen" [Let us be serious], published in *De Volksstem* in 1905,<sup>78</sup> put the issue of Afrikaans on the agenda for Transvaal Afrikaners. Claiming that the vernacular, Afrikaans, was very different from the formal language, Dutch, he campaigned that Afrikaans should also become a written language. Many readers responded by writing their letters in Afrikaans.

On 13 December of the same year the *Afrikaanse Taalgenootskap* (ATV) was established in the Transvaal<sup>79</sup> and significantly its goal was not only to advance the language Afrikaans, it was also the "aankweking en ontwikkeling van 'n suiwer Afrikaanse nasionaliteitsgevoel" [cultivation and development of a pure Afrikaans nationalism].<sup>80</sup> The ATV was the first of a series of

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<sup>76</sup> Hofmeyr I, *op cit*, p16.

<sup>77</sup> Quoted by Thompson L, *The political mythology of Apartheid*, p35.

<sup>78</sup> Nienaber P J, *Taal en beeld. Die geskiedenis van die Afrikaanse taalbewegings*, no page numbers.

Preller's series of articles was in response to a speech of J J Hofmeyr ("Onse Jan") at the University of Stellenbosch. The speech was entitled "Is't ons ernst?" [Are we serious about it?] and asked Dutch speakers to maintain and protect their language (Dutch). Hofmeyr was not in favour of the Afrikaans movement.

<sup>79</sup> Hofmeyr I, *op cit*, p21 and Du Plessis J H O, *op cit*, p332.

<sup>80</sup> Nienaber P J, *op cit*, document 93.

organisations established to promote and protect (and construct!) Afrikaans. In 1909 the *Zuid-Afrikaanse Akademie vir Taal, Lettere en Kuns* [South African Academy of Language, Literature and Art] came into being with as goal "De handhaving en bevordering van de Hollandse taal en letteren en van Zuid-Afrikaansche geschiedenis, oudheidkunde en kunst" [to maintain and promote the Dutch language and literature and the South African history, archeology and art]<sup>81</sup> The *Federasie van Afrikaanse Kultuurvereniging* [Federation of Afrikaans Cultural Organisations] (FAK) was established in 1929 in Bloemfontein. The main idea behind the establishment of the FAK was the following:

'n Sentrale organisasie moet daargestel word wat sal sorg dat doelbewuste en georganiseerde pogings aangewend word om ons taal te bevorder en ons kulturele selfstandigheid te handhaaf.<sup>82</sup>

[A central organisation must be established to take responsibility for deliberate and organised efforts to promote our language and maintain our cultural independence.]

A year later Afrikaans-speaking officials in the South African Railways established the *Afrikaanse Taal- en Kultuurvereniging van die Suid-Afrikaanse Spoorwee* [Afrikaans Language and Culture Society of the South African Railways] (ATKV), which also worked for the maintenance of the Afrikaans language and culture.<sup>83</sup>

In 1915 the *Akademie* compiled the first spelling rules which were published in 1917 in Die Afrikaanse woordelys en spelreels. The translation of the Bible in Afrikaans in 1933 was seen as one of the highlights in the publishing history of Afrikaans.<sup>84</sup>

The "second language movement" also aimed at making Afrikaans an official language in education, religion, media and government. Provincial councils decided in 1914 that Afrikaans could be taught up to Standard 6. During this year Afrikaans was also for the first time used at universities and colleges.<sup>85</sup> Although the church was at first very hesitant to acknowledge Afrikaans as a church language, by the year 1919 all four provincial synods of the Dutch Reformed

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid, no page numbering.

<sup>82</sup> Quoted by Scholtz G D, Die ontwikkeling van die politieke denke van die Afrikaner. Deel 7. 1924-1939, p64.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid, pp65-66.

<sup>84</sup> Du Plessis J H O, op cit, p346.

<sup>85</sup> I Hofmeyr, op cit, p22 and Du Plessis J H O, op cit, p335.

Church acknowledged Afrikaans as "kanseltaal" [preaching language], starting with the Orange Free State in 1916. This did not mean that Afrikaans instantly became the language of the church - it was left up to the individual church councils to decide. When a minister preached in Afrikaans it more than often led to outrage on the part of the congregation, eg it was one of the major factors that led to a big and bitter split in the Dutch Reformed Church of Graaff Reinett.<sup>86</sup>

With unification in 1910 Article 137 of the constitution guaranteed equal language rights for Dutch and English.<sup>87</sup> After a dramatic speech of Dr D F Malan in Parliament, Afrikaans became one of the two official languages of the Union on 8 May 1925.<sup>88</sup> Through these major efforts the language gained a higher status and became institutionalised.

The NP was launched in January 1914 after Hertzog and his followers walked out of the SAP congress in November 1913. Their most important policy points (and most important differences with the SAP) were South African self-sufficiency, dual-medium education and compulsory bilingualism in the public service. Hertzog, as a well-trained lawyer, was a respected member of the Afrikaner intelligentsia, and a founding member of the anti-imperialist *Orangia-Unie*. In the Transvaal Hertzog enjoyed the support of a group of young Pretoria lawyers who called themselves *Jong Suid-Afrika* [Young South Africa]. By the time he was appointed to Botha's cabinet, he was already known for his controversial efforts to establish dual-medium education in the Orange Free State and his successful campaign during the National Convention to achieve official equality for Dutch and English and a bilingual public service. Davenport labels Hertzog as "the leading representative of latent Afrikaner republican sentiment".<sup>89</sup>

The huge financial debts incurred by the 1914 rebels<sup>90</sup> led to a unique phenomenon in Afrikaner

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<sup>86</sup> Van der Walt P B, op cit, pp307-312.

<sup>87</sup> Du Plessis J H O, op cit, p332.

<sup>88</sup> See also Dr D F Malan's speech in parliament about this issue. Pienaar S W and Scholtz J J J (eds), Glo in u volk. Dr D F Malan as redenaar, 1908 - 1954, pp181-185 and Du Plessis J H O, op cit, p335.

<sup>89</sup> Davenport T R H, op cit, p174.

<sup>90</sup> In what is generally referred to as the Rebellion of 1914, a group of Afrikaners took up arms against the government to protest the Union's involvement in the First World War (see 3.2.2). The rebels were heavily fined by the courts. Their long absences from home and work (both during the rebellion and while they were in gaol) also had dire financial consequences. By far the most important financial impact of the rebellion, however, had to do with the fact that the rebels were

history, a phenomenon that is generally called the *Helpmekearbeweging*. The purpose of this "movement" was to collect money to pay the financial debt of the rebels. The movement eventually proved to be extremely successful. Not only was more than enough money collected, the movement was also heralded as a spontaneous nationalist cooperation and an expression of Afrikaner unity. By 1918 the movement was mentioned in the same breath as Blood River. Looking at Ehlers' 1986 study<sup>91</sup> of the "movement", it appears that this response by the Afrikaans-speaking community was not altogether spontaneous. According to Ehlers' account of the *Helpmekaar* movement it was not such a well-coordinated and national movement as the history books generally suggest. In the first place, Ehlers shows that there never actually was a *Helpmekaarvereniging*.<sup>92</sup> The *Helpmekaar* initially was anything but a spontaneous wave of nationalist solidarity - it started in fact as a few isolated and uncoordinated attempts to help the rebels. Initially it did not have the support of the majority of Afrikaans speakers and in some cases

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ill-prepared and ill-equipped for their struggle. They had virtually no weapons, ammunition, food and clothes and embarked on a system of "opkommandering" [conscription] - all supplies were simply demanded from shops and individuals, with the rebels signing receipts for everything taken. By the end of 1914 loyalists (citizens who did not take part in the rebellion) started claiming compensation for losses incurred at the hands of the rebels. Both direct and indirect compensation were claimed. All the above factors, but mainly the claims for direct and indirect compensation, led to a major financial crisis for the rebels: they were all in heavy debt.

<sup>91</sup> *Helpmekaar* has been strangely neglected by historians - and here the silence of Afrikaner nationalist historians is particularly conspicuous. When South African historians refer to *Helpmekaar*, they usually do not need more than a sentence to do so. There are only three accounts of the "movement", the "loflied aan die Helpmekaar en sy ondersteuners" [ode to the *Helpmekaar* and its supporters], written by Kestell in 1918, M C E van Schoor's *Die Vrystaatse Helpmekaar* (1960) and then the more recent and very detailed study by Ehlers. Although Ehlers mentions this silence in Afrikaner historiography, he never poses the question why this silence exists.

Ehlers A, *Die Helpmekearbeweging in Suid-Afrika: die storm- en drangjare*, pii.

<sup>92</sup> Ehlers eventually refers to the *Helpmekaar* almost in the same laudatory terms as Kestell, even though he himself relates stories that lead to exactly the opposite conclusion. See especially his conclusion (pp188-204). He ends his thesis by saying:

Die sukses van die Helpmekaar het Afrikaners in hul eie oë en in die oë van ander volke gerehabiliteer. Hulle het gevoel dat hulle weer 'n nuwe begin kon maak en hul plek met selfvertroue onder die ander volke kon inneem. Bowenal is hul versterk deur die wete dat God aan wie hulle hul sukses toegeskryf het, hul steeds as volk bygestaan het. (p204)  
[The success of Helpmekaar restored Afrikaners in their own eyes and in the eyes of other nations. They felt that they could make a new beginning and that they could confidently take their place among other nations. Ultimately they were encouraged to know that God to whom they ascribed their success, still helped them as a *volk*.]

Ehlers A, op cit, p204.

the organisation was actively opposed by Afrikaans speakers. It was only by the second half of 1917, two years after the inception of the various initiatives, that there was a national effort that did reach exceptional proportions.<sup>93</sup> It required tremendous efforts by the leaders: the skillful marketing and the very effective propaganda that went into this final campaign is a topic that merits a study on its own. Leaders in the various organisations, but especially Dr D F Malan of Die Burger, vigorously propagated both the *Helpmekaar* day and the 100 pound campaign to the public and the results, especially in the case of the 100 pound campaign, was astonishing. Malan skillfully played on the slumbering ethnic sentiments of his constituency ("Niemand die zich Afrikaner noemt, mag achter blijven"/No one who calls himself an Afrikaner can stay behind<sup>94</sup>), he called on people to contribute if they called themselves Christians<sup>95</sup> and he encouraged competitive contributions from organisations, individuals, districts and provinces<sup>96</sup>. Significantly, the final effort also enjoyed the unconditional support of the Dutch Reformed Church and the

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<sup>93</sup> This final effort consisted firstly of a £100 campaign started by J E de Villiers who pledged the amount of £500 to the movement if 500 other individuals each contributed £100. The second part of the final effort was to establish 10 November 1917 as "Helpmekaardag" [*Helpmekaar* day], the aim of which was "om deur middel van 'n gelijktijdige en eenparige optreding deur die ganse land 'n reuse volkspoging te maak om 'n nekslag te gee aan die enorme skuld die nog, in die vorm van direkte rebelle-eise, als 'n steen aan die hals van vele van ons landgenote in die Vrijstaat hang" [by way of simultaneous and unified action, to launch a major, nation-wide campaign and eventually deliver the death-blow to the enormous debt of rebel claims that weighs like a stone around the neck of many of our compatriots in the Free State].

Ehlers A, op cit, p123.

<sup>94</sup> Editorial De Burger, 24 August 1917, quoted by Ehlers A, op cit, p126.

<sup>95</sup> Loc cit.

<sup>96</sup> Ehlers A, op cit, p137.

As example of this competitive spirit, Ehlers quotes R T van der Merwe in a letter to Mrs Paul Roux:

Ik seg nog niks maar die Kaap Provinsie moet nie te gerus word nie een van die dage sal die OVS lys eers regtig losbreek en sal ons probeer om die arme Transvaal met 'n enkele distrik te klop.

[I don't say anything, but the Cape Province shouldn't be too complacent - one of these days the OFS will really cut loose and with a single district we'll try to beat the poor Transvaal.]

It is interesting that the Transvaal was far behind the Cape province and the Orange Free State in the provincial competition.

See ibid, p143.

National Party and was positively reported in the Dutch Afrikaans press.<sup>97</sup> After the success of the campaign the movement was proclaimed as an Afrikaner victory in the tradition of Blood River.

It was in the wake of the *Helpmekaar* success that the **Afrikaner Broederbond** was launched.<sup>98</sup> The official launch took place on 5 June 1918 in Malvern<sup>99</sup>, a suburb of Johannesburg, and according to the official minutes of the first meeting the main object of the new organisation was the "bringing together of Afrikaners who are at present spread over the whole of South Africa and are largely opposed to each other, without the least cohesive power".<sup>100</sup> Despite the success of *Helpmekaar*, the time was evidently still regarded as a time of crisis for the Afrikaner. At the second meeting held on 18 June 1918 and attended by 27 men, the name *Afrikaner Broederbond* was adopted and some of the aims were formulated. Above all the aim, as indicated by the name of the organisation, was to foster a bond of brotherhood between Afrikaners.<sup>101</sup> O'Meara, who described the Broederbond as "the self-chosen elite of 'Afrikanerdom'" with membership restricted to "financially sound, white Afrikaans-speaking, Protestant males over 25 years old",<sup>102</sup> identifies three major areas in which the Broederbond worked: the ideological redefinition of Afrikanerdom and Afrikaner nationalism; the organisation of Afrikaner workers into ethnic trade unions; and the establishment and promotion of Afrikaner business interests.

These organisations were in many ways supported by an Afrikaans press that was becoming an important force in South African politics. Also, very often it was office bearers of the Dutch Reformed church that played leading roles in the different projects of the Afrikaner petty

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<sup>97</sup> Ehlers A, op cit, pp128-129.

<sup>98</sup> O'Meara D, op cit, p59.

<sup>99</sup> Serfontein J H P, Brotherhood of power, pp31-32.

<sup>100</sup> Serfontein J H P, op cit, p32.

<sup>101</sup> These aims will all be reflected in the discourse of Die Boerevrou, with the difference that Malherbe concentrated on creating a bond of "sisterhood" among women.

<sup>102</sup> O'Meara D, op cit.

It is interesting that in discussing these areas, O'Meara concentrates on the petty bourgeoisie nature of the bond but does not discuss the requirement that all members should be male. While hammering on the fact that there were few members that were workers, he never comments on the fact that women were explicitly excluded from the AB. Neither Pelzer nor Serfontein comment on women's exclusion from the AB and there are no discussions of the AB's women policy or the absence thereof in either the work of Serfontein and Pelzer.

bourgeoisie. This meant that this powerful church gradually also came to put its weight behind the new Afrikaner nationalist struggle.

We can thus say that by 1920 it was possible to discern specific articulations of an Afrikaner nationalist discourse. This discourse was articulated by several different institutions and organisations. However, from the discussion above it should be clear that the development of this discourse was by no means a natural or smooth process. It was a process that at first was haphazard and unstable. The origins of the Afrikaner nationalist discourse cannot be found in the natural feelings of some kind of natural community, but should rather be seen in the context of certain political and social developments and as being orchestrated and constructed by a small section of the population, the petty bourgeoisie and the intellectuals.

### 3.2 Issues of/in the ethnic discourse of Afrikaner nationalism

#### 3.2.1 Some characteristics of the discourse

Before embarking on a short discussion of some of the main issues that were addressed and generated within the Afrikaner nationalist discourse of 1915 we need to deal briefly with the nature of the discourse itself. The discourse displayed all the distinguishing features of a nationalist discourse. As examples some of the *Helpmekaar* and AB texts are particularly suggestive:

Daar ontstaan iets in die volkshart in 1915. Dis 'n gees, wat vir elkeen in sij mag krijg. Niemand het hem geskep; niemand kon hem teehou. Niemand het hem verwag; niemand het voorspel dat hij sou kom. Maar hij het gekom. Hij het ons volk oorweldig soals niks anders dit nog gedaan het. Dis 'n magtige stroom wat bruis oor die hele land. Ons gee aan hem 'n naam: hij is die *Helpmekaar*.<sup>103</sup>

Dis mij eie volk wat in die nood is. Dis been van mij been, en bloed van mij bloed!  
En die hart kloep sneller!  
lets pak die volk beet. 'n Grote geesdrif bruis in die binnenste. Soos 'n geweldige golf staat hij oor Suid-Afrika. Die nasie voel. Die nasie leef. Dis een gedagte wat vir duisende in besit neem.  
Dis die *Helpmekaar*!<sup>104</sup>

Ons staan op die rotsplante van 'n berg, waarlangs ons opgeklim het met angs, en arbeid en stryd.  
'n Swarte diepte lê agter ons.

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<sup>103</sup> Kestell J D, Die Helpmekaar-gedenkboek, p5.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid, p11.

En daar voor ons glooi die heuwels en die dale - en daar grijns ook die dieptes van donkere afgronde.

Maar die lig van 'n nuwe dag lê op die nuwe wêreld.

Dis die lig van die son van hoop en geloofsvertroue wat in die ooste rijs.<sup>105</sup>

[In 1915 there arose something in the heart of the *volk*. It is a spirit that possessed everyone. No one created it; no one could oppose it. No one expected it; no one could predict that it would come. But it came. It possessed our *volk* as nothing had ever possessed us. It is a mighty stream that invigorates the whole nation. We give it a name: it is *Helpmekaar*.

It is my own *volk* who are in need. They are bone of my bone, blood of my blood!

The heart beats faster!

Something possesses the *volk*! A great enthusiasm surges in the heart. Like a giant wave it rises over South Africa. The nation feels. The nation lives. One ideal possesses thousands.

This is *Helpmekaar*!

We stand on a rocky ridge which we ascended in fear, with struggle and strenuous work.

A deep darkness is behind us.

Ahead of us the hills and valleys gently slope - and treacherous precipices bare their ugly teeth.

But the light of a new day rests on a new world.

It is the light of the sun of hope and confidence and faith rising in the east.]

These three passages represent the nationalist self-understanding of the *Helpmekaar* initiative and more generally indicate how nationalist ideologues portrayed Afrikaner nationalism, the nation and nationalist initiatives. Nationalism is portrayed as an ahistorical and natural force ("Dis 'n gees, wat vir elkeen in sij mag krijg. Niemand het hem geskep; niemand kon hem teehou."/It is a spirit that possessed everyone. No one created it; no one could oppose it). The bonds between members of the nation are "natural" bonds and therefore unchosen ("Dis been van mij been, en bloed van mij bloed!"/They are bone of my bone, blood of my blood). Therefore, members of the nation are loyal to and supportive of each other; they are emotionally bound by what Anderson called "political love" ("En die hart kloep sneller! lets pak die volk beet. 'n Grote geesdrif bruis in die binnenste."/The heart beats faster! Something possesses the *volk*! A great enthusiasm surges in the heart.)

The same kind of formulations were earlier used by D F Malan in Die Burger, the nationalist newspaper based in Cape Town, when writing about the *Helpmekaar* campaign:

Het beteken die **verhoging van ons nasionaal selfrespekt**, de heling van ons **gebroken volkshart** en de **geboorte van een nuwe geest**. Het kan ook beteken de schepping van een atmosfeer waarin de **hereniging van ons volk** niet alleen mogelijk maar ook onvermijdelijk zal zijn...Het **verantwoordelike gevoel** van ons volk voor ieder deel daarvan is ontzagelijk versterkt geworden. Onze **volksliefde** en onze **bereidheid tot zelfopoffering** in

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<sup>105</sup> ibid, p41.

de dienst en tot heil van ons volk is ontzaglik toegenomen.<sup>106</sup>

[This **raises our national self-respect**, it heals the **broken heart** of our *volk* and it **gives birth to a new spirit**. It can also create an atmosphere where the **reunification of our volk** is not only possible, but also inevitable...the **responsibility** that our *volk* feel for one another has been bolstered immensely. Our **love of our nation** and our **willingness to self-sacrifice** in the service and in the well-being of our *volk* has increased tremendously.]

Significant in this passage is the recognition of the constitutive role of ethnic mobilisation along with a pretense that a united nation existed before. Also interesting are the highly moralistic words used to describe the feelings Afrikaners should have for the volk: responsibility, love and willingness to sacrifice. One cannot but remember Anderson's remark, "...it is useful to remind ourselves that nations inspire love and often profoundly self-sacrificing love".<sup>107</sup>

The first constitution of the AB included the following formulations:

The welding together of Afrikaners...Differences of opinion about national problems must be removed and a healthy progressive society and uniformity of purpose must be achieved...The interests of Afrikaners must always be served...To carry the Afrikaner volk towards its sense of identity, to inspire selfrespect and to encourage and cultivate love for his language, history, land, volk and law...Pure original South African culture and art must be promoted in every regard...The society must be purified with the maintenance of its old pure morals and characteristics, such as hospitality, democratic conviviality, and readiness and generosity to stand by each other in bitterness or need...We build our future on the Rock of Christ.<sup>108</sup> (Serfontein's translation.)

In this passage the invention of the nation as a traditional community is obvious. The kind of Afrikaner community that is referred to here (one with "old pure morals and characteristics") is imagined or invented - it never did exist before 1918. The paradox of the AB was that its whole existence and all its reasons for existing (promoting and inspiring Afrikanerdom) deny the postulated "naturalness" and "spontaneity" of Afrikanerdom. In the above document words such as "welding", "inspire", "cultivate" and "promoted" overtly suggest the constructed nature of Afrikanerdom which the AB itself so strongly denied.

Before looking at some of the main issues that were generated and addressed within the discourse, it is necessary to note that these nationalist concerns and expressions should not be taken at face value but should be understood in context. Attention will only be paid to the issues

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<sup>106</sup> Editorial in Die Burger of 3 November 1917, quoted by Ehlers A, op cit, p138.

<sup>107</sup> Anderson B, op cit, p129.

<sup>108</sup> Serfontein J H P, op cit, p32.

of particular relevance to the *volksmoeder* discourse. Very important issues such as the struggle for political power, the religious justification for Afrikaner nationalism and the accumulation of capital will not be discussed as they were not directly relevant to the *volksmoeder* discourse.

### 3.2.2 Ethnic divisions and the ideal of ethnic unity

Although the new nationalist discourse was constructed around the theme of ethnic unity, the Afrikaner community (if one could call it that) was riddled with deep and bitter divisions. This is clear from the following 1968 formulations of Henning Klopper, the first chairman of the executive of the AB and (later) Speaker of the South African Parliament, when he addressed the jubilee festival of the Broederbond and described the time in which the Broederbond was created:

The years 1914 to 1917, culminating in the establishment of the Broederbond in 1918, were years of struggle for the Afrikaner, years of dissension, years of scattering (*verstrooiing*), years of frustration. This was the decade after the English war in which we were destroyed. But we felt that we could not remain lying down; by the grace of God we had to stand up.<sup>108</sup> (Serfontein's translation.)

This period was consistently perceived by the nationalist leaders to be a time marked by division and disunity. The most serious division that had to be addressed was the increasing class division. As indicated earlier, the different classes of Afrikaner commercial farmers, workers and petty bourgeoisie each seriously defended their conflicting interests. To unite these different classes in ethnic terms it was necessary to assimilate their interests in the Afrikaner nationalist discourse.

The division amongst Afrikaners also found expression in party-political terms with Hertzog's breakaway from the SAP and the launching of the NP in 1914. Two major efforts to unite the two parties failed. The first effort was a congress that took place in June 1919 in Somerset-East and the second a congress in September 1920 in Bloemfontein. Neither of the congresses succeeded in solving the party-political division of Afrikanerdom.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Serfontein H, op cit, pp30-31.

Also in the "official" history of the AB, published in 1979, A N Pelzer writes that the AB was born "uit die dringende nood van 'n volk wat op die drumpel van ondergang gestaan het" [out of the urgent need of a *volk* on the threshold of destruction]. He says that the rebellion and its consequences led to a reality that was more somber than that of 31 May 1902.

Pelzer A N, Die Afrikaner-Broederbond: Eerste 50 jaar, pp4 and 7.

<sup>110</sup> Scholtz G D, op cit, pp355 and 365.

The Rebellion of 1914 was another clear manifestation of the political split amongst Afrikaners. When, in September 1914, the Union government under Botha and Smuts decided, in response to a request from the British Imperial government, to invade German South West Africa, they met with strong resistance from fellow Afrikaners who little more than a decade before had fought the Empire. While Hertzog denied that South Africa was legally obliged to take part in the war, other Afrikaans leaders such as Generals C F Beyers, J H de la Rey and Christiaan de Wet were even more aggressive in their opposition to the war and eventually took up arms. Botha declared *krygswet* [martial law] and conscripted only Afrikaners to stop the rebellion. The word "rebellion" perhaps suggests a level of organisation that did not exist - there was very little planning or strategising. The relative small number of "rebels" (according to Van Jaarsveld there were 7 000 from the Orange Free State, 3 000 from the Transvaal and 2 000 from the Cape province) also indicates that the importance of the rebellion did not so much lie in the numerical strength of the resistance, but rather in the political division it would express.<sup>111</sup> While organisations such as the NP and the Dutch Reformed Church never openly supported the rebellion itself, they later supported the rebels when they were awaiting sentences and deeply in debt. The rebellion, which became the symbol of that which divided Afrikanerdom, ironically also was used as a major issue around which to mobilise a new Afrikaner nationalist sense of community.

### 3.2.3 Afrikaner poverty: "the poor white problem"

In the context of uneven development and the social disruption caused by rapid industrialisation, urbanisation and war, poverty became an endemic feature of South Africa at the beginning of the century and a problem that pervaded all sectors of South African society (black and white,

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<sup>111</sup> The bitter division caused by the rebellion is illustrated very well by the effect it had on the largest of the Afrikaans churches, the Dutch Reformed Churches. Van der Watt describes some of the many local conflicts between members of the same church and the same congregations. In some congregations members were disciplined for taking part in the Rebellion while in other congregations members were disciplined for fighting in the state forces. Because a new schism threatened a special conference was called in January 1915. The conference itself was deeply divided and took quite a while to decide on what the view of the church was on rebellion. Even after a long discussion and a watered-down motion that in some circumstances it is justified to rebel, the vote was still 49-22 against rebellion. Van der Watt P B, Die Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk, 1834-1866. Deel twee, pp343-347.

Even with all this activity, the church could not prevent two of its congregations to split. In Vinburg the pro-rebellion people started their own congregation called "Rietfontein" and in Potchefstroom the anti-rebellion people started a congregation called "Moorivier". At both these places there were thus two congregations in one area

- \* In 1923 another congress was held, this time in Bloemfontein, under the chairmanship of the Rev P van Heerden, moderator of the Dutch Reformed Church of the Orange Free State.

By 1920 Afrikaner poverty in the form of the "poor white" was regarded as a major problem in nationalist circles and as such it became a central theme within the Afrikaner nationalist discourse. Poverty was perceived to be affecting Afrikaners specifically and reference was often made to the fact that a large number of Transvaal Afrikaners could be labeled as "poor whites".<sup>114</sup>

The most important and most comprehensive investigations into the so-called "poor white problem" were undertaken by the Carnegie Commission, their findings being published in five volumes in 1932. In 1972 Dian Joubert remarked that this still was the most comprehensive social-scientific research project ever to have been completed in South Africa. Joubert also comments on the fact that the project not only resulted in an incredible documentation of the lives of almost 400 000 white people, it was also a documentation of "geleerdes se spontane en onselfsugtige betrokke-raak in die rehabilitasie van hul volksgenote" [a spontaneous and unselfish involvement of the learned in the rehabilitation of the members of their *volk*].<sup>115</sup> This remark refers to the role of intellectuals in the ethnicisation of poverty: their concern with poverty was not general, but rather with the poverty of a specific ethnic group.

The problem of poverty was popularised by Afrikaner intellectuals in a variety of ways as the Afrikaner public was encouraged to take up the issue. In August 1924, for example, the Rev M L Fick presented the government with a petition with 60 000 signatures, asking them to do

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<sup>114</sup> The Rev Fick claimed that most of the 100 000 (his estimate) poor whites in South Africa were Afrikaners and of those 30 000 lived in the Transvaal. Die Boerevrou, June 1920, p5.

Grosskopf stated in the Carnegie report of 1931 that the so-called "poor whites" were mostly Dutch-speaking.

Grosskopf J F W, The poor white problem in South Africa. Report of the Carnegie Commission. Part 1. Economic report: Rural impoverishment and rural exodus, p44.

It was calculated that in 1910 the per capita income of English-speaking South Africans was three times as high as that of Afrikaans-speakers.

Giliomee H and Adam H, Afrikanermag: opkoms en toekoms, p81.

<sup>115</sup> Joubert D, Toe witmense nog arm was. Uit die Carnegie-verslag 1932, p2.

something about the poor white problem.<sup>116</sup> Family magazines carried numerous articles about poverty<sup>117</sup>, while women's organisations<sup>118</sup>, the church<sup>119</sup> and political parties also paid a lot of attention to the problem.

The sustained concern with ethnic poverty in the nationalist discourse had various functions. In

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<sup>116</sup> In an article about this petition he claimed that there were "160 000 hulpelose arm manne, vroue en kinders wat nie op die been sal kom as hulle nie by die hand gevat word nie...Dis 'n abnormale toestand in ons land" [160 000 helpless poor men, women and children who cannot cope unless they are taken by the hand...This is an abnormal situation in our country.]

He said that the fact that 11% of the population consisted of poor people was abnormal: not more than 3% of the population should be poor.

Scholtz G D, *op cit*, pp191-192.

<sup>117</sup> See for example Fick M L, "De opheffing onzer armen" [The upliftment of our poor] in *Die Boerevrou*, June 1920, p4 and Leipoldt C L, "Armoede als patalogiese verskynsel" [Poverty as pathological phenomenon] in *Die Brandwag*, 25 April 1920, p113. *Die Boerevrou* received many letters from readers on the topic of poverty and specifically the "poor whites". See for instance the letter of P J Uys on poverty on the diggings in *Die Boerevrou*, May 1923 and the letter of Johanna Botha about the poor children of the *volk* in *Die Boerevrou*, August 1923.

<sup>118</sup> For instance, the *Suid-Afrikaans Vrouefederasie* (SAVF) embarked on a major project to help the poor on the diggings. In June 1931 they announced in *Die Boerevrou* that in future a special diggings commission would be responsible for collecting food and clothes. The SAVF estimated that there were about 2 000 people on the diggings who were extremely needy. Mrs Nicol of the SAVF wrote:

Hoe kan ons heerlik die warmte en ete geniet in ons huise nou in die koue winter, as ons dink dat hier naby ons vergaan arme vroue en kinders by duisende van ellende...Dis mos baie aaklig om te dink aan die duisende van ons arm medemense wat daar in die bitter koue nou so swaar ly. Dikwels honger en byna nie gekleed nie. Die huisies wat vir die koue wind en stof so goed as niks is nie. Daar word moeder en kind aan die ongenadige elemente blootgestel...As ons almal saam trek en elkeen sy klein deeltjie doen, dan sal die saak lank nie so onoplosbaar wees nie.

[How can we in this cold winter enjoy our food in the warmth of our homes, if we consider the thousands of wretched women and children who perish on our very doorsteps...It is horrible to consider how thousands of our fellow human beings must suffer in this raw winter. Frequently hungry and barely clothed. Dwellings that offer almost no protection against the cold and dust. Mothers and children are exposed to the merciless elements...If we all work together, and everyone does his part, this matter will be much closer to a solution.]

*Die Boerevrou*, June 1931, pp42 and 44.

<sup>119</sup> See for instance the publication of the Dutch Reformed Church, published in 1948, entitled Kerk en Stad. Verslag van die kommissie van ondersoek van die Gereformeerde N G Kerke na kerklike en godsdienstige toestande in die nege stede van die Unie van Suid-Afrika.

one sense the issue of poverty was addressed in order to improve the socioeconomic position of the Afrikaner nation as a whole. The more material resources (such as capital and land) the "nation" could accumulate the greater its potential for power in the rapidly developing South African society would be. In another sense, addressing the problem of poverty in these ethnic terms was a way of assimilating the interests of the Afrikaner working class (employment and a living wage) to the interests of the petty bourgeoisie without acknowledging those interests in class terms.

#### 3.2.4 The concern about the reproduction of the nation

The attitude towards population growth and birth control (contraception and abortion) in South Africa has to be seen against the backdrop of a world-wide concern with a decline in birth rates. In a world that had just experienced the biggest war in its history, a world which was characterised by nationalist struggles and by competition between the major imperialist forces, population growth had become a major issue.

Davin describes how, in England at the beginning of the century, a numerous population was regarded as being a national resource.<sup>120</sup> The birth rate was a matter of national importance: population was power.<sup>121</sup> Davin merely speculates about this new attitude: she links it to a more general anxiety about national deterioration at a time that Britain was economically threatened by America and Germany, with Japan also becoming a major imperial force.<sup>122</sup>

In the United States of America President Theodore Roosevelt in 1906 called the falling birth rate among American whites "race suicide". Roosevelt severely criticised white women who engaged in "willful sterility - the one sin for which the penalty is national death, race suicide".<sup>123</sup>

In 1920 the French government instituted medals for mothers (bronze for five, silver for eight, and gold for ten children) and penalties for abortion were increased. Large families received allowances, mothers who nursed received premiums and subsidies were granted to mothers who

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<sup>120</sup> Davin A, "Imperialism and motherhood" in History Workshop Journal, Issue 5, Spring 1978, p9.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid, p10.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid, p49.

<sup>123</sup> Davis A, Women, race and class, p209.

did not work outside the home. In Stalinist Russia mothers were also rewarded and birth control was made almost impossible.<sup>124</sup>

With the advent of national-socialism in Germany, the world witnessed the launch of an extraordinary (and perhaps the most comprehensive ever in the modern world) drive to increase the birth rate. Koonz describes this drive:

For each child born to a couple in the Marriage Loan Program<sup>125</sup>, the government reduced the principal by 25%.

Income tax deductions were increased so that the parents could deduct 15% per child off their gross income from taxable income, and parents of six children paid no personal income tax at all. The term "dependent" was redefined to include children up to 25 years of age...Women who bore their fifth child could choose to make a nationally prominent man the godfather of that baby<sup>126</sup>...Mother's day was changed to Hitler's mother's birthday and made a national holiday. Finally, motherhood medals were introduced (bronze for five children, silver for six, and gold for seven). Whenever a member of the Hitler Youth met a decorated mother (with her award worn neatly on a blue ribbon at her neck), he had to snap to attention with a brisk "Heil Hitler!" Material and psychological incentives were reinforced by coercive policies. Birth control was outlawed...Arrests and convictions of people performing or aiding abortion doubled, and punishments became more severe.<sup>127</sup>

Although it was never explicitly stated, it seems that Afrikaner nationalist concern with population figures was due to two major factors: the many people that died during the South African War and the drop in fertility rates of Afrikaans women in comparison of those of other ethnic and race groups. If Smuts' calculation that there were 200 000 Boers living in the two republics before the war was correct, more than 10% of them (27 927) died in concentration camps during the South African War.<sup>128</sup> The Director of Census, C W Cousins, after comparing the growth of the white population between 1911 and 1921 with the growth of the African population in the same period, warned:

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<sup>124</sup> Koonz C, Mothers in the fatherland. Women, the family and Nazi politics, p149.

<sup>125</sup> Shortly after taking power, Hitler introduced a marriage incentive program that offered government grants to newlyweds of DM 1 000. To qualify couples had to meet two requirements: the wife could not work outside the home and the families of both partners had to be certified "Jew free" for two generations.

<sup>126</sup> This plan was suspended, however, when Hindenburg outran Hitler as chosen godfather!

<sup>127</sup> Koonz C, op cit, pp185-186.

<sup>128</sup> Spies S B, "Women and the war" in Warwick P (ed), The South African War, p170.

It will require very little calculation to show that if the white race is to hold its own in South Africa it will be necessary to secure an immense development of white civilization during the next 50 years or, perhaps, only the next 25 years. This comparatively short period may and in all probability will, decide once and for all the issue upon which speculation has turned - whether the white race is to have any part in the ultimate development of South Africa, or whether it is to be entirely outnumbered and crowded out by the aboriginal population.<sup>129</sup>

Government censuses did not provide separate figures for different language groups before 1926. From figures quoted by Prinsloo it is clear that white South Africans did make use of some kind of birth control in the period 1911 to 1935. While there is a drop in the number of births per 1 000 white people, there is an increase in the number of marriages per 1 000 white people. Prinsloo concluded that as the falling birth rate could not be ascribed to a falling marriage rate, it had to be ascribed to the fact that there was a drop in the fertility of marriages.<sup>130</sup>

The census of 1926 was the first to take cognizance of the home languages of the population. According to this census 56% of all the whites in South Africa were Afrikaans-speaking. The publication of this figure led to the following comment in Die Volksblad:

Die wetenskap dat ons as Afrikaners 'n volk van een miljoen siele is, behoort ons 'n riem onder die hart te steek en 'n waarborg te wees dat daar nog 'n skone toekoms ons weggeleë is...<sup>131</sup>

After 1930 the concern with the decline in birth rates became much more prominent. In many Calvinist publications the issue was discussed in much detail.<sup>132</sup> Van der Merwe showed how, from 1930 onwards, almost all the Afrikaans churches voiced their objection to birth control in

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<sup>129</sup> Quoted by Scholtz G D, Die ontwikkeling van die politieke denke van die Afrikaner. Deel 6. 1910-1924, p433.

<sup>130</sup> Prinsloo M J M, Blanke vroue-arbeid in die Unie van Suid-Afrika.

<sup>131</sup> Quoted by Scholtz G D, Die ontwikkeling van die politieke denke van die Afrikaner. Deel 7. 1924-1939, p15.

<sup>132</sup> For different Calvinist views about birth control see Cloete G N P, "Die posisie van die vrou" in Stoker H G and Potgieter F J M (eds), Koers in die krisis 1, p219; Kramer R, "De Christen-arts" in ibid, pp228-230; Honig C J, "Huwelyk, geboortebepערking, sterilisatie" in Stoker H G and Vorster J D (eds), Koers in die krisis 3, pp109-128. These views were published in 1935 and 1941 respectively. Totius, Die Kerkblad, 2 March 1932 (reproduced in D'Assonville V E, Totius. Versamelde werke 7. Die staat, maatskappy, taal en kultuur, p319).

some way.<sup>133</sup> In the 1940s Afrikaner nationalist concern with dropping birth rates culminated in the official family policy of the Ossewa-Brandwag<sup>134</sup> and the 1944 publication of a book entitled Die selfmoord van 'n nasie.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> The Dutch Reformed Church of South Africa (Cape) in 1940 condemned birth control, and especially the use of contraceptives, as "'n sedelike en geestelike ondermyning van ons volkslewe". At the same time the minister of "volksgesondheid" was requested to ban the trade in contraceptives by law.

Van der Merwe A, Die huwelik. 'n Histories-sosiologiese studie van die huwelik as instelling met besondere verwysing na Suid-Afrikaanse ontwikkelinge, pp180-181.

In Kerk en Stad (published by the Dutch Reformed Church in 1945) the writers do not give any religious grounds for their concern about birth control. Their reasons for opposing birth control are wholly social and political.

Albertyn J R, Du Toit P and Theron H S, Kerk en stad. Verslag van die kommissie van ondersoek van die Gereformeerde N G Kerke na kerklike en godsdienstige toestande in die nege stede van die Unie van Suid-Afrika, pp224-229.

As early as 1931 the Orange Free State Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church condemned birth control on religious, practical and social grounds. The synod urged people to regard children as a blessing of God and as an asset for "land en volk" [country and *volk*]. Abortion (in and out of matrimony!) was regarded as murder.

Van der Merwe A, op cit, p181.

The Nederduitse Hervormde or Gereformeerde Kerk of South Africa expressed its disapproval of birth control in 1931. At later meetings (1934, 1944 and 1951) this disapproval was reiterated with more specific measures eg trying to stop the advertising of contraceptives and highlighting the fate of other "volke wat reeds hierdeur te gronde gegaan het".

Loc cit.

The Gereformeerde Kerk of South Africa warned in 1933 against neo-Malthusian principles and practices of birth control and the use of contraceptives.

Ibid, p182.

<sup>134</sup> This policy, which was outlined in a 1942-pamphlet entitled Gesonde huisgesinne bou 'n lewenskragtige volk! Amptelike gesinsbeleid van die Ossewa-Brandwag, strongly resembled the family policy of the Nazis in Germany. In the pamphlet the following three state measures concerning birth control were recommended:

- \* A system of interest-free marriage loans;
- \* free maternity care and free medical care during a child's first year; and
- \* a system state of allowances for children.

Ossewa-Brandwag, Gesonde huisgesinne bou 'n lewenskragtige volk! Amptelike gesinsbeleid van die Ossewa-Brandwag, pp16-19.

<sup>135</sup> Van Ryssen J, Kruger J H and De Klerk B J, Die selfmoord van 'n nasie. Cape Town, HAUM 1944.

In a report brought published by the Dutch Reformed Church in 1945, the number of infants christened in the church is taken as an indication of the birth rates of Afrikaans speakers - the first census to distinguish between white language groups was the one of 1926. Between 1893 and 1897 there was an average of 49 infants per 1 000 "souls" christened. Between 1903 and 1907 the same figure was 46, while between 1913 and 1917 it had dropped to 39.<sup>136</sup>

### 3.2.5 The health of the nation

In any nationalist project the leaders (usually the petty bourgeoisie or intellectuals) firstly have to ensure that they have a nation - they thus encourage reproduction. The people of the nation, however, also have to be healthy and educated to be valuable assets for the nation. It is of no consequence if the population is numerous, but sick and illiterate and uneducated.<sup>137</sup> In Afrikanerdom, just as in many of the other nations of the world at the time, "the health of the nation" became associated with "the wealth of the nation".<sup>138</sup> Healthy people were required not merely for the maintenance of the nation, but also to provide the nation with a stable workforce.<sup>139</sup>

Not surprisingly then, another major concern of Afrikaner leaders was the health conditions of Afrikaners. Dr W A Murray's Health factors in the poor white problem, Part 4 of the 1932 Carnegie report, provides a comprehensive account of health problems of the time and one can deduce that the main concerns were infant mortality rates, malnutrition, bad housing conditions

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<sup>136</sup> Albertyn J R, Du Toit P and Theron H S, op cit, p225.

<sup>137</sup> This principle would later be articulated more explicitly by the Ossewa Brandwag when they discussed the functions of the household. They stated that the biological function of the household "kom neer op stelselmatige voortplanting van die volk (dit wil se kwalitatief en kwantitatief). Daar moet met ander woorde nie alleen genoeg kinders in die wereld gebring word nie, maar ook wel gesonde kinders" [implies a systematic procreation of the nation (that means qualitatively and quantitatively). In other words, not only should enough children be born, but also healthy children.]

Ossewa Brandwag, Gesonde huisgesinne bou 'n lewenskragtige volk! Amptelike gesinsbeleid van die Ossewa Brandwag, p4.

<sup>138</sup> Davin A, op cit, p49.

<sup>139</sup> Loc cit.

and the shortage of medical services.<sup>140</sup> Like poverty, the health problem was popularised and ethnicised<sup>141</sup> and the term *volksgesondheid* [health of the *volk*] was coined by such popular publications as Die Huisgenoot,<sup>142</sup> which carried regular articles about *volksgesondheid*.

A standard example of such an article is the editorial, entitled "Volksgesondheid" in Die Huisgenoot of June 1919. This editorial seriously called for state involvement in health issues and child care:

Met die vraagstuk van die volksgesondheid is ons hele huidige sosiale orde gemoeid... Ons sien dat die vraagstuk van die volksgesondheid ons hele sosiale orde aantast en in opspraak bring... Elke kind van die staat... behoort in staat gestel te word om te lewe volgens voorskrifte wat hij op skool ontvang... Vir die mielieboer word van staatswee deskundiges opgelei om die mielie-oes te behartig. Vir brandsiekte onder skape word 'n boer swaar bestraf. Die staat is dan nie met privaat inisiatiewe tevrede nie; maar waar dit die gesondheid van dieselfde boer se kinders betref, is daar, so te se, geen toesig nie...<sup>143</sup>  
[The matter of national health impacts upon our whole present social order... We see the matter of national health affecting and upsetting our whole social order... Every child in the state... should be enabled to follow the instructions he receives at school... The state trains experts to help the maize farmer manage his crop. If there is scab in a farmer's flock, he is severely penalised. Here the state will not be satisfied by private initiatives, but when it concerns the health of the same farmer's children, there is almost no supervision...]

In the same year Die Brandwag asked for child welfare legislation. The request was motivated by arguing that child welfare was very important for the future of the nation. The following guidelines were suggested:

Die standerds (standaarde?) waarna gesoek word, moet bereken wees om alle kinders van die nasie 'n goeie kans te gee in die lewe, van voor die geboorte af, tot hul agtiende jaar, sodat die maatskappij verseker kan wees daarvan dat die komende geslag gesond sal wees, opgevoed word om nuttige werk te verrig, en bekwaam om op hul beurt die vaders

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<sup>140</sup> See Murray W A, The poor white problem in South Africa. Report of the Carnegie Commission. Part 4. Health report: Health factors in the poor white problem.

<sup>141</sup> This connection between "the health of the nation" and "the wealth of the nation" was also made in England at about this time. Davin points out that although the connection is now generally accepted, **when** the connection emerged for the first time and **how** (ie its particular focus and its limitations) it emerged is very significant. Davin A, op cit, p49.

<sup>142</sup> The issues of child care and health were also taken up by Die Brandwag. See for example Die Brandwag, 24 December 1919, pp229-230.

<sup>143</sup> Die Huisgenoot, June 1919, p30.

en die moeders te word van toekomstige geslagte.<sup>144</sup>

[The standards we need, should be designed to provide all the nation's children with a fair chance in life, from before their birth till age eighteen, in order to ensure a healthy next generation, people who can be educated for useful work, competent to be the fathers and mothers of future generations.]

We see then that Afrikaner intellectuals regarded health as a very importance resource of the nation: the issue of health was ethnicised and addressed within the context of Afrikaner nationalism.

### 3.2.6 "Boor idleness" and black labour

Many different sources from the late 19th century and early 20th century concur that the Boers as a group were not particularly hard-working or industrious. Increasingly, "Boor idleness" was identified as a social problem. Cachet, in his very sympathetic and pro-Boer history of the Afrikaner in Transvaal wrote:

Arbeidsaam, in de Hollandsche beteekenis van het woord, zijn de Boeren kwalik...Ongetwijfeld zou er meer land onder den ploeg gebracht, meer "geld gemaakt", doch de Transvaler zegt: cui bono? en neemt den arbeid wat gemakkelijk. Eigenaar van het grond, waarop hij woont; niet gedrukte door zware lasten, en met niet vele persoonlijke behoeften, kan hij die ook doen, zonder schade voor hem zelve of, eigenlijk, van iemand anders.<sup>145</sup>

[Industrious, in the Dutch sense of the word, the Boers can scarcely be called...More land could be tilled, more money made, but the Transvaler says: "For whose benefit?" and passes up the hard work. Owning the land on which he lives, unburdened by heavy demands, and without many personal needs, he can afford to do this, without it being to either his or anyone else's detriment.]

This perceived lack of industriousness was, of course, rooted in the pre-industrial subsistence economy of an agrarian society. It is in the context of industrial development and its associated work ethic that it comes to be regarded as a major social problem. By the beginning of the century many leaders and social observers expressed their concern with what J M Coetzee called the "idleness" of the Afrikaners.<sup>146</sup>

The concern with "idleness" in South Africa was of course nothing new. In a larger context the

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<sup>144</sup> Die Brandwag, 24 December 1919, pp229-230.

<sup>145</sup> Cachet F L, op cit, p418.

<sup>146</sup> Coetzee J M, "Idleness in South Africa" in Social Dynamics, Volume 8 Number 1, pp1-13.

often expressed concern with idleness in South Africa should be seen in the context of a world-wide change in the attitude to work deriving from the Reformation and the Renaissance. Particularly in Calvinism, to work is regarded as to be obeying the law of God and thus had some kind of ethical value in itself. Labour and poverty were regarded as polar opposites. If you work hard, you cannot be poor and if you are poor you cannot have been hard-working. With the Reformation the emphasis changed and work became morally important because it was regarded to be a person's duty to him/herself and his/her fellow human beings. According to Coetzee both these attitudes towards idleness (idleness as sin and idleness as self-betrayal) were present in the discourse of the early Cape. They were still prevalent in the discourse around poverty during the first half of this century.<sup>147</sup> Another factor, however, led to the deepening of this concern at the turn of the century in South Africa. This is the transfer from a pastoral lifestyle and a subsistence economy to an industrialising and capitalist economy. As the Carnegie Commission pointed out: where it had in fact been possible in earlier times to make an existence without regular and hard work<sup>148</sup>, in a modern capitalist economy one has to work hard and regularly in order to ensure a living. Also, for a nation to survive in a capitalist economy, it needs a productive labour power. In the following words of Hertzog (uttered at a church conference held in 1917) the intensification of the attitudes to work identified by Coetzee are apparent:

Wat ons volk moet leren, is dat elkeen een arbeider is...Wat men moet doen verstaan, is dat arbeid niet alleen niet 'n schande is, maar dat men arbeiden moet om iets te beteken.<sup>149</sup>

[Our *volk* must learn that everyone is a labourer...They should understand that not only is work no disgrace, but that we should work to be of any significance.]

The heightened concern about idleness is also obvious in the earliest documents of the SAVF. Mrs Melt Marais, convenor of the first education committee of the SAVF in January 1905, coined the slogan, "Ons volk moet self leer om te werk" [Our *volk* must learn to work]. The welfare work of the SAVF emphasised the importance of self-sufficiency and the primary aim was to lead the less privileged to look after themselves. The following extract from the 1909 minutes illustrates this emphasis on work and self-sufficiency:

De algemene opinie van de vergadering is dat waar men niet werken wil geen hulp verleend

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<sup>147</sup> Coetzee J M, op cit, pp4-5.

<sup>148</sup> They point out, for instance, that it was possible to go hunting every now and in this way provide food for the family.  
Grosskopf J F W, op cit, px.

<sup>149</sup> Scholtz G D, op cit, p25.

moet worden omdat sodanige persoon daardoor niet veredeld maar slechts verlaagd wordt. **Elke Afrikaner moet leren dat arbeid adelt.**<sup>150</sup>

[The general opinion of all present is that when men will not work, no help should be provided, since such a person will not be ennobled, but merely debased. **Every Afrikaner should learn that work ennobles.**] (My emphasis.)

A complicating characteristic of the "traditional" Afrikaner idleness, as J M Coetzee points out, was that it was achieved at the expense of a servile class which was predominantly black.<sup>151</sup> The Carnegie Commission, in their joint findings and recommendations stated that the fact that black people could be employed at very cheap rates made it possible for the white farmer and his wife to get by without doing much hard work. This also led to a social bias among whites that certain kinds of work were humiliating for white people and should be done by blacks. The Carnegie researchers recorded hundreds of references to this Afrikaner attitude that some work is *kafferwerk* [kaffir work] and should not be done by whites.<sup>152</sup> This issue had been taken up by leaders and academics even prior to the Carnegie Commission,<sup>153</sup> but once again the issue became increasingly ethnicised when the Afrikaans press and popular organisations took it up. In 1911 the Bloemfontein newspaper De Vriend des Volks remarked:

In het verleden is ons volk al te zeer gewend geraakt om alles aan de kaffer over te laten. Op deze wijze is de ongelukkige geest ontstaan, die onderscheid maakt tussen kafferwerk en witmanswerk. Vraag de man die steeks is voor kafferwerk wat hij dan eigenlijk zou willen doen, en als hij eerlik wil zijn, dan zal hij zeggen: stokkies snijden.<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> SAVF. Vyftig jaar van seen. 1904-1954, p17.

<sup>151</sup> Coetzee J M, op cit, p10.

<sup>152</sup> Even G D Scholtz, has to acknowledge idleness at the cost of black workers as "een van die grootste skadukante van die Afrikaanse volkslewe" [one of the darkest sides to the Afrikaans national life].

Scholtz G D, op cit, p24.

<sup>153</sup> President M T Steyn said in 1910:

Een ding staat vast als gindse bergen: Indien de blanken het enkel als hun roeping beschouwen om kafferarbeid in 't leven te roepen, dan zal de arbeider het op de lange duur van de werkgevers winnen en dan zal het donker werelddeel nog donkerder worden. Niet tevergeefs is het bevel gegeven: in het zweet uws aanschijn zult gij brood eten.

[One thing stands as solid as a mountain: Should whites regard it as their solemn duty to create kaffir work, then the labourers will eventually wrest all work from their employers, leaving this dark region of the world even darker. It was no accident that the command rang: in the sweat of your brow you will eat your bread.]

Quoted from Ons Land, 7 January 1911 by Scholtz G D, op cit, p25.

<sup>154</sup> Quoted by Scholtz G D. op cit, p185.

[In the past our *volk* became used to leaving everything to the kaffirs, thus creating the unfortunate distinction between kaffir work and work for whites. Should you ask the fellow who shies away from kaffir work, what work he may consider doing himself, an honest answer might be: to whittle at sticks.]

In the Afrikaner nationalist discourse the importance of work and activity in the modern capitalist economy was emphasised. This was not simply due to a moralistic concern about idleness, but also expressed emergent nationalist aspirations to become a force in developing South Africa.

### 3.2.7 Modern education and literacy

Education is a vital concern in any nationalist struggle on a number of different levels. Firstly, education is used as a means to transmit national culture, to conscientise people and to make them aware of themselves as members of a certain national group. For example, children are taught the nationalist version of history at school. Secondly, education is important because it is through education that people come to know modern science and are modernised.<sup>155</sup> As cultural entrepreneurs the bourgeoisie, while they have to arouse the consciousness of people around their nationality, also have to promote reforms aimed at educational, scientific, technological and industrial advancement.<sup>156</sup> Thirdly, imagining a nation is difficult without general literacy or access to print-language (novels, newspapers and magazines).

Education became important for Afrikaner nationalists on all these levels. Not only would education and literacy make possible the imagining of the "nation", it was also increasingly through education that the Afrikaner culture was transmitted. Education was regarded as important for the modernisation of the nation and overcoming the "backwardness" (idleness, poverty and the poor health conditions) of the nation.

The education level of the Transvalers was low and there were many people who were not literate. In 1882 Cachet remarked about the Transvalers, "Boekenkennis hebben zij over het algemeen weinig..." [In general they possess little book knowledge...]<sup>157</sup>. In 1920 the Reverend M L Fick

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<sup>155</sup> Jayawardena K, Feminism and nationalism in the Third World, p6.

<sup>156</sup> Jayawardena K, op cit, p4.

<sup>157</sup> Cachet F C, op cit, p420.

in Die Boerevrou identified lack of education as the main cause of the poor white problem.<sup>158</sup>

Much hard work went into the effort to improve the level of education of the nation. Parents and children were informed about the importance of adequate schooling. There were efforts to improve the quality of the schooling as well as efforts to control the contents of the schooling (Christian National Education and "moedertaal-onderwys"/mother-tongue education).

This nationalist concern with education has to be located in the context of the introduction of compulsory education for whites by the beginning of the 20th century and specifically the expansion of secondary education. Education became compulsory in the Transvaal with the Education Act of 1917 (also known as the Smuts Act of 1917). According to the act education was made compulsory for children between the ages of 7 and 14 who resided within a radius of three miles from the nearest school. The school boards were responsible for enforcing the law.<sup>159</sup>

Apart from the growing emphasis on the importance of formal education, much attention was paid to the development of a reading culture. The concern with the reading habits (or lack thereof) of Afrikaners, manifested itself in newspapers, magazines, the projects of women's organisations etc. In 1925 Die Burger wrote:

Die klagte dat ons Afrikanervolk nie lees nie, is algemeen. Uit honderd Afrikaners is daar tagtig wat nie lees nie, wat bang is vir 'n boek, wat die lees van 'n boek as 'n las beskou. So 'n toestand van sake mag natuurlik nie voortduur nie. 'n Volk wat nie lees nie is ontrou aan homself.<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> Die Boerevrou, June 1920, p5.

<sup>159</sup> Malherbe E G, Education in South Africa. 1652-1922, pp340-341.

<sup>160</sup> Quoted by Scholtz G D, op cit, p68.

During the 1930s women's organisations conducted different investigations into school libraries. In 1930 an ACVV survey of 741 primary and farm schools in the Cape province showed that 17,8% of the schools did not have any library books. In the same year the OVV conducted a similar survey in the Orange Free State and found that 40,8% of the schools were without library books. In 1931 the SAVF launched a special project to collect information about the availability of reading material in Transvaal schools. Sixty circulars were distributed - one to every branch of the federation. Only 30 branches replied. Those 30 branches represented 224 schools of which 150 had reading material available. Out of the total of 7 610 books available at these schools, 2 789 were Afrikaans, 3 889 were English and 364 were Dutch.

Die Boerevrou, June 1931, p44.

[There is a general complaint that our Afrikaner nation does not read. Out of every hundred Afrikaners there are eighty who do not read, who are afraid of books, who regard reading as a burden. By no means may a situation like this continue. A *volk* who does not read, is untrue to itself.]

Education and literacy were very important issues on the nationalist agenda. Not only was it easier to transmit the Afrikaner nationalist message through education and to a literate nation, but for the nation to be a competitive force in a developing country, its members had to be modernised and had to acquire a knowledge of modern science.

### 3.2.8 The transmitting of an Afrikaner culture: History, language and the redefinition of everyday life

We have seen that in most nationalist discourses, culture assumes a place of central importance. In Afrikaner history the paradox of nationalism, as described by authors such as Gellner, Nairn, Anderson and Hobsbawm becomes apparent: the "nation" had to be mobilised around culture, but the national culture first had to be constructed. Gellner's metaphor of nationalist culture as a garden "sustained by literacy and by specialised personnel", becomes relevant when one see how one of the first priorities of the Afrikaner nationalist petty bourgeoisie was to create an "Afrikaner culture" and to transmit this culture to the members of the "nation". This process involved the invention of a history, the redefinition of everyday life, and the standardisation, organisation and popularisation of the Afrikaans language.

Although we have seen that there were earlier attempts to write nationalist histories, it was after 1910 that there was a systematic effort to create a unified past for the Afrikaners as a group. Afrikaner entrepreneurs, of whom Gustav Preller was perhaps the best known,<sup>161</sup> worked hard to instill pride among Afrikaners in their past. Coupled with the construction of history was the reconstruction of everyday life. While the new unified histories made it possible for people to imagine "their" past, it also created the possibility of reinterpreting the present in accordance with this past.

By 1920 the process of creating and popularising a culture was fully underway. Language entrepreneurs were involved in a serious struggle to popularise, standardise and organise the language Afrikaans. The construction of a common history was accompanied by a serious effort

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<sup>161</sup> See Hofmeyr I, "Popularising history: the case of Gustav Preller" in Journal of African History, Number 29, pp521-535.

to reconstruct an "Afrikaner" way of life.

### 3.3 Conclusion

In this chapter we looked at the origins and the early development of the discourse of Afrikaner nationalism. This communal discourse, paradoxically, emerged against the historical background of a Transvaal which had been characterised by an extreme individualism. It developed in the context of the closing of the frontiers and the rapid, if uneven, industrialisation and capitalisation of the Transvaal countryside. The development of the discourse was also facilitated by the collective trauma of the South African War, by improved central government, the formation of Union and the emergence of other shared institutions.

In many ways the Afrikaner nationalist discourse was a typical nationalist discourse. It was carefully constructed to project the Afrikaner nation-community as an ahistorical and natural force in history. In the discourse it was precisely this "naturalness" of the community that was supposed to legitimise its existence and its struggle for power.

Many of the issues that became important within the Afrikaner nationalist discourse were issues that typically can be found in other nationalist discourses. These issues were expressed as concerns or problems: the lack of unity, poverty, low birthrates, poor health conditions, lack of education and illiteracy, idleness and the absence of culture and consciousness. In an almost dialectical process, the issues that became important within the Afrikaner nationalist discourse also generated the ethnicisation of poverty, education, labour and health. The same process of ethnicisation of gender worked in the Afrikaner nationalist discourse and in the more specific *volksmoeder* discourse. In Chapter six we will look in more detail at how the *volksmoeder* discourse provided a response to these issues. But first we have to investigate how the issues of women and gender became salient at the beginning of the 20th century (Chapter four) and to provide a general characterisation of the *volksmoeder* discourse as a gender discourse (Chapter five).

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE PROBLEM OF GENDER

There is a gender aspect to all discourses, but in certain circumstances gender becomes a salient issue and specific gender discourses are generated. In the South Africa of the early 20th century, gender slowly became an issue for various reasons and in different ways. By 1920 more than one distinct gender discourse could be discerned. For our purposes it is essential to investigate what caused gender to become a more salient issue, thus generating specific discourses. In this chapter some factors that played a role in this development will be investigated. Although other distinct gender discourses were articulated at the time, the first traces of the *volksmoeder* discourse will be emphasised in this chapter.

#### 4.1 The patriarchal tradition: women in pre-industrial society to women in an industrialising society

Before 1900 very little had been written about Boer women in the Transvaal. W F Andriessen remarked in 1903 that "(o)ver de eenvoudige Boeren-vrouw, die steeds op den agtergrond bleef, bestaat geen omvangrijke literatuur..."<sup>1</sup> [about the plain Boer woman, who still remains in the background, no comprehensive literature exists...] Of course there were gender roles and men and women did have distinct gender identities.<sup>2</sup> Still, one might say that the silence in the literature

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<sup>1</sup> Andriessen W F, De vrouwen der boeren, p67.

<sup>2</sup> From Miem Fischer's camp diary kept during the South African War it is clear that gender roles did exist:

As vrou het ek geleef soos dit die boeregewoonte was, stil en, soos ek toe gedink het, eenvoudig, maar wel gelukkig. Ek het van geen ander huislike lewe geweet as die wat ek van my ouers gesien en leer ken het nie.

[As a woman I lived according to Boer custom, quietly and, as I then thought, plainly, but happily. I knew no other domestic life apart from the one I got to know from my parents.]

Her next comment is ironic and obviously aimed at British or even colonial contempt of the Boer lifestyle - it does, however, provide more hints about pre-1900 gender roles and identities:

Ek het wel gehoor dat dit onbeskaaf was om altyd met jou man en kinders tuis te bly, niks anders te eet as wat ons tuine en landerye opgelewer het nie, of dikwels dieselfde rok aan te hê, gesond te wees en gesonde kinders te hê.

[I did hear that it was uncivilised to always stay at home with your husband and children, to eat nothing else than what our gardens and farm-lands yielded, or to often wear the

amounts to the absence of a comprehensive discourse dealing specifically with women and women's roles before 1900.

This silence about women and the absence of specific gender discourses indicates that women, gender and gender roles were not important issues at the time. Gender roles, such as that which traditionally consigned women to the private and domestic spheres, were either not challenged or were not considered to be essential.

When Boer women did feature in pre-1900 literature, it was mostly in descriptions of domestic life on Boer farms in the Transvaal. Most of these accounts were published after 1875. There was hardly any serious attempts to understand who the Afrikaans woman was and little attempt to tell her who she should be. Most of the accounts were quite positive<sup>3</sup> and part of the conscious effort of certain writers to portray the Transvalers in a more favourable light and to destroy existing prejudices against them.<sup>4</sup>

A remarkable exception to these superficial descriptions was Olive Schreiner's Thoughts on South Africa,<sup>5</sup> first published as a series of articles in The Fortnightly Review in English in 1890.<sup>6</sup> Of the twelve separate essays in this collection six were concerned with the Boer. Schreiner's essay "The Boer woman and the modern woman's question" was probably one of the first essays ever

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same dress, to be healthy and to have healthy children.]  
Fischer M, Tant Miem Fischer se kamp-dagboek, p5.

<sup>3</sup> Anthony Trollope's portrayal was one of the exceptions. In 1878 he painted a very unflattering picture of the Boer family:

Things in the Boer's house no doubt are generally dirty...The Boer's dress is dirty, - and also, which is more important, that of the Boeress. The little Boerlings are all dirty; - so that, even when they are pretty, one does not wish to kiss them.

Trollope A, South Africa. Volume 2, p12.

<sup>4</sup> Examples of such positive descriptions can be found in F L Cachet's De worstelstrijd der Transvalers (1896), J H Rovers's De Transvalers en hunnen heldhaftige vrouwens (1896), F W Reitz's A century of wrong. Elsabe Brink also refers to the works of historians Klok and Van der Loo. See Brink E, "Man-made women: gender, class and the ideology of the 'volksmoeder'" in C Walker, Women and gender in southern Africa to 1945, p276. For comments about the historians of this time see Van Jaarsveld F A, Die Afrikaner en sy geskiedenis, pp107-111.

<sup>5</sup> Schreiner O, Thoughts on South Africa (1923). In this thesis a "facsimile reproduction" of the 1923 edition has been used.

<sup>6</sup> Clayton C (ed), Olive Schreiner, p8.

to deal extensively with the Boer woman and moreover to do so from a feminist perspective. Despite her pro-Boer<sup>7</sup> and pro-women bias, her work on Afrikaans women is valuable in that it provides the reader with good descriptions of gender roles and gender identities of the time, even if not specifically concerned with the Transvaal. We may thus utilise Schreiner's accounts and a few other contemporary sources to gain some picture of the social position of Afrikaans women in pre-industrial society.

#### 4.1.1 Women's work in pre-industrial<sup>8</sup> societies: "een onnoemelijk getal zorgen" [countless troubles]

A very important indication of gender roles is the division of labour: What is regarded as women's work and what is regarded as men's work? There is generally speaking a much less marked division of labour in pre-industrial societies, and thus a pronounced difference between the work that women do in industrial society and the work they used to do in pre-industrial society. Before modernisation the agricultural economy was constituted by family economies in which men and women both had direct access to the means of production (land, tools, seed) and women, men, and children all contributed labour. Because the whole household rather than the individual in the household was tied to socially productive labour, there was a less acute distinction between

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<sup>7</sup> According to the introduction to Thoughts on South Africa the sections on Afrikaners were part of a project to portray the Boers in a more positive light. Ironically, Olive Schreiner was severely criticised (and always remembered for) in Afrikaner nationalist circles for her earlier depiction of a Boer woman in The story of an African farm. MER, herself an admirer of Schreiner, later recalled the upset the book had created:

Daar is miskien nog ou mense onder ons wat haar nooit daarvoor vergeef het nie. Ek weet dat Langenhoven my eendag vertel het, "Ek het die boek van my af oor die vloer gesmyt! En ek het nooit weer een ding gelees wat sy geskryf het nie!"...Dit gaan oor die Karooplaas van 'n "Boer woman" met name Tant Sannie - 'n growwe, walglike karikatuur van 'n mens; die paar ander Afrikaners wat in die boek beskryf word is ook grof, dom, onbeskaafd. [There are possibly still some old people among us who have never forgiven her for that. I know that Langenhoven told me once, "I threw the book on the floor! And I never read anything else she wrote!"...It is about the Karoo farm of a "Boer woman" called Tant Sannie - a crude, disgusting caricature of a person; the other Afrikaners described in the book are also crude, stupid and uncivilised.]

Rothmann M E, M E Rothmann Collection, University of Stellenbosch Document Centre, 55.L.4 (5).

<sup>8</sup> The distinction in this chapter between "pre-industrial" Transvaal and "industrialising" Transvaal should not be regarded as a rigid distinction. In reality, because industrialisation was an uneven process, it is impossible to date its start precisely. The date 1900 is used in this chapter for analytical purposes.

women's work and men's work.<sup>9</sup> In Viola Klein's words:

Before the agricultural and industrial revolution there was hardly any job that was not also performed by women. No work was too hard, no labour too strenuous, to exclude them. In fields and mines, manufactories and shops, on markets and roads as well as in workshops and in their homes, women were busy assisting their men, replacing them in their absence or after their death, or contributing by their labour to the family income.<sup>10</sup>

This does not mean that there was gender equality, but it does mean that in practice there was "an unquestioned and ingrained habit of co-operation, with men, women and children all working together..."<sup>11</sup> This view is corroborated in the Dutch Reformed Church's publication Kerk en stad (1940):

In die ou tyd...was die familie feitlik op homself (sic) aangewys vir voeding, kleding, huisvesting en beskerming. Huise moes gebou word, meubels vervaardig, waens en trekgoed gemaak, velle gelooi vir klere en skoene, seep en kerse voorsien word, en talle van ander benodigdhede. Man, vrou en kinders moes saamwerk...Dit bring mee 'n gevoel van samehorigheid, van helpmekaar wat dien om die gesinslede nou en heg aan mekaar te bind. Hierdie selfversorgende eienskap, met al sy belangrike voordele verdwyn in die stad. Elkeen het nou sy eie werk, heeltemal apart van die ander.<sup>12</sup>

[In the olden days...the family was thrown on itself for food, clothing, accommodation and protection. Houses had to be built, furniture made, wagons and trekking implements made, skins tanned for clothes and shoes, soap and candles provided, and many other supplies. Husband, wife and children had to work together...This brought about a feeling of togetherness, of mutual aid which served to create a close and firm bond between the family members. This self-supporting characteristic, with all its important advantages, disappears in the city. Everybody now has his own job, entirely separate from the others.]

To what extent was this also true of pre-industrial Boer society in the Transvaal? In the first place, it seems that there definitely was a division of labour, with women's specific functions being those closer to the house. This was regarded to be the general norm. For instance, according to a 1898 description by Schreiner, the Boer woman "retains possession of one full half of the labour of her race", mostly domestic labour. Domestic labour, according to Schreiner, included the bearing of children, breast-feeding and rearing them, feeding the household, making clothes and training and

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<sup>9</sup> Barrett M, Women's oppression today. The marxist/feminist encounter, p177.

<sup>10</sup> Viola Klein as quoted by Miles R, The women's history of the world, p155.

<sup>11</sup> Gordon L, "What does welfare regulate?" in Social Research, Volume 55 Number 4, Winter 1988, pp620-621 and Miles R, op cit, p155.

<sup>12</sup> Albertyn J R, Du Toit P and Theron H S, Kerk en stad. Verslag van die Kommissie van Onderzoek van die Gefedereerde N G Kerke na kerklike en godsdienstige toestande in die nege stede van die Unie van Suid-Afrika, p207.

teaching the children "all that in many cases they ever know of the religion and the tradition of their people".<sup>13</sup> Cachet's description of women's work is more detailed. He says that "behalve de zorg voor het huishouden en de kinderen, rust op haar de verantwoording van de boterbereiding; hebben zij brood te bakken, de slacht te bezorgen, zeep te koken, kaasen te maken, vruchten te drogen, het naaiwerk te verrichten, ook manskleeders te maken en ten deele, voor den groentetuin te zorgen" [apart from caring for the household and the children, the responsibility also rests on her to make butter, bake bread, slaughter animals, boil soap, make candles, dry fruits, do the sowing, also of men's clothes, and to partly look after the vegetable garden]. He comments that "(d)e vrouwen hebben betrekkelijk nog meer werk dan de mannen"<sup>14</sup> [the women have comparatively more work than the men]. It is clear then that the Boer woman was very much involved in home production and women's work was central to the "simple pastoral economy of Boer society".<sup>15</sup> According to Cachet, women usually had between six and

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<sup>13</sup> Schreiner O, Thoughts on South Africa, pp200-202.

Later (in 1911) Schreiner wrote about the work of "the burgher's wife" in the household:

And the burgher's wife, asked why she did not go to labour in her husband's workshop, or away into the market-place, or go a-trading to foreign countries, would certainly have answered: "I am too busy to speak with such as you. The bread is in the oven (already I smell it a-burning), the winter is coming on, and my children lack good woollen hose and my husband needs a warm coat. I have six vats of ale a-brewing, and I have daughters whom I must teach to spin and sew, and the babies are clinging round my knees...Would you have me to leave my household to starve in summer and die of cold in winter, and my children to go untrained, while I gad about to seek for other work? A man must have his belly full and his back covered before all things in life. Who, think you, would spin and bake and brew, and rear and train my babes, if I went abroad?...Who will rear and shape the nation if I do not?"

And the young maiden at the cottage door, beside her wheel...would surely have answered: "Go away, I have no time to listen to you. Do you not see that I am spinning here that I too might have a house of my own? I am weaving the linen garments that shall clothe my household in the long years to come! I cannot marry till the chest upstairs be full. You cannot hear it, but as I sit here alone, spinning, far off across the hum of my spinning-wheel I hear the voices of my little unborn children calling me - O mother, mother, make haste that we may be...Who will give folk to the nation if I do not?"

Schreiner O, Women and labour, pp37-39.

<sup>14</sup> Cachet F C, op cit, pp427-428.

<sup>15</sup> Walker C, "The women's suffrage movement" in Walker C (ed), Women and gender in southern Africa, p317.

twelve children<sup>16</sup> and the responsibility of child care must therefore have been no small or simple task.

Schreiner described the Boer woman's labour as "relatively far more useful and important to her society than that of immense masses of females (in Europe) under 19th century conditions".<sup>17</sup> Compared to the way the ordinary English woman of the time (in South Africa as well as in England) spent her time, it can indeed be said that the Boer woman was a more productive member of society than her English counterpart.<sup>18</sup> In Schreiner's view, at least, the local division of labour compared relatively favourably as far as "women's work" were concerned: "Not only is half the labour in the hands of the women, but that it is not the least complex or socially honourable; and that she is far more the fellow labourer and comrade of man, than are the mass of women in nineteenth century societies."<sup>19</sup> (My emphasis.)

The division of labour in pre-industrial Transvaal was not very rigid. Circumstances often meant that women were not able to live in accordance with these gender roles. When circumstances forced them to do so (ie, when the men were not available or absent), women did not hesitate to do "men's work".

W F Andriessen wrote in 1903 that the men of the two Boer republics often left home for long periods to do commando duty, to reclaim stolen stock or to go hunting. All the responsibilities were then left in the hands of the women:

Daar is de moeder met de jongere kinderen in het kleine huis met een onnoemelijk getal zorgen. Zij moeten beesten, bokken en schapen oppassen en zorgen dat deze niet onder het bereik van leeuw en jakkals komen; zij moeten zaaien, boomen en tabak planten, en waterleiden; zij moeten de graaf opnemen en onkruid schoffelen; er moet voor kost en kleederen gezorgd, en als de vader te huis komt van de jacht het vleesch gedroogd en bezorgd worden. Des avonds, de eenige gelegenheid en tijd die er voor de moeder

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<sup>16</sup> Cachet euphemistically commented that "(d)e echt is zelden kinderloos en over het algemeen zeer gezegen" [the marriage is seldom childless and generally very blessed] (Cachet F C, op cit, p426), while Anthony Trollope said that the "Boers are prolific, marrying early" and "the women have children early, but then they have children very late also" (Trollope A, op cit, p12.

<sup>17</sup> Schreiner O, Thoughts on South Africa, p204.

<sup>18</sup> See Schoeman K, Olive Schreiner. 'n Lewe in Suid-Afrika, pp222-223.

<sup>19</sup> Schreiner O, op cit, p204.

overschiet, leert zij haar kinderen.<sup>20</sup>

[There is the mother with her young children in the small house confronted by countless troubles. She must look after and care for cattle, goats and sheep so that they are not caught by lions and jackal; she must sow, plant trees and tobacco and irrigate; she must take the spade and hoe weeds; she must provide food and clothes, and when the father returns home from the hunt, she must dry and prepare the meat. In the evenings, the only time left to the mother, she teaches her children.]

In a very powerful passage dated 1898, Olive Schreiner related the story of a Boer woman whose husband was too sick to work. Schreiner stressed that this woman was an exception, someone who was ridiculed:

In the veld, some ten miles from the town, we saw approaching a large wagon with a team of ten donkeys...As the wagon approached we saw it was laden with wood and dried cakes of manure for the next morning's market in the town...Then it came nearer and we saw, in truth for the first time in our lives in such a position, a huge Boer woman of perhaps forty. She wore a black dress made without regard to fashion with a full short skirt and short jacket.<sup>21</sup> On her head she had a large white cotton kapje, such as Boer women make, projecting far forward with white curtains hanging on to the shoulders. In her hand she had a wagon-whip made from a bamboo eight or nine feet long, with the plaited leather cord long enough to reach the front donkeys of the span. She sat massively upright on the front-box...We found out afterwards that she had nine children and was the wife of a man, an invalid and too feeble to work, that they were what is known in South Africa as *bywoners*, poor people living on the land of a richer farmer, and that she has supported her family entirely. She would take her wagon of fuel to the next morning's market, and the little clerks and shopkeepers and women with flowers in their hats would laugh at her short black skirt and her resolute scowl.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Andriessen W F, op cit, p75.

<sup>21</sup> The significance of this description only becomes apparent when one reads Schoeman's fascinating description of women's clothes of the time and how their clothing restricted women (see Schoeman K, op cit, pp224-225). For Schreiner as feminist, the "full short skirt and short jacket" must have been the symbol of liberation.

<sup>22</sup> Schreiner O, Thoughts on South Africa, p219.

Schreiner was full of admiration for this woman and even held her up as a kind of feminist ideal:

We looked at her as we passed and she scowled at us from under her deep kapje with resentment which I knew meant, *Verdomde Engelse vrou* [Bloody Englishwoman], do you think I care for your ridicule!...if she had known what was in our minds, we might have stopped and shaken hands...Had we but be able to sit beside her on the *voorkist* and been able to make clear to her our meaning, we would have said: "The new women from all the world over send you their greetings, *Tante* [Aunt]! In you and such as you we see our leaders, and we are following in your steps. For God's sake, *Tante*, hold fast to your seat on the frontchest and your fuel and carry it to market in spite of all the fools. I see in you, *Tante*, something that harmonises strangely with this great blue African sky above us and

There are thus three main points to take into account with regard to Boer women's labour in pre-industrial South Africa. Firstly, there was a traditional division of labour according to which most of women's functions were in or around the household. Secondly, women's role in the domestic sphere was generally respected. Thirdly, the division of labour was not rigid and it was not always clear what was regarded to be "men's work" and what was regarded to be "women's work". Circumstances made it also impossible for the distinction to be enforced rigidly.

#### 4.1.2 Women's power: "the voice from the armchair beside the coffeetable"

The 19th century Boer household of the Transvaal was patriarchal:<sup>23</sup> "Een groot huisgesin, een wijde familiekring, is de trots van iederen Boer; in de huiselijken kring is hij vader en heer; daar is zijn wil wet; en in den wijden familiekring ligt zijn sociale en politieke sterkte." [A big household, a wide family circle, is the pride of every Boer; in the domestic circle he is father and master; his will is law; and in the wide family circle lies his social and political strength.]<sup>24</sup> Women did not have any formal political rights and were thus not formally active in the public sphere. The man represented the household in the public sphere (ie, church and state) and the women were, formally at least, regarded to be his inferiors. Schreiner described the Boer woman as either bride

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the little *koppies* [hills] to our right, and the great plain to our left, and the red sandy road in which your donkeys plough, and the thorn-trees here and there casting their shade. Like the wide plain, you wake in me an aspiration for freedom and independence which no woman in the town below us could awaken. For God's sake, *Tante*, never give up your wagon-whip for a mother-of-pearl card case, and your kappie for a straw hat with paper flowers, and, instead of digging up fuel in your kraal and cutting wood, take a croquet mallet for your weapon of toil! I see in you, *Tante*, the secret of many a brave fight that your race has fought for freedom, and many still to come. When you paste little black spots on your cheeks and pencil your eyebrows with black, and wear an eighteen-inch waist, and trip with high-heeled shoes with your head on one side, there will be no more Amajubas. Keep thy hard horned hands, *Tante*. The day will perhaps come when thy sons and daughters will grasp the artist's brush and the thinker's pen and the mechanic's tool in place of the spade and the axe and the driving-whip; but, till that time comes, labour on in thine own field...The working women of all the world over, whether they toil with the head or the hand, indoor or out, send their greetings to you, *Tante*. You are not only the backbone of your race and of South Africa, but you and such as you are the backbone of the human race. In many an hour of weariness and doubt over the future of woman, of South Africa, and humanity, your sturdy figure on the wagon chest will come back to us."

<sup>23</sup> Cachet F C, *op cit*, p426.

<sup>24</sup> Cachet F C, *op cit*, p427.

or mother, thus always defined in terms of someone else, always a secondary person.<sup>25</sup>

In this context special interest and significance attaches to one of the few historical episodes involving public political action by Afrikaans women. The story of the Boer women threatening that "they would walk barefoot over the Drakensberg to freedom or to death" rather than "subject themselves again to British sway" (a story that in the 20th century would be reiterated frequently for different purposes), surfaced in the last quarter of the 19th century.<sup>26</sup> Interestingly, this story involved an attempt by the Natal Afrikaans women to lay claim to political rights, said to have been promised to them in 1841. The source of this story was a letter written by the British high commissioner in Natal, Henry Cloete in 1843. After the annexation of Natal a deputation of women under the leadership of Mrs Susanna Smit (the wife of Rev Erasmus Smit) went to see Cloete. What happened at this meeting was recorded by Cloete in a letter to the colonial secretary in Cape Town:

The spokeswoman commenced by declaring that in consideration of the battles in which they had 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 had claimed this privilege, and although now repelled by the Volksraad, they had been deputed to express their fixed determination never to yield to British authority. That they were fully aware resistance would be of no avail, but they would walk out by the Drakensberg barefooted, to die in freedom, as death was dearer to them than the loss of liberty. I endeavoured (but in vain) to impress upon them that such a liberty as they seemed to dream of, had never been recognised by any civil society. That I regretted, that as married ladies they boasted of a freedom, which even in a social state they could not claim, and that, however much I sympathised in their feelings, that I considered it a disgrace on their husbands to allow such a state of freedom. After an interview which lasted for a couple of hours, they left me, still more excited than they had been when they first arrived, and departed exclaiming that their shibboleth was liberty or death. From this state of frenzy into which the females had worked themselves His Excellency may conceive, how easily it was for them, to impart some portion of that excitement into the minds of their relatives.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Schreiner O, Losse gedachten over Zuid Afrika, p124.

<sup>26</sup> Reitz F W, op cit, p13.

The story was drawn from G M Theal's History of South Africa from 1795 to 1872. Volume 2, pp450-451.

<sup>27</sup> The story about this claim was recalled (and is still recalled!) at different occasions for different reasons. In the present context we cannot investigate the circumstances of the original episode. For our purposes the most important aspect of this story is rather when, where and how it was used in later periods. One such a context was that of the struggle for women's vote and the suffragette movement in the early decades of the 20th century. Johanna Brandt's version of the story in the May 1914 issue of The Woman's Outlook (p5) was one of the many

While from Cloete's letter it is clear that the demand for women's enfranchisement was central to the episode, the story would later mainly be recalled in an Afrikaner nationalist context. At the beginning of the century, however, when the suffrage for women was an issue, the women's rights aspect of the story was emphasised.

Even if the Boer women of Natal failed in their unprecedented attempt to lay claim to the vote, it is relevant that they were granted certain *burgerregte* [civil rights] in 1841 and in those respects were therefore regarded as citizens. With the establishment of the Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek, these rights, including, among other things, that women could inherit and own land, were confirmed.<sup>28</sup> Land was probably at the time the most important of the means of production.

In general it can be stated then that most 19th century historians and social observers were adamant that **formally**, although she enjoyed some civil rights, the Boer woman's primary role was regarded to be in the domestic sphere. Intriguingly, however, they also claimed that women had some influence outside the domestic sphere and that **informally** they were active in the public sphere. Cachet, for instance, in 1882, mentioned the special interest Afrikaans women had in

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interpretations of the story. She used the story to justify why women should be enfranchised and to illustrate the power of Boer women. After quoting Cloete's letter in full, she added:

Maar hij heeft vergeten te vertellen hoe de teleurgestelde vrouwen hem van zijn stoel rukten en hem buiten zijn kantoor wierpen, in hun wanhoop over weigeren van hun verzoek...De handelingen van deze vrouwendeputatie tonen wel dat onze grootmoeders begeerden hun invloed te doen gevoelen en de zaken van land en volk.

[But he forgot to tell how the disappointed women dragged him from his chair and threw him out of his office in their despair about the denial of their request...The conduct of this delegation of women shows that our grandmothers desired a say in the affairs of our country and volk.]

In Die Boerevrou of February 1931, just after the suffrage was granted to South African women, the same story was reiterated by AR in an article entitled "Vrouestemreg deur die Voortrekkers belowe?". Her aim with the story was to show that Afrikaans women were the first women to whom the vote was promised. The fact that this promise was never fulfilled, does not seem to have concerned her.

<sup>28</sup> A decision of the ZAR-Parliament of 18 June 1855 read:

Wanneer een manspersoon als burger van dezen Republiek erkend is, zal zijne vrou daardoor ook als burgeres van dezen Republiek erkend worden en blijven.

[When a man is acknowledged as a citizen of this Republic, his wife will also be acknowledged as a citizen of this Republic and she will remain thus.]

Stockenstrom E, Geskiedenis van die vrouebeweging en die vrouestemreg in Suid-Afrika, pp32-35 and Van Rensburg A P, Moeders van ons volk, p112.

politics. He did not approve of, nor condemn this interest:

ledereen - mannen en vrouwen, en soms de vrouwen nog meer dan de mannen - "wil weten wat er op Pretoria, in den Volksraad verhandeld wordt", en de Staatscourant wordt gretig ter hand genomen door menschen, die, behalve in hun Bijbel, weinig lezen...Opmerkelijk is het hoe ook de vrouwen haar oordeel weten uit te spreken over de "politiek" en hoe zij, bij meer dan een gelegenheid, hare mannen en zonen tot den strijd voor onafhankelijkheid en recht hebben aangevuurd.<sup>29</sup>

[Everybody, men and women, and sometimes the women more than the men, "want to know what is happening in Pretoria, in the House of Assembly", and the Government Gazette is eagerly read by people who, apart from the Bible, seldom read...It is noticeable how they, on more than one occasion, had incited their men and sons to the struggle for independence.]

Schreiner likewise suggested that the influence and interest of Boer women extended beyond the domestic sphere. She evinced a very high regard for the strength and the power that the Afrikaans woman displayed in the sphere of her house. When listing all the assets that "the young (Afrikaans) man desires in his wife", she not only mentioned the general household tasks, but also said that the woman should be able "to advise him over all matters of domestic economy and external business". Although one would like to believe Schreiner's claim that Afrikaans men chose their wives for their intellects, this seems to be a bit of a suspect generalisation. Cachet presents us with the other side of the story:

De armste jongedochter breng gewoonlijk nog eenig vee, als bruidschat, ten huwelijk, - bemiddelden soms veel vee en een eigen plaats...Het vee der bruid geeft dikwijls den doorslag bij het vaststellen der huwelijksplannen, meer dan dat van den bruidegom.<sup>30</sup>

[The poorest young girl usually brings some livestock as dowry to the marriage, - the well-to-do sometimes a large amount of livestock and a farm...The bride's livestock were often decisive in determining the wedding plans, more than those of the groom.]

Writing about the Transvaal War of 1881, Schreiner said that "it was from the armchair beside the coffeetable that the voice went out for conflict and no surrender" - thus implying that women played a powerful political role in this war. Apart from playing their traditional role "in producing and rearing, at a risk to life almost as great and at the cost of suffering immeasurably greater, the warriors of the nation", Schreiner stated that the Afrikaans women's share in the defence of the state was "more direct, more conscious and unmistakable".<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Cachet F C, op cit, pp428-429.

<sup>30</sup> Cachet F C, op cit, p426.

<sup>31</sup> Schreiner O, Thoughts on South Africa, p201.

Schreiner went so far as to claim that, although Boer women had set duties in the household, they were not excluded as intellectually inferior from discussions which in other cultures might have been regarded as male discussions.<sup>32</sup> Again, this was Schreiner's personal view and not necessarily historically correct. Taking into account that Schreiner was brought up by Rebecca Schreiner, a woman who was committed to the maintenance of Victorian norms (even in the unlikely South African pioneer environment),<sup>33</sup> it is perhaps not surprising that she perceived Boer women, who definitely lived in less rigid and formal households, as being less restricted. The relatively greater equality that Boer women apparently enjoyed, Schreiner ascribed to the kind of labour that Boer women were involved in.

Schreiner's view on the political influence of Afrikaans women in the Transvaal is, however, supported by other contemporary writers. In 1903 W F Andriessen claimed that there was little hope that the Transvaal could gain independence "...totdat de vrouwen zich in den strijd mengden en, het vruchteloze van verder delibereeren inziende tot haar man zeiden: 'Als jullie nie ga vecht nie, dan gaat ons.'"<sup>34</sup> [...until such time as the women involve themselves in the struggle and, realising the futility of further deliberations, says to her husband: 'If you won't fight, then we will.'] In the previous chapter Andriessen's claims about women's decisive role at the *volksbyeenkomste* [gatherings of the *volk*] was mentioned. Andriessen also recalled many stories about women's involvement in the Transvaal War and said that "(d)ergelijke staaltjes zijn er in menigte aan te halen" [many similar anecdotes can be recalled].<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Schreiner wrote:

...the Boer woman's condition is even more happy yet, being one of intellectual equality with her male companions...We believe there is hardly a Boer farm-house in South Africa, where the perturbing influence of the nineteenth century civilisation has not yet crept, where it would be possible to discuss any matters with the male members of the household which its females would not have discussed with an equal thoughtfulness, knowledge and intelligence.

*ibid*, pp202-203.

<sup>33</sup> Schoeman K, *op cit*, p219.

<sup>34</sup> Andriessen W F, *op cit*, p77.

<sup>35</sup> Andriessen W F, *op cit*, pp77-78.

There was Miss Buskes, "een kleine tederen vrouw" [a small frail woman], who with the bombardment of the government buildings kept herself busy with "het maken van terpentijn bollen om het dak van het kantoor in brand te steken" [the making of turpentine balls to set fire to the roof of the office]. Andriessen also quoted from a letter written by a woman to her husband (on

Mrs Joubert, "de Transvaalsche Kenau Hasselaar" [the Kenau Hasselaar of Transvaal], was, according to Andriessen, responsible for the victory at Amajuba because it was she who "'s morgens om half vijf 't eerst de 'Rooinekke' ontdekt" [first discovered the 'Rooinekke' at half past four in the morning].<sup>36</sup> Joubert, when asked about her involvement in the "Eerste Vryheidsoorlog", explained:

Ik, ag ik was mos ooral. Daar is nie een oorlog gewees nie, of ik het saamgegaan. Eers met mijn vader en later met mijn man. Al die kafferoorloe het ik saamgetrek en ook met Colley s'n oorlog, en ook later...Hoekom sou ik agterblij? Ik hoort mos bij mijn man. Die kinders was goed versorg en ik se: Ik is net maar een, en wat sal ik mijn man alleen laat trek?<sup>37</sup> [I, well, I was everywhere, of course. If there was a war, I went along. First with my father and later with my husband. I went along to all the Kaffir wars and also to Colley's war, and later as well...Why should I stay behind? I belong at my husband's side. The children were cared for, and I said: I am only one (person), and why should I let my husband go?]

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commando under Kommandant Weilbach):

Ik verlang veel om u te zien, want ik heb iets opgedaan, en het is een tweeling, beide zoons. Maar ik eisch u niet terug, voor dat gij die Engelschman 30 mijlen ver de blauwe vlakke het opgejaagd. En zorg voor twee geweren voor die twee zoons. Verder de beste groete van uw vrouw..."

[I long to see you very much because I have acquired something and it is twins, both sons. But I do not demand your return before you have chased the English 30 miles up the blue plains. And make sure to provide two guns for the two sons. Best greetings from your wife...]

Andriessen recounted this story because he said that this was a "typische briefje van een vrouw aan een burger" [a typical letter of a woman to a burgher].

<sup>36</sup> Loc cit.

Mrs Joubert's own account of this episode is rather amusing:

...teen dagbreek sta ik op. Ik klee mij aan en gaan buitekant die tent 'n keteltjie kook. Daar sta ik so, en kijk naar die morelig, en bowe op die berg sie ik mense. Ik kyk nog 'n slag en roep dan vir die generaal: "Kom gauw 'n beetje, daar is mense op die kop." Mijn man kom buitekant en hij se: "Dis die versterkings wat ik verwag het." "Maar man," se ik, "vat jou kijker, het ons mense dan rooi baatjes?"

[...at dawn I got up. I dressed and went outside the tent to boil a kettle. I stood there, looking at the morning light, when I saw people on the mountain. I looked again and then called the general: "Come here quickly, there are people on the hill." My husband came outside and said: "It is the reinforcements I was expecting." "But husband," I said, "take your binoculars, do our people then have red jackets?"

Rompel-Koopman L, Wat Mevrouw Generaal Joubert vertelt, p50.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, pp49-50.

Significantly she regarded accompanying her husband as her first priority. Joubert was an exceptional woman and from her account it seems that she was the only woman who accompanied her husband during this war. She herself, however, did not regard her bravery during the war as extraordinary and thought that women's role in history was underestimated:

Daar is maar min bekend watter dappere dae menige vrouw verrig het. Hulle het nooit daaraan gedenk dat hul eintlik die geskiedenis van 'n nasie gemaak het. Hulle was sulke eenvoudige mense en al hulle dappere dae het hulle gereken, kom van God, en hulle het Hem al die eer gegee.<sup>38</sup>

[Little is known about the brave deeds many women performed. They never thought about the fact that they actually made the history of a nation, they were such plain people and considered all their brave deeds as coming from God, and gave Him all the glory.]

It is not always possible to determine how representative the observations of people like Schreiner, Andriessen and Cachet

are. Schreiner did, to some extent, idealise and romanticise Boer women and their lives. Andriessen and Cachet, as men, might have used their claims that women were informally involved in the political sphere to justify women's lack of formal rights. It is more important for our purposes to determine what images of Afrikaner women were carried into the 20th century. From all the literature available about Boer women of the 19th century, it may be concluded that the household was always regarded as the woman's sphere. There was, however, some ambiguity about the role and influence of women outside the domestic sphere. Eric Stockenstrom, in his history of the suffrage for women in South Africa, claimed that Boer women in the 19th century had a higher social status than their English sisters. Cheryl Walker contends that "although the place of Boer women was centred around the domestic, this did not mean they were unproductive members of society, or that they were excluded from community affairs". There thus seems to have been a certain, if limited, recognition of women's importance outside the domestic sphere. While the virtues of "passivity, modesty and decorativeness" were encouraged in the women "in the drawing-room of metropolitan England"<sup>39</sup>, Afrikaans women were bearing children, organising the household and helping their husbands on the farm.

Ironically this relative advantage in informal status and power may be responsible for Afrikaner women's marked opposition to the struggle for recognition of women's rights. Although there was clearly a strong patriarchal tradition it seem that there was, as Spies says, a tension between the informal influence and even power that was ascribed to women in the political arena and their lack

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<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, p84.

<sup>39</sup> Walker C, *op cit*, p317.

of formal political rights. This claim Spies justifies by quoting from a 1900 letter from the Cape politician, J X Merriman, to a Canadian friend:

Oddly enough in South Africa the women have always exercised a great influence. I say "oddly", because they are so utterly and entirely opposed to the modern view of "women's rights".<sup>40</sup>

This observation of Merriman, who was, incidentally, "arch-conservative on the issue of women's rights",<sup>41</sup> is important, as the claim that Afrikaans women were conservative regarding women's issues was prevalent throughout the 20th century - and, in fact, still is today. While one can question the reliability of the assertion in the light of Merriman's own conservative views, we will see that Afrikaans women indeed did not, on a large scale, become involved in suffrage and feminist movements. In a way this passage then poses the most important question of this thesis: Why did strong and powerful women agree to and support policies that were conservative regarding women's issues?

#### 4.1.3 Women's work in an industrialising South Africa

The late 1800s and early 1900s were times of major structural changes in the South African society. These changes also profoundly affected the social roles of women, and gender increasingly became a sensitive and contested issue.

In the previous chapter various social and economic changes that accompanied industrialisation were discussed. Some of the most important changes were those that took place in the sphere of the household. As factories and industries started producing the commodities which families used to produce for themselves, and as wage labour developed, the household had to rely increasingly on incoming wages rather than on its own production. Households primarily became units of consumption while their function of social production decreased in significance. While the pre-industrial housewife controlled her own home unit of production and could make money with what was left over of her home products, for the housewife in industrial society there was an increasing differentiation between her domestic activities and the commercial sphere, and she was no longer substantially involved in production.

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<sup>40</sup> Quoted by Spies S B, "Women and the war" in Warwick P, The South African War. The Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902, p162.

<sup>41</sup> Walker C, op cit, p323. See also Stockenstrom E, op cit.

The rise of capitalism was thus accompanied by the increasing separation of the home and the workplace.<sup>42</sup> The drive towards increased labour productivity led to mass production, job differentiation and mechanisation, all of which were easier at bigger sites outside the home. Very often the workplace was so far removed from home, that the whole household had to move, or the wage-earner moved on his/her own and did not live with the rest of the members of the household. This separation made child care a problem, and the problem was usually solved by making women responsible for child care. Therefore, where in pre-industrial times women often worked next to their husbands, with industrialisation she lost her partnership status. She was increasingly denied the opportunity to share her husband's work as well as the opportunity of equal participation in wage labour. Home became the exclusive domain of women, while women increasingly became dependent on the wages of male breadwinners. Women's dependency is thus not simply a traditional given, but was created by the industrial economy.<sup>43</sup> With their dependence on the wages of men came also an emotional and psychological dependence.<sup>44</sup> The family wage system enforced women's dependence and domesticity, a system of reproductive labour that was cost-effective for capitalists and husbands.<sup>45</sup>

In an industrial economy, then, women lost the relative flexibility, status and control of their work in pre-industrial society. This is **not** to say that the present position of women in the household is the creation of capital only, or that capitalism cannot survive without women being responsible for domestic labour.<sup>46</sup> Such assertions would deny the inequalities that already existed in pre-industrial society. Michelle Barrett rightly concludes that we should rather "consider the way in which pre-capitalist gender divisions have been incorporated, possibly entrenched and exaggerated, into the structure of capitalist relations of production".<sup>47</sup> For our purposes, in the

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<sup>42</sup> Barrett makes the important point that the separation of home and workplace is not coterminous with capitalist relations of production, but was historically brought about in the development of capitalism. Barrett M, op cit, p178.

<sup>43</sup> Gordon L, op cit, p622.

<sup>44</sup> Barrett M, op cit, p179.

<sup>45</sup> Gordon L, op cit, p629.

<sup>46</sup> These functionalist arguments have been proved to be highly problematical. They do not explain why it was women and not men who fulfilled certain essential functions like child care for capitalism. This problem will again surface when we look at women's role in Afrikaner nationalism.

<sup>47</sup> Barrett M, op cit, p181.

context of this thesis, the relevant point is that with capitalism gender divisions, that already existed in pre-industrial society, were incorporated, entrenched and exaggerated. In particular, the family wage system, ie the notion that men ought to be able to earn enough to support a wife and children, was correlated with and supported the modern norm that economic responsibility stopped at the boundaries of the nuclear family. This stimulated as well as justified men's efforts to keep women out of public-sphere activity, economic or political, and increasingly formed the ideological basis for a great deal of cross-gender bonding among men.

These general developments apply to South Africa as well, though in South Africa the development of capitalism was characterised by its unevenness. Therefore, in early 20th century, while there were women and men who were fully proletarianised, there were also women and men in the rural areas who remained fully involved in pre-capitalist relations of production. The capitalisation of the South African agriculture, especially in the Transvaal, was a slow and uneven process.

If in other respects the changing significance of "women's work" followed similar patterns in the transition from pre-industrial to industrial society, there were also important divergent and complicating factors. In South Africa the role of the woman in the household was (and still is) very much influenced by the presence of (black) domestic workers in the household. Charles van Onselen states that historically, domestic service, along with mining and agriculture, has always been one of the three major sectors of employment in South Africa.<sup>48</sup> Relatively little research has been conducted about this reality<sup>49</sup> and consequently it is very difficult to determine the effect domestic workers had on the structure and the division of roles in the household. Still, enough is known to lend to support to Gaitskell, Kimble, Maconachie and Unterhalter's claim that the identity of South African women as housewives and domestic labourers cannot always be sustained as so much of the domestic labour and "wifely duties" are performed by hired domestic

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<sup>48</sup> Van Onselen C, Studies in the social and economic history of the Witwatersrand. 1886-1914. New Nineveh, p1.

<sup>49</sup> Van Onselen argues that the reason for this lack of interest in domestic workers is due to the fact that domestic workers serve rather than produce and that they live and work in isolation. Because of this fragmentation sociologists have never really been interested in them and there is very little data available about them.

Van Onselen, op cit, pp1-2.

workers.<sup>50</sup>

We thus have to take account of the changing position of women in Afrikaans society at this time in at least three different contexts: that of women who stayed at home, women who themselves worked outside the home, and in relation to black domestic workers.

#### 4.1.3.1 Black domestic workers

Whereas black men and white women predominated in domestic service up to at least 1914,<sup>51</sup> black women, the last group in South Africa to join the urban proletariat, after 1915 started to play a more prominent role in this sector of employment. Between 1926 and 1936 the number of black women workers almost doubled.<sup>52</sup>

The letter pages of Die Boerevrou reveal the pervasive presence of black domestic workers in households during the 1920s. Black domestic workers occur in the margins of letters covering all possible topics and their presence was never explained, nor justified. Johanna Fourie's description of how she made starch from potatoes illustrates the role of the ever-present domestic workers:

Laaste Dinsdag vind ek uit my stysel is op. Ek sê vir die meid, "Wag stryk maar die ander goed ek kom nou." Een, twee, drie die ou Boerevrou-tjies bymekaar geroep en begin gesels. Ja, hier kry ek 'n aartappelstysel-resep. "Betta, haal vir my 'n paar mooi groot aartappels, was hulle skoon! Kaatjie, haal jy vir my 'n spyker en 'n hamer, gou! moenie vra wat ek wil maak nie, jy sal sien!" ...Die aartappels geskil en gerasper, waters gou afgegooi. Die vierde was skoon en - mooi helder wit stysel! "Dê, Betta, jou water kook ne? Nou maak maar nes met al die ander stysels!" Betta was verstom...<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Gaitskell D, Kimble J, Maconachie M and Unterhalter E, "Class, race and gender: domestic workers in South Africa" in Review of African political economy, Number 27/28, 1984, p93.

<sup>51</sup> Van Onselen C, op cit, p2.

<sup>52</sup> Cock J, Maids and madams. A study in the politics of exploitation, pp240-241.

<sup>53</sup> Die Boerevrou, February 1923, pp17 and 19.

A few other arbitrary examples read:

Ons het 'n meidjie gehad wat bietjie groter as ek was. Sy was baie goed na my hand geleer. (M D Delport)

[We had a servant who was a bit older than I was. She was very good and trained to my will.]

Die Boerevrou, January 1924, p25.

Toe my tante tuiskom was daar baie wasgoed, wat die meide gewas het. Die aand sê my

[Last Tuesday I found out that I had run out of starch. I told the maid: "Wait, first iron the other things, I'll be back now." One, two, three called all the *Boerevrou*tjies together and we started chatting. Yes, here I find a recipe for potato starch. "Betta, fetch me a couple of nice, big potatoes, and clean them! Kaatjie, fetch me a nail and a hammer, quickly! Don't ask me what I want to do, you'll see!"...The potatoes were quickly peeled, grated, and the water strained. By the fourth time I had clean and clear white starch! "Here, Betta, your water is boiling, not so? Now, do it like with all other starches!" Betta was speechless...]

Domestic workers were present in households in all classes of society.<sup>54</sup> Class position, however, usually determined how many domestic workers were employed in the household and what work they did.<sup>55</sup> From a 1921 debate in Die Boerevrou it transpires to what extent Boer women relied on their black domestic workers. In letters to the journal women again and again claimed that it was impossible for women to cope with the housework without domestic workers. For instance, Mrs C de Villiers wrote that she really was overworked as she only had two domestic workers. She thought that at least three domestic workers per household was necessary to leave the "housewife" with time for her husband, her children, her charities and the needlework.<sup>56</sup> Given

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tante my niggie en ek en die meide moet gaan wasgoed optel. Ons wou nie vir die meide help nie... (G Nel)

[When my aunt arrived home there was a lot of washing which the servant-girls did. That evening my aunt told my niece and I and the servant-girls to take down the washing. We did not want to help the servant-girls.]

Die Boerevrou, June 1924. p19.

<sup>54</sup> Although the ethnic boundaries of womanhood will be discussed at a later stage, it should be stated here that despite the physical proximity between the housewife and the domestic worker, a definite social distance was maintained which made the recognition of a common womanhood impossible.

Cock J, op cit, p223.

<sup>55</sup> Loc cit and Gaitskell D, Kimble J, Maconachie M and Unterhalter E, op cit, p92.

<sup>56</sup> This claim was justified by three job-lists that were included in the letter. The lists contained the daily jobs of the three domestic servants:

#### Binnenmeid

Maandag: Zitkamer goed aan kant maken en zilvergoed schoonmaken,

Dinsdag: Voorkamer goed aan kant maken; alle ruiten binnenshuis en alle spiegels en elektriese lichten eens in de 14 dagen wassen.

Woensdag: Een week de eetkamer en een week de voorkamer goed aan kant maken. Alle kopergoed aan de deure en vensters en de gasketel in de badkamer schoon poetsen.

Donderdag: Een slaapkamer, de badkamer en de linnenkamer goed aan kant maken.  
Alle wastafels,  
kommen en

b e k e r s  
wassen.

Vrijdag: Een slaapkamer, schrijfkamer, werk- of naaikamer en de gang, goed aan kant gemaakt. Borstels en kammen met ammonia wassen.

Zaterdag: Twee slaapkamers, dispens en bediendekamer goed aan kant gemaakt.

#### Kok

Maandag: Melkkamer, alle rakken afstoffen en vloer schrobben.

Dinsdag: Bijkombuis, potterakken en borderak.

Woensdag: Stoof goed schoonmaken en kombuisvloer schrobben.

Donderdag: Kombuis, dispens, goed schoonmaken koek bakken.

Vrijdag: Alle blikgoed schuren. Binne dispens goed gestoft en geschrobd.

Zaterdag: Kombuis goed aan kant maken en vloer schrobben.

#### Kafferjong

Maandag: De tuin aan de rechterkant goed schoonmaken.

Dinsdag: Alle ruiten buitendeurs en 't tuinperk mooi snijden.

Woensdag: Alle kopergoed buitendeurs schoonmaken en de tuin aan de linkerkant.

Donderdag: De twee stoepen schrobben en de tuin voor de deur schoonmaken.

Vrijdag: Hoenderhokken en hoenderacterplaats goed schoonmaken.

Zaterdag: Groentekamer, was- en strijkkamer, stal, garage en kinder-achterplaats goed schrobben.

#### Housemaid

Monday: Tidy living-room thoroughly and clean silverware.

Tuesday: Tidy drawing-room thoroughly; wash all windows inside and electric lights every 14 days.

Wednesday: Tidy the dining-room thoroughly the one week and the drawing-room the other week. Polish all copper on doors and windows and the geyser in

the bathroom.

Thursday: Tidy one bedroom, the bathroom and the linen-room thoroughly. Wash all wash-stands, wash-bowls and pitchers.

Friday: Tidy one bedroom, writing-room, work- or sowing-room and the passage thoroughly. Wash brushes and combs with ammonia.

Saturday: Tidy two bedrooms, pantry and servant's room thoroughly.

#### Cook

Monday: Dust shelves and scrub floor of dairy.

Tuesday: Scullery, pot-rack and plate-rack.

Wednesday: Clean stove thoroughly and scrub kitchen floor.

Thursday: Clean kitchen and pantry thoroughly and bake cake.

Friday: Scour all tins. Dust and scrub pantry.

Saturday: Tidy kitchen thoroughly and scrub floor.

#### Kaffir boy

Monday: Clean the garden on the right thoroughly.

the size of Mrs De Villiers's house and yard, she was probably an example of a middle class or higher middle class woman.

Class position also determined the consequences of the availability of domestic workers. While it freed women in the working class to work outside the home, for women of the middle class "it grants their positions as wives and mothers a certain status; they have become the managers of labour rather than the performers thereof".<sup>67</sup> It is exactly this new status of middle class women who stayed at home that would contribute to the major dilemma of Afrikaans women of the early 20th century.

#### 4.1.3.2 Women who stayed at home

Capitalist development in South Africa, characterised by its unevenness, did not affect all the Afrikaner women in the same way. While some women in more agrarian contexts could continue with their involvement in home production, many women living in urbanising environments lost this function in the household, but nevertheless stayed home. With increasing capitalist and industrial development home production, and therefore also women's involvement in it, became more rare, even in rural areas.

#### 4.2.3.2.1 The continuation of home production

By 1920 there were still many Afrikaans women, especially rural women, who remained actively involved in home production and were working side by side with their husbands. A series of articles on farming that appeared in Die Boerevrou in 1923 and 1924 suggested that in important respects rural women were still seen as their husband's partners on the farm. These columns, which were specifically directed at women readers, did not only contain market reports and advertisements of market agents (because "(s)o baie van ons lesers is ver van die mark en ook nie voldoende op hoogte van sake nie"/so many of our readers are far from the markets and not

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Tuesday: Wash outside windows and cut lawn neatly.  
 Wednesday: Clean all copperware outside and the garden on the left.  
 Thursday: Scrub the two stoeps and clean the garden front of the door.  
 Friday: Clean chicken-coop and chicken-backyard thoroughly.  
 Saturday: Scrub vegetable-room, laundry, stable, garage and children's backyard thoroughly.]  
Die Boerevrou, January 1921, pp15-16.

<sup>67</sup> Bozzoli B, Feminist interpretations and South African studies: some suggested avenues for exploration, p23.

adequately informed), but also included articles about the advantages and disadvantages of farming, the social interests of rural people and other issues which were regarded as important both for the *boer* and the *boerevrou*<sup>58</sup>. In July and August 1923 the articles were entitled "Hoe 'n vrou haar man kan help" [How a woman/wife can help her husband] and discussed the woman's role on the farm. The July article dealt with the advantages and disadvantages of the different kinds of farming, while the August article covered the specific ways in which women could contribute to production. The activities which were recommended were soap making, canning, poultry farming, dairy farming and vegetable gardening.<sup>59</sup> These articles thus portrayed a woman still involved in production, not isolated from the activities of her husband.

The extent to which women remained involved in home production by the twenties is also apparent from the very popular column in Die Boerevrou called "Ruilkolom, vrae en wenke" [Exchange column, questions and tips]. Some examples from this column give a picture of ongoing domestic production and commercial activity based on this:

H M verkoop goeie wit boerseep teen 9d per lb.  
[H M is selling good white home-made soap at 9d per lb.]

Druuwe. Mej K Jordan maak bekend dat 10lb kassie druiwe, goed gepak, gestuur sal word na enige adres op ontvangs van 2/-.  
[Grapes, Miss K Jordan announces that a 10lb box grapes, well-packed, will be sent to any address at receipt of 2/-.]

Mev H v d Ahee het pragtige wit kalkoene om te verruil vir hoendervoer soos mielies, kafferkoring ens.<sup>60</sup>  
[Mrs H v d Ahee has beautiful white turkeys to exchange for chicken-feed such as maize, Kaffir corn, etc]

Mev J H Valkenburg het opregte Australiese swart Orpington hoenders, 12 hene en hane, om te verruil vir goeie gansvere.<sup>61</sup>  
[Mrs J H Valkenburg has pure-bred black Australian Orpington chicken, 12 hens and cocks, to exchange for goose-feathers.]

Mev A M Celliers wil die lesers laat weet dat sy uitverkoop is van pere en moskonfyt, maar

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<sup>58</sup> Used in this context the terms can be translated as "the farmer" and the "farmer's wife" or the "farm woman".

<sup>59</sup> Die Boerevrou, August 1923, pp44-45.

<sup>60</sup> Die Boerevrou, April 1924, p41.

<sup>61</sup> Die Boerevrou, May 1924, p53.

dat sy nog die volgende het: geskilde gesnipperde pere teen 5d per lb; gedroogde vye, gepers in een pond pakkies, teen 7d per lb; gedroogde appelkose, 6d per lb; rosyne, 4d per lb; heuningbostee, 3d per lb; fyn bergbesems, 4d stuk. Sy is gewillig om mielies in ruil te neem.

[Mrs A M Celliers wishes to inform readers that she is sold out of pears and *moskonfynt*, but that she still has the following: peeled, shredded pears at 5d per lb; dried apricots, 6d per lb; raisins, 4d per lb; bush-tea, 3d per lb; fine bush-brooms, 4d a piece. She is willing to accept maize in exchange.]

Similarly, the letters that appeared in the regular column of Die Boerevrou, "Om die koffietafel" [Around the coffee table], confirm that many women were still involved in home production. The following is an example of a letter dealing with home production:

Ek wil net 'n bietjie vertel van ons hoedemakery. Ons werk met raffia gras. Van al die tuisgemaakte hoede is raffia hoede die mooiste en sterkste wat ek nog gesien het...Mej B Badenhorst en C van Vuuren...is die vernaamste werksters. Hulle het al 220 hoede gemaak. Die meidjie (op die foto) is besig om die gras te knoop. Daar is baie werk aan verbonde voor so 'n hoed klaar is, bv die gras word eers nat gemaak, uitgesoek en aanmekaar geknoop voor 'n mens daarmee kan hekel.<sup>62</sup>

[I just want to tell something about our millinery. We use raffia grass. Of all home-made hats raffia hats are the prettiest and strongest I have ever seen...Miss B Badenhorst and C van Vuuren...are the principal workers. They have already made 220 hats. The servant-girl (on the picture) is busy knotting the grass. It involves a lot of work before a hat like this is finished, eg, one first wets the grass, select it and tie it together before one can crochet with it.]

#### 4.1.3.2.2 The changing role of women in the household

Gradually, however, industrialisation and capitalisation brought about changes that relieved women from much of their traditional household duties, including both productive and social labour.

In spite of all this evidence of the continuing involvement of women in home production, the spread of commodity production must have relieved the Boer woman, especially those who lived in towns and cities, of many of her tasks. The Carnegie report stated:

(I)n homes forming part of any real community...the supplies brought by the father are already prepared for use. The animal has already been slaughtered, and the meat is delivered ready to be cooked. The meal is bought ready ground or the bread ready baked; and many other foodstuffs are bought ready for consumption; there is an extensive choice

<sup>62</sup> Die Boerevrou, April 1924, p17.

of ready-made clothing or material for clothing.<sup>63</sup>

A few of the items in Die Boerevrou of April 1930 are perhaps indicative of the changing times:

Mev Du Preez het 'n goeie kou-water (ys)kas...Dis 'n onvergaanbare kas. Rede van verkoop - woon nou op dorp, dus slag en karring nie meer nie...<sup>64</sup>

[Mrs Du Preez has a cold-water (ice) box...It is an imperishable box. Reason for sale - now lives in town, therefore (she does not) slaughter and churn anymore.]

Mev A M Cilliers wil bekend maak dat sy niks meer het om te verkoop nie.<sup>65</sup>

[Mrs A M Cilliers wants to announce that she has nothing left to sell.]

The introduction of labour-saving appliances in the home also led to the "deskilling" of certain forms of domestic labour. Certain domestic tasks such as cleaning, gardening and cooking were being mechanised to a considerable degree.<sup>66</sup>

The state was slowly getting more involved in education, partly relieving women from another of their very important tasks in the domestic sphere. Formal education became compulsory in the Transvaal with the Education Act of 1917.

It is perhaps that very fine social observer, M E Rothmann (MER), who best described the changes

<sup>63</sup> Carnegie Commission as quoted by Bozzoli B, op cit, p15.

<sup>64</sup> Die Boerevrou, April 1930, p41.

<sup>65</sup> Die Boerevrou, April 1930, p41.

Mrs Cilliers used to be one of the most prolific contributors to the column (see 4.1.3.2.1)

<sup>66</sup> Bozzoli B, op cit, p23.

Not that all women made use of the new household equipment that became available! Mrs C de Villiers did not feel that machinery made her task as housewife any easier:

Ik heb ook 'n gasstoof, maar kook liever op mijn hout- en kolenstoof...Ik gebruik mijn gasstoof meestal alleen voor't koken van water. Ik vind, dat zulk 'n stoof nogal duur uitkomt. Ik heb ook 'n stofzuiger, maar twee mense moet ermee werken en omtrent eens per maand laat ik al mijn tapijten in de binnensplaats met 'n bezem vegen, want 'n stofzuier neemt er al't stof niet uit. Ik heb geeneen tapijt dat vastgespijkerd is.

[I also have a gas stove but rather cook on my wooden and coal stove...I usually use my gas stove only to boil water. I find that such a stove is quite expensive to run. I also have a vacuum cleaner but two people have to operate it and about once a month I have all my carpets swept in the courtyard because a vacuum cleaner does not take all the dust out of them. None of my carpets are nailed down.]

in the lives of women:

I think that you will find that the woman who has to run her household on her own manufactures from the raw product, spends not only her time but most of her creative energy in doing just that...The days are overfull for the woman; her children's needs, their food, their clothing made at home, the help she gives and the interest she often takes in the lives of the poorer women living round the farmhouse, the very large amount of thought and forethought that husband seeks and gets from the wife as to his share of the farming, all these things fill the days. When the town housewife plans her day she need not first see that the sheep is caught, slaughtered, cut up, salted, or otherwise used, for such a simple thing is the children's bread and butter. She will not have had long beforehand to plan for the best sort of corn, the best milling process, the fuel for baking and cooking, the baking, the milking, the cow's feed, even the seed for pasturage, the separating of the milk, and the churning of butter...But the strain on the farmer's wife is lessening a little, as it has long ago lessened very considerably for the townswoman. She gets soap and candles from the factory, a good deal of readymade clothing especially for her menfolks; the children are sent away to schools. Many conveniences have lightened her hometasks; water is laid on to her bathroom and kitchen, she has her sinks and wastepipes. The harvest time, the annually climbed mountain of the farmer's wife, has been shortened to a few days; motor ploughs and reapers have lessened the number of permanent labourers and the great strain on the kitchen, which used to be overwhelming. Farm women are taking breath...<sup>67</sup>

These processes - the decrease in home production, the introduction of public education, the availability of domestic workers and the mechanisation of certain domestic duties - which freed women from their productive and social labour in the domestic sphere, had the potential to liberate women. Paradoxically, however, because no alternative role was available to women, these processes instead created much frustration. It was this frustration and sense of loss that was addressed by Schreiner in her well-known Women and labour:

Our spinning wheels are all broken, and we dare no longer say proudly as of old, that we and we alone clothe our peoples...for a time we kept possession of the kneading trough and the brewing vat (but) today steam often shapes our bread and the loaves are set down by our very door.<sup>68</sup>

The decline of the old-style family economy robbed women of much of the status and fulfillment they enjoyed as participants in home production and as sole educators of their children. Even more important, this loss of her traditional role created an identity crisis for the woman who stayed at home: Who was she? What was her role? What was her purpose in life? This dilemma of women

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<sup>67</sup> Rothmann M E, M E Rothmann collection, University of Stellenbosch Document Centre, 55.L.3(1), "The Afrikaner attitude towards woman's suffrage" (speech read to a meeting of the Women's Enfranchisement League, Cape Town, 1926), pp1-2.

<sup>68</sup> Schreiner O, op cit, p11.

is powerfully expressed by Schreiner in the last paragraph of Women and labour:

It is because so wide and gracious to us are the possibilities of the future; so impossible is a return to the past, so deadly is a passive acquiescence in the present, that today we are found everywhere raising our strange new cry - "Labour and the training that fits us for labour!"

This dilemma could be solved in various ways. Women either had to assign a new importance and relevance to their role in the household or they had to find a new role in the labour market - like their working sisters. Schreiner's demand for training and labour was the feminist response to women's crisis.

#### 4.1.3.3 Women working outside the house

Of crucial importance to the changing role of Afrikaans women in the first three decades of the century, was the process through which the female labour participation in the labour market steadily increased during this time.<sup>69</sup> This change was the most visible in the industrial sector. According to Joubert the increase of women workers in the industries was not only substantial during the First World War, but also from 1922/23 onwards during the economic revival. The number of men in the industrial labour market was constant between 1924 and 1933 while there was a marked increase in the number of women.<sup>70</sup> Joubert shows that while women represented only 14,6% of the industrial labour force in 1924/25, this figure grew, in spite of the depression, to about 25% in 1938.<sup>71</sup>

The census of 1921 indicated that 68,7% of the working women on the Witwatersrand were housewives, while the same percentage for 1926 was 74,4%.<sup>72</sup> This would indicate that the norm, even in a highly industrialised area like the Witwatersrand, still was for women not to be employed outside the house.

In the pages of Die Boerevrou the issue of working women increasingly became a topic of

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<sup>69</sup> Grosskopf J F W, The poor white problem in South Africa. Report of the Carnegie Commission. Part 1. Economic report: Rural impoverishment and rural exodus, p218.

<sup>70</sup> Joubert J, Blanke arbeid in die sekondêre industrieë aan die Witwatersrand, 1924-1933, p150.

<sup>71</sup> Joubert J, op cit, p151.

<sup>72</sup> Calculated from Joubert J, op cit, pp151 and 200.

discussion, indicating the extent to which working women were becoming part of the Afrikaner's social reality. Although Die Boerevrou provided very little factual information on this score, the magazine not only reflected general attitudes about working women, but also attempted to shape those attitudes, a matter to which we will return below. Suffice here to say that by 1920 there still was a very clear bias against working women.

In the context of a society in which it was considered not desirable for women to work outside the house, it is important to try and establish why some women went against the wishes of society and did go out to work. By and large it was economic needs which drove women to find work outside the domestic sphere. For South Africa as a developing capitalist society the gap between the myth that women were supported by men and the reality that so many were not, caused a huge dilemma for women.<sup>73</sup> Joubert states that in practice the married woman often was the breadwinner. He quotes a study conducted in 1931 by the University of the Witwatersrand which found that out of a total of 455 women 40% were the actual breadwinners of their households. Figures for married and unmarried women combined indicated that 50,7% of the women could not rely on the income of men.<sup>74</sup> The most important reasons why women in the working class worked outside the house were bread and butter issues. They worked because their husbands' incomes were not sufficient, they worked because they wanted a better position for their family in society or they worked because their husbands were unemployed. They also worked because they were single and had to support themselves or had to help support their parental household.

In her study of the garment workers Brink attempts to show that, although the women workers were socially looked down upon, their economic role as workers was vital for the survival of their families. She quotes a garment worker, Anna Jacobs, as saying:

Wat help dit as ons vrouens tussen die potte en panne werk en dit is leeg? Moet ons handjies vou en wag tot daar self kos in die potte val?  
 [Does it serve any purpose if we women work among the pots and the pans and these are empty? Must we fold hands and wait until food falls into the pots automatically?]<sup>75</sup>  
 (Brink's translation)

Brink suggests that there was an inverse relationship between the availability of employment for

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<sup>73</sup> Gordon L, op cit, p621.

<sup>74</sup> Joubert J, op cit, p149.

<sup>75</sup> Brink E, The Afrikaner women of the Garment Worker's Union, 1918-1939, pp1-2.

men and the number of women and children who worked. The Afrikaner household now increasingly functioned as a wage-earning unit and to survive economically all possible avenues of employment had to be explored.<sup>76</sup> This also implies, according to Brink, that women were drawn into capitalism and into the wage labour market in times of depression rather than in times of prosperity.

Grosskopf similarly commented on the importance of the role of the women in poor white families. He implied that wives and daughters often supported or helped to support the household when the father earned little or nothing:

On the whole the female members of the poor rural families in the bigger towns command our highest respect...Not only the mothers, but the daughters as well, greatly contribute to the advance of such poor families in the towns...it depends very largely on the womenfolk and especially the mother, whether the family sinks lower or rises.<sup>77</sup>

The Carnegie Commission remarked on the vital role of the daughter in the poor white family:

The earnings of the girls are of great importance to the poor family; particularly in the cities the family forms the wage-earning unit. Hence there is a natural supply of female labour...and the excess of womenfolk in the cities is directly connected with the attraction exerted by the opportunities so offered.<sup>78</sup>

If Grosskopf described the supportive role that daughters played in many households,<sup>79</sup> M E Rothmann added in her report that in most cases working girls lived with their families "for the wages of women in factories...do not enable them to support themselves". The girl could not manage without the home and, on the other hand, her additional wage was of the greatest importance to the family. This clearly demonstrates the importance of the household as a wage-earning unit.<sup>80</sup>

Even so, in the Afrikaner community there was a blatant refusal to acknowledge the reality of working women. We will return to this question below. In the present context the relevant point

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<sup>76</sup> Brink E, op cit, pp39, 55 and 56.

<sup>77</sup> Grosskopf J F W, op cit, p219.

<sup>78</sup> ibid, pxxiii.

<sup>79</sup> Grosskopf J F W, op cit, pp219-220.

<sup>80</sup> Rothmann M E, The poor white problem in South Africa. Report of the Carnegie Commission. Part 5 (b). Sociological report: The mother and daughter in the poor family, p208.

concerns the fact that as more and more Afrikaner women entered the labour market and even became fully proletarianised, this was one of the factors which made it necessary for Afrikaner nationalist ideologues to formulate a clearer position regarding women. Walker identifies some of the more important reasons for this. Women working outside the domestic sphere had the effect of "softening" prejudices against female involvement in the public sphere.<sup>81</sup> Being wage-earners outside the domestic sphere gave many women "a new autonomy" - working women were "less inclined to submit unquestioningly to male control over their independence and their earnings".<sup>82</sup> Working women, especially those working in fields that were traditionally reserved for men, served as "alternative role models for women, visibly challenging the presumption of female intellectual inferiority and dependence on male breadwinners".<sup>83</sup>

In concluding this section on women's work in industrialising South Africa, one can say that even such a superficial survey of Afrikaans women's labour in and outside the household at the beginning of the century suggests that middle class women were facing a dilemma. Not yet forced by circumstances to seek employment outside their homes, the demise of the old-style family economy and other contributing factors also relieved them from many of their duties in the domestic sphere. They had to find a new role and a new identity. There were various options to choose from, and various historical processes and events in the first twenty years of the century would shape this choice. The *volksmoeder* discourse was but one of the responses to this dilemma.

#### 4.2 Women on the foreground: the heroines of the South African War

One of the historical events that profoundly affected the image as well as the consciousness of Afrikaans women, was the South African War. In the unique and traumatic context of the war Afrikaans women were pushed to the foreground. Whereas socio-economic changes resulted in uncertainties about the position of women in society, it was events such as the war that brought about radical changes in social relations and views.

##### 4.2.1 Women at war

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<sup>81</sup> Walker C, op cit, p331.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid, p332.

<sup>83</sup> Loc cit.

With the outbreak of the South African War in 1899, family life was immediately disrupted: with men being called up, women had to take care of their homes and farms.<sup>84</sup> When General Roberts ordered his troops in March 1900 to start burning down houses, women were even more directly affected. Although the destitute women and children were at first handed over to the fighting Boer commandos, the British authorities started a policy of "refugee camps" in September 1900. These "refugee camps" did not only accommodate refugees, but also housed the families of fighting Boers who had been driven into the camps. By the end of the war there were more than forty camps for whites housing altogether more than 116 000 people. Conditions varied from camp to camp but by the end of the war 27 927 Boers (including 22 000 children under 16 years and 4 000 adult women) had died in the concentration camps. Spies comments that this was "certainly more than, and possibly double, the number of men on both sides who were killed in action".<sup>85</sup> Although there are isolated accounts of women being involved in the actual conflict of the war,<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> During the South African War women were largely responsible for running the farms. Andriessen described women doing "men's work" in the absence of the men during the war:

De oogst werd binnengehaald, het koren gemaaid, aan schoven gebonden en door vrouwen- en kinderarmen naar de zolders gebracht. En dan nog zorgden die trouwe echtgenoten voor de aartsvaderlijke gezinnen...zij voorzagen de beesten van het noodige om hen straks weer te gebruiken voor den ploeg...Het was pijnlijk om te zien, die vrouwen overal...die **mannenwerk** deden. In de stallen vrouwen, op het veld jonge meisjes, ossenwagens bereden door vrouwen, en dat alles kalm en rustig... (My emphasis.)

[The harvest was brought in, the corn cut, bundled and carried to the lofts in women's and children's arms. And then the faithful wives also look after the patriarchal families...they provide the cattle with the necessary to maybe use them for ploughing...It was painful to see women everywhere...doing men's work. In the stables women, young girls in the veld, ox-wagons driven by women, and everything calm and peaceful.]

Andriessen W F, op cit, pp80-81.

<sup>85</sup> Spies S B, op cit, pp162, 164-165, 167, 169-170.

<sup>86</sup> Examples of these tales are: A certain Mrs Otto Krantz was reported to have remained in the field during the Natal campaign and Helena Wagner of Zeerust was said to have spent five months fighting without her identity being revealed. Hendrina Joubert was rumoured to have been chief military adviser to her husband, Commandant-General Joubert. (See also Rompel-Koopmans L, Wat Mevrouw Generaal Joubert vertelt.) When General P A Cronje surrendered in the laager at Paardeberg in February 1900, his wife, Hester, and about 50 other women (100 according to Andriessen) were with him. (Andriessen comments: "...moedig was dat zeker, maar toch moet haar aanwezigheid hier ook wel belemmerend hebben gewerkt op de bewegingen van den generaal."/it was certainly brave, but their presence must have hampered the movements of the general.) Cronje's wife even accompanied him into exile to St Helena.

Spies S B, "Women and the war" in Warwick P (ed), The South African War, p161-162; Andriessen W F, op cit, pp78 and 80.

it is highly improbable that there was widespread active female participation in the military conflict.

Besides their suffering in the camps, women were also recognised for their encouragement and support of the Boer commandos<sup>87</sup>, their spying activities<sup>88</sup> and their active resistance to and

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Andriessen quotes from a letter from an Orange Free State woman to Boere who did not go to fight:

Wat mij en vele vrouwen met mij betreft, wij staan gereed om zoodra mogelijk schouder aan schouder te vechten met onze mannen en broeders en ons bloed te offeren voor de vrijheid...

[As far as I, and many women with me, am concerned, we are ready to, as soon as possible, fight shoulder to shoulder with our husbands and brothers and to offer our lives for freedom...]

He then mentioned that a few weeks after this letter appeared in the newspaper, some of the Boers who were killed in a battle near Ladysmith were found to be women.

Andriessen W F, op cit, p82.

<sup>87</sup> A letter from Smuts at this time reads:

En toch volharden ook dezen (de vrouwen) op de wonderbaarlijkste wijze; bijna geen brief wordt uit deze gevangeniskampen naar de commando's doorgesmokkeld, of hij moedigt de mans aan om te volharden tot den dood en toch nooit de schande van overgave op den naam der familie te brengen. Geen wonder dat de burgers vast gelooven, dat zulk een geest niet van den mensch maar van God is...

[But they (the women) persevered in the most miraculous way; almost no letter was smuggled from these concentration camps to the commandos or they encouraged the men to persevere until death and to never bring the disgrace of surrender over the name of the family. No wonder the burgers firmly believed that such a spirit was not from man but from God...]

Andriessen W F, op cit, p86.

Both Kitchener and Roberts saw the fact that most of the women were encouraging their husbands and sons to keep on fighting and not to give up as an important factor in the war. Various strategies were followed in order to neutralise the influence of the women (see Spies S B, op cit, pp164-175). Five days after assuming command Kitchener wrote to Roberts:

The woman question is always cropping up and is...difficult. There is no doubt the women are keeping up the war and are far more bitter than the men...

Spies S B, op cit, p168.

<sup>88</sup> Andriessen W F, op cit, p84; Spies S B, op cit, p164. See also Johanna Brandt's very interesting account of women's spying activities in Pretoria, The petticoat commando or boer women in the secret service.

contempt for the English soldiers<sup>89</sup>.

The end of the South African War saw the emergence of "a considerable body of literature" of Afrikaans women about their war experience.<sup>90</sup> For once, the plight of women did not go

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<sup>89</sup> Andriessen quotes several examples: A Bloemfontein woman was ordered to bake bread for the English: she first refused but was then forced to do so. After eating the bread all the soldiers got sick and on investigation it was found that copper acid was added to the dough.

A woman said to an English soldier, "die klappertand van koors" (shivering with fever): "Ik sal jou niet helpen om je weer beter te maken, opdat je onze menschen kunt gaan doodschieten." [I will not help to heal you, because you can kill go and kill our people.]

The daughter of Commandant Fourie watched tearless but angry how her house is set on fire. After everything had been burnt down, the officer asked for a cup of coffee, which was brought to him personally by the daughter of Fourie. Very surprised he asked her why she did this after he had just burnt down her house. She answered:

Alleen, omdat 't onze menschen nog bitterder en nog dapperder zal maken, wanneer zij hooren dat ik u nog koffie gegeven heb, nadat gij ons alles hadt ontstolen. Ieder kop koffie - geloof dat vrij - zullen onze menschen op u wreken.

[Only because it will make our people even more bitter and brave when they hear that I gave you coffee, after you had taken everything from us. Every cup of coffee - believe me - our people will revenge.]

Andriessen W F, op cit, pp84-85.

<sup>90</sup> Spies S B, "Women and the war" in Warwick P (ed), The South African War, p161. Although I use Spies's terminology in calling it a "considerable body of literature", it is only when comparing it to what had been previously published about women that one can regard it to be considerable. When compared with the body of literature published about men's experiences in the war, it seems paltry. The body of literature covering women's experiences in the war, published before 1925, includes the following publications: Hobhouse E (Emily), The brunt of the war and where it fell (1902); Neethling E N (Mrs), Should we forget? (1902?); Vis W R (Wilhelmina), Tien maanden in een vrouwenkamp. Het leven en lijden van een boeregezin in Transvaal tijdens den laatsten oorlog met Engeland (1902) Andriessen W F, De vrouwen der boeren (pamphlet-1903); De la Rey J E (Mrs), A woman's wanderings and trials during the Anglo Boer War (1903); De la Rey J A, Mijne omswervingen en beproevingen gedurende den oorlog (?); ADL, Woman's endurance (1904) Brandt J (Johanna), Het concentratie-kamp van Irene (1905); Brandt J, Die kappiekommando of boerevroue in geheime diens (published in Die Brandwag in 1912 and 1913, subsequently published in book form in Afrikaans); Brandt J, The petticoat commando or boer women in secret service (1913); Neethling E N, Vergeeten? (1917); McCrystal, Ter herinneringen aan onze heldinnen en lieve kinderen (pamphlet-1918); Van Helsdingen J (Johanna), Vrouweleed. Persoonlike ondervindinge in die boeroorlog (1918); Boshoff-Liebenberg L (Lenie), Moedersmart en kinderleed of 18 maande in die konsentrasiekampe (1921?); Badenhorst A (Aletta), Tant Alie of Transvaal: her diary 1880-1902 (1923); Hobhouse E, War without glamour (1924); Postma M (Mrs), Stemme uit die vrouekampe. Gedurende die Tweede Vryheidsoorlog tussen Boer en Brit van 1899 tot 1902 (1925);. Although this list is not comprehensive, only one

unrecorded.<sup>91</sup> Although for the purposes of this thesis it is not possible or necessary to survey in detail the contents of this literature in any detail,<sup>92</sup> it is important to note that the general message the books conveyed was both that Afrikaans women had suffered and endured much, and also that the role they had been playing during the war had been courageous and important.

This raises the question why the plight of Afrikaans women, who had previously almost been ignored in literature, received so much publicity during and immediately after this war. There are different reasons why this might have happened. The first and most obvious reason is that these women did suffer an appalling social tragedy: more children and women died in the concentration camps than men died on the battlefields. The South African War was the first war in which guerrilla tactics, which affected women and children more directly, were employed.

Another reason was the fact that there had been many other women from different social backgrounds who witnessed what happened to Boer women or who were in some way involved in the war. The different groups that Spies distinguishes are the British upper class women who became involved due to their husbands' participation in the war, the many British upper and middle class women who came to South Africa as nurses, the social reformers and humanitarians (including Emily Hobhouse), and finally the "smart hord"<sup>93</sup> of "women camp followers who were less useful".<sup>94</sup> Socially prominent women in Cape Town, such as Marie Koopmans-De Wet, were also active observers of the events in the neighbouring provinces. These women observers looked

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of the books (the one written by ADL) and the two pamphlets were written by men. Of all the women referred to above, only Emily Hobhouse was not South African. Apart from these books there were also official reports. Helkampe by Ewald Steenkamp was published in 1941 and 1964 saw the publication of Tant Miem Fischer se kampdagboek. (For more information about these books see "Bibliography".) For examples of books about men's experiences of the war see the books listed under "Military aspects of the war" and "Life on commando" in Warwick P (ed), op cit, pp404-405.

<sup>91</sup> Spies even suggests that women's sufferings were sometimes emphasised at the cost of other aspects of the war.  
Spies S B, op cit, p161.

<sup>92</sup> Surprisingly, very little original research has been conducted about women's experiences in the war. Although most South African history books include some account of the concentration camps, these accounts are normally quite stereotypical and it seems that only S B Spies has written about the concentration camps from a modern perspective.

<sup>93</sup> J S Merriman quoted by Spies S B, op cit, p180.

<sup>94</sup> For more details see Ibid, pp177-182.

at the war from a woman's point of view (as Hobhouse's almost feminist preface indicates) and it is not surprising that they would focus on what had happened to women during the war. Because of a growing awareness of feminist issues world-wide, these observations found a ready audience.

The actual effect of all the publicity concerning women's sufferings in the war is hard to establish. It is not clear to what extent the books were distributed and how widely they were read. Steenkamp claimed in his Helkampe (published in 1940) that the literature actually reached very few people. He ascribed this to three reasons: many of the books (especially those of Emily Hobhouse)<sup>95</sup> were suppressed, the books were badly distributed and most of the books made for very difficult reading as they usually simply consisted of a number of affidavits.<sup>96</sup> However, from Hobhouse's own accounts in her personal letters it seems that her books made her quite well-known in South Africa. She related a few episodes in which South Africans approached her and congratulated her on the book.<sup>97</sup> Elsabe Brink claims that "the book (The brunt of the war and where it fell) seems to have had a considerable effect on those who did read it - mainly patriotic Afrikaners".<sup>98</sup>

Apart from the reasons for and effects of these accounts we also have to establish who it was that wrote about women's experiences, how these experiences were represented and what purposes the accounts had to serve. The primary literature mostly consisted of first-hand accounts covering the sufferings of women during the war. Although the work of Hobhouse is usually emphasised in this regard,<sup>99</sup> and correctly so, it is important to keep in mind that many Afrikaans women also published their own accounts, with or without Hobhouse's encouragement. Many women wrote personal reports that were included in compilations. Gaitskell and Unterhalter's

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<sup>95</sup> Steenkamp claims that many important bookshops in London and Cape Town did not sell Hobhouse's books. This claim is substantiated by Hobhouse herself in letters to Mrs Steyn and Leonard Hobhouse respectively. She said that her book seemed to be "under silent prohibition". Steenkamp E, Helkampe, p15 and Van Reenen R (ed), Emily Hobhouse. Boer War letters, pp173, 180.

<sup>96</sup> Steenkamp E, Helkampe, pp11-12.

<sup>97</sup> Van Reenen R (ed), op cit, pp177, 201 and 340.

<sup>98</sup> Brink E, op cit, p278.

<sup>99</sup> See for instance Brink E, "Man-made women: gender, class and the ideology of the volksmoeder" in Walker C (ed), Women and gender in southern Africa to 1945, p277.

statement, that the image of women in the Boer War was shaped by male cultural entrepreneurs with "the women as silent as in their stereotypical portrayal"<sup>100</sup> is thus not correct. Although cultural entrepreneurs (men and women) would later use the image of the suffering women in the concentration camps to construct a new nationalist and new gender discourse, directly after the war women themselves were largely responsible for this literature<sup>101</sup> about and the images of women's sufferings in the war.<sup>102</sup> As examples it will suffice to quote Johanna Brandt and "Mrs Wijlen Ds H L Neethling":

Het was een akelig leven in het kamp...en overall waren bloedende harten van moeders, die hun kinderen moesten zien sterven, van vrouwen in angst en spanning over hun vechtende mannen en zoons, en toch waren wij, die dagelijks met hen leefden, hoe langer hoe meer doordrongen van eerbied en respect voor hun heldenmoed, hun geloof en geduld en vast vertrouwen op den God hunner vaderen.<sup>103</sup>

[Life in the camp was horrible...and everywhere were the bleeding hearts of mothers who had to see their children die, of women anxious and tense about their fighting men and children. However, the longer we, who lived with them from day to day, remained with them, the more we were filled with reverence and respect for their heroism, their faith and patience and their firm trust in God their father.]

The patriotism, the patience, the endurance of the women, has been wonderful. To many a one there was no loss, no hardship, no disappointment she feared so much as that her husband would disgrace his men and surrender. We know of a woman in a camp who had lost her only two children and had suffered much; but when her husband came in, instead of welcoming him, she burst into tears, exclaiming, "O, this is the hardest blow of

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<sup>100</sup> Gaitskell D and Unterhalter E, "Mothers of the nation: a comparative analysis of nation, race and motherhood in Afrikaner nationalism and the ANC" in Davis N and Anthias F, Women - Nation - State, p60.

<sup>101</sup> This is not to accept that these accounts were in all respects accurate. The relevant point is that these were the kinds of descriptions that shaped the public's image of the camps. For alternative views on the camps see Martin A C, The concentration camps. 1900-1902. Facts, figures and fables and Devitt N, The concentration camps in South Africa during the Anglo-Boer War or 1899-1902 for criticism of the women's accounts.

<sup>102</sup> Willem Postma, for instance, in his 1919 Boerevrou. Moeder van ons volk supplied his readers with a "gruwel-register" [register of atrocities] and said that for proof of this the books of Miss Hobhouse, Mrs Brandt van Warmelo, Mrs De Larey, Mrs Joubert, Mrs Van der Walt, Miss Wilhemina Riem-Vis, Mrs Neethling, General De Wet, General Viljoen, Captain Jack Hindon, the Reverend J D Kestell could be read. Postma W, op cit, p150.

<sup>103</sup> Brandt J, Het concentratie-kamp van Irene, p11.

all".<sup>104</sup>

In the process of publicising what happened to women in the concentration camps, the work of Emily Hobhouse acquired a special prominence, and it is relevant that she specifically set out to provide a woman's perspective. Just before the signing of the peace treaty in May 1902, she published a book entitled The brunt of the war and where it fell. This is how she explained her goal with the book:

This book is designed to give an outline of the recent war, **from the standpoint of women and children**...So far, little has been heard in England of the farm-burning and the camps, from the sides of those most concerned. The story is therefore largely told in the letters of women and in descriptions written by their friends. On them fell the brunt of the war.<sup>105</sup> (My emphasis.)

Two themes were present in all Hobhouse's works on the South African War. The first one was a distinctly anti-war theme as was evident from the introduction to her second book War without glamour, published in 1924: "...these accounts are, in my belief, a real aid to the cause of permanent peace, for they depict war in simple unvarnished language..."<sup>106</sup> The second, less explicit, theme was a feminist one. Hobhouse regarded her accounts of the war as evidence of the strength of women: "The women maintained extraordinary composure and seldom lost mental control under this ordeal..."<sup>107</sup> That her accounts had little to do with specific pro-Boer sentiments is clear; she was concerned with a general anti-war pro-woman statement. This appears from the preface that she wrote for Tant Alie of Transvaal. Her diary:

It has long been my dream to see issued a range of such books from all lands stretching back to all ages, recording war from the standpoint of women and children: those passive but heroic figures massed obscurely in the background of **every war**, but ultimately bearers of its worst and most long-enduring burdens.<sup>108</sup> (My emphasis.)

In the many other books that were published about the concentration camps, two additional themes featured, informing these accounts with a nationalist and symbolic significance. Firstly, we find an emphasis on the idea that the war in general and the experiences of women specifically were very important for the building of the nation. Johanna Brandt, in her account of her

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<sup>104</sup> Neethling E N, Should we forget?, pp5-6.

<sup>105</sup> Hobhouse E, The brunt of the war and where it fell, p xv.

<sup>106</sup> Hobhouse E, War without glamour, p5.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid, p6.

<sup>108</sup> Badenhorst A, op cit, p7.

experiences as a nurse in the Irene concentration camp, saw the war as having been a unifying experience for Afrikaans people, and that therefore it was worthwhile recording its history:

...en deze dingen moeten bewaard worden met al het ander, zoowel goed als kwaad, dat medegewerkt heef om den Afrikaanschen stam tot een volk te maken. O, vrouwen van Zuid-Afrika, schrijft op alles wat gij geleden hebt onder de handen van onze machtige verdrukkers. Niets mag verloren gaan, niets mag vergeten worden.<sup>109</sup>  
 [...and these things must be preserved with all the other, both good and bad, that contributed to making the Afrikaans tribe a nation. Oh, women of South Africa, write down all the things you suffered at the hands of our mighty oppressors. Nothing must be lost, nothing must be forgotten.]

Similarly, in a very early (1902) account of the war, Should we forget?, E N Neethling stated that her reasons for writing the book were, firstly, "to induce all good men and women to see and acknowledge the horror, the wickedness of war" and, secondly, to declare that "we realise that we, Afrikaners of the republics and the colonies from the Cape to the Zambesi, are today, more than we ever were before, ONE PEOPLE".<sup>110</sup> The point that this "sad chapter in the building of a united people" should not be forgotten, was frequently repeated.<sup>111</sup>

In his preface to Lenie Boshoff-Liebenberg's book about the war, Jan F E Celliers stated that the book would not only remind people of the strength of the Boer woman, but also "(a)s ons eendag as volk bereik het wat ons moet en sal bereik, dan sal ons in boeke soos hierdie een kan nagaan waar en wanneer en hoe die boustone van 'n groot volk gelê is" [if we as a nation one day achieve what we must and will achieve, then we will be able to trace in books like these where and when the building-blocks of a great nation were laid].

Secondly, we find that in these accounts the heroines of the war were represented as ideal women, and by implication all Afrikaans women were told that they should strive towards this ideal. We may discern in this the earliest beginning of the establishment of a new nationalist and

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<sup>109</sup> Brandt J, Het concentratie-kamp van Irene, p123.

<sup>110</sup> Neethling E N, Should we forget?, pp127 and 128.

<sup>111</sup> In 1917 an Afrikaans version of the book, Vergeten?, was published. It was not a direct translation and the author explained that her attitude when writing a book for her own people had to be different. The Afrikaans book is much more emotional than the original English version. Neethling noted on the title page:

NB: Dit boek is niet voor diegenen, die willen vergeten.  
 [NB: This book is not for those who want to forget.]

gender discourse: the idealised representation of the suffering Afrikaner woman functions as a symbol of martyrdom for the cause of the nation.

In a 1904 pamphlet "Die vrouwen der boeren" W F Andriessen stated that "de vrouwen der Boeren...zijn in dezen oorlog op de zwaarste proef gesteld, maar schitterend hebben zij die doorstaan; een voorbeeld zijn zij geweest, dat vele mannen niet hebben kunnen navolgen. Den lijdensbeker, die haar aan de lippen werd gezet, hebben zij tot den laatsten druppel leeggedronken en ook toen nog hebben zij pal gestaan, zijn zij gebleven trouw en onbezweken" [the wives of the Boers...were tried to the utmost during this war but endured it splendidly; they were an example many men could not follow. The cup of bitterness that was put to her lips she drank to the last drop and she still stood firm, she remained faithful and unwavering].<sup>112</sup> He described the women as follows:

Zoo staan die vrouwen daar voor ons, eenvoudig van uiterlijk, niet geleerd, maar met een opvatting van nationaliteit, een vrijheidszin en een opofferingsgezindheid, die ons vervullen met diep ontzag.<sup>113</sup>

A chaplain in the concentration camp of Bethulie, ADL, had his diary published in 1904. He stressed that his goal with the book, entitled Women's endurance, was not political, but rather "that it presents the story of that endurance, and the fortitude of the Dutch women and children, one of the noble aspects of the war".<sup>114</sup> While ADL himself thus stressed that he only wanted to tell a story, the secretary of the Boer Relief Committee, D de Villiers, who wrote the preface to ADL's book, thought the book might fulfil more specific functions: "May this pathetic relation...serve to awake in every woman's breast the desire to emulate and perpetuate the pure faith and noble devotion which these sisters of ours have handed down to us and to all posterity as their priceless legacy."<sup>115</sup>

It is possible to assert that at least the Afrikaans leaders, and especially those who would become nationalists, were aware of the issues raised in this post-war literature, and in subsequent years used it for different purposes, both in the construction of an Afrikaner nationalist discourse and for a distinctive gender discourse. In the following sections we will trace how these themes were

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<sup>112</sup> Andriessen W F, op cit, p65.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid, p67.

<sup>114</sup> ADL, Women's endurance, "Introduction of author".

<sup>115</sup> Ibid, "Preface".

taken up and given a symbolic significance in the emerging Afrikaner nationalist discourses.

#### 4.3.2 The Vrouemonument [Women's monument]

In 1907 President Steyn called a national conference, to be held on 7 February 1907, for representatives of all major Afrikaner parties and organisations. The purpose of this conference was to discuss Steyn's wish to honour the women and children who died in the South African War. This wish of Steyn cannot simply be taken at face value. Although Steyn was undoubtedly moved by the plight of women and children during the war, as an Afrikaner statesman he probably saw such an occasion as an opportunity to bring together the Afrikaans people. The conference's first decision was that a monument would be erected in "roemrijke nagedachten" [honorary memory] of "de moeders, vrouwen en kinderen, die tijdens den jongsten oorlog zijn omgekomen, of op ander wijze bitter hebben geleden in de vrouwen kampen of daar buiten" [the mothers, the women and children who die in the youngest war, or suffered in the women's camps or elsewhere].<sup>116</sup> The second decision recorded added an important difference in emphasis:

Besluit no 2. Het wordt besloten dat een waardig Monument worde opgericht om uiting te geven aan **het nationaal gevoel van bewondering** voor de vrouwen en kinderen die in de kampen tijdens den oorlog hebben geleden.

Dit Monument de vorm te hebben van een gedenkzuil of standbeeld, waarop of waardoor uitgedrukt zal worden vooral **het lijden voor het Vaderland** door de Afrikaansche vrouw verduurd.<sup>117</sup> (My emphasis.)

[Resolution no 2. It is decided that a worthy monument will be erected to express the national feeling of admiration for the women and children who died in the camps during the war.

This monument will have the shape of a commemorative pillar or statue on which or through which especially the suffering the Afrikaans women endured for the Fatherland will be expressed.]

While the initial decision had been more concerned with the women and their sufferings, the second decision emphasised the significance these sufferings would have for a potential nation. The minutes of the meeting reflect a process of reinterpreting the sufferings as having been endured for nationalist reasons.

This nationalist interpretation of the women's war experiences was further elaborated by Totius

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<sup>116</sup> Van der Merwe N J, Die nasionale vrouemonument, p3.

<sup>117</sup> Van der Merwe N J, Die nasionale vrouemonument, p3.

(J D du Toit) in his first collection of poems, By die monument [At the monument], published in 1908. In three sections entitled "Die kind" [The child], "Die vrou" [The woman] and "Die man" [The man], the concentration camps were viewed from these three different perspectives. The collection of poems was published to help raise money for the proposed monument and was dedicated to the woman and children who died during the war.<sup>118</sup>

Shortly before the unveiling of the monument on 16 December 1913,<sup>119</sup> Totius published Rachel, a collection of poems devoted to the memory of the suffering of Afrikaans families. In the title poem the Afrikaans woman was compared to Rachel, the "mother of Israel", and the central idea of the volume was that the suffering and sacrifice of the women and children brought national salvation. Throughout the collection the emphasis in the depiction of women was on mothering. Steyn, in his introduction to the book, used the cradle as symbol to emphasise the importance of mothering and reproduction for the *volk*:

Rachel is 'n wieg Lied - nie om aan die slaap te sus, maar liever om wakker te skud...die toekoms van ons land en volk lê in die wieg. Die oplossing van die meeste van ons groot vraagstukke sal gevonde word in die wieg. Dit is die wieg, wat traagheid en selfsug vernietig, wat die arbeid en liefde bevorder, en wat ons volk veredel en bewaar. Hulde, driewerf hulde aan die Afrikaanse vrou en moeder, wat haar nie skaam nie en wat nie skrik nie vir die wieg, en wat altijd gereed is om haarself en haar kroos voor volk en vaderland op te offer.<sup>120</sup>

[Rachel is a lullaby - not to soothe us to sleep, but rather to stir us up...the future of our country and volk is lying in the cradle. The solution to most of our questions will be found in the cradle. It is the cradle that destroys sluggishness and selfishness, that promotes labour and love, and that elevates and preserves our nation. Honour...to the Afrikaans wife and mother who is not ashamed and who is not scared of the cradle, and who is always ready to sacrifice herself and her offspring for volk and fatherland.]

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<sup>118</sup> Totius, Bij die monument and Hexham I, The irony of apartheid, pp23-24 and 34-35.

<sup>119</sup> Hexham comments on Totius' "remarkable" sense of timing in publishing his poetry. He remarks that By die monument appeared at a time when emotions were high about the sufferings of women and children during the war. These emotions led to the plan to erect the monument. Similarly, the publication of Rachel "catches the spirit of a later period when expectations were rising as the unveiling ceremony...grew near." Hexham I, op cit, p42.

It cannot be questioned that Totius had a remarkable sense of timing. What is not certain, however, is to what extent his poetry reflected or captured the spirit of the time. It might just as well have been that his books helped to create or construct the spirit of the time.

<sup>120</sup> Totius, Rachel, pi.

On 16 December 1913 the monument was unveiled. According to reports, between 15 000 and 20 000 people from all over South Africa travelled to Bloemfontein "at great personal cost" to celebrate the unveiling of the monument. The event was given extensive coverage in the Afrikaans press.<sup>121</sup> If the symbolism of women's suffering was thus appropriated for the Afrikaner nationalist cause, this was not yet done wholly in terms of a mothering discourse. It is of some significance that the monument was called the *Vrouemonument* and was unveiled on *Vrouedag* - it could have been *Moedersdag* [Mother's day] and the *Moedersmonument* [Mother's monument]. The speeches made on this day also emphasised women, rather than mothers. President Steyn, in his speech, expressed the admiration for and gratitude to women which led to the erection of the monument.

But one of the major speeches was written by a woman, Emily Hobhouse. In analysing the speech Hobhouse prepared for the opening of the *Vrouemonument*<sup>122</sup>, one finds that she only mentioned motherhood once - when she talked about childhood. However, her whole speech was about women, she wrote as if addressing women and she refers again and again to women and womanhood. Although the writings of Hobhouse may in fact, as Brink suggests, have been used later in the creation of an identity of *volksmoeder*,<sup>123</sup> Hobhouse herself did not represent women primarily as mothers and did not refer to any ethnic or nationalist struggle.<sup>124</sup> Hobhouse, in fact, focused very little on the woman's role as mother and certainly never used the word *volksmoeder*. Indeed, instead of just focusing on the importance of the South African women for their "volk", she ended her speech by saying that the monument is a world monument "for your dead by their brave simplicity have spoken to Universal Womanhood, and henceforth they are 'woven into the

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<sup>121</sup> Hexham I, *op cit*, p183.

<sup>122</sup> Due to Hobhouse's illness she was not able to complete her journey to Bloemfontein for the opening of the monument. She had to turn around at Beaufort West. Her speech was eventually read by Charlie Fichard and distributed to the audience in Afrikaans and English. Van Reenen R, *Heldin uit die vreemde*, p105.

<sup>123</sup> Brink explains this statement as follows:

"In the hands of Afrikaner nationalist ideologues Hobhouse's material, which she had placed in the context of a broad and non-sectarian vision of womanhood, was taken from its general framework and applied parochially to the role of women in Afrikaans society."

Brink E, *op cit*, p279.

<sup>124</sup> Van Reenen R (ed), *Emily Hobhouse: Boer War letters*, pp401-408.

stuff' of every woman's life".<sup>125</sup> Her emphasis was neither on the nation, nor on the mother. She glorified womanhood.

Although the actual word *volksmoeder* was not yet used at the unveiling of the monument, the idea might well have concretised in this context. Totius' collection of poems, *Rachel*, referred to "mother of Israel", and both Steyn and Botha in their speeches also alluded to the idea of mother of the nation. While Steyn said that "'n volk wat uit sulke moeders spruit, het niks vir sij toekoms te vrees nie" [a volk that springs from such mothers does not have fear for its future]<sup>126</sup>, Botha said that "'n (v)olk wat sulke moeders het, kan nooit ontaard nie" [a volk that has such mothers can never degenerate]<sup>127</sup>. We do not yet, however, find a distinctive *volksmoeder* discourse or even a special stress on the idea of mothering in the proceedings at the monument. The emphasis was rather on national sentiment or national unity, as Steyn's final words indicated:

Hierdie monument staan dus hier...om liefde te bevorder; want ik voorsien die dag, wat ieder deel van die Suid-Afrikaanse volk, van welke oorsprong ook, indien met die ware Suid-Afrikaanse gees besiel, die deugde - deur hierdie monument verewig - als hulle gemeenskappelijke erfdeel sal beskou.<sup>128</sup>

[Thus, this monument is standing here...to foster love; because I foresee the day when every part of the South African nation, from whatever origin, and if inspired by the true South African spirit, will regard the virtues immortalised by this monument as their collective inheritance.]

If the unveiling of the *Vrouemonument* was not yet accompanied by a full articulation of the *volksmoeder* discourse, it can be regarded as an event that in important ways contributed to the eventual construction of this discourse. The unveiling of the monument ensured that the story about the concentration camps and the heroic role of women was popularised and, moreover, in a pronounced Afrikaner-nationalist context. This provided the material to be further utilised by cultural entrepreneurs such as Totius and Postma who were on their way to create a new gender discourse.

The construction of the new gender discourse can be followed in the poetry of Totius. In 1915 Totius' *Trekkerswee*, a ballad about an old Boer and his life before and after the war in the

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<sup>125</sup> *Ibid*, p408.

<sup>126</sup> Quoted in Postma W, *op cit*, p153.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid*, p155.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid*, p153.

Transvaal, was published. In one section of the poem, a bride (a young woman from the Transvaal) and a bridegroom (a man from the Cape) discuss their love. The bride says:

Ek is maar net 'n boerebruid  
 en gee my vir niks anders uit;  
 geen jonkman hoef hom te vergis,  
 want ek is maar net wat ek is.  
 Maar 'k het twee arrens, rond en sterk  
 wat regstaan vir die huishou-werk.  
 [I am just a Boer bride  
 and I do not pretend to be anything else;  
 for I am just what I am.  
 But I have two arms, round and strong  
 that are ready for the housekeeping work.]

Ek is maar net 'n boerebruid  
 ek laat nie my geleerdheid uit.  
 As hul oor politiek begin  
 dan luister ek en hou my in.  
 Maar ek sal my kinders eendag wel  
 die storie van Transvaal vertel.  
 [I am just a Boer bride,  
 I can't boast of my education  
 and if they start with politics  
 I listen but contain myself.  
 But one day I will tell my children  
 the story of the old Transvaal.]<sup>129</sup>

Note that the *boerebruid* [Boer bride] is active in the household and passive in the political sphere. As passive listener, she has a role: she will relate the stories of the volk she heard to the next generation. In this *boerebruid* the characteristics of the soon-to-be-created *volksmoeder* can already be discerned.

The significance of the South African War and the *Vrouemonument* for the construction of the new gender discourse can be summarised by saying that the post-war literature (created by women) provided nationalist ideologues with powerful images of suffering women. These images became public property with the inauguration of the *Vrouemonument* and were further popularised in the poetry of people like Totius. Because the *Vrouemonument* became a symbol of national unity, women were also strongly associated with the ideal of unity.

Ironically, the public acknowledgement and nationalist appreciation that women received for their

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<sup>129</sup> Totius, *Trekkerswee*, pp37-37.

contribution during the war, coincided with developments such as their increasing importance in the labour market. It also coincided with a number of organisational initiatives marking the appearance of women in public life. Through these initiatives women cautiously started venturing into the prohibited public sphere. After 1913 there was a noticeable tension between the gradual emergence of a conservative new gender discourse, and the new confidence and determination with which Afrikaans women organised and acted. In the following section we will trace some of these new initiatives as background and counterfoil for the new gender discourse.

#### 4.3 New initiatives: Transvaal women organise and act

In the first two decades of the 20th century a significant number of middle class white women's organisations were established in South Africa.<sup>130</sup> This development should be seen in the context of middle class women's response to the dilemma caused by their removal from the corporate family economy.<sup>131</sup> It should also be seen in the context of a growing awareness of women's and gender issues world-wide. More specifically, however, the organisations of Afrikaans women would from the start be shaped by the circumstances of the South African War and the gradual construction of an Afrikaner nationalist discourse.

##### 4.3.1 Welfare organisations: The *Suid-Afrikaanse Vrouefederasie* (SAVF)

The first Afrikaans women's organisation to be established in South Africa was, significantly, a welfare organisation. The *Afrikaanse Christelike Vroue Vereniging* (ACVV) was established in 1904 and had its origins in the war relief work of middle class Afrikaans women in Cape Town and Cradock.<sup>132</sup> The establishment of the ACVV was followed by the establishment of similar

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<sup>130</sup> Apart from the organisations mentioned in the main text, the following are some of the organisations in which Afrikaans women were active: the Young Women's Christian Association of South Africa (YWCA), established in 1901; the National Council of Women (NCW), 1909; Women's South African Party (WSAP), 1910; the Women's National Party (WNP), 1915; different branches of the Women's Enfranchisement League (WEL) (1902-1911); Women's Enfranchisement Association of the Union (WEAU), 1911; *Bond van Afrikaanse Moeders*, 1919; *Federale Raad van Vroueverenigings van Suid-Afrika* (1921, consisting of the SAVF, OVV, ACVV, NCVV, RCVV); *Federale Raad vir Moederkunde en Kindersorg van Suid-Afrika*, 1927; International Federation of University Women, 1923.

<sup>131</sup> Ryan M, Cradle of the middle class: the family in Oneida County, 1790-1865, p85.

<sup>132</sup> For more details see Butler J, "Afrikaner women and their ethnic consciousness" in Vail L, The creation of tribalism in southern Africa, pp61-63.

welfare organisations in the other provinces: the *Suid-Afrikaanse Vrouefederasie* (SAVF) in the Transvaal (1904), the *Oranje Vroue Vereniging* (OVV) in the Orange Free State (1908) and the *Natal Christelike Vroue Vereniging* (NCVV) in Natal.

The SAVF was the main Afrikaans women's organisation set up in the Transvaal. Like the ACVV the origin of this movement can, indirectly, be traced to the South African War. After a journey through war-torn South Africa and moved by the plight of women in these parts,<sup>133</sup> in 1904, Mrs Georgina Solomon, wife of the Jewish statesman and proprietor of the *Cape Argus*, Saul Solomon<sup>134</sup>, launched the SAVF at Stellenbosch. The aim was to make the federation a national organisation, but attempts (with the support of Mrs Koopmans-De Wet) to establish a branch in Cape Town<sup>135</sup> failed as the newly established *Afrikaanse Christelike Vroue Vereniging* (ACVV) had already secured the backing of a significant number of Afrikaans women in Cape Town.<sup>136</sup> Mrs Solomon then took her idea to the Transvaal where she convinced Mrs Louis Botha to set up a meeting in Pretoria. This meeting, held on 19 October 1904, was attended by 43 prominent Pretoria women and culminated in the founding of a SAVF branch in Pretoria.

Retrospectively, some aspects of the founding of the SAVF seem rather ironic. This Transvaal-based predominantly Afrikaans organisation was founded in the Cape by an English-speaking woman. Rather than objecting to an English-speaking woman's interference like their Cape sisters,<sup>137</sup> the Transvaal women welcomed Solomon's support.<sup>138</sup> At a meeting held early in

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<sup>133</sup> Georgina Solomon recorded:

I had the honour to visit them in their own shabby homes as they are today and to meet some of the heroic women who had harnessed themselves on the plough to prepare the soil for the grain they required to feed their children. I walked across portions of the lands ploughed by women in this manner and felt that I was walking on holy ground.

Lessing M, "The woman's educational function and role in the community", p6.

<sup>134</sup> He was described as having acted "pro-Boer" in the Anglo Boer War (*Suid-Afrikaanse Vrouefederasie Transvaal 1904-1929*, p16).

<sup>135</sup> Mrs Koopmans-De Wet refused to join the ACVV because it was not open to Catholic women.

<sup>136</sup> *SAVF. Vyftig jaar van seën. 1904-1954*, p10.

<sup>137</sup> According to Pienaar the Cape specifically preferred the ACVV because it was founded by an Afrikaans-speaking woman, Mrs Roos. They had objections against joining an organisation started by an English-speaking woman. In reality the reasons for the SAVF not taking off in the

1905 the speaker, the Reverend Steenkamp, thanked God "dat een vrouw als Mev Saul Solomon, ofschoon niet in den bloede aan ons verwant, de stoot gegeven aan deze vrouwe organisatie" [that a woman like Mrs Saul Solomon, although not related to us in blood, inspired this women's organisation].<sup>138</sup>

For our purposes an interesting aspect of the early SAVF documents is that, whereas in later years women would be predominantly portrayed as mothers, the word "mother" was absent from the early SAVF discourse. Women were acknowledged as "women" and in the limited number of pre-1910 documents studied, women were never referred to as mothers. Instead we find, eg, a crucial significance attached to the image of the woman as teacher. Pienaar, referring to a speech the Rev Klopper made at the first annual congress of the SAVF (1905), said:

Ds Klopper het...die vroue so indrukwekkend toegespreek dat sy woorde na byna 40 jaar nog in gesprekke herhaal word. Hy het die vrou die onderwyseres van die volk genoem. 'n Onderwyseres wat 'n helder hoof, 'n heldinne hart en helpende hand moes hê. Sy moes die "dierbare volk" wat 'n "overgangs-periode" beleef het, die "dure lesse" van aanpassing by die nuwe eise leer.<sup>140</sup>

[The Reverend Klopper addressed the women in such an impressive manner that his words are still repeated in conversations almost 40 years later. He called the woman the teacher of the *volk*. A teacher who had to have a clear mind, a heroine's heart and a helping hand. She had to teach the "beloved nation", which was going through a "transitional phase" the "costly lessons" of adapting to new demands.]

From its outset, the Boer War heroine featured prominently in the discourse of the SAVF. The important role ascribed to women by the federation was justified by the role women were thought to have played in history. Annie Botha's words at a SAVF meeting held in 1905 illustrate this appropriation of women in history:

In de geschiedenis van 't Transvaalse volk, hebben de vrouwen grote krachten getoond; en was het haar moed, die de mans in dagen van moeilijkheden opwekte. Zij waren ook de grootste slachtoffers van de bloedige stryd.<sup>141</sup>

[In the history of the Transvaal nation the women showed great power, and it was her

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Cape were probably more complex.

Pienaar T C, Qorsig van die werk en strewe van die Suid-Afrikaanse Vroue Federasie Transvaal 1904-1944, p2.

<sup>138</sup> See Pienaar T C, op cit, pp13 and 14.

<sup>139</sup> SAVF Transvaal 1904-1929, p23.

courage that cheered the men in difficult times. She was also the biggest victim of the bloody battle.]

As a women's and a welfare organisation the SAVF proceeded to define its focus and its membership in particular ways. The fact that the SAVF was a **South African** federation rather than an **Afrikaans** federation suggested an inclusive policy regarding membership and focus. In this regard there were important differences between the SAVF and the ACVV. The ACVV, for example, took the political step of changing its name from *Zuid-Afrikaansche Christelike Vrouwen Vereeniging* to *Afrikaansche Christelike Vrouwen Vereeniging* in 1906 - thereby giving formal expression to the organisation's ethnic character.<sup>142</sup> Significantly, the words "Boer" or "Afrikaans" did not appear in the early documents of the SAVF. Although the federation had a Christian basis, it was not formally required that members belong to one of the three Dutch churches, as in the ACVV.<sup>143</sup>

Although formally the SAVF followed a more inclusive policy, effectively it was largely a white

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<sup>142</sup> Butler J, op cit, p63.

These differences between the organisations should be seen against the background of the major division in Afrikaner politics between the conciliation politics of Botha/Smuts and the Afrikaner nationalism of Hertzog, that would eventually become the policies of the South African Party and National Party.

In 1907 there was an attempt to amalgamate the ACVV and SAVF. Three representatives of each organisation attended the meeting which was chaired by Mrs Steyn. President Steyn was also present in an advisory capacity. After a long discussion it was decided that amalgamation would be impossible because of a fundamental difference in goals of the two organisations. The federation wanted the co-operation of all South African women, while the ACVV was only interested in Dutch-Afrikaans women. The 1907 annual report of the federation stated:

De federatie meent dat almal die Zuid-Afrika tot hun land aannemen en van plan is om hun leven hier door te brengen, beschouwd moet worden as Afrikaners.

[The federation was of the opinion that all people who have accepted South Africa as their country and who plan to spend their lives here, should be regarded as Afrikaners.]

Pienaar T C, op cit, pp20-21.

<sup>143</sup> This was apparently one of the other reasons why the SAVF and the ACVV never amalgamated. In April 1924, in a special report about the work of the SAVF, the writer said that it was not possible to start an organisation similar to the ACVV in the Transvaal as the ACVV had very close links with the Dutch Reformed Church. Because there were three Dutch churches in the Transvaal, it was not possible to start an organisation which would have links with only one of the churches.

Die Boerevrou, April 1924, p7.

Afrikaans women's organisation.<sup>144</sup> It almost goes without saying that the relatively inclusive policy of the SAVF still did not provide for the membership of black South African women. Its political alignment to the *Het Volk* Party in the early years, even if unofficial, must further have limited membership. The language policy<sup>145</sup> of the SAVF also made it easier and more convenient for Afrikaans-Dutch people to join than for others. In later years even this relatively more inclusive attitude would change and the organisation developed more pronounced links with Afrikaner nationalism.

Paradoxically, there was an inverse relationship between the development of links between the SAVF and Afrikaner nationalism, and the level of SAVF activity in the political arena. As the SAVF retreated further into the supposedly apolitical traditional sphere of women (moral, spiritual and welfare work), their contribution to the Afrikaner nationalist struggle increased.

Before the political involvement of the SAVF can be discussed, a few general remarks about the role of women's welfare organisations are in order. Through women's welfare organisations, women were introduced into the hitherto forbidden public arena. In such organisations women could do what was regarded as "women's work", but for the public good, rather than for their households. Women remained without political rights and politics continued to be taboo to them.

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<sup>144</sup> This is acknowledged in Pienaar's 1944 history of the SAVF. In retrospect she said:

Nou kom die groot vraag wat met die diepste erns aan elke Federasielid gestel moet word: "Het die Federasie gedurende haar veertigjarige bestaan die land gedien, of...die volk? Wat het die Federasie gedoen om die volksiel te voed, te verpleeg en te behou?"...die Federasie (het) 40 jaar lank haar deure oopgesit vir Protestant en Katoliek, blankes van alle Christelike gesindes in Transvaal en hoeveel uitlanders het ingekom? Die bree aanvang om 'n organisasie te vorm van alle blanke vroue van Suid-Afrika, het misluk. Na veertig jaar het die Federasie net maar 'n suiwer Boer-Afrikaanse organisasie gebly.

[And now the important question which should be put to every federation member in profound seriousness: "Has the federation, in her 40-year existence, served the country or...the volk? What has the federation done to nourish the soul of the volk, to nurse it and to retain it?"...for 40 years the federation's doors have been open Protestant and Catholic, whites of all Christian-disposed (churches) in the Transvaal, and how many foreigners joined? The broad beginning to start an organisation of all white women of South Africa failed. After 40 years the federation has remained just a pure Boer-Afrikaans organisation.]

Pienaar T C, op cit, pp17-18.

<sup>145</sup> Despite requests that meetings should be bilingual (Dutch/Afrikaans and English), the SAVF repeatedly decided against awarding English "equal rights" at meetings. Members were, however, allowed to speak English at meetings if necessary. The constitution was always available in Afrikaans/Dutch and English.

See Suid-Afrikaanse Vrouefederasie. Transvaal 1904-1924, pp28-29 and Pienaar T C, op cit, p18.

The early documents of the SAVF show that the question of political involvement was indeed one of the most controversial issues within the organisation. In the early years there was much discussion and debate as to whether the SAVF as a welfare organisation should involve itself in "politics". Stockenstrom wrote in 1921 that the SAVF differed from the ACVV and the OVV in that it was not a purely philanthropical and Christian organisation - it participated in politics.<sup>146</sup>

While the original draft of the SAVF constitution did not mention politics at all, a later draft included a clause which stated that the SAVF would concentrate on the educational, moral and spiritual needs of the nation and that they would not participate in any political activities.<sup>147</sup> The constitution that was finally registered on 3 April 1905, however, did not include this clause.<sup>148</sup> Instead, two of the goals expressed in the constitution had a clear political content:

1. Met de hulpe Gods, ons land te dienen: (a) door te streven alle goede en rechtvaardige wetsverordeningen te behouden; de vrijheden des volks onder "verantwoordelijk bestuur" te beschermen, en verstandelijk te ijveren voor wijze en rechtmatige wetgeving; (b) door mede te werken tot de verkiezing van mannen van beginsel en oprechte leefwijze als lede der wetgevende lichamen; en (c) door het bevorderen krachtens de stem des volks van een gezonde opvoeding van en door het volk.

[With the help of God to serve our country: (a) by striving to keep all good and just laws; to protect the freedoms of the nation under "responsible government" and to work sensibly for wise and just legislation; (b) to work for the election of men with principles and an honourable way of life as members of the legislative bodies; and (c) through the advancement in accordance with the will of the *volk*, of a healthy education of and by the *volk*.

2. Door te helpen "verantwoordelijk bestuur" te verkrijgen voor de Transvaal en de Oranje Rivier Kolonie, en al de weldaden die onder die leiding Gods, daarop behooren te volgen.<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> Stockenstrom E, Die vrou in die geskiedenis van die Hollands-Afrikaanse volk, p281.

<sup>147</sup> Pienaar T C, op cit, pp4-5.

<sup>148</sup> It is not clear what had prompted the women to decide on being politically active. In T C Pienaar's words: "Die notule is taktvol onduidelik op hierdie punt." (The minutes are tactfully unclear on this issue.) Pienaar T C, op cit, p7.

<sup>149</sup> The rest of the goals read as follows:

3. Door het vereenigd gebed voor allen die over ons gesteld zijn, onze wetgewing, ons land, geheel Zuid-Afrika en de wereld.

4. Door het bevorderen van ware eenheid en vrede en de beoefening der menschenliefde door het lenigen van smart en lijden.

5. Door het verhoogen van de zaak van gerechtigheid, reinheid en liefde, in den naam van onzen Heer Jezus Christus.

[By helping to achieve "responsible government" for the Transvaal and the Orange River Colony, and all the benefits which should follow this under God's guidance.]

It is significant that the aim not to be politically involved had been left out of the final constitution. Even when their lawyer, Mr Findlay, warned them in June 1905 that their constitution might not be registered because of its being "too political", the women decided that they wanted to keep the controversial points one and two in the constitution.<sup>160</sup> In 1905 two branches, Heidelberg and Johannesburg, asked for those two points to be omitted from the constitution, but after a heated discussion, it was again decided that the constitution should reflect the political goals of the organisation.<sup>161</sup>

During its early years, from 1905 until about 1914, the governing sentiment of the SAVF thus reflected a deliberate "political" orientation. In practice this meant that the interests of Botha's political parties, first the *Het Volk* Party and later the South African Party (SAP), were promoted.<sup>162</sup> General Botha, who always displayed a special personal interest in the work of

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In een woord: Door de behartigen door elk middel dat ons ten dienste staat, van de ware belangen van Transvaal en van Zuid-Afrika, wat betreft onzen nationale vooruitgang; in elke afdeeling van het leven en den arbeid van ons volk, op stoffelijk, verstandelijk, zedelijk en geestelijke gebied.

[3. Through the united prayer for everyone appointed over us, our legislation, our country, the whole of South Africa and the world.

4. Through the furthering of true unity and peace and pursuit of human love through the relief of pain and suffering.

5. Through the promotion of the cause of justice, virtue and love in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In one word: Through the furthering, through every means at our disposal, of the true interests of the Transvaal and South Africa concerning our national progress; in every section of the life and labour of our *volk*, in the material, intellectual, moral and spiritual spheres.]

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid*, p11.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid*, p12.

<sup>162</sup> In a special report on the SAVF in *Die Boerevrou* of April 1924 the debate about the political role of the federation was summarised as follows:

Daar was egter een beginsel, wat van die begin aan 'n oorsaak van wrywing was nl 'n klousule in verband met politiek. Hoewel etlike vroue daarteen gekant was...werd dit vasgestel dat die federasie sou ywer vir die leiers van 'n party, die *Het Volk*, wat toe nog in wording was. Uiteindelik, egter, in 1916, is hierdie politieke klousule uit die konstitusie geskrap en die hoofdoel bly opheffing van die volk as 'n geheel en die doen van liefdadigheidswerk.

the SAVF, said in November 1906 at a federation meeting:

...Sommige mense wil dat die politiek uit die federasie gehoude sal word...Maar wat is politiek? Vat enige besigheid, die wordt altyd politiek aangelegd, en vooral in Zuidafrika moet men die politiek aanleggen, omdat die moeilikheden hier so groot is en hier is zulk 'n klein blanke bevolking, dat niet alleen de man zich met politiek moet besig houden maar ook die vrou, Die moet haar invloed laten gelden, en niet alleen de steunpilaar zijn van de man, maar van het ganse volk. Die vrou is er toch niet alleen om het huis schoon te houden; zy is 'n levend lid van die maatschappij, en wat komt er van die vrou terecht als zy net in 't huis zit en die kleintjes oppast?...Als die vrouen vorentoe komen om te helpen, kunnen zij veel doen, ook in die politiek; maar als die vrou net in een groef blijft, trekt die man zich ook in die groef terug, want 'n man is maar lief vir 'n vrou.<sup>163</sup>

[Some people want to keep politics out of the federation...But what is politics? Take any business, it is always planned politically, and in South Africa especially one must plan politically because the problems here are big and we have such a small white population that not only the men must involve themselves in politics but also the women. The women must use their influence and must be a tower of strength, not only for the men but for the entire nation. The woman is surely not only there to keep the house clean; she is a living member of society and how can the woman come into her own if she only stays at home and looks after the little ones?...If the women come to the fore to help they can do much, also in politics; but if the women just remain in a rut the men will also get into a rut because men like women.]

Botha thus defined politics broadly and underplayed the importance of a strict division between women's sphere and men's sphere. With the clear understanding that the SAVF would support his political programme if politically involved, it was in his political interest to encourage the organisation's political activities. The SAVF's political involvement was thus from the beginning associated with a particular Afrikaner political movement. Political independence and decision-making was not part of the deal. Not surprisingly then, Botha's views on the political involvement of women underwent a drastic change during the 1910s. While he was in favor of the political involvement of women and even women's suffrage in 1906, at the 1913 sitting of parliament, he said in his capacity as Prime Minister that women were not ready for the vote and that if it was offered to them, they would refuse it.<sup>164</sup> This change of attitude coincided more or less with the

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[However, there was one principle which was a bone of contention from the beginning, namely, a clause which concerned politics. Although several women were against it...it was determined that the federation would work for the leaders of a party, the *Het Volk*, which was then still being formed. Finally, however, in 1916, this political clause was removed from the constitution and the main aim remained the upliftment of the volk as a whole and the performing of charitable work.]

*Die Boerevrou*, April 1924, p7.

<sup>163</sup> *SAVF Transvaal 1904-1929*, p27.

<sup>164</sup> Stockenström E, *op cit*, p154.

split in his party, the founding of the National Party (NP) as well as a change of attitude in the SAVF.

Annie Botha remained loyal to her husband's views and therefore in the early years also encouraged the political involvement of the SAVF. In a letter to the 1908 congress she argued that if the federation was to stay relevant it had to be politically involved:

Als wy alles dat maar 'n weinig lyk naer politiek van onze agenda willen, dan komt het my voor dat onze organisasie niets meer of minder zal worden dan 'n liefdadigheidsvereniging. Ik meen dat onze federatie meer dan dat beoogt. Ons streven hangt dikwels nauw samen met politieke vraagstukken, en, zonder dat het nodig is luidruchtige "suffragettes" te worden, denk ik dat wy zich onze werkzaamheden niet nouw moeten beperken, en wanneer ons doel samenhangt met 'n politieke vraag, niet behoren te skromen om onze aandacht ook daaraan te geven, en zulke kwesities te bespreken.<sup>155</sup>

[If we leave everything which just looks like politics from our agenda then it seems to me that our organisation will become nothing more and nothing less than a charitable society. I think our organisation has more in mind than that. Our endeavours often hang together with political questions and, without it being necessary to become vociferous suffragettes, I think we should not limit our activities, we should not hesitate to also pay attention to that and to discuss such matters.]

Mrs Botha was thus explicitly concerned with the nature and extent of the political involvement of a women's organisation like the SAVF. This is contrasted to the suffragette movement but she also felt that it was undesirable to be "only" a welfare organisation. In this respect the Transvaal-based SAVF differed from the welfare organisations in the other provinces.

The SAVF continued to follow the line set by Mrs Botha until 1914, when with the founding of the NP another Afrikaner party came into existence.<sup>156</sup> In 1916, two years after the launch of the National Party, the SAVF formally abandoned its political role and decided to restrict its activities to social welfare. Annie Botha, without acknowledging the political nature of the SAVF's welfare activities, justified this change in policy by claiming that "ons tot die oortuiging gekom het dat die liefdadigheid van baie groter betekenis was in ons stryd tot opheffing en bewaring...die politiek (het) geleidelik daarvoor plek gemaak" [we have come to be convinced that welfare was of much greater importance in our struggle for upliftment and conservation...politics has slowly made way for it] - a direct negation of her 1908 argument!<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> SAVF Transvaal 1904-1929, p29.

<sup>156</sup> SAVF Transvaal 1904-1929, p29.

<sup>157</sup> Suid-Afrikaanse Vrouefederasie 1904-1929, p90.

What were the real reasons behind this change in policy? There were now more than one political party that represented the interests of the Afrikaans people. To stay out of party politics meant that the support base of the federation could remain broad and would not be confined to one political party. It also meant that the federation could play an important role in the unification of the *volk*: if women worked together in the SAVF, regardless of party-political affiliation, the federation could contribute to the breaking down of divisions in Afrikanerdom.

Still, it would be wrong to conclude that the SAVF had entirely abandoned all political involvement. Its concern with welfare activities was actually not apolitical at all. One has to understand what exactly social welfare work entailed for the SAVF. On the face of it the list of activities of the different branches of the SAVF sounded as innocent and apolitical as can be. It included picnics, concerts, competitions, bazaars, lectures about health issues, street collections, sport days, soup kitchens, baby exhibitions, supplying bread for poor school children, "gesellige aande" (convivial social gatherings), garden parties, wreath-laying ceremonies etc. The money collected in these ways was spent to support the different SAVF institutions,<sup>158</sup> to keep children at school, to help widows and the elderly, to erect monuments, graves and statues, to uplift poor people on the diggings and other less privileged people, to buy wreaths, to make contributions to the Transvaalse Universiteits Kollege (TUK) [University of Pretoria] fund, to improve the conditions of the physically disabled and sick, to educate young women etc.

On the surface then, it seems that the SAVF kept its word: it was limiting itself to welfare work. However, looking at the motivation for the welfare work, how it was done and what the effect of it was, one cannot call the federation's work apolitical. Although, according to the new 1916 policy, they were not active in party politics, welfare work is seldom apolitical, and in the case of the SAVF it was overtly political in a broad Afrikaner nationalist orientation. Great care was taken not to mention politics or any specific political party, but political points were constantly made under the pretext that it was a statement about child care, public health, *ons volk* etc - topics that

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<sup>158</sup> The federation ran different institutions. Up to 1929 the following institutions were under their wings:

- \* the old age home at Krugersdorp (Started in 1910);
- \* the housecraft school in Pretoria (Started in 1910);
- \* the Armstrong-Berning Home or "Reddingshuis" (Started in 1905, the goal of this institution was to take in "gevalle" [fallen] women and girls, to teach them to work and to teach them the importance of honesty and purity.); and
- \* an industrial school at Standerton.

were accepted to be apolitical and falling within the "legitimate" sphere of women.<sup>159</sup>

In summary then, the most significant aspect of the SAVF's first years can be said to be that the organisation, which at first openly espoused a political involvement, chose to abandon party-politics in 1916, but unofficially worked according to an Afrikaner-nationalist agenda.

#### 4.3.2 Bond van Afrikaanse Moeders: "'n langversuimde plig" [a long-neglected duty]

In May 1918 Mrs Elize van Broekhuizen of the Women's National Party (WNP), granddaughter of Paul Kruger, called a meeting for women where the shocking conditions in which many Afrikaans

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<sup>159</sup> This can be illustrated by examining the discussion points ("beskrywingspunte"), handed in by the various branches at some of the annual congresses. The discussion points were divided into the following categories: purely administrative issues, the institutions of the federation, child care and education, public health, the nation ("ons volk") and general.

In 1927, for instance, the three points of discussion under the heading public health were in fact all concerned with more decidedly political issues. The suggestions were:

- \* That all training (including that of nurses) should take place in both Afrikaans and English. The rule that party politics and the racial question should not be discussed with patients should be more strictly applied.
- \* That the possibility of an Afrikaans hospital on the Rand should be discussed or the possibility of asking the Johannesburg General Hospital to keep one wing aside for the exclusive use of Afrikaans-speaking patients.
- \* That "kaffirs" should be in possession of health certificates before they can apply for work in the rural areas or in the cities.

Die Boerevrou, October 1927, p53.

All these suggestions were accepted in principle.

Points in the category of "Ons volk" included a motion of support for the Immorality Act of Minister Roos (this suggestion received a standing ovation at the 1927 congress) (Die Boerevrou, October 1927, pp53 and 77) and a request for separate doors for the different races at post offices in 1929 (SAVF Transvaal 1904-1929, pp6-7).

women gave birth were discussed.<sup>160</sup> Child birth became a much-discussed issue as a letter from a *boerevrou* of Lydenburg had been published in the Volkstem in March 1918. In this letter the woman related how she had to give birth with the help of "only" a black worker.<sup>161</sup> The meeting was attended by two representatives each of the WSAP, the WNP, the SAVF and *Helpmekaar*, and led to the establishment of the *Bond van Afrikaanse Moeders* [Union of Afrikaans mothers]. The goal of this organisation was to promote national health, concentrating on the suffering of women during and after childbirth in the rural areas. In 1919 the Bond started a maternity home and training school for midwives in the house that had belonged to Paul Kruger. Midwives who were trained at the school were expected to go back to their own districts where they had to serve as representatives of the Bond for at least one year. Although patients who could pay were also treated at the maternity home, preference was given to poor patients who were not able to pay.

By August 1923 37 women had been trained as midwives and more than 600 women had given birth and were nursed in the clinic. Almost half of the patients did not pay.<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> Mrs Van Broekhuizen explained her own concern about this issue:

As predikantsvrou het dit my met huisbesoek op die platteland telkens opgeval dat ons nie deur die eie moeder van die klein kindertjies in die boerehuise ontvang was nie, maar deur 'n stiefmoeder. Navraag het aan die lig gebring dat meeste moeders hul lewens verloor het ten gevolge van ontoereikende hulp met die geboorte van 'n kind.

[As a minister's wife it struck me again and again during parish-visits in the rural areas that we were not received in the Boer homes by the small children's own mother but by a stepmother. Enquiries revealed that most mothers died because of insufficient assistance with the birth of a child.]

Pienaar T C, op cit, p56.

<sup>161</sup> Mrs Johanna Preller, who also attended the meeting, wrote in 1929:

Die vrou het 'n beroep gedaan wat deursidder was van benoudheid en angs, 'n beroep op die vroue van haar volk, om hulle dure plig nie te vergeet jeens diegenes van hul susters wat ver weg woon van die geriewe van die stede. En sy het hulle 'n huiweringwekkende verwyt gemaak van 'n langversuimde plig.

[The woman made an appeal which shuddered with distress and anxiety, an appeal to the women of her *volk*, not to forget their bounden duty to those of their sisters who live far away from the conveniences of the cities. And she made a disturbing reproach about a long-neglected duty.]

SAVF 1904-1929, p30.

<sup>162</sup> Die Boerevrou, August 1923, p55.

The establishment of the *Bond van Afrikaanse Moeders* was significant for various reasons. For our purposes it is important how this women's initiative linked motherhood to ethnicity and that it became important to be an **Afrikaans** mother. This union of Afrikaans mothers was unique in that it managed to transcend party political and church boundaries among Afrikaners. The emphasis on health, specifically women's health and birth conditions, was new but would soon be repeated in many other initiatives and projects.

#### 4.3.3 The women's march of 1915: "Soos 'n oorstroming 'n stuk land inneem..." [like a flood taking over a piece of land]

An event which, in the context of this thesis, merits some detailed attention, is the Afrikaans women's march to the Union buildings in 1915, prompted by the Rebellion. This event is important, firstly, in that it involved national political action organised by women for women. Secondly, this action was Afrikaans women's response to an issue that was of central importance to emergent Afrikaner nationalism. The women's march was probably the first mass action of women that had clear nationalist goals.<sup>163</sup>

Two Pretoria women, Mrs Brummer and Mrs Fred Beyers, proposed a protest march in order to request the governor-general to give amnesty to all the rebels, including General De Wet. This idea was taken up by a group of prominent Pretoria women, who formed a committee and eventually organised the march. After an open letter in the press and a request to women of other regions to send representatives, a date was set and an appointment with the governor-general was made.

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<sup>163</sup> It was, however, not the first mass political action of women in South Africa's history. We have briefly dealt with the Natal women's demand for the vote in which about 400 women participated, but also interesting was a series of protest meetings held in 1900. These meetings were held in protest to the continuation of the war, the removal of women and children from their homes and the destruction of farms by the British. The first meeting, held on 9 July 1900 in Cape Town attracted 550 women, while a national meeting held in the Paarl on 10 November 1900, was attended by 1 550 women. This meeting was attended by representatives from all the provinces and was called the first "Women's Congress" in South Africa. Neither of these meetings were predominantly Afrikaans.

De Villiers A, Barrevoets oor die Drakensberg, p47; Lessing M, "The woman's educational function and role in the community", p8; and Malan F S, Marie Koopmans-De Wet, pp201-205.

In 1913 black women staged a major anti-pass campaign in the Orange Free State. This campaign of passive resistance started when 600 black women marched to the office of the mayor of Bloemfontein and presented him with a petition.

See Walker C, Women and resistance in South Africa, pp30-31.

Boarding was organised for all the representatives from other regions.<sup>164</sup>

On Tuesday 3 August 1915 a prayer meeting was held at the United Church in Pretoria. At two o' clock on Wednesday 4 August about 3 000 women gathered at the corner of Beatrix and Vermeulen Street. According to De Burger these women represented a total of almost 50 000 women across the country.<sup>165</sup> The representatives were organised according to provinces, with the Orange Free State women leading the march. After being welcomed by Mrs General P Joubert and Mrs F C Eloff (the convenors), the petition was read and accepted and the women marched.<sup>166</sup> An eye-witness described the scene:

Besonder indrukwekkend was dit om bo van die stoep van die Uniegebouw die skare van moeders en dogters te sien nader in die slingerpad, voetjie-vir-voetjie, stil, soos 'n lykstasie. Die agter-end van die stoet was nog bij die tweede slinger van die pad toe die voerpunt by die Uniegebouw aankom. Soos 'n oorstroming 'n stuk land inneem, stadig in die sekerheid dat hij onweerstaanbaar is, so het die skare die grote halfroond ingeneem voor die Uniegebouw.<sup>167</sup>

[It was particularly impressive to watch from the stoep of the Union buildings as crowds of mothers and daughters came closer in the winding path, step by step, quietly, like a funeral procession. The rear of the procession was only at the second bend in the road when the front reached the Union buildings. Like a flood taking over a piece of land, slowly in the knowledge that it is irresistible, the crowd took over the large semicircle in front of the Union building.]

The deputation, consisting of the convenors and two representatives from each province, then went to see the governor-general while the rest of the women waited in the amphitheatre. Mrs M Marais described her feelings at the time:

En soos 'n vloedgolf het meteens die besef van die skone verhewe bestaan van die vrouw ons oorstelp, toen ons haar daar so swijgend sien staan, uit **die stille kring van haar daaglikse liefdewerk**, om te probeer of liefde ook nie iets kan volbreng nie in **die ander kring, die gebied van die staatsbestuur**, waar die man eintlik thuis behoort, maar waar hij deur liefdeloosheid en gevoelloosheid alles verbrouw het.<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> Die vroue-optog van 22 Junie 1940, no page numbers.

<sup>165</sup> Ehlers A, op cit, p56.

<sup>166</sup> Die vroue-optog van 22 Junie 1940, no page numbers.

<sup>167</sup> Marais M, "Bij die vroue-betoging", Die Brandwag, 1 September 1915, p100.

<sup>168</sup> Loc cit.

It is significant, however, that in this very lyrical account of the march, there is also a bitter reference to the divisions in the Afrikaner community:

[And like a tidal wave the realisation of the beautiful, exalted existence of the woman suddenly overwhelmed us, when we saw her standing there so quietly, outside **the silent circle of her daily labour of love**, to see whether love could not also accomplish something in **the other circle, the sphere of government**, where the man actually belongs but where he, through lovelessness and callousness, had made a mess of everything.] (My emphasis.)

From this it is clear that the demonstration was perceived as a conscious political initiative by women, deliberately leaving the domestic sphere traditionally supposed to be their domain and intruding in the previously male sphere of public politics.

After a long wait, the deputation returned with the message that the governor-general will come back with an answer after having discussed the petition with the cabinet. The women walked back to Church Square via Church Street and after singing a few songs together, they dispersed.<sup>169</sup>

At the time the march was regarded as important in that Afrikaner women ventured into the public sphere with confidence and assertiveness. Stockenström also later described the march in terms indicating the unprecedented nature of this political action of women:

Die beroemde optog van die vroue in Pretoria was nie 'n monsterdemonstrasie van saamsweersters nie, maar, intendeel, 'n **openbare vergadering** van die edelste vroue van Suid-Afrika, wat tot die oortuiging gekom het, dat dit hul plig was om die Boerleiers, wat vir drie jaar teen die oorweldigende mag van Engeland gestry het, uit die gevangenis los te kry. Dit was grootliks aan die onvermoeide pogings van die vroue te danke dat die

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Afrikaners, van die susters geskei deur 'n kloof van vreemde-vergoding, of van blindheid vir eie geskiedenis en nasionale waardigheid, het staan loer uit vensters bo, waar hulle nie goed gesien of herken kon word nie. Maar ons ken hulle. Daar was meer als een onder, wat tog maar te bereid was om Engelssprekende landgenote te herberg bij geleentheid van konferensies of kongresse in onse stad, maar nou hulle huise geslote gehou het vir susters van eie bloed, en geweiger het om te teken vir die verlossing, uit die gevangenis, van Generaal De Wet en ander landgenote...Eensaam moes die loerders uit die vensters die dag gevoel het.

[Afrikaners, separated from their sisters by a chasm of idolising the foreign, or out of blindness for their own history and national dignity, peeped from the windows above, where they could not be seen properly or could not be recognised. But we know them. There was more than one among them who was only too willing to house English-speaking compatriots at the occasion of conferences or congresses in our city, but who now kept their houses closed for the sisters of their own blood and who refused to sign for the release from prison of General De Wet and other compatriots...How lonely the peepers from the windows must have felt.

Loc cit.

<sup>169</sup> Die vroue-optog van 22 Junie 1940, no page numbers.

politieke gevangene eindelijk almal hul vryheid teruggekry het.<sup>170</sup>

[The famous march of the women in Pretoria was not a mass demonstration of conspirators but, on the contrary, **a public meeting** of the noblest women in South Africa who came to the conviction that it was their duty to get the Boer leaders, who for three years had fought against the overwhelming power from England, out of jail. It was to a large extent due to the untiring efforts of the women that the political prisoners at last all went free.] (My emphasis.)

In the second place both organisers and political observers understood the implicit Afrikaner nationalist significance of the march in terms of the potential unity between Afrikaners that it represented. Mrs Joubert, one of the leading women in the march, explained the significance:

Hier leggen wij, wat ook gebeurt, 't fondament van 'n volksverbintenis, die geen scheidingslijnen kent, Zuid-Afrika heeft nog zulke onderneming nooit te voren gekend...Wij zijn een en onze eenheid is heden voor de eerste maal werkelijkheid geworden.<sup>171</sup>

[Here we lay, whatever happens, the foundation of an alliance of the *volk*, which knows no boundaries. South Africa has never seen such an undertaking...We are one and our unity has for the first time become a reality.]

The editor of Die Brandwag also hailed the event as an expression of national unity and wrote in September 1915:

Die mees treffende gebeurtenis, wat in die afgelope maand plaatsgevind het in ons land, is ongetwyfeld die betoging van **moeders en dogters**<sup>172</sup> uit alle dele van ons Unie om die vrijlating te versoek van Generaal De Wet, 'n Afrikaner naar die hart van sij volk. Dit was 'n pragtige uiting van nasionale gevoel hierdie betoging, wat in die sombere tije waarin ons leef, 'n ligpunt vorm, waaroor ons ons van harte mag verheug. Dit is 'n aanduiding hoe die nasionale gevoelens van ons volk meer en meer doelbewust word, want vaagheid en onbestemdheid in daardie opsig is 'n gebrek wat te baje onder ons nog aankleef.<sup>173</sup> (My emphasis.)

[The most striking happening which has taken place in our country in the past month is undoubtedly the demonstration by mothers and daughters from all parts of the Union to request the release of General De Wet, an Afrikaner close to the heart of the *volk*. It was a beautiful expression of national feeling and is a ray of hope in the somber times in which we live, something in which we can rejoice. It is an indication of how the national feeling of our *volk* is becoming more and more purposeful, because vagueness and indefiniteness in that regard is a lack still too much part of many of us.]

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<sup>170</sup> Stockenström E, op cit, p281.

<sup>171</sup> Quoted by Scholtz G D, Die ontwikkeling van die politieke denke van die Afrikaner. Deel 6. 1910-1924, p243.

<sup>172</sup> Note that the word "mother" instead of "woman" was used.

<sup>173</sup> Die Brandwag, 1 September 1915, pi.

It should be noted that the women's march was taken to express an ethnic unity of Afrikaners, not national unity in the broader, more inclusive sense. It therefore was not a unity that included all white South Africans and certainly not all South Africans, black and white.

According to the editor of Die Brandwag everyone noticed the uniformity and shared language of the representatives, in spite of the fact that they were from different regions:

Dit was dieselfde soort mense met dieselfde taal, of hulle nou al gekom het uit die Kolonie, uit Natal, die Vrijstaat of Transvaal. Dit is 'n magtige faktor hierdie gelijkvormigheid, waarvan ons nog eendag die voordeel sal pluk in die stryd om ons volkbestaan.<sup>174</sup>

[It was the same kind of people with the same language whether they had come from the Colony, from Natal, the Free State or Transvaal. This uniformity is a powerful factor, and one day we will reap its fruits in the struggle for nationhood.]

The march was the event that inspired Jan F E Celliers's poem, "Bij die vrouwe-betoging" [At the women's demonstration] - the poem that would become the motto of Die Boerevrou - and was first published in Die Brandwag of September 1915.<sup>175</sup>

4.4.4. Women and Helpmekaar: "...waar daar nood is daar is sij" [where there is need, there she is]

Women also played a prominent role in another political initiative generated by the rebellion, the *Helpmekaarbeweging* (see Chapter three). Stockenström strongly emphasised the role that women played in *Helpmekaar*:

As daar iets in die geskiedenis van ons volk is in verband waarmee die Afrikaanse vroue, of ten minste die grote meerderheid van die Afrikaanse vroue, vir hulle 'n roemryke plek verwerf het, dan is dit ongetwyfeld die Helpmekaar-beweging. Deur die lengte en breedte van ons land is daar basare gehou, en die opbrengs is gebruik om die ontsaglike skuld wat op die burgers gerus het, wat in die opstand deelgeneem het, gedeeltelik af te betaal. Die vroue moes die spit afbyt by al die basare.<sup>176</sup>

Women featured prominently in J D Kestell's Helpmekaar-gedenkboek. They were mentioned as

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<sup>174</sup> Loc cit.

<sup>175</sup> Die Brandwag, 1 September 1915, p101.

<sup>176</sup> Stockenström E, op cit, p281.

the main victims of the Rebellion: not only did the women have to deal with the absence of their husbands (who usually were the breadwinners) while these men were taking part in the Rebellion and while they were in jail; women were also the recipients of the summons and had to deal with the claims while their husbands, the rebels, were still in jail.<sup>177</sup> Kestell commented that women worked exceptionally hard to collect money and related this hard work to women's role in South African history. Kestell said that women can always be counted upon in times of crisis: "Waar daar nood is daar is sij."<sup>178</sup>

#### 4.3.5 Women's political parties: The Women's South African Party and the Women's National Party

Apart from the many welfare organisations that were established in those years, at least two overtly political organisations also came into existence. They were the women's political parties, the Women's South African Party (WSAP) in 1910 and the Women's National Party (WNP) in 1915. These organisations were established when women did not yet have any political rights. Significantly, as such political organisations, both parties did not at first become involved in the struggle for women's suffrage. Instead, they allied themselves with the policies of the SAP and NP, both of which opposed the enfranchisement of women. It is indeed ironic that women established organisations in support of parties and policies that refused to recognise the right of women to participate in the political process.

Stockenstrom drew special attention to the fact that both the WSAP and the WNP were established in the Transvaal.<sup>179</sup> The establishment of the WNP in the Transvaal was particularly interesting as the organisation did not become national until 1923. While the establishment of WNP branches in other provinces can be understood in terms of political developments surrounding the imminent enfranchisement of women in the 1920s, the establishment of the WNP in the Transvaal was very much a women's initiative and the organisation was launched in a time that the enfranchisement of women did not seem a realistic prospect.

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<sup>177</sup> J van Melle's Afrikaans novel Bart Nel is a very moving fictional account of the tensions the rebellion created in households.

<sup>178</sup> Kestell J D, Die Helpmekeer-gedenkboek, p34.

<sup>179</sup> Stockenstrom E, Geskiedenis van die vrouebeweging en die vrouestemreg in Suid-Afrika tot 1930, p136.

A women's branch of the SAP was launched in August 1910 in Johannesburg with Mrs Annie Botha, wife of the General Louis Botha, as the first president and Mrs F E T Krause as the first chair.<sup>180</sup> Within the first six years 50 branches of the WSAP were established. According to Stockenstrom, at this time General Botha, his cabinet and most of the party members were against the involvement of women in party politics and the leaders of the new movement were hampered in various ways. The SAP for instance refused to support the WSAP financially.<sup>181</sup> Mrs Krause was very active in the struggle for the franchise for women, but the WSAP as an organisation only gave their official support to the suffrage campaign in 1923.<sup>182</sup>

On 21 July 1915 Johanna Brandt<sup>183</sup> started the Women's National Party of Transvaal in Braamfontein, Johannesburg. At almost the same time a *Dameskomitee* [Ladies' committee] was established in Pretoria to support the jailed rebels and their families. It was this committee that was responsible for the women's march in 1915. After the march these women wanted to launch a national organisation, but instead decided to amalgamate with the Women's National Party.<sup>184</sup> In 1920 Brandt discussed the reasons for the launching of the WNP:

Ons siet in die toekoms een nasionale regering onder een onafhankelike vlag, en die enorm verantwoordelikheid en ontsaggelike moeilikhede van sulk een nasionale regering wek bij ons die verlange op om die vrouwe organisasie op te bouw, als onderdeel, als vrouwelike aanhangsel van sulk een regering, sodat die morele steun en vrome gebede van die lede kan meewerk in die beskerming van die ware belange van land en volk.<sup>185</sup>

[We see in the future a national government under one independent flag, and the enormous responsibility and the tremendous difficulties of such a national government evoke in us the desire to build the women's organisation as a part, the feminine accessory, of such a government, so as to let the moral support and devout prayers of its members contribute to the protection of the true interests of country and *volk*.]

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<sup>180</sup> Loc cit, p136.

<sup>181</sup> Loc cit, p136.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid, p304.

<sup>183</sup> For more information about Johanna Brandt see 1.2.6 and 4.2.1.

<sup>184</sup> Stockenstrom E, op cit, pp185-186 and Van Rensburg A P, Moeders van ons volk, p113.

<sup>185</sup> Brandt J, Die smeltkroes. 'n Politieke vlugskrif, pp24.

Formally expressed, the goals stated that the Transvaal WNP were to develop the *volk* by watching over the education of the children; the distribution of Afrikaans reading material; the organising of lectures and the writing of articles about historical, political and social questions; campaigning for laws against the trade in liquor, Sabbath breaking and moral degradation; trying to get the best men in government; providing employment to all people without regard to age, poverty or class; supporting nationalist newspapers and other publications; and by organising different fund-raising events.<sup>186</sup> Significantly, the franchise for women was not on their agenda. Stockenstrom said that the nationalist women were against the principle of the suffrage for women.<sup>187</sup> This was in spite of the fact that many leaders in the WNP (such as Mabel Malherbe, Elsie van Broekhuizen and Johanna Brandt) personally were in favour of the enfranchisement of women. It is highly probable that this was a strategic decision in view of possible opposition from men and also from other women - we will see later that many of the ordinary Afrikaans women were either against the suffrage for women or did not regard it as an important issue. Brandt herself attempted to explain the WNP's position in this regard:<sup>188</sup>

Waardig, eerlik en kalm en sterk in onse oortuiging, kan onse manne sig begeef naar die stembus, en daar hulle stem gebruik vir die nasionale verteenwoordigers van die volk. Hierin kan die vrouw haar invloed laat voel. Door self een verhewe gees te ontwikkel, kan sij die man sterk beïnvloed tuis, en door geen skelden toe te laat in die openbaar, geen krenkende, vijandige, hatelike op- of aanmerking in onse vergaderinge of in onse koerante.<sup>189</sup>

[Dignified, honest and calm and strong in our convictions, our men can proceed to the ballot-box to use their vote for the national representatives of the *volk*. In this the woman can make her influence felt. By developing an elevated spirit herself, she can strongly influence the man at home. Also through not allowing abusive name-calling in public, and all those hostile and hateful insults that we get in the newspapers and at political meetings.]

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<sup>186</sup> Stockenstrom E, op cit, pp185-186.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid, p188.

<sup>188</sup> This explanation cannot be taken seriously as at more or less the same time Brandt was writing articles in favour of the suffrage for women in The Women's Outlook. M E Rothmann, a leader of the Cape WNP, would later make the following statement about the WNP and its contradictory approach to the suffrage for women: "We said nothing about the suffrage, though all the leaders were suffragists...Mental and bodily soundness, that is what we worked for, the actual suffrage did not appeal to us." Rothmann M E, M E Rothmann Collection, University of Stellenbosch Document Centre, 55.L.3 (1), "The Afrikaner's attitude towards woman's suffrage" (speech read to a meeting of the Women's Enfranchisement League Cape Town, +-1926), p3.

<sup>189</sup> Brandt J, op cit, p24.

The timing of the launch of the WNP was very interesting. It was launched after the rebellion of 1915, the women's march to the Union Buildings and in the time of *Helpmekaar*. At this time the SAVF was in the process of abandoning its overt political orientation. Brandt, who launched the organisation, commented in 1920 on the timing:

Gestig in die bange en droewige dage na die mislukte Rebellie, in een tijd toe dit een skande was om die naam van Nasionalist te draag, en gevaarlik om een politieke beweging op tou te sit...<sup>190</sup>

[Founded just after the failed Rebellion, in those days of fear and sadness, when it was a shameful to carry the name of Nationalist, and dangerous to start a political movement...]

This account strongly suggests the primacy of the emergent Afrikaner nationalist concerns relative to the franchise for women. Still, the new women's political parties flourished. When the first congress of the WNP was held in Johannesburg in 1916, a total of 4 130 members had already joined.<sup>191</sup> By 1922 there were 85 branches with a total of almost 8 000 members in the Transvaal.<sup>192</sup> The Vrededorp branch alone had 700 members.<sup>193</sup> In 1922, after the patient and tactful efforts of people such as Malherbe and Van Broekhuizen, the Transvaal WNP at its annual congress held in Standerton, voted in favour of the suffrage for women.<sup>194</sup>

In March 1923 the WNP was also established in the Cape province. At a meeting to discuss the potential of such an organisation in the Cape province, the suffrage for women was the main topic of discussion. The main concern of the NP-orientated women in the Cape were that, in the now more imminent event that women were to be enfranchised, they would vote for the SAP as the WSAP was very active country-wide. The meeting decided that the WNP should be established in the Cape,<sup>195</sup> with goals similar to those of the WNP in Transvaal. In 1923 the WNP was also

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<sup>190</sup> *Ibid*, pp23-24.

<sup>191</sup> Stockenstrom E, *op cit*, p290 and Reitz H and Oost H (eds), *Die Nasionale boek*, p345.

<sup>192</sup> Stockenstrom E E, *op cit*, p293.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid*, p292.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid*, p292 and Behrens L, "Mabel Malherbe - die 'boerevroujtjie' wat nou promoveer" in *Sarie Marais*, 15 April 1953, p14. In Chapter seven we will have a detailed look at Malherbe's arguments in favour of the enfranchisement of women.

<sup>195</sup> According to M E Rothmann, this initial meeting was held at the request of the National Party which liaised with the women through Charlie Malan. Rothmann M E, *My beskeie deel*, p226.

launched in Natal,<sup>196</sup> while at Hertzog's special request the organisation was established in the Orange Free State in the same year.<sup>197</sup> The new organisations, although established in the context of the pending enfranchisement of women, were officially against the suffrage for women.

In 1924 the first Nationalist government took office and passed a bill that would cause a crisis for women's political parties. The Electoral Bill of 1924 read that no political party was allowed to do any philanthropic work (and vice versa) and as the WNP concentrated very much on that kind of work, it experienced a crisis. Rothmann said:

**We were dismayed! And it was Dr Malan's bill; the blow came from the hand of a friend...to us it was a bad shock. There we were; it seemed that we just had to spend our energies in getting money for the men's party, and indeed, indeed, we did not want to do that! So we were forced to take ourselves seriously as a political party; no - as women and citizens; we saw that we would have to step out and vote, however much our shoulders, already heavily laden shrank from the burden of election campaigns and so on. And that is what quietly brought the WNP to vote for suffrage.<sup>198</sup> (My emphasis.)**

This explanation for the change in policy is, of course, over-simplified as we know that the Cape WNP was established around the issue of the suffrage for women. Also by this time a delegation from the WNP had already discussed the issue with Hertzog, who had explained to them that although the suffrage for women was on the agenda, they should postpone their demand for the vote until the problem of the black vote had been solved.<sup>199</sup> Subsequently, in 1924 a decision of the Cape WNP regarding the enfranchisement of women became the national policy of the WNP:

Ons sal in ooreenstemming met die versoek van Genl Hertzog handel, en 'n besluit voor of

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Dr D F Malan, who was present at this meeting, thought that women should rather join the ordinary National Party. The decision to establish the organisation was in spite of this opposition from Malan. It would indeed be interesting to find out exactly why women could not organise women from within the NP. One can assume that Malan respected the decision as, in commenting on the launch of this organisation, he later said that women were now organised and that he was not aware of any women's project that had not been a success. Stockenström E E, op cit, pp307-309.

<sup>196</sup> ibid, pp315-316.

<sup>197</sup> ibid, p315.

<sup>198</sup> Rothmann M E, M E Rothmann Collection, University of Stellenbosch Document Centre, 55.L.3 (1), "The Afrikaner's attitude towards woman's suffrage" (speech read to a meeting of the Women's Enfranchisement League Cape Town, +-1926), p4.

<sup>199</sup> ibid, p5.

teen vrouestemreg laat rus totdat wanneer segregasie in werking tree, en intussen met ons ondersoek voortgaan.<sup>200</sup>

[We shall act according to the decision of Genl Hertzog, leaving a decision for or against women's suffrage until we can implement segregation - in the meantime we shall continue with our inquiry.]

A Federal Council for the WNP was established in 1926. In 1930, following the extension of the franchise to women, the WNP and the NP amalgamated.<sup>201</sup>

It is significant that women were so active in political parties before they could even vote. Even more significant is the fact that both these parties were at first not in favour of the vote for women. It is not surprising then that Marie du Toit, Afrikaans feminist, severely criticised the idea of political parties for women (WNP and WSAP). She said that "(d)ie vrouekwessie moet vir vroue van eerste belang wees totdat hulle eers stemreg het; as hulle daarna meen net so goed vir partybelange as vir vrouebelange te kan ywer, val daar niks teen te se nie" [the women's issue should be of primary importance for women until they have the suffrage. If, thereafter, they can work as hard for party interests as they can work for women's interests, nothing can be said against it].<sup>202</sup>

#### 4.4 Die Boerevrou: "Nou kom die tyd van die vrou aan!" [Now the time of the woman has arrived!]

Two contradictory trends can be identified in the developments around Afrikaans women in the first two decades of the twentieth century. In the first place, many of the above organisations and actions were indicative of women formally starting to organise themselves in a sphere in which they had traditionally just been tolerated informally: women were entering the labour market; they were launching political parties; they successfully organised a major political protest march; to a limited extent they became involved in or exposed to the suffrage movement (see 4.5.1 below); they were honoured at a major public celebration and they started several other women's organisations.

These developments were, paradoxically, accompanied by a deliberate retreat back into the domestic sphere. Women workers converged in particular employment sectors, sectors related to

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<sup>200</sup> Stockenstrom E E, op cit, p329.

<sup>201</sup> Van Rensburg A P, op cit, p121.

<sup>202</sup> Du Toit M, Vrou en feminist. Of iets oor die vrouevraagstuk, pp116-117.

their domestic roles and did not conflict with established views about their "natural" abilities. The women's political parties did not take up the issue of the suffrage for women and initially the Transvaal WNP even explicitly expressed its opposition to the enfranchisement of women. The most powerful women's organisation in the Transvaal, the SAVF, formally announced its departure from the political arena.

While the first trend was indicative of gender becoming an issue, women exploring other spheres in search for a new identity and new roles, the latter was closely associated with the first traces of a new gender discourse, the *volksmoeder* discourse, which, in response to this issue of gender, would create a new identity and new roles for Afrikaans women.

It was in this particular context that Mabel Malherbe started the first Afrikaans magazine for women in 1919. The magazine was compiled by women for women. Most of the contributors were also women. The editor and her staff had strong Afrikaner nationalist sentiments and, although it professed to be apolitical, the magazine had a strong Afrikaner nationalist inclination.

#### 4.4.1 Launch and goals

In the very first issue of Die Boerevrou in March 1919, Mabel Malherbe published an editorial which amounted to a programmatic statement for the project of this journal. Against the background of the developments which have been traced in this chapter, Die Boerevrou proposed to focus on the position of Afrikaans women but also to link this with ethnic concerns in particular ways. This general statement of the aims informing the journal, whose actual contents will be analysed in detail in later chapters, is important enough for our purposes to deserve to be quoted in full:

Die Boerevrou is 'n maandblad vir die Afrikaanse vrou. Ons is nou moeg daarvan om altyd in 'n uithoekie van tydskrifte (by die kinder-afdeling) een, of miskien twee bladsye te kry wat aan ons belange gewy is!

Die twintigste eeu word met reg genoem die eeu van die kind - daar is groot vooruitgang op elke gebied in die behandeling en opvoeding van kinders.

Nou kom die tyd van die vrou aan!

Die moeder, die met liefde gekroonde koningin van iedere gelukkige huisgesin, is en sal tog altyd bly die middelpunt van alle geestelike ontwikkeling van 'n volk.

Die moeders en vrouens van 'n volk vorm die siel daarvan. Mans en seuns (en teenswoordig die dogters ook) word opgelei vir hulle lewenswerk, maar die vrou, wat die

moeilikste en mees gewigtige roeping het, moet maar deur foute en bittere lyding haar opleiding kry: en ondertussen ly die hele huisgesin.

As die Afrikaanse vrou nou gaat in sien dat haar roeping as moeder en vrou tog wel degelik eis dat sy dink en leer sal dit vir ons volk van baie groot waarde wees.

Dan groei ons seker tot 'n groot volk, want dit hang tog alles van die moeders af.

As 'n vrou haar huis met kennis regeer, - kennis van gesondheidsleer en huishoudkunde, en die kinders 'n gevoel kan inwortel van die waarde van, op iedere gebied, met vaste kennis te werk te gaan, en niks op goed geluk of toeval te laat nie, sal die kinders dit seker baie ver bring en groot dinge vir land en volk doen.

As die Afrikaanse vrou leer om te dink en te lees, en die goeie dinge wat sy so leer toe te pas op die huishoudelike lewe, is daar 'n groot toekoms vir haar kinders.

Kyk maar hoe ver het sy, die dappere moedertjie in die verlede gekom sonder boekekennis of enige hulp van buite, net deur haar vasberadenheid en onverskrokke wilskrag, en haar groot geduld.

Ek sien haar wag, geduldig, sonder woord,  
soos sy al honderd jaar gewag het en gely.  
Ek sien haar win,  
want haar naam  
is Vrou en Moeder!

Miskien is dit 'n baie idealistiese voorwoord en 'n bietjie hoogdrawend vir 'n gewone vroueblaadjie wat heeltemal nie wil poseer vir iets besonder letterkundig of hooggeleerd nie, maar tog sonder ideale kom ons nêrens nie!

En dit is wel met hoë ideale wat ons die werk begin.

Ons leef in 'n tyd waarin alles verander; daar is groot dinge op koms, en ons kan die grote wêreld daar buite nie langer uitsluit nie. Ons moet probeer om vas te hou aan die insettinge van ons voorvaders en die waardige hoflike maniere en gewoontes van die verleë, maar ons moet tog probeer om uit die teenwoordige kennis op te neem wat nuttig sal wees vir die ontwikkeling van ons seuns en dogters. Ons moet vashou aan ons selfvertroue en ons moed, en nooit vergeet dat 'n geslag wat in die verleë gedoen het wat ons voorgeslag wel gedaan het, (besied deur die vrouens) geen ideaal te hoog en geen toekoms te skoon is nie.

Ons hoop dat iedere Afrikaanse vrou die hele land deur sal saamwerk om Die Boerevrou werklik die mondstuk van ons vrouens te maak. Hulle moet voel dat die blad aan hulle behoort en dat hulle vry is om raad en wenke te gee en te vra; om te kritiseer en, as hulle iets op die hart het dit dan deur middel van ons blad aan ons ander landgenote bekend te maak.<sup>203</sup>

[Die Boerevrou is a monthly magazine for the Afrikaans woman. We are tired of having to

<sup>203</sup> Die Boerevrou, March 1919, p2.

look in a small corner of magazines (usually in the children's section) for a page or two devoted to our issues!

The twentieth century can justly be called the century of the child - there are major advances in every aspect of the treatment and rearing of children.

Now the time of women has dawned!

The mother, lovingly crowned as queen of every happy household, will always be the center of the spiritual development of a *volk*.

The mothers and women are the soul of the *volk*.

Men and boys (and nowadays girls also) are trained for their careers, but women, though they have the most difficult and most important task in life, still must receive their training through their own mistakes and terrible suffering -while all along the whole family suffers.

Should the Afrikaans woman begin to realize that her task as mother and woman thoroughly requires her to think and learn, it will be of great value to our *volk*.

Then we will become a great nation, for the role of the mother is crucial.

Should a woman manage her house with knowledge, knowledge of hygiene and domestic science, and should she implant in her children a bias to work with knowledge on every terrain, to leave nothing to chance, then her children must be successful, achieving much for country and *volk*.

Should the Afrikaans woman learn to read and to think, and to apply the things she reads to her domestic tasks, then there will be a great future for her children.

Just see how much the brave little mothers of the past achieved, lacking book learning and all external help, merely applying their determination and fearless will power and boundless patience.

I see her waiting, patient and in silence  
 as she has suffered through a hundred waiting years  
 I see her triumph  
     for she is called  
     Woman and Mother!

This preface may be somewhat idealistic and pretentious for an ordinary little women's magazine with no pretense of either literary value or high learning - but lacking ideals, you get nowhere!

Indeed, this work we start with lofty ideals.

We live in a time when everything is changing. Major new things are happening, and we can no longer exclude the world at large. We should hold onto the rules of our ancestors and the courteous customs of the past, but we should also try to assimilate from the

present knowledge that which may prove useful to our sons and daughters. We should hold onto our confidence in ourselves, we should keep up our courage, we should never forget that for our heroic lineage, emboldened by women to achieve great things, no ideal can be too lofty, and no future too bright.

We hope that every Afrikaans woman all over the country will co-operate to make Die Boerevrou the mouthpiece of all our women. They should feel that the magazine belongs to them, and they should feel free to give advice and tips and to ask questions; to criticise, and, should they have something to share, to reveal it to our compatriots by way of our magazine.]

A fuller discussion of various aspects of and issues arising from this programmatic statement will be undertaken in later chapters of this thesis. Here it may be sufficient to note that in this powerful first editorial the editor of the new magazine, Die Boerevrou, announced that the time of the woman has arrived, but that this announcement was not followed by any explicit feminist argument or objective. It is followed rather by a call to all Afrikaans women to be educated as mothers for the benefit of their children and, ultimately, for the benefit of the *volk*. In fact, we have here an announcement of that distinctive gender discourse which will be our concern in later chapters.

The goals of Die Boerevrou were not inflexible. Malherbe often told her readers that the contents of the magazine depended on their requirements and needs.<sup>204</sup> Die Boerevrou, however, was also very clearly Malherbe's project and it very often reflected her specific interests and alignments. We will see how she, in the later years of Die Boerevrou, tried to restructure and broaden the discourse and how she was in a constant dialogue with her readers.

#### 4.4.2 Readership and circulation

It is of some importance to establish the extent and make-up of Die Boerevrou's readership. Die

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<sup>204</sup> In March 1921, for instance, she wrote:

In die begin het ons so baie planne gemaak. Maar uit die briewe van ons vriende het ons 'n ander en 'n breër blik op die saak gekrij en dit is uit hulle briewe en skrijwe dat ons die leidraad krij wat ons in die rigting neem waar ons moet gaan. Nou soek ons gedurig in ons briefwisseling om voeling te hou met die intekenaars en so te probeer gee wat hulle nodig het.

[Initially we had many plans of our own. But thanks to the letters of our friends we have been gaining a broader perspective, and we let their letters guide us as to where we should go. We try to stay in touch with our subscribers on a regular basis, mostly through this correspondence, and we shall strive to give them what they ask.

Die Boerevrou, March 1921, p2.

Boerevrou was a popular magazine and although circulation figures are not available it can be assumed that it had a substantial, but not particularly large, readership.<sup>206</sup> The popular appeal of Die Boerevrou can be established in various ways. Thus there is the fact that so many people wrote to the magazine. It seems that Die Boerevrou was inundated with letters. Malherbe later recalled that the letters were so many and took in so much office space that it was decided to destroy all the letters after they had been answered!<sup>206</sup> The monthly column *Om die koffietafel* [Around the coffee table], which consisted of letters from readers, took up between three and seven pages every month. The "Ruilkolom" took up one or two pages monthly, with the offers and requests of between 15 and 25 readers (subscribers only) placed every month. All the letters and requests received could not be published. Malherbe wrote in June 1921 that Die Boerevrou at that stage corresponded with more than a 1 000 people.<sup>207</sup>

Secondly, Die Boerevrou served as the official organ of the SAVF for much of its lifetime (1921-1931), and later (from 1929) of the OVV, so that many women had access to the magazine. We also find numerous references to the journal's popularity and to its widely recognised influence.<sup>208</sup> Malherbe herself wrote the following about the popular appeal of Die Boerevrou:

Dit was die eerste leesstof wat baie plattelandse vroue in Transvaal in hul eie taal gekry het. Dat dit die hart van ons boerevroue gesteel het, was baie duidelik uit die talryke briewe wat ons ontvang het, selfs van mense wat nie graag of maklik skrywe nie. [It was the first reading material in their own language that many rural women in the Transvaal obtained. That it stole the hearts of our *boerevroue* was very clear from the many letters we received, even from people who did not enjoy writing and did not write easily.]

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<sup>206</sup> See also Rothmann M E, My beskeie deel, p205.

<sup>206</sup> Sarie Marais, 15 April 1954, p14.

<sup>207</sup> Die Boerevrou July 1921 p17. See also Die Boerevrou, January 1927, p2.

<sup>208</sup> See for instance Die Huisgenoot, 1 January 1932, p1 and Die Huisgenoot, 1 June 1945, p33. Louis Hiemstra who helped Malherbe with editing in the first three years of the magazine's existence, wrote about MER's employment in 1920 that the *hoogstaande* [high-quality] women's magazine was so popular that the editorial staff had to be expanded. Hiemstra L, "Aanrakingspunte met MER" in Botha E (ed), MER 100, p60.

According to J H O du Plessis, in his study of the Dutch-Afrikaans press, Die Boerevrou was "n uitmuntend geillustreerde vroueblad...besonder gewild en van hoë gehalte" [exquisitely illustrated women's magazine...exceptionally popular and of high quality].

Du Plessis J H O, Die Afrikaanse pers. 'n Studie van die ontstaan, ontwikkeling en rol van die Hollands-Afrikaanse pers as sosiale instelling, p205.

What is more difficult to establish, however, is who the readers actually were. Die Boerevrou was ostensibly aimed at all white Afrikaans women, whether they lived in rural or urban areas, in the Cape or in the Transvaal, whether they were working class or middle class and whether they were old or young.<sup>209</sup> Whether women in all these sectors of the population were actually reached cannot be established with any certainty. The letters that were published did come from all over the country. It seems that the addresses of correspondents were only supplied if they were writing from outside the Transvaal or the Orange Free State, where most readers lived. There were many letters from the Cape, quite a few from British-East-Africa and the occasional one from Europe and the United States of America. Malherbe wrote in March 1927 that letters were received "van die uithoeke van ons land" [from the far corners of our country]. Many of the letters published were written by women living on farms and in rural areas and the requests and offers made in *Die Ruilkolom* [The Exchange Column] give the impression that many of the readers were involved in some kind of home production and thus did not live in very densely populated areas.

Although there were many letters from the wives of clergymen and professors ("Mev Ds"/Mrs Reverend and "Mev Prof"/Mrs Professor), the simplicity of many letters also shows that all readers did not come from educated circles. Malherbe often refers to the fact that many of her readers were not educated and that they should also feel at home with the magazine. M E Rothmann (MER) also alluded to the simplicity of many of the readers.<sup>210</sup> Many of the readers mentioned their financial troubles and how they were suffering to make ends meet.

Most of the women who wrote to the magazine were married, but the published letters indicate that the readership was not limited to a certain age group. Although letters from professional women were often published, there were very few letters which indicated that their writers were from the urban working class. This might suggest that this group of women was not very well represented in the readership of Die Boerevrou.

#### 4.4.3 Editorial staff, management and financing

Die Boerevrou was compiled and managed by women. Men only participated in an advisory capacity, as contributors, or in Kenne Malherbe's case, as a financial supporter. The small staff consisted of well-educated middle class women who moved in the same social circle. Although

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<sup>209</sup> The significance of such a target readership will be discussed in Chapter six.

<sup>210</sup> Rothmann M E, op cit, p204.

there were occasional references to the *kantoormeisie* [office girl]<sup>211</sup>, she was never mentioned as part of the staff.

The original staff consisted only of Malherbe (editor) and Marguerite Pienaar (administrator), with Louis Hiemstra (of Die Volksstem) helping out with the editing during the first three years. Marguerite Pienaar was a cousin of Mrs Malherbe (the daughter of Lizzie Niemeyer and sister-in-law of Sara Niemeyer) and did not work for a salary. MER joined the staff as sub-editor in 1920 and was paid a substantial monthly salary of 20 pounds. After two years she had to leave as Malherbe could not afford to keep on paying her sub-editor such a high salary. Mrs A Carinus-Holzhausen later joined Die Boerevrou as sub-editor, taking Rothmann's place. Malherbe often referred to the editorial staff as *die driemanskap* [the triumvirate]. Eva Walters (Hubrechtse) was a regular contributor who also spent a lot of time in the office.

The magazine was financed by subscription fees, advertisements and the generous Kenne Malherbe. Mabel Malherbe herself said that launching the magazine was a *waagstuk* [risk]:

Dit het moeite gekos om Pa te oortuig dat Ma ook 'n eie tydskrif wou hê...Om kontant (10s per jaar) uit te gee vir nog 'n tydskrif, waar hulle alreeds Die Huisgenoot, Die Brandwag en Die Kerkbode kry, was nie so maklik nie."

[It was difficult to convince Father that Mother also wanted her own magazine...To spend cash (10s annually) on a magazine if you already get Die Huisgenoot, Die Brandwag and Die Kerkbode was not easy.]

There often was concern about the financial state of Die Boerevrou and every now and again the editor called for more subscriptions and for more support for advertisers. In 1924 there was an effort to amalgamate Die Boerevrou and Die Huisgenoot, but Malherbe, in spite of the financial relief and "more leisure" that such a step would have brought, decided against it, apparently because she was not sure that she would get along with everyone.<sup>212</sup>

#### 4.4.4 Contents of Die Boerevrou

While the contents of Die Boerevrou will be discussed in detail in later chapters, some of the

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<sup>211</sup> For instance, in Die Boerevrou of October 1924 the anonymous *kantoormeisie* was allowed to add a postscript to an article about working women. Die Boerevrou, October 1924, p15.

<sup>212</sup> Pienaar M, M E Rothmann Collection, University of Stellenbosch Document Centre, 55.K.P.2 (5), Letter to Rothmann, p1 and Goldblatt S, C J Langenhoven Collection, USDC, 202.KG.H9, Letter to Langenhoven, p2.

regular columns and topics should be mentioned here. A standard edition of Die Boerevrou would include an editorial, a religious column (*Stille Sondag-ure/Silent Sunday Hours*), the letter column (*Om die Koffietafel*), a column in which readers could exchange products, questions and advice (*Ruilkolom*), the SAVF pages, the column for children (*Fakkeldraers/Torch bearers* and later *Ons kleintjie/Our little one*) and book reviews (*Die boerevrou se boekrak/The boerevrou's bookshelf*). Other topics that were regularly covered were beauty and fashion, handwork, recipes, nutrition, health, education, mothering, domestic duties, architecture and interior decorating, historical events and "national heroes". Many short stories and poems were published - in the 12 years of its existence Die Boerevrou carried stories and poems of virtually all the well-known Afrikaans authors and poets of the time. Every December a special edition for Christmas and the Day of the Covenant was compiled. Special projects that the magazine embarked on included a major health project, the *Boerevroue-bond* ("om die vroue van die platteland saam te snoer en hulle te help om hulself te help op ekonomiese gebied"/to unite the women of the rural areas and to help them to help themselves), a campaign to convince women to wear traditional clothes to national festivals, a vocabulary project which was aimed at collecting Afrikaans words that were used by women in the domestic sphere etc. Much coverage was given to Afrikaans women's organisations. While Die Boerevrou was the official organ of the SAVF and later also of the OVV, the Women's League of South Africa in later years also had a regular column in the magazine. Articles about other women's organisations such as the ACVV, the YWCA and the Red Cross were also published occasionally. An interesting fact about Die Boerevrou was that it seems that all letters that were received were either published or personally answered by the staff. The office in Bureau Avenue in Pretoria was regularly visited by readers and Eva Walters wrote in 1932:

Ek moes daaraan gewoond raak dat op enige uur van die dag, druk of nie, besoeker in die kantoor verwelkom word. Die mense het die drumpel platgeloop, nie om te kom help nie, maar om te kom hulp vra. Onder die korrespondensie was daar gedurig versoekskrifte. Op die telefoon is dikwels dringend gesoek. Die kantoor was in werklikheid niks anders as 'n hulpburo nie.<sup>213</sup>

[I had to get use to the fact that at any time of day, busy or not, visitors were welcomed in the little office. The people wore out the doorstep, not to come and help, but to request help. The correspondence frequently included petitions. On the telephone there often were urgent pleas. The office, in reality, was nothing else but a help bureau.]

As we shall see Die Boerevrou, in the 12 years of its existence, played a very important role in the construction of the *volksmoeder* discourse. In Die Boerevrou ethnicity and gender were deliberately connected in an effort to construct new identities and new roles for women. These constructions

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<sup>213</sup> Behrens L, "Mabel Malherbe - die 'boervroutjie' wat nou promoveer" in Sarie Marais, 15 April 1953.

will be the main points of discussion in the following chapters.

#### 4.5 Other important initiatives of women

After having construed some of the early organisations and actions of Afrikaans women as responses to their changing roles in industrial society, it is also necessary to look at some other ways of dealing with women's exclusion from the public sphere - an exclusion which persisted in spite of women's changing social roles. The most important of those responses were the suffragette movement and feminism, both of which would in important ways also shaped the construction of the *volksmoeder* discourse.

##### 4.5.1 The suffragettes in South Africa<sup>214</sup>

In 1867 the first society formed to specifically campaign for the suffrage for women was established in England. This was followed in 1869 by the founding of the National Women's Suffrage Union in the United States of America. Cheryll Walker describes how these early suffrage movements were linked to the major social and political reform movements of the time.<sup>215</sup>

The first women's organisations concentrating specifically on the issue of suffrage were regional organisations formed in Durban (1902), Port Elizabeth (1905), Cape Town (1907), Johannesburg, Pretoria and Bloemfontein (1908), Pietermaritzburg (1910) and Kimberley, Grahamstown, East London and Somerset East (1911).<sup>216</sup>

A national body, the Women's Enfranchisement Association of South Africa (WEAU), consisting of many different auxiliary societies (including those mentioned above), was formed in 1911.<sup>217</sup> The WEAU was, according to Cheryll Walker, "exclusively white, predominantly English-speaking

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<sup>214</sup> For more detailed and complete accounts of the suffrage movement in South Africa, see C Walker, "The women's suffrage movement: the politics of gender, race and class" in Walker C (ed), Women and gender in southern Africa, pp313-345 or Walker C, The women's suffrage movement in South Africa (published by the Centre for African Studies, University of Cape Town, 1982).

<sup>215</sup> C Walker, "The women's suffrage movement: the politics of gender, race and class" in Walker C (ed), Women and gender in southern Africa, pp, pp319-320.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid, p326.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid, p327.

questioned, it was within the given structure that the suffragists wanted to obtain power by enfranchisement. Therefore the existing division between man's world and woman's world ("The home, as has so often been said, is the woman's sphere"<sup>224</sup>) was not attacked. The main arguments of the suffragists were that the values reigning in the woman's world should be taken into the man's world or alternatively that women should have legal power so as to protect the interests they have in their woman's world ("We claim she has a right to form her children's future. To every mother it is a vital matter whether Parliament taxes diamonds and ostrich feathers, or bread and meat; whether education is accessible to all or the privilege of a few..."<sup>225</sup>)

Given this general background and character of the suffrage movement in South Africa, it is necessary to establish the extent of Afrikaans-speaking women's involvement in and their attitude to the struggle for the suffrage.

A few Afrikaans women were involved in the suffrage movement in South Africa. According to Stockenstrom Mrs A H Murray was one of the first Afrikaans women who became active in the struggle for the franchise for women. In March 1910, she published a pamphlet entitled "Het vrouwestemrecht" [The vote for women]. In the pamphlet she asked women to support the women's movement practically by joining the Women's Enfranchisement League.<sup>226</sup> Stockenstrom claims that this special effort of Mrs Murray was significant as Dutch Afrikaans women generally felt neutral about the suffrage for women; and some of them were very much opposed to it. He says that although a small group of "hoogontwikkelde" [highly developed] Afrikaans women eventually took up the issue, "op die groot massa van Boerevroue in Suid-Afrika het dit geen uitwerking gehad nie/on the great mass of *Boerevroue* in South Africa it had no effect".<sup>227</sup>

This view was also expressed by Marie du Toit, in Vrou en feminist, when commenting on Afrikaans women's participation in the struggle for the franchise for women:

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<sup>224</sup> The Woman's Outlook, June 1913, p5.

<sup>225</sup> Julia F Solly, a member of the International Women's Suffrage Alliance, in a letter to the Cape Times. The letter was published in an occasional paper of the WEAU in March 1926.

<sup>226</sup> Stockenstrom E E, op cit, pp126-127.

<sup>227</sup> Stockenstrom E E, op cit, p131.

Gelukkig is daar 'n deel van ons vrouebevolking wat vlytig besig is met die saak, hoewel hulle groteliks bestaan uit Engelssprekende dames. Die Afrikaanse vrouens is, treurig om te meld, met weinige uitsonderings, baie lou en lusteloos teenoor so 'n belangrike saak.<sup>228</sup>

[Fortunately there is a part of our women population working hard on the issue, although they are mainly English-speaking ladies. The Afrikaans women are, it is sad to say, with little exception, very tepid and listless about such an important issue.]

On 11 February 1921 a petition for the enfranchisement of women with 54 500 signatures was handed over to Parliament. The Woman's Outlook made specific mention of the Afrikaans women present. Among the regional representatives was a Mrs Erasmus who was the only speaker who delivered her speech in Afrikaans. The representatives from the Orange Free State included Mrs Colin Steyn (daughter-in-law of President Steyn and Mrs Du Toit (daughter of the ex-president). According to The Woman's Outlook Mrs Steyn herself would have been there "if her delicate health had permitted".<sup>229</sup>

The Woman's Outlook's approach to Afrikaans women, gives one an indication of how they were viewed in suffragist circles. Johanna Brandt, author of Die kappie-kommando and founder of the NWP, seemed to be the regular Dutch/Afrikaans correspondent for The Woman's Outlook. Her main argument in favour of the vote for women was that it was precisely because women were mothers that they should be allowed to vote, thus explicitly accepting the traditional view of mothering as women's basic role. She also argued that voting would broaden the horizons of women and was thus important for their development:

Het stemrecht brengt ontwikkeling. En wie zal beweren dat kennis, van welke aard ook een nadelig effect kan hebben op het huiselike leven? Op moederlike plichten? De sfeer van de vrouw ligt thuis! Ja, en juist daarom, omdat zij verantwoordelijk is voor de opvoeding van het nakomend geslacht, is het zo nodig voor haar een hooger ontwikkeling te bereiken. De vrouw is de moeder van de staatsman. De vooruitgang van ras hangt af van de ontwikkeling van de vrouw.<sup>230</sup>

[The vote brings development. And who will claim that knowledge of any kind can have negative effects on home life? On motherly duties? The sphere of the women is at home! Yes, and exactly because of that, because she is responsible for the education of the next generation, it is necessary that she reaches higher development. The woman is the mother of the statesman. The progress of a race depends on the development of the woman.]

In the May 1914 issue of The Woman's Outlook Brandt recalled the role that Afrikaans women had played in history in order to prove that South African women deserved the vote:

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<sup>228</sup> Du Toit M, op cit, p116.

<sup>229</sup> Du Toit M, op cit, p117 and The Woman's Outlook, April 1921, pp8-12.

<sup>230</sup> The Woman's Outlook, February 1914, p3.

In de geschiedenis van geen ander land der wereld kan de vrouw een voorname en belangrijker rol gespeeld hebben dan in die van Zuid-Afrika. Denkt aan de vrouwen en dochters van de voortrekkers, hoe ze meegevochten hebben tegen barbaren, tegen wilde gedierten en wrede overmachten, en hoe ze voor de vrijheid de dood hebben getrotseerd door vuur en vloek! Denk aan hun volharding, hun trouw!<sup>231</sup>

[In the history of no other country in the world can the woman have played and more prominent and important role than in the history of South Africa. Think of the wives and daughters of the *voortrekkers*, how they also fought against barbarians, against wild animals and cruel, overpowering forces, and how they, for freedom, had to face death by fire and curse! Think of their perseverance and faithfulness!]

In January 1914 The Woman's Outlook discussed the topic of "Boer women" and the vote. The article, "All in the day's work", asked: "Is it true that the Boer women do not want the vote? If so, why?" The writer of the article investigated this question by visiting farms and telling the Afrikaans women in "her rather clumsy *Taal*" that she wanted to talk about the vote for women. She explained to women that parliamentary representatives would be much more careful about decisions if they had to account to women. She also asked the women why "coloured" men in the Cape province should have the vote but not women. The women responded by saying that they did not know about these things. The writer then explained the Boer women's reluctance to join the struggle for women suffrage as follows:

Ignorance of facts, not having thought about it, and the want of power of expression, are the only things that hold back the Boers, both men and women, from demanding it, and some day soon some slight thing will light up the veld fire and there will be nothing to stop the demand.

She then recommended how Boer women should be made aware of the issue. It is significant that she recommended the use of arguments about children and motherhood, arguments otherwise not frequently used in The Woman's Outlook:

See the expression of a Boer woman when told that the married mother is not the legal parent of her child. Whisper to a mother that it is a greater crime, and receives a greater punishment, to steal a pair of boots than to mislead a little girl child, and then they will soon think and say that laws must be made that will consider the point of view of the woman and the mother. And this is how the knowledge must be spread - by means of quiet talks to intelligent women in their own houses.<sup>232</sup>

It is clear that the Afrikaans women were regarded to be largely uninformed about the issue of the suffrage. Secondly, Afrikaans women were considered to be passionate mothers and arguments regarding the mothering role were deemed to be the most successful in convincing Afrikaans

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<sup>231</sup> The Woman's Outlook, May 1914, p4.

<sup>232</sup> The Woman's Outlook, January 1914, p6.

women of the importance of the suffrage for women.

M E Rothmann, although citing ignorance as one of the reasons for Afrikaans women's indifference and even opposition to the issue of the suffrage for women, also said that in many cases the indifference could be ascribed to a deliberate choice. She firstly linked this choice to the fact that so many Afrikaans women were still involved in home production:

I think you will always find that the woman who has to run her household on her own manufactures from the raw product spends not only her time but most of her creative energy in doing just that. That is what happens on farms in our country, not only to Afrikaners but also Englishwomen...It is in the nature of things I am sure that the housewife who has to care for food production through all its stages has little attention to spare for the housekeeping of the state, and is only too thankful to leave that to the men. This then is the main reason for the inattention of the women outside the towns to the suffrage question. But the strain on the farmer's wife is lessening a little...Farm women are taking breath and are beginning to look round them at the way their affairs are being settled outside their house as well as inside.<sup>233</sup>

Retrospectively (in 1972) she emphasised the importance of ethnic and Afrikaner nationalist issues in Afrikaans women's decision not to become involved in the struggle for enfranchisement:

Afrikanervroue het van die hele ding opsy gestaan. Dit was nie omdat hulle teen die stemreg was nie, maar om ander redes - veral om 'n rede wat ons reeds meer as 150 jaar beïnvloed het, naamlik dat die beweging Engels van oorsprong en instelling was. Verder kon ons nie eintlik sien dat dit van dringende belang was nie; **ons was besig met ons taalstryd, onse stryd teen verarming en agteruitgang, met ons hele stryd van rehabilitasie;** vrouestemreg het ons nie voorgekom as 'n belangrike faktor in hierdie stryd nie.<sup>234</sup> [Afrikaner women stood aside. It was not because they were against the vote, but for other reasons, namely that the movement was English in origin and intent. Also, we could not really see that it was of urgent importance; **we were busy with our language struggle, our struggle against poverty en retrogression, with our whole struggle of rehabilitation;** women's suffrage did not appear to us to be an important factor in this struggle.] (My emphasis.)

The First World War and the WEAU's reaction to it, further emphasised the British character of the movement. At its 1915 conference the WEAU passed a resolution not to make the suffrage campaign its first priority during the war, but rather to become active in war relief work. A resolution protesting against "citizens who have recently taken up arms in open rebellion being allowed to exercise their vote...seeing that loyal women are still unenfranchised" was also passed.

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<sup>233</sup> Rothmann M E, M E Rothmann Collection, University of Stellenbosch Document Centre, 55.L.3 (1), "The Afrikaner's attitude towards woman's suffrage" (speech read to a meeting of the Women's Enfranchisement League Cape Town), p2.

<sup>234</sup> Rothmann M E, My beskeie deel, p226.

Both these resolutions were eventually retracted in the midst of a major controversy as some members felt that Afrikaans women would be alienated by such resolutions.<sup>235</sup>

After the folding of The Woman's Outlook in June 1922, the WEAU issued occasional papers on a regular basis. In these papers further efforts were made to accommodate Afrikaans women. Frequently articles in both Afrikaans and English were published. In the 6th Occasional Paper, published in 1924, an open letter from Mrs Annie Botha appeared. She argued that the issue was not whether South African women deserved the vote; it was a right they were claiming:

Dat dit niks meer as reg sou wees nie dat die vroue dieselfde voorreg sal geniet as die manne, en 'n stem behoort te he in die sake, verantwoordelikhede, moeilikhede en gevare van ons land waarin hul lewe en wat hul lief het. Dit is seker 'n feit dat Suid-Afrika vroeer of later die vrouens stemreg sal kry, - waarom dan nie vroeer?<sup>236</sup>

[That it would be nothing more than right that women should enjoy the same privileges as the men, and should have a vote in the issues, responsibilities, difficulties en dangers of our country in which they live and which they love. It is probably a fact that South Africa sooner or later will have the suffrage for women - why not sooner?]

How did Afrikaans women respond to these overtures, and what were their views on the suffrage movement? There are very few references to the issue of women's suffrage in the records of the SAVF. The SAVF congress of 1911, despite some opposition, encouraged members to join societies working for the franchise for women.<sup>237</sup> This decision was taken at a time when the SAVF was still formally involved in politics. In August 1922 the Johannesburg-East branch of the SAVF hosted a debate about voting rights for women. The secretary wrote in Die Boerevrou of September 1922:

Dit was warm gedebatteer, en toe daar gestem word, is die oorgrote meerderheid ten gunste van vrouestemreg. Ons vertrou dat dit sal help om die saak te bespoedig.<sup>238</sup>

[It was passionately debated, and when there was a vote, the majority was in favour of women's enfranchisement. We trust that this will help to accelerate the issue.]

For our purposes it is of considerable significance that the issue of the vote for women was hardly ever raised in Die Boerevrou until it was announced in 1930 that women will be able to register as voters as from January 1931. This is even more significant if we take the editor's own pro-

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<sup>235</sup> Walker C, op cit, pp330-331.

<sup>236</sup> WEAU, An occasional paper, 6th issue.

<sup>237</sup> Pienaar T C, op cit, p22.

<sup>238</sup> Die Boerevrou, September 1922, p48.

enfranchisement views into account. Mrs Malherbe herself was an avid campaigner for the suffrage for women. According to Anna Neethling-Pohl she confronted General Hertzog with this issue in January 1919, at her first meeting with him.<sup>239</sup> Her name also appeared on a list of Pretoria women who intended to go and see the acting prime minister in 1921 about suffrage for women.<sup>240</sup> Why then did it not feature prominently in her journal? In June 1930 the editor explained that this issue had not yet been discussed in Die Boerevrou as it used to be too controversial an issue among women and would have caused angry and bitter arguments.<sup>241</sup>

This indicates that the franchise for women was perceived as a controversial issue and there must have been a substantial number of Die Boerevrou readers not in favour of the vote for women. In spite of this policy of Die Boerevrou, EMW wrote in November 1924:

Dit is moeilik om te verstaan hoekom die vrou in Suid -Afrika nog nie die stemreg het nie; tog is dit al iets om voor dankbaar te wees dat elke Suid-Afrikaanse dorpie van enige betekenis nou al 'n vrou in die stadsraad het, en dat daar tenminste een is wat 'n vrou het as burgemeester.<sup>242</sup>

[It is difficult to understand why women in South Africa still don't have the vote. One should be thankful, however, that every small South African town of any consequence has a woman in the city council, and there is at least one with a woman as mayor.]

To summarise one should say, in the first place, that the fact that Afrikaans women were not very visible in the WEAU does not necessarily indicate a total indifference about the issue of the suffrage for women. Their reluctance to become involved in this organisation had a lot to do with the specific character of the WEAU: British, middle-class and urban. However, there were individual Afrikaans women like Brandt and Malherbe who did work with the WEAU occasionally. Other prominent Afrikaans women such as the Steyns also supported the principle of the vote for women.

It is not very clear where the average Afrikaans women, especially those living in the rural areas, stood regarding the issue, but from the opinions expressed by others, it can be deduced that a large number of them were not aware of the issue at all or were against the suffrage for women. This position would drastically change during the twenties.

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<sup>239</sup> Neethling-Pohl A, "Mev Mabel Malherbe" in Die Huisgenoot, 1 June 1945, p33.

<sup>240</sup> The Woman's Outlook, August 1921, p19.

<sup>241</sup> Die Boerevrou, June 1931, p2. See also 6.1.5. and 7.2.2.

<sup>242</sup> Die Boerevrou, November 1924, p23.

In spite of the reluctance of Afrikaans women to become involved in this issue, the fact that they, especially the leading women, were exposed to the views of a suffrage movement, had important consequences for the new *volksmoeder* discourse that was to be articulated around the 1920s.

#### 4.5.2 Feminism in South Africa: "Die herstel van 'n vrou haar selfrespek"<sup>243</sup> [The reparation of the self-respect of women]

In similar ways, the wider feminist tradition was important for Afrikaans women and the construction of a *volksmoeder* discourse. While Afrikaans women never supported feminism on a large scale, at least the intellectuals and leaders (women and men) were exposed to it (in varying degrees) and thus the discourse of feminism formed part of the context in which the *volksmoeder* discourse was constructed. In many ways, as will be indicated in subsequent chapters, the *volksmoeder* discourse was constructed as an alternative to the feminist discourse.

The two main feminist texts available by 1900 was Mary Wollstonecraft's A vindication of the rights of women (1792) and John Stuart Mill's The subjection of women (1869). This meant that the basis of late 19th century and early 20th century feminism was liberal and focussed on individual rights. Also in South Africa the first feminist works were very much in the liberal tradition, but were surprisingly progressive for their time. For our purposes it is necessary to take some account of the views of Olive Schreiner and of an early Afrikaans feminist Marie du Toit.

Olive Schreiner received world-wide acclaim for her feminist works, which included The story of an African farm, From man to man and Women and labour (1911). In this context it would not be possible to do justice to Schreiner's fascinating and complex views on women.<sup>244</sup> Her feminism permeated all her work and to understand her feminism in its biographical and socio-historical context is even more interesting.<sup>245</sup> Schreiner's feminist views were grounded in strong humanist convictions as this 1907 letter to Betty Molteno indicates:

The whole question seems to me not one of sex but of common human duty and right. The

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<sup>243</sup> Du Toit M, Vrou en feminist. Of iets oor die vrouebeweging, p.

<sup>244</sup> Many writers emphasise the contradictions and inconsistencies in Schreiner's views on women. See for instance Barsby C, "Olive Schreiner: towards a redefinition of culture" in Pretexts, Volume 1, Number 1, Winter 1989, p33 and Clayton C, "Olive Schreiner. Paradoxical pioneer" in Clayton C (ed), Women and writing in South Africa. A critical anthology, pp48-49.

<sup>245</sup> See for instance Clayton C, op cit, pp47-51 and Schoeman K, op cit, pp218-228.

insult seems to me to be to take any notice of the sex of an individual in things which have nothing to do with the reproductive function of sex.<sup>246</sup>

Schreiner believed that women should be allowed in the public sphere so as to end their financial dependence on men. She thus demanded a drastic change in the position of women. On the other hand she also emphasised a re-evaluation of the private sphere and of women's work and role within this sphere. Christine Barsby also finds in Schreiner's work a third argument or demand, the demand for the redefinition of culture. She explains:

...Schreiner attempts to end the exclusion of women from culture by virtue of their association with nature, to displace the status of domestic work and childrearing as marginal within culture, and in so doing to eliminate both the material and psychological oppression that results from binary oppositions such as "nature and culture".<sup>247</sup> (My emphasis.)

In her work one therefore finds the demand for equality and the demand for difference - "not as competing claims but rather as demands that are necessarily united".<sup>248</sup>

Through her writings and as a founding member of the Cape Town branch of the Women's Enfranchisement League, Schreiner served as a very important source of inspiration for the suffragettes of South Africa.<sup>249</sup> She also had staunch admirers in the Afrikaans community. After her death in 1921, Malherbe wrote in the March editorial that Olive Schreiner was "die voorvegster vir almal wat in die verdrukking gesit het" [the front fighter for the oppressed] and that her whole life was "liefdewerk vir andere" [work of love for others]. She honoured Schreiner, not as author of literary works, but as "een wat altijd gevoel en gewerk het vir die saak van die vrou" [someone who always felt and worked for the women's issue]:

Wat ons enigszins verwonder is dat die meeste mense net haar beroemde roman The story of an African farm aanhaal en weinig of niks se van haar ander boeke nie. As kunswerk is

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<sup>246</sup> Quoted by Clayton C, op cit, p46.

<sup>247</sup> Barsby C, op cit, pp29-34.

<sup>248</sup> Ibid, p33.

<sup>249</sup> Walker C, op cit, p323.

Schreiner in later years, as a result of their position regarding the black vote in Cape Town (see 7.2.2), distanced herself from the WEAU. For the same reasons, after women were granted the vote in 1930, Schreiner's husband asked for her name not to be associated with the victory celebrations of the WEAU.

Ibid, pp323 and 336.

die genoemde roman natuurlik die meeste werd om genoem te word...Maar in wat sij as haar lewenswerk beskou het, pleit sy vir die vrou - nie die Afrikaanse vrou alleen nie, maar haar susters deur die wereld heen. Sij was een van die voorgangers van die vrouebeweging. Na haar is daar oneindig veel geskrywe en gepraat oor dieselfde onderwerp, maar naar ons denke staan haar boek Woman and Labour nog bo aan die lijs. Dit is ook vertaal in Hollands. Ons as volk is haar veel dank skuldig, en vrouens oor die hele wereld kan haar naam eer...<sup>250</sup>

[We find it somewhat astonishing that, while most people quote from her novel, The Story of an African Farm, they almost completely ignore the rest of her books. As a work of art, this novel is surely the most deserving of her books...But in what she regarded as her life's work, she pleads for the woman - not only for the Afrikaans woman, but for all her sisters the world over. She was a forerunner of the women's movement. After her much has been said and written on the subject, but we still regard her Woman and Labour as the leading book in the field. Her work has also been translated into Dutch. We as a *volk* owe her our gratitude, and women the world over may rightly honour her name...]

Malherbe, however, was not an ordinary Afrikaans woman. F W Reitz, who wrote an article in honour of Schreiner in the March 1921 issue of Die Boerevrou,<sup>251</sup> indicated that most of the readers in the country would not have agreed with Schreiner's views on religion, the place of women and the future of humanity. Although he acknowledged the probable disagreement, Reitz still felt that Afrikaans women in particular should honour Schreiner:

Dit sou jammer wees as 'n blad wat opgerig is om te werk vir die belange van die boerevrou die heengaan van Olive Schreiner, wat in haar tijd sò hard, sò dapper en sò bekwaam vir die regte van haar Afrikaanse susters in die bresse gespring het, onopgemerk sou laat verbijgaan...Die Afrikaners en die leseresse van Die Boerevrou sal haar nagedagtenis in eer en in liefde bewaar, want sij het haar landgenote bemin, soos alleen die groot siele van die wereld dit kon doen...<sup>252</sup>

[It would be sad, should a magazine aimed at furthering the cause of the *boerevrou*, let the death of Olive Schreiner, who fought so hard, so bravely, and so effectively for the rights of her Afrikaans sisters, pass unnoticed...Afrikaners and readers of *Die Boerevrou* will honour and cherish her memory, for she loved her compatriots as only the truly great souls of history can do...]

While Woman and labour was regarded as the most important feminist work published in South Africa, another feminist work of consequence was published in 1921 in Bloemfontein. This book

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<sup>250</sup> Die Boerevrou, March 1921, p2.

<sup>251</sup> In the article Reitz told the story of Schreiner's life and concentrated on her anti-war work. He said that he knew her personally and told her that he liked her more than he liked her books. Die Boerevrou, March 1921, p4.

<sup>252</sup> Die Boerevrou, March 1921, p4.

was Vrou en feminist. Of iets oor die vrouevraagstuk,<sup>253</sup> written by Marie du Toit.

Marie du Toit was the sister of Totius, celebrated Afrikaans poet and ardent opponent of women's liberation. Of her life little is known: she did not feature in any of the biographies of her famous brother. She was a victim of tuberculosis and according to her own account, this illness impeded the writing of the book. As a single woman she dedicated the book "aan my geslagsgenote veral in ons land en meer besonder aan my lewensgesellin K S J as 'n blyk van dankbaarheid" [to the people of my gender especially those in my own country and more particularly to my life companion K S J as a token of gratitude].<sup>254</sup>

The book, Du Toit wrote, was written because it was seldom if ever that an Afrikaans book written in honour or in favour of women was published.<sup>255</sup> Feminism was defined by Du Toit as the maintenance of the interests of women at all times in all circumstances.<sup>256</sup> By not defining the interests, Du Toit kept the definition broad. She added that the woman's issue was not "n losse groep om stemreg nie (soos baie hier in ons land skyn te dink), nee die stemreg is maar een middel, wel 'n magtige middel...tot bereiking van verskillende doeleindes..."<sup>257</sup> [a willful call for enfranchisement (as many seem to think around here), but the vote is but one instrument - albeit a powerful one - to achieve a variety of purposes...]. In many respects she was actually more radical than the suffragettes. Du Toit expressed the view that South African women were in a particularly disadvantaged position:

...en as ons nou Suid-Afrika vergelyk by die lande dan moet ons erken dat ons ver agter is, nie net wat betref die stemreg nie maar in alles wat in verband staan met die feminisme.<sup>258</sup>

[...should we compare South Africa to other countries, it is clear that we are far behind, not merely as far as suffrage is concerned, but in all issues regarding feminism.]

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<sup>253</sup> It would be very interesting to attempt a systematic analysis of this book. Du Toit, perhaps because she was writing the first book on feminism in Afrikaans, dealt with a great variety of topics. Her book is thus a fascinating conglomeration of information, arguments, views and criticism.

<sup>254</sup> Du Toit M, op cit, p3.

<sup>255</sup> ibid, p5.

<sup>256</sup> ibid, p33.

<sup>257</sup> ibid, pp33-34.

<sup>258</sup> ibid, p114.

Brink states that the book was unknown and not widely read at the time.<sup>259</sup> However, many of the popular magazines and newspapers carried reviews of Du Toit's book at the time of publishing.<sup>260</sup> The suffragette magazine, The Woman's Outlook, said that the "personality of Miss Du Toit imparts a Dutch-Afrikander character to Vrou en feminist which will go straight to the hearts of her readers, and her book will have a powerful influence among the Dutch-speaking women of the Union". The review went on to say that the book was "representative of all that which is best in South African womanhood and will appeal to that great spirit of the Dutch women who have shewn that they were prepared to live and die for an ideal..."<sup>261</sup>

In Die Boerevrou no mention was made of the "Dutch-Afrikander" character of the book. Instead, the book was criticised for not correctly describing conditions as they were in South Africa and for being dated. The reviewer implied that South African women and women generally were better off than Du Toit claimed:

Ons wette wat gebaseer is op Romeins-Hollandse wet, verskil baie van die van Engeland en is seker, wat die vrou en haar regte betref, ook veel beter. Onregte wat Mej Du Toit aanhaal uit die boeke van Engelse skrywers bestaan gelukkig in baie gevalle nie hier nie....In Engeland self is daar nou na die wêreldoorlog verbasende veranderinge gekom en Mej Du Toit sou haar boek verrijk het as sij ook die toestande soos dit nou is beskrywe het.<sup>262</sup>  
[Derived from Roman Dutch law, our laws differ much from British laws, and are far superior, as far as women and their rights are concerned. Injustices quoted by Miss Du Toit from the books of English authors fortunately do not exist here...Even in England itself there have been surprising changes following the world war, and Miss Du Toit would have enriched her book had she also mentioned current conditions.]

In spite of this criticism, the book was recommended:

Dis waar, ons het seker leesstof nodig oor die onderwerp, want ons kan dit nie langer van ons wegstoot nie, en gesonde juiste inligting oor een en ander is baie nodig...ons raai almal aan om die boek te lees...<sup>263</sup>

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<sup>259</sup> Brink E, op cit, p281.

<sup>260</sup> See Die Boerevrou, September 1921, p9 ; Die Burger, 3 August 1921; Die Huisgenoot, November 1921, p275; De Goede Hoop, 12 May 1921, 20 (3) and The Woman's Outlook, September 1921, p11.

<sup>261</sup> The Woman's Outlook, September 1921, p11.

<sup>262</sup> Die Boerevrou, September 1921, p9.

<sup>263</sup> This cool recommendation was in strong contrast with the enthusiastic recommendation in The Woman's Outlook of September 1921 (p11):

"We have nothing but praise and appreciation to record of Miss Marie du Toit's book...It

[Indeed, we need to read about this subject, for we dare ignore it no longer, and we need accurate and useful information on the issue...we recommend this book to everyone...]

The review was concluded with the suggestion that women were in fact not yet ready to play their legitimate justified roles in society, but that with education they would be able to do so:

Die boerevrou het 'n groot rol gespeel in die geskiedenis van ons land en het haar invloed goed en kragtig laat gelde en ons twijfel nie daar aan nie dat sij in ons tijd met meer geleentheid tot ontwikkeling en die verblijdende stroom van Afrikaanse boeke, nog meer dan ooit tevore haar ware plek in die samelewing sal inneem.<sup>264</sup>

[The *boerevrou* has played a major role in the history of our country, exercising her positive and powerful influence. We have no doubt that in our time she will utilise all opportunities to develop and the welcome stream of Afrikaans books, and that more than ever she will take her true place in society.]

Also Die Huisgenoot, in a very positive review with the heading "'n Belangrike boek" [An important book], also recommended that all its women readers should read the book:

...die hoofsaak is dat die boek ons tot dink aanspoor, sodat ons dit graag sou wou sien in die hande van elke leseres van Die Huisgenoot, om vir die eerste keer of opnuut kennis te neem van die belangrike vraagstukke hierin bespreek.

[...the main issue is that this book stimulates us to think. Therefore we would like to see it in the hands of every women reader of Die Huisgenoot, to be introduced to these important issues again or for the first time.]

Once again it is doubtful that either Schreiner's or Du Toit's views enjoyed any wide support in the Afrikaner community. However, the fact that their relative progressive feminist views were available in Afrikaans or in Dutch,<sup>265</sup> is relevant. It also meant that feminist ideas were presented by South African women in a South African context, that Afrikaans women and men were confronted by these views in local publications and were forced to think about them and to respond.

#### 4.5.3 The struggle of black women

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is the first attempt to interest the Dutch South African women by writing for them in their own language on a subject of world-wide importance...We urge our readers to secure a copy of this book; which will rivet their attention; certainly no one who can read Afrikaans should fail to read it, and it should be in all the public libraries of the Union."

<sup>264</sup> Die Boerevrou, September 1921, p9.

<sup>265</sup> Olive Schreiner's Women and Labour was translated into Dutch with the title Vrou en arbeid. Extracts from the book were published in Die Boerevrou. See for instance Die Boerevrou, August 1921, pp6 and 8.

Although feminists and suffragettes did not enjoy wide support among Afrikaans women, Afrikaans women at least took notice of their struggles and to some extent discussed it. But in the second decade of the 20th century another group of South African women entered the public political arena. In what Walker calls "one of the earliest expressions of discontent by black women in modern South Africa"<sup>266</sup>, black women in 1913 staged a major anti-pass campaign in the Orange Free State. The campaign started when some Bloemfontein women presented a petition to the mayor and were subsequently arrested for not carrying passes. They resisted:

Friday morning, the 6th June, should and will never be forgotten in South Africa. On that day, the Native women declared their womanhood. Six hundred daughters of South Africa taught the arrogant whites a lesson that will never be forgotten. Headed by the bravest of them, they marched to the magistrate, hustled the police out of their way and kept shouting and cheering until His Worship emerged from his office and addressed them, thence they proceeded to the Town Hall. The women had now assumed a threatening attitude. The police endeavoured to keep them off the steps...the gathering got out of control. Sticks could be seen flourishing overhead and some came down with no gentle thwacks across the skulls of the police, who were bold enough to stem the onrush - "We have done with pleading, we now demand", declared the women.<sup>267</sup> (My emphasis.)

Walker states that the importance of this event was not only symbolic, but also forced the African National Congress (ANC) to accommodate black women in the organisation. Consequently in 1913/1914 a Bantu Women's League, "the first national organisation of black women to attempt to operate within the framework of non-tribal institutions",<sup>268</sup> was established within the ANC. The Bantu Women's League not only operated within a weak and badly organised ANC, it also played a secondary role in the organisation and did little to encourage the redefinition of women's roles. Although it survived, the first 15 years of this organisation was marked by inactivity and marginalisation.

It is difficult to establish the effect of black women's political activities on Afrikaans women. But it is significant that the Bantu Women's League was established in 1913/1914 while the WNP came into being in 1915. Also the Orange Free State anti-pass campaign took place two years before the Women's March to the Union Buildings. Also important in the context of this project is the fact that women's participation in public political activities in the 1910 was a national phenomenon and a phenomenon which was apparent in all sectors of society in urban South

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<sup>266</sup> Walker C, Black women and resistance in South Africa, pp26-27.

<sup>267</sup> The African People's Organisation as quoted by Walker C, op cit, pp30-31.

<sup>268</sup> Ibid, p27.

Africa.

#### 4.7 Conclusion

The primary purpose of this chapter was to establish why and how the issue of gender became salient in South Africa during the first two decades of the 20th century. In pre-industrial Transvaal, although there was a distinction between what was regarded as men's work and what was regarded as women's work, this distinction was not rigid and not always clear. The society was patriarchal in that definite gender roles could be distinguished: the man was the formal head of the family and its representative in the public sphere (eg state and church), while the woman was formally confined to the domestic sphere. However, historians (such as Cachet) and social observers (such as Schreiner), wrote of the strong interest in and influence of Afrikaans women and thus of a certain informal tolerance of Boer women in the political sphere. Women were not only regarded as extremely powerful in the domestic sphere, but were also thought to (informally) exert power in the public sphere. Such a situation might have been the result of the more fluid boundaries between men's work and women's work in pre-industrial society. These observations could also, however, have functioned to justify women's lack of formal power. Whatever might have been the case, the image of Boer women that was carried into the 20th century was that of a domesticated person who nevertheless had strong political influences.

The processes of industrialisation and urbanisation had very important consequences for the household. Changes in the structure and the function of the household in turn led to changes in gender roles and gender identities. The most important of these consequences was that, with the household gradually changing into a unit of consumption, women also slowly lost their productive function within the household. As a result of this some women entered the labour market, while the majority remained in the household, increasingly isolated and excluded from the production process. This situation created a certain tension: On the one hand working women challenged stereotypes of domesticated women, softened prejudices against women in the public sphere and projected a new kind of autonomy for women. On the other hand most women were still at home, struggling to find a new role and a new identity in the familiar domestic sphere, where they were increasingly excluded from the production process. The tension could only be relieved either by women abandoning the domestic sphere and insisting on becoming part of the labour market, or by women staying exclusively in the domestic sphere but restructuring and redefining their role there so that it would again become important and relevant.

The South African War generated a new image of women: that of the silent martyr and strong sufferer, intimately associated with the fate of the nation. On the one hand the new image gave women a new prominence, a new importance and ultimately a new confidence. On the other hand, the fact that the image became public property, made it available to cultural entrepreneurs who started using this image to invent an ideal woman, the traditional Afrikaner mother. This ideal would be restrictive and inhibitive.

A certain ambivalence regarding gender roles and gender identities now existed within the Afrikaans community. In the changing socio-economic circumstances new questions had been generated: what should women do and who should they be? Afrikaans women attempted to answer these questions by launching new organisations and planning new activities. These answers were sporadic, uncoordinated and often contradictory, but tended to be closely associated with the powerful new Afrikaner nationalist movement and discourse. Many of these initiatives originated in the Transvaal, where the effects of both industrialisation and the South African War was most intense.

At the same time these issues were also addressed in other and differently structured ways: the construction of a relatively coherent suffragette discourse and attempts to construct a more extreme feminist discourse. Although these discourses never became prominent in the Afrikaans community, Afrikaans women were exposed to them.

It was in the context of all these developments that the *volksmoeder* discourse was constructed. The *volksmoeder* discourse was the "response" of nationalist men (and also women!) to the questions (or issues) of gender. While the construction of this discourse will be discussed in Chapter five, Chapter six and seven will deal specifically with why nationalists and women chose to respond to gender issues in terms of the *volksmoeder* discourse.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### THE *VOLKSMOEDER* DISCOURSE

In the previous chapters it has been suggested that in the context of an industrialising society and an emergent Afrikaner nationalist movement certain social and historical issues, roughly categorised as "gender issues" and "ethnic issues", by 1918 led to the articulation of a new gender discourse, the *volksmoeder* discourse. Women's identity and women's role (who a woman should be and what a woman should do), previously never an important point of discussion, in various ways and in different contexts became a controversial topic and was systematically ethnicised in terms of what it meant to be an Afrikaner woman and an Afrikaner mother. Idealised womanhood, in the past "not defined with any precision",<sup>1</sup> became the concern of nationalist leaders, both men and women. Before looking at how the *volksmoeder* discourse functioned as a response to these ethnic and gender issues, it is necessary to look at the discourse itself. What did the *volksmoeder* discourse entail?

#### 5.1 A new gender discourse

For the purposes of this thesis, and in accordance with the problem of the constitution of the subjectivity of Afrikaner women in relation to Afrikaner nationalism as stated, we will be specifically concerned with an investigation of the *volksmoeder* discourse. Formulating our enterprise in this way implies both that it will primarily proceed through an investigation of a certain constellation of certain relevant texts, especially those of Die Boerevrou, and also that it will be concerned with the relevant meanings, norms and ideals of the *volksmoeder* discourse as discursive constructions.

As a discourse the *volksmoeder* discourse was a distinctive enterprise, marked by the construction of characteristic gender and ethnic identities. We will analyse Die Boerevrou texts by asking how specific constructions in the texts function in the articulation of the *volksmoeder* discourse and what ends they achieve. With this aim in mind, we will look at the texts as narratives, concentrate on the structure of arguments and focus on syntactic structures. It should be clear, then, that we will not study the texts as mere markers of reality, but rather as active constituents of meaning, norms and ideals. We will specifically look at how Afrikaner women were constructed and

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<sup>1</sup> Brink's terminology. Brink E, "Man-made women: gender, class and the ideology of the volksmoeder" in Walker C (ed) Women and gender in southern Africa to 1945, p274.

reconstructed as social subjects (as mothers and as Afrikaners) in the textual articulations of this *volksmoeder* discourse.

The *volksmoeder* discourse was a collective undertaking manifested in and through different texts as a distinctive enterprise; as such a discourse, though, it was characterised by fragmentation, diversity, incoherence and flexibility. Although we will specifically concentrate on Mabel Malherbe's project in the magazine Die Boerevrou it is important to keep in mind that this very much functioned within a wider context of similar texts at the time.

Although aspects of gender roles and gender identities of the 19th century were echoed in the *volksmoeder* discourse of 1918, the *volksmoeder* discourse could only have been articulated with the emergence in the 1910s of a distinctly nationalist discourse and a more or less clear notion of *volk*. As Brink suggests, there was "a clear convergence between the development of the ideal of the 'volksmoeder' and the rise of Afrikaner nationalism".<sup>2</sup> The discourse was to some extent based on and influenced by events such as the opening of the *Vrouemonument* [Women's monument] and the women's march of 1915, but by 1918 the concept *volksmoeder* had not yet been used and the central characteristics of the discourse had not yet been articulated. It was only in 1918 that the discourse was formally and systematically articulated for the first time.<sup>3</sup>

By 1918 the increasing salience of gender and ethnic issues resulted in a sudden, but not inexplicable upsurge of publications taking the form of a definite gender discourse. This interest was mostly articulated in books or magazine articles, representing the new *volksmoeder* discourse. The person responsible for the first systematic articulation of the *volksmoeder* discourse was Rev Willem Postma (his pseudonym was Dr O'kulis), brother-in-law of Totius.<sup>4</sup> In 1918 the *Nasionale*

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<sup>2</sup> Brink E, op cit, p279.

<sup>3</sup> Brink, in her 1990 essay on the ideology of "volksmoeder", claimed that Afrikaans women and their position in society had been bounded by the notion of "volksmoeder" since the late 19th century. Postma's books, she says, was "an articulation of the already established image of the 'volksmoeder'".

Brink E, op cit, pp273 and 280.

I would rather support her earlier claim in her work on the garment workers, where she states that the myth of the *volksmoeder* was first formally conceptualised in 1918 by Postma.

Brink E, The Afrikaner women of the Garment Worker's Union, 1918-1939, p12.

<sup>4</sup> Willem Postma (Dr O'kulis) (1874-1920) was a clergyman in the Gereformeerde Kerk and the youngest son of the founder of the Gereformeerde Kerk in South Africa, Dirk Postma. In his column *Oogdruppels* [Eye drops] in De Vriend des Volks, a Bloemfontein newspaper, he wrote on

*Helpmekaar en Kultuurvereniging* [National *Helpmekaar* and Culture Organisation] of Reddersburg commissioned him to write a book about Afrikaans women. Postma called the book Die Boervrou.<sup>5</sup> Moeder van haar volk and it constituted a paradigmatic articulation of the new nationalist gender or *volksmoeder* discourse.

Postma's book was closely followed in March 1919 by the launch of the monthly women's magazine, Die Boerevrou,<sup>6</sup> by Mabel Malherbe (see Chapters one and four). In this magazine formulations similar to those of Postma were used, adapted and developed over a period of thirteen years. All the members of the editorial staff of this magazine were women and most of the contributors were also women - a fact that refutes the claim that women did not take part in the construction of the new gender discourse.<sup>7</sup>

These were not the only publications articulating this new gender discourse at this time.<sup>8</sup> A lengthy article about "Die vrou van Suid-Afrika" [The woman of South Africa] with sub-heading "Sal ons haar voorbeeld volg van trouw en lijdszaamheid?" [Will we follow her example of loyalty and suffering?], written by Eugene C Van Wijk was published in Die Brandwag of 25 June 1919.<sup>9</sup>

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a wide range of topics. He was very active in the struggle for the recognition of Afrikaans and also a strong advocate for Christian National Education. As representative of the Gereformeerde Kerk he also took part in the translation of the Bible into Afrikaans. His leading role as an Afrikaner nationalist ideologue is best illustrated by the fact that in 1914 he drew up the draft constitution of the National Party - this draft constitution was adopted virtually unchanged by the congress. He was also considered to be Hertzog's right-hand man during the establishment of the National Party.

De Kock W J and Kruger D W (eds), Dictionary of South African Bibliography Volume 2, pp554-556.

<sup>5</sup> The reader will note that Postma used the word "boervrou", while the magazine was called Die Boerevrou. In 1921 the name of the magazine was changed to Die Boerevrou, so as to correspond to the new Afrikaans spelling rules. To avoid confusion I will consistently refer to the magazine as Die Boerevrou.

<sup>6</sup> See footnote 5 above.

<sup>7</sup> Brink E, "Man-made women: gender, class and the ideology of the volksmoeder" in Walker C (ed) Women and gender in southern Africa to 1945, pp281, 290 and 291.

<sup>8</sup> It is interesting to note that it was also in 1921 that Marie du Toit's Vrou en feminist of iets oor die vroue-vraagstuk was published. In some ways this could be regarded as an attempt to provide a feminist response to the new gender discourse of the *volksmoeder*. (See Chapter four.)

<sup>9</sup> Die Brandwag, 25 Junie 1919, pp18-22.

In 1921 Die vrou in die geskiedenis van die Hollands-Afrikaanse volk. 'n Beknopte oorsig van die rol wat die vrou in die geskiedenis van Suid-Afrika gespeel het in die 350 jaar tussen 1568 en 1918<sup>10</sup>, written by Eric Stockenström, was published.<sup>11</sup>

The *volksmoeder* discourse was not uniform nor was it static. Postma's articulation of the discourse was but one specific articulation, and was particularly conservative and inflexible. Malherbe's articulation was in some respects more liberal and certainly less strict. The readers of Die Boerevrou would sometimes contradict Malherbe or would concentrate on different aspects of the discourse.

Apart from being articulated differently by different people, the discourse constantly fluctuated and was adapted to new situations.<sup>12</sup> In this respect Gaitskell and Unterhalter's analysis of the *volksmoeder* discourse (which they call "an ideology of 'the mother of the nation'") is important. They show how this discourse (or in their terms, ideology) changed and how each change related to "a changing conception of race and nation".<sup>13</sup> The discourse, because of its flexibility, could,

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<sup>10</sup> It is significant that Stockenström's book too had been commissioned.  
Stockenström E, Die vrou in die geskiedenis van die Hollands-Afrikaanse volk, "Voorwoord".

<sup>11</sup> Eric Egidius Stockenström (1878-1963) was an educationist and historian. He taught at various schools, and later became a lecturer in the faculty of education at the University of Stellenbosch. He wrote several history books and was a very popular speaker, especially at national festivals.  
Beyers C J (ed), Dictionary of South African Bibliography Volume 4, pp621-622.

<sup>12</sup> Brink claims in 1989 that the notion of an idealised Afrikaner womanhood and thus the notion of "volksmoeder" is "remarkable for its continuity until at least the mid-twentieth century...(i)t remained constant during a time of great industrial, political and social change in southern Africa".  
Brink E, op cit, p273.

I would rather agree with her earlier formulation that the image of Afrikaner women as "volksmoeders" fluctuated and that there was "a rise and decline" in the use of the term.  
Brink E, The Afrikaner women of the Garment Worker's Union, 1918-1939, p14.

<sup>13</sup> They identify three periods in which the nation was perceived differently and the "volksmoeder" ideology shift accordingly:

**1902 (Afrikaner defeat by the British in the South African War):**

(T)he nation's defeat in the Boer War was most feelingly focused on and remembered in the fact of the suffering of Afrikaner motherhood.

**1914 (the formation of the National Party):**

(T)he national call for mobilisation of political support for separate Afrikaner identity as well

to a certain extent, also accommodate other important social changes, such as the changing status of women.

Gaitskell and Unterhalter's argument is important not only because it illustrates the flexibility and the diversity of the discourse but also illustrates the basic consistency of the discourse. This might sound paradoxical, but at closer examination it will become clear that the discourse although articulated differently, always followed the same basic patterns and rules. Gaitskell and Unterhalter, for instance, show how the discourse remained related to the conception of nation. Therefore, although there was room for negotiation, change and movement within the *volksmoeder* discourse, these negotiations, changes and movements had to take place within certain boundaries set by the discourse.

The 1918 texts were different from the pre-1918 texts in that they systematically articulated a coherent gender discourse. If compared to the erratic nature of earlier responses, it becomes clear that by 1918 certain patterns or regularities have emerged, making it possible to start talking about an actual discourse. The fact that both Postma's and Stockenstrom's books were commissioned and that Malherbe's Die Boerevrou originated in Pretoria, "birth place" of the "second language movement" and the *Afrikaner Broederbond* (in the same decade!) suggests that the emergence of this discourse was by no means coincidental. In the rest of this chapter we will be concerned with a preliminary survey of the characteristic features of this discourse, drawing also on the relevant writings of Postma and others, before proceeding in the next chapter to a closer analysis of Die Boerevrou texts as responses to the underlying ethnic issues generating this gender discourse.

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as the mobilisation of Afrikaner wealth had its counterpart in domestic cultural mobilisation which was seen as pre-eminently the work of women as mothers.

**1948 (the accession to power of the first wholly Afrikaner nationalist government):**

(A)fter some years when Afrikaner mothers rejoiced in being able to display the successful achievement of financially secure and culturally distinct homes, the power of motherhood had been invoked to assist in the survival of white domination.

Gaitskell D and Unterhalter E, "Mothers of the nation: a comparative analysis of nation, race and motherhood in Afrikaner nationalism and the African National Congress" in Davis N and Anthias F, Women - nation - state, pp60-68.

The existence of the first stage can be questioned. On the one hand there was not a very clear conception of the nation or the "volk" yet and on the other hand there was not that much emphasis on the mothering role of women yet.

## 5.2 The naturalising of mothering: the *boerevrou* as mother

...wat is die ideaal van God vir 'n vrou? Om 'n moeder te wees. Wat eis ons Afrikaanse volk van ons? Om moeders te wees.....kan daar nog vroulikheid bestaan as die moederlikheid uitgedryf is?

[...what is the ideal of God for a woman? To be a mother. What does the Afrikaans *volk* demand from us? To be mothers. ..can femininity exist if motherliness has been driven out?

-Joan Theron (a reader of Die Boerevrou)<sup>14</sup>

Central to the new gender discourse was the notion of the Afrikaner woman as a mother. To be a woman was to be a mother. Already in the title of his book, Boerevrou. Moeder van haar volk, Postma equated being a Boer woman with being a mother of the nation. Malherbe used the word "mother" almost as a synonym for "woman".<sup>15</sup>

M E Rothmann, in the fifth part of the report of the Carnegie Commission, described the duties and functions of a mother in the normal civilised home. This can be taken as illustrating the middle-class conception of what being a mother involves:

(a) to apply to their uses the supplies provided by the father, such as food, clothing, and money, and to manage the house according to the needs of the family;

(b) to give home training to the children, ie so to arrange and order the home life that the children, especially the daughters, unconsciously learn how they in their turn may make orderly and normal homes. Allied to this home training is social training, by the development of judgement, adaptability, etc in the children; and

(c) to bear children and care for them during infancy.<sup>16</sup>

Earlier, in a 1928 debate in Die Boerevrou on whether a woman should work outside the house, the prize-winning letter (for a "weldeurdagte brief"/well-considered letter) of J A S described the work of a mother as follows:

Vir die vrou wat haar huishou reg aanpak, hoef dit nie iets verveligs te wees nie, maar inteendeel 'n besondere interessante beroep...Sy bestier die hele huishouding self, sy sien dat alles rein en skoon gehou word. Sy hou self haar oog oor die kokery, sodat die kinders goeie gesonde kos kry. Sy koop alles self, sien om die allebeste te kry teen die laagste

<sup>14</sup> Die Boerevrou, May 1928, p37.

<sup>15</sup> Die Boerevrou, March 1919, p2.

<sup>16</sup> Rothmann M E, The poor white problem in South Africa. Report of the Carnegie Commission. Part 5. Sociological report: The mother and daughter in the poor white family, p172.

moontlike pryse. Sy doen baie van haar eie naaldwerk en hat dus geld oor om op ander maniere te spandeer. Sy kyk dat klere elke week netjies gelap en gestop word voor dit weggesit word. Sy hou die omgewing van haar huis netjies an aantreklik, sy sorg persoonlik vir die godsdienstige en morele opvoeding van haar kinders. Sy kyk self dat hulle alle lesse en tuiswerk goed en netjies doen vir die volgende dag. Sy let noukeurig op die gesondheid van haar man en kinders. Sy lees met hulle saam, speel en gesels met hulle saam. Sy versuim nie haar pligte teenoor die samelewing nie. Dit is maar so ietsie van die dure pligte van die vrou en moeder...<sup>17</sup>

[For the woman with the right approach to housekeeping, it need not be a bore, but it can be a most interesting occupation...She manages the whole house herself, she sees to it that everything is kept clean, she oversees the cooking herself, providing nutritious food for the children. She buys everything herself at the lowest possible prices. She does the sewing herself, leaving some money to spend on other things. She sees to it that clothes are darned and cared for before putting it away. She keeps her house clean and attractive on the outside. She personally takes care of the religious and moral education of her children. She makes sure that all lessons and homework for the next day are satisfactory and neat. She carefully looks after the health of her husband and children. She reads with them, plays with them and takes part in their conversations. She does not neglect her duty to society. This is but a small part of the solemn responsibilities of a wife and mother...]

This conception of mothering is, of course, not unique to this particular gender discourse. On the contrary, it is easy to recognise features common to any number of other mothering discourses. Peculiar to the *volksmoeder* discourse, as we shall see, was that this common notion of gender identity as mothering became fused with a particular ethnic identity so that Afrikaner women found their identity not just in being mothers but in being *volksmoeders*. While we will investigate how the role of mothering came to be invested with a special ethnic significance in the case of Afrikaner mothers, we must first look at how the mothering identity and role was discursively constructed. Before going on to investigate the special fusion of Afrikaner women's gender identity with ethnic identity in the *volksmoeder* discourse, we must thus deal with two other sets of questions: (i) How was mothering presented and justified as "natural" in this gender discourse; and (ii) The critical need to denaturalise mothering in this as in other discourses.

### 5.2.1 A calling from God: the natural role

In the *volksmoeder* discourse, the mothering identity was constructed in such a way that it would seem to be the "natural" identity for women. To be able to denaturalise mothering we first have to understand how, in this specific discourse, mothering was theologically and biologically justified as the "natural" identity and role for women.

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<sup>17</sup> Die Boerevrou, April 1928, p47.

The religious and theological naturalisation of mothering can be clearly traced in the work of Postma. Postma, as a minister of religion and staunch Calvinist, tried to convince women that the mothering role was their most important role as it was the role that God had ordained for them. He referred to God frequently and implied that the role he was advocating for women was God's will for women.<sup>18</sup> The idea that the link between motherhood and womanhood lay somewhere outside history, was also worked out in detail on the religious pages of Die Boerevrou.

In a series of articles on Eve, published in Die Boerevrou,<sup>19</sup> a regular contributor to the religious column, Professor J A du Plessis, explained that women were created as mothers:

Moeder en hulp was sy. Dit was haar oorspronklike roeping. Hierdie stempel het die goddelike skepping op haar aard en bestemming gele...Sy was voedster en opvoedster.<sup>20</sup>  
[She was mother and help. It was her original calling. This was her nature and purpose as God's creation...She was nourisher and educator.]

Women, he claimed, should be willing to go through the trauma of childbirth and child-rearing because it was by bearing children that they were to receive salvation. Du Plessis quoted Paul as saying in 1 Tim 2:15, that a woman "shall be saved in childbearing, if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety". This doctrine of salvation through suffering compelled women to martyrdom. The position in which God placed her, explained Du Plessis, corresponded to her weaker nature:

In haar skepping is sy nie die beklagde mindere van die man nie, want met hom is sy beelddraagster van God. Sy is alleen anders geskape en geroepe tot 'n ander werkkring, wat beantwoord aan haar swakkere aard en fynere sielslewe.<sup>21</sup>  
[In her creation she is not the lamented minor of the man, for together with him she is the bearer of the image of God. She is merely created differently and called to a different sphere of work, corresponding to her weaker nature and gentler soul.]

Like Du Plessis, the Rev R Theron in 1928 tried to find biblical justification for the primacy of the

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<sup>18</sup> For example, he speaks about "...die bande, wat God self gelê het..." [...the ties, which God Himself created] and "(d)ie Boerevrou besef haar roeping teenoor land en volk sowel als in verband met Gods koninkrijk" [the *boerevrou* acknowledges her calling with respect to her country and *volk*, as well as to God's kingdom].  
Postma W, op cit, pp84 and 157.

<sup>19</sup> Die Boerevrou, August 1922, p3; Die Boerevrou, September 1922, pp4 and 5; and Die Boerevrou, October 1922, pp5 and 10.

<sup>20</sup> Die Boerevrou, August 1922, p3.

<sup>21</sup> Loc cit.

mothering role for women. In the column *Stille Sondagure* [Silent Sunday Hours] he wrote about the prophetess, Deborah, who said in Judges 5:7: "I, Deborah, arose, that I arose a mother in Israel." Theron made two points about Deborah. Firstly, he said, although she entered public life, she never neglected her home.<sup>22</sup> The second important point about the story of Deborah, according to Theron, is that Deborah was not content with just being a mother, she was a *volksmoeder*.<sup>23</sup>

The argument that mothering is the role that God ordained for women is very closely related to the biological argument that mothering is a **natural** role for women. Totius, in Rachel (his collection of poems published in 1913), used the following metaphor to present mothering as a role determined by biology:

Kinders is jou ingewand,  
klein plantjies in jou bloed gekweek  
en in jou arms uitgeplant.<sup>24</sup>  
[Children are your entrails,  
small plants cultivated in your blood  
and re-planted in your arms.]

In the *volksmoeder* discourse, the Bible and biology (instinct) were invoked to convince women that motherhood was the essence of women's being. Because mothering was considered to be the God-commanded natural role for women, it could be presented as being the primary, natural and only role for women. For example in the Die Boerevrou editorial of February 1923 a reader, Mrs Kuyper is quoted extensively, saying:

Die grootste glorie van de vrouw moet zijn de moederschap. Ze moet met vreugde zichzelf verliezen voor haar kinderen. Met blydschap moet ze haar lente opofferen voor den herfst, die komt.<sup>25</sup>  
[The biggest glory of a woman should be motherhood. Joyfully she should loose herself for her children. With gladness she should sacrifice her spring for the coming autumn.]

Totius, also in Rachel, emphasised that mothering was a woman's most important role:

Haar glorie nimmer welke sal

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<sup>22</sup> Die Boerevrou, September 1928, p3.

<sup>23</sup> This very interesting development from being a mother to being a "volksmoeder" will be discussed below in section 5.3.

<sup>24</sup> Totius, Rachel, p76.

<sup>25</sup> Editorial in Die Boerevrou, February 1923, p2.

want hoogheid soek sy nie van gees;  
 een ding begeer sy - dit is al;  
 om moeder van 'n kroos te wees.<sup>26</sup>  
 [Her glory will never diminish  
 because she is not looking for spiritual grandeur  
 one thing she desires - that is all;  
 to be a mother of children.]

The claim that to mother is to obey God's will or to follow a (biological or natural) instinct raises a set of important questions. If this was biologically a natural role for women or if it was a role that God created for women, why have the interest in mothering and motherhood varied in history even in so-called God-fearing societies? Why would it suddenly be necessary in 1918 to invoke God and nature to remind women of their divine and natural duties? The very deliberate and extensive theological and biological justifications for mothering in the *volksmoeder* discourse, paradoxically, very strongly suggest that this notion of mothering is a construction in response to the underlying issues of gender and ethnicity that became important at this time. If mothering was so natural, why should its "naturalness" need such extensive explanation at this specific time in history?

### 5.2.2 Denaturalising mothering

If in the *volksmoeder* discourse as articulated after 1918, womanhood was tied to motherhood in a very definitive way, this pronounced emphasis on mothering in this gender discourse was new in the Afrikaans community. Before 1915 much less attention was paid to the mothering role. Although women, of course, were mothers before 1918 and spent a lot of their time mothering, it was a role that was taken for granted and not really discussed. For instance, as indicated above, mothering, did not feature prominently in the early SAVF discourse or at the opening of the *Vrouemonument*.

Exactly because this emphasis on mothering was new, we have to look critically at the essentialist and naturalist terms in which mothering was connected to womanhood in the *volksmoeder* discourse. To be a woman meant to be a mother. At first glance this connection may not seem surprising. It seems simply to reflect the reality of most women's lives. Mothering has so often and so strongly been associated with womanhood that the connection does not seem peculiar. The link between womanhood and motherhood appear as "common sense, as what is natural and

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<sup>26</sup> Totius, op cit, p51.

taken for granted".<sup>27</sup> Because it is seen as a simple reflection of reality, it is never questioned. Feminists point out that throughout history women had been associated with motherhood implying a complex set of gender roles and responsibilities over and above that of child-bearing:

Women mother. In our society as in most societies women do not only bear children. They also take primary responsibility for infant care, spend more time with infants and children than do men, and sustain primary emotional ties with infants. When there have been children...women have cared for them.<sup>28</sup>

Pervasive as it may be, mothering needs to be denaturalised and critically questioned.<sup>29</sup> Mothering involves much more than the natural function of childbearing. It also is associated with the rearing of children: the functions of nurturing, caring and educating. Although their capacity for biological reproduction and lactation provided the basis for women becoming mothers, it does not necessarily follow that women should also raise children and take responsibility for managing home and family life.<sup>30</sup> The feminist emphasis on mothering as not "natural" suggests that what a woman should be and do, is not written in the stars or in her biology, the meaning of the word woman fluctuates with the times as societies change. Mothering only becomes important under certain conditions. Gayle Rubin writes:

What is a domesticated woman? A female of the species. The one explanation is as good as the other. A woman is a woman. She only becomes a domestic, a wife, a chattel, a playboy bunny, a prostitute or a human dictaphone in certain relations.<sup>31</sup>

Rubin could also have said: "A woman only becomes a mother in certain relations." It is only in certain relations that mothering becomes important for women, for men and society. Thus we can say that although, traditionally, women in South Africa, like women in most societies, were and are responsible for mothering, the meaning and significance attached to motherhood are not

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<sup>27</sup> Marshall H and Wetherell M, "Talking about career and gender identities" in Skevington S and Baker D (eds), The social identity of women, p109.

<sup>28</sup> Chodorow N, "Mothering, male dominance and capitalism" in Eisenstein Z (ed), Capitalist patriarchy and the case for socialist feminism, pp83 and 86.

<sup>29</sup> Eisenstein H, Contemporary feminist thought, p87.

<sup>30</sup> Lewis J, "Introduction: Reconstructing women's experience of home and family" in Lewis J (ed), Labour and love. Women's experience of home and family, 1850-1940, pp2-3. Now, with the increase in adoption and the development of new reproductive techniques, it has become more clear than ever that the link between the bearing of children and mothering is not absolute.

<sup>31</sup> Rubin G, "The traffic in women" in Jagger A M and Struhl P E (eds), Feminist frameworks, p155.

universal. In different contexts different sets of expectations and preconditions are associated with motherhood. Lois Braverman, in a recent review of anthropological and historical data on motherhood, states that "mothering is a culturally determined role...the objectives of mothering differ from generation to generation...that social and economic realities significantly influence the expectations of motherhood".<sup>32</sup>

There still are traditional psychologists who claim a special phylogenetic inheritance that makes maternity the most fulfilling role for women, at least when children are young.<sup>33</sup> To make mothering an instinct, is to claim to a large extent that the subjectivity of a woman is "naturally" pre-determined: even if she herself or society wants her to be someone else, she will always be a mother.

As against this, feminists argue that a woman only becomes a mother by participating in a gender discourse in which gender identity is specifically constituted in terms of mothering. The discourse of Die Boerevrou is an excellent example of the mothering discourse, carefully cultivated to socialise girls and women into wanting children and wanting to care for them. Barbie Antonis' question, "Why, if wanting and bearing children were instinctive, are the efforts to socialise girls into wanting babies so pervasive and persistent?",<sup>34</sup> is relevant here, particularly in the light of Die Boerevrou's tremendous effort to get women to take their roles as mothers seriously and to teach them the skills of mothering.

To "denaturalize" the connection between womanhood and motherhood, it is necessary to deconstruct the term "mother". What does mothering mean in this particular discourse in this specific context? We have to ask "how it functions; what representation it designates, what elements it cuts out and removes, how it analyses and composes, what play of substitutions enables it to accomplish its role of representation..."<sup>35</sup> What exactly was the meaning that mothering acquired in the *volksmoeder* discourse?

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<sup>32</sup> Braverman L, "Beyond the myth of motherhood" in McGoldrick M, Anderson C M and Walsh F, Women in families. A framework for family therapy, p228.

<sup>33</sup> Sherman quoted by Squire C, op cit, pp66-67.

<sup>34</sup> Antonis B, "Motherhood and mothering" in the Cambridge Women's Studies Group, Women in society. Interdisciplinary essays, p59.

<sup>35</sup> Michel Foucault as quoted by Schöttler P, "Historians and discourse analysis" in History Workshop. A journal of socialist and feminist historians, Issue 27 Spring 1989, pp41-42.

Mothering in the *volksmoeder* discourse was not only related to the bearing and rearing of children. As one of the central concepts of the *volksmoeder* discourse, it called up a whole set of other concepts<sup>36</sup> while excluding a whole range of others. Not only was mothering associated with the functions of bearing, nurturing, caring for and educating children, it also invoked concepts like home, household and husband, or in other words, the nuclear family.<sup>37</sup> While it excluded any action or work in the public sphere, it was strongly related to the invented nation community. In the context of the *volksmoeder* discourse mothering also implied a certain ethnic identity and thus set up ethnic boundaries as well. In fact, if mothering was the first central concept in the *volksmoeder* discourse, the nation or the *volk* was the second one.

### 5.3 Fusing gender and ethnic identity: the *boerevrou* as *volksmoeder*

If the gender identity of mothering and the ethnic identity of nation community are the two central concepts in the *volksmoeder* discourse, it is important to understand how their fusion was brought

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<sup>36</sup> Andries du Toit refers to such a set of concepts as "a closely-linked cluster of notions". This formulation is useful as it emphasises how certain notions cannot be isolated, they always already include another.

Du Toit A, The national committee of liberation (ARM) (1960-1964): sabotage and the liberal subject, p8.

<sup>37</sup> To illustrate how mothering or parenting in different discourses can call up and exclude different concepts, the different kinds of parenting identified by Ann Ferguson can be listed. In a capitalist patriarchal discourse at least four different household structures are prevalent in which very different forms of parenting will be prevalent: capitalist patriarchal nuclear family (male breadwinner, female housewife), the joint wage-earning "second shift" family, the extended female-dominant kin/network family and the isolated single mother family. In feminist discourses other types of household structures and family become important and the centrality of different kinds of parenting become possible: communal family households (persons, not all of whom are biologically or maritally related, sharing a household with some commitment to collective economic sharing and decision-making), the "reconstructed" nuclear family (ie a family created by an amalgamation of sexual mating partners and children from first marriages or liaisons: step-parenting); the lesbian or gay couple with children; the "living together but not married" heterosexual couple with biological or adopted children; the divorced/separated but co-parenting family and the "revolutionary family-community" (a group of non-kin-related, separate family and /or communal households of any of the above sorts, living in geographical proximity, which have an ongoing collective commitment to material and social support for others and for childrearing together, and which emphasises feminist and egalitarian values). From these examples it should be obvious that mothering or parenting does not necessarily have to call up house, husband etc in just one sense or nexus.

Ann Ferguson, Blood at the root. Motherhood, sexuality and male dominance, pp175 and 181-182.

about and how this combination then in turn called up the other concepts identified. While we have seen how mothering was naturalised in the *volksmoeder* discourse with biological and theological arguments, the fusion was legitimised in history through the invention of the tradition of the *volksmoeder*.

### 5.3.1 The invention of the *volksmoeder*

In the *volksmoeder* discourse, the story of the growth of the Afrikaner *volk* was closely linked to the story of the Afrikaner woman. She was someone to be proud of, someone to be honoured and love, Postma said, because "(g)een beter, edeler moeder het ooit in voller en rijker sin 'n volk geteel nie, als die moeder van die Boerevolk"<sup>38</sup> [never has there been a better, nobler mother who gave birth to a *volk*, never has breeding a *volk* been fuller and richer, than when our mothers gave birth to the Boer *volk*]. A great variety of stories about women's role in the history of the *volk* were invoked to create a paradigmatic image of the Afrikaner mother. The *volksmoeder* was the "ideal Afrikaner woman".

Being a *volksmoeder* necessarily entailed certain modes of behaviour and certain characteristics. These were, through their example, taught by the mothers of the nation. Postma wrote in the preface to his book:

Dis my doel om die lewe en daede van die Boervrou in de geskiedenis op te spoor en voor te stel op eenvoudige en helder wyse. Ik wens die laaste Boervrou en dogter te bereik met hierdie geskrif, want als hulle eers weet wie hul moeders is, sal hulle nooit meer iets anders wil wees, als Boervrou en Boernooi.<sup>39</sup>

[It is my purpose to trace the lives and deeds of Boer women in our history, and to portray it clearly and simply. I wish I can reach every *boerevrou* with this document, for once they realise who their mothers are, they will want to be nothing but *boerevrou* and boer girls.]

Postma described women's role in history (from the "Black Circuit", through the "Great Trek" and during the South African War)<sup>40</sup> in great detail. These lengthy descriptions led to a discussion of the characteristics displayed by Afrikaner women in history. According to him the *boerevrou* is religious ("Veel argument sal ons bij die boervrou nie krij nie, veral nie oor godgeleerde vraagstukke nie, maar haar handel en wandel word deur haar godsdiens beheers in alles.)/Much

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<sup>38</sup> Postma W, op cit, "Preface".

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, pii.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, pp157-156.

argument we shall not encounter among Boer women, especially not as far as theological issues are concerned, since their religion completely determines their daily lives.);<sup>41</sup> **brave**;<sup>42</sup> **has a spirit of freedom** ("Hier het ons nie te doen met die ijdele emancipatie van die vrouwe nie - nie 'n begeerte naar vrijheid van die bande, wat God self gelê het nie, maar om als vrouwe en moeder vrij te wees van 'n vreemde juk - minder om haarself, als om man en kind...sij sou en kon slawediens doen, 'n slawe lewe lij vir die vrijheid van haar man en kind - om 'n vrije volk te teel."/Here we do not have to do with vain women's emancipation - it is not a desire to escape the relationships that God Himself ordained, but the desire as a woman and mother to be free of a foreign yoke - less for herself than for husband and child...willing even to suffer as a slave to gain the freedom of her husband and child - to breed a free volk.);<sup>43</sup> **willing to sacrifice and be charitable** ("Die egte boerevrou is altijd moeder van haar volk, aan haarself geen gedagte, vir haar geen ideaal so hoog en heilig als die welsijn van haar volk - daarvoor wil sij lewe, daarvoor sterf."/The true *boerevrou* is always mother of her volk, with no concern for herself - for her there is no ideal as lofty or as sacred as the well-being of her *volk* - for that she wants to live and die.);<sup>44</sup> **independent**;<sup>45</sup> **housemotherly and domesticated** ("Hier kom nog bij die verkleefdheid aan die huis en die haard. Die Boerevrou het haas nooit lus of tijd om op reis te gaan nie...Bij al die deugde is die Boerevrou agterhoudend, skugter van aard. Sij tree maar selde op die voorgrond in geselskap of in publiek...Die stemreg-vrouwees is vir haar vreemd...Die praatwerk wat nege tiendes van die politiek uitmaak laat die vrouwees aan die mans oor...politiek en stemreg - die egte boerevrou wil daar niks van weet nie...Haar plek is tuis."/Add to this the attachment to her home. The *boerevrou* has neither the desire nor the time to travel...Added to all her virtues the *boerevrou* is humble and shy. She seldom seeks the public eye...The suffragette spirit is foreign to her nature. Politics, which is nine-tenths talking, women leave to men...politics and enfranchisement are things that the true *boerevrou* would know nothing about - her place is at home.);<sup>46</sup> **talented**;<sup>47</sup> **virtuous** ("Die sterke sedelikebesef, die eer van die Boervolk was vir haar bo alles en het haar kinders

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<sup>41</sup> *ibid*, p63-67.

<sup>42</sup> *ibid*, pp67-83.

<sup>43</sup> *ibid*, pp84-91.

<sup>44</sup> *ibid*, pp91-94.

<sup>45</sup> *ibid*, pp94-97.

<sup>46</sup> *ibid*, pp97-102.

<sup>47</sup> *ibid*, pp103-106.

rein bewaar..."/The strong sense of morality, the honour of the Boer *volk* was her highest priority, this kept her children pure.);<sup>48</sup> and **inspiring** (Dis 'n spreekwoord onder ons dat die moeder die huis bymekaar hou...Dan eers sien ons die boervrouw in haar volle krag, als koningin op haar plaas, als die man en seuns op die slagveld is. Van haar gaan die besieling uit."/We have a saying that the mother keeps the home together...That is where we see the full power of a *boerevrou*, as queen of her farm when husband and sons are away on the battle field. She is the source of inspiration.)<sup>49</sup> Postma's ideal Afrikaner woman was a silent sufferer for *volk*, husband and children - as mother she was a martyr.<sup>50</sup> In the chapter that he committed to the suffering of the Boer woman,<sup>51</sup> Postma wrote: "Dwarsdeur ons land loop die bloedspoor van die Boervrouw."<sup>52</sup> [Throughout our country we see the bloody trail of the *boerevrou*.]

Van Wijk's 1919 article in Die Brandwag followed a pattern similar to that of Postma's book. Afrikaner women were religious, idealistic, honest, inspiring and loved freedom. Not only did Van Wijk mention more or less the same characteristics as Postma, he ended his article with the poem of J F E Celliers, also quoted by Postma.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid, pp106-109.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, pp109-113.

<sup>50</sup> Different historians have commented on the fact that Afrikaans women have frequently been portrayed as martyrs - always suffering and always sacrificing. Dunbar Moodie relates this to what he calls "the civil faith" of the Afrikaner. As a martyr a special place of pride was reserved for the Afrikaner woman. Like the Holy Virgin in Catholicism, Moodie says, the Afrikaner woman was a symbol of "God's grace and intercession in the life of his people". She was gentle, innocent, righteous and pure and suffered patiently and with faith in the future. By suffering like this, she taught "one of the deepest truths of the civil religion" - that the coming republic would result from divine, not human action.

Moodie T D, The rise of Afrikanerdom. Power, apartheid and the Afrikaner civil religion, p17.

Irving Hexham, when discussing Totius' poetry, also refers to the fact that the accounts of the suffering of the woman served to remind the volk that salvation is achieved through suffering, as illustrated by the examples of Israel and Christ.

Hexham I, The irony of Apartheid. The struggle for national independence of Afrikaner nationalism against British imperialism, pp33-46.

<sup>51</sup> Postma W, op cit, pp114-157.

<sup>52</sup> Postma W, op cit, p114.

<sup>53</sup> Die Brandwag, 25 Junie 1919, pp18-22.

According to Malherbe, in the first editorial of Die Boerevrou (March 1919), the mother was the queen of the household and the soul of the volk. The *boerevrou* she depicted was determined, strong-willed, patient, courageous, self-assured and idealistic. She also based her ideal woman on the Afrikaner woman in history.<sup>54</sup>

In all the texts women's lives were centred around their concern for their nation, their husbands and their children. The most important attributes of women were their ability and willingness to suffer and sacrifice for nation, husband and children. As martyrs they were heroes not because of their actions, but because of their passivity: their humbleness, their patience, their resignation, their submissiveness and their servility. As an example one can look at how Postma understood an attribute such as a "spirit of freedom": it did not refer to a positive desire to be free, but rather to the willingness to be a slave in order to free others.<sup>55</sup>

In Chapter four the development of the symbol of the suffering woman was discussed. While women, after their experiences in the South African War, gave many accounts of suffering and endurance, these stories gradually developed to become idealising and symbolising constructions. Increasingly these constructions were appropriated for nationalist purposes and by 1918 they were thus "available" to be developed even further and for other purposes in the *volksmoeder* discourse. Although, to a certain extent the suffering heroines of the war were idealised even in the earliest accounts of life in the concentration camps, the main emphasis in this early literature was on the **description** of the ordeal of women. Now, in the *volksmoeder* discourse, however, the image of suffering women was appropriated to construct a new identity and new roles for Afrikaans women. It is necessary to understand how this new subject position for Afrikaans women was actually constructed in the *volksmoeder* discourse. The pages of Die Boerevrou afford an opportunity to follow and investigate this discursive process in action.

The "ideal woman", the *volksmoeder* with her essential attributes, was embodied in two constant emblems that would be sustained throughout the life-time of Die Boerevrou. Firstly there was the motto of Die Boerevrou: "Ek sien haar wen, want haar naam is vrou en moeder" [I see her triumph, because her name is wife/woman and mother]. This motto was taken from the poem "By die vrouebetoging" [At the women's demonstration], written by Jan F E Celliers, published for the first time in Die Brandwag of 1 September 1915. Significantly, the poem was also quoted by both

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<sup>54</sup> Die Boerevrou, March 1919, p2.

<sup>55</sup> Postma W, op cit, p84.



A striking feature of the motto is that women were described as triumphant - and this, ironically, in the context of a society where women had not even won the most basic rights for themselves. Moreover the notion of women as "triumphant" was specifically linked precisely with the spheres to which she was conventionally confined. Celliers described these spheres in his poem: "Die grond is heilig waar haar voete gaan-/ op kamer-vloer, in moord-kamp, oor die straat..."<sup>57</sup> [The earth is holy where her feet tread/ Be it chamber floor or murder camp or street...] She was victorious in suffering and therefore not triumphant in her own personal right, but for husband, son and brother. This suffering for others was then invested with a religious significance by linking it to Jesus and the way of the cross: "Ik sien haar win, deur lije, net soos Hij./ Ik sien haar win, vir man en soon en broeder..." [I see her triumph, as He did triumph, through suffering/ I see her triumph, for husband, son and brother...] She was a winner in this suffering role of woman (wife) and mother, with the conjunction "and" suggesting that she had to be both to be victorious.

The second important symbol was the cover picture of Die Boerevrou. During the 13 years of Die Boerevrou's existence the same photograph of Anton van Wouw's bronze statue *Nooientjie van die Onderveld* [Girl of the Onderveld] served as cover picture.<sup>58</sup> The *nooientjie* wore an old Voortrekker costume, and with her hands folded in front of her, her head slightly bowed, she

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for she is called  
Woman/wife and Mother!]

<sup>57</sup> Because this poem was written in the context of the women's march, the fact that it contains only one phrase that can possibly be a reference to the march ("oor die straat"/across the street) was highly significant. While the march signified one of the first mass ventures of Afrikaner women into the public sphere, the poem portrayed a woman still very firmly established in the domestic sphere, with only the one very weak and unpoliticised reference to the march.

<sup>58</sup> It was probably because of this statue that Kootjie, a typical "son" of the "Free State Flats - a pair of velskoene, some cord trousers, a coloured shirt and a huge, floppy hat" wrote to Gustav Preller:

Please tell "Jan Celliers" that *volk* poet of ours, that if he wants to celebrate the plains then he must also celebrate the *boerseun*, because he, the plains and the sheep are one. And if that great artist, your friend Van Wouw should perhaps wish to make a bronze or marble portrayal of a *boerseun*, then he can have me because my friends say I am terribly *boereseunish* (boereseunagtig) and hence he will find what he is looking for in me." (Isabel Hofmeyr's translation.)

Quoted by Hofmeyr I, "Popularizing history: the case of Gustav Preller" in Journal of African History, 29, 1988, pp530-531.

It would be very interesting to investigate the gender discourse of the time in order to understand the creation of an "ideal manhood". What was a *boer* and a *boereseun* supposed to be like?

looked down with a very pensive, almost morbid expression on her face. This depiction of the Afrikaner woman came to symbolise both the magazine itself and the women who were its target readership. For the modern reader the meaning of this symbol seems obvious: the costume (especially the *kappie*/bonnet) clearly signifies the traditional Afrikaner woman in history. For the contemporary readers, however, the meaning of the symbol was not yet that obvious. They themselves were still involved in the process of constituting the meaning of the symbol and did so by questioning it and reinterpreting it. This is also an illustration of how the women, while interpellated by the discourse in which the symbol became central, were also at the same time constitutive of it. In a 1923 debate on the letter pages this process becomes apparent.

In February 1923 a reader wrote that she did not like the cover picture of Die Boerevrou. She felt that the picture was old-fashioned as women were not wearing *kappies* anymore. She also felt that the *nooientjie* was a misrepresentation of *boerevroue* as she was not working and did not look cheerful. Significantly this letter provoked a lively controversy. The letters in response can be divided into two categories. Firstly there were those who endorsed the symbolic value of the *nooientjie* and asked for the cover not to be changed. In the second place there were the readers who, because they thought that the *nooientjie* was an "unrealistic" and/or inappropriate portrayal of the contemporary Afrikaans woman, asked for a new cover picture.

The readers who were in favour of the *nooientjie* as cover picture regarded the Afrikaans-speaking woman as courageous, cheerful, peaceful, assertive, serious, strong, hopeful, satisfied, pure, simple and humble. To them the *nooientjie* appropriately represented all those characteristics and thus symbolised this ideal Afrikaner woman. For instance, "P", in total disagreement with the complainant, wrote:

Die kunstenaar (Van Wouw) wou...in 'n beeld die siel weergee van die boervrou in die algemeen - haar reinheid, nederigheid, natuurlikheid, eenvoud, wat sy ook behoort te behou teenoor al die nuwerwetse opskik en gemaaktheid.

Nou wel het ek nog nooit 'n beeld gesien waarin die egte onvervalste Afrikaner vrouesiel so goed uitgedruk word as in hierdie beeld nie. Dis iets om amper voor op jou kniee te gaan. Dis iets soos die eenvoud van die groot swyende vlaktes self, ongerep, onbedorwen, naief. Is dit nie veel mooier om so iets geestelik hoogs en egs te sien nie, so iets allesomvattends en diepgaands? Ons weet almal dat die boerevrou werksaam is.

[The artist (Van Wouw) wanted to capture in a sculpture the soul of the *boerevrou* in general, her purity, humbleness, naturalness, simplicity which she should retain against all the new-fashioned finery and affectation.

I have never seen a sculpture in which the true, unadulterated soul of the Afrikaner woman is so well expressed as in this sculpture. One almost has to kneel in front of it. It is

something like the simplicity of the great, silent plains itself, untouched, unspoilt, naive. Is it not much more beautiful to see something so spiritually lofty, so all-embracing and profound? We all know that the *boerevrou* is industrious.]

Mrs A E C also wanted to keep the existing cover:

Daar is erns op die soete, onskuldige gelaatstrekke, ja, want die Verlede van haar Volk is ernstig, en die Hede en die Toekoms is ook maar ernstig. Maar moedeloos? Nee! Sy is net stil tevrede, want sy berus in die beskikking van 'n Hoer Hand. Dit lyk vir my asof sy vir 'n paar oomblikke weggevlug het uit al die drukte van die lewe - miskien was dit huisskoonmaakdag of koekbakdag - en toe het sy erens op 'n stil plekkie in die veld so gaan staan en luister na die stem van die groot natuur om haar heen en die stille stem van haar eie siel. En as sy aanstons weer huis toe gaan, is sy sterk. Sy kan weer ly, en stry - en oorwen!<sup>69</sup>

[There is a seriousness in the sweet, innocent features, yes, because the past of her *volk* is serious, and the present and the future are also serious. But despondent? No! She is just quietly satisfied because she rests with God's dispensation. It seem to me as if she has escaped for a few minutes from the pressures of life - maybe it was the day for cleaning the house or baking cake - and she went to a quiet place somewhere in the veld to stand and listen to the voice of nature around her and to the quiet voice of her own soul. And when she presently returns home she is strong again. She can again suffer and struggle - and triumph!]

These quotations contain a very significant contradiction: the symbol of the quiet, passive woman strongly contradicts the suggestions of an active, industrious woman. While "P" on the one hand refers to the boer woman who is like the "silent plains", she says everyone knows that the boer woman is industrious and busy. A E C's quote refers to the "silent soul" of the woman, although "life's pressures", "house-cleaning day" and "cake-baking day" suggest days filled with activity. Both quotations try to resolve the contradiction by making the symbol a reflection of the soul of the boer woman, while the activity and industriousness supposedly functioned on a more superficial level. Images of nature ("silent plains", "veld", and "majestic nature") were strongly associated with the soul of the boer woman, also perhaps serving to naturalise the symbol.

MER, perhaps more aware of the contradiction, in her support of the *boerenooientjie* [Boer girl] solved the problem differently. While the passivity was not portrayed as the woman's true or deeper nature, it was her "mooiste" [most beautiful] side.

Vir my stel sy die Afrikaanse vrou op haar mooiste voor, netjies, stil en kalm voor die wereld. Maar as ek haar so bekyk dan stel ek my voor hoe sy ook vrolik en plesierig kan wees as daar vrolikheid is, of beslis en heldhaftig as daar gevaar is.

[For me she represents the Afrikaans woman at her most beautiful, neat, quiet and calm in front of the world. But if I look at her like this I also imagine how cheerful and happy she

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<sup>69</sup> Die Boerevrou, April 1923, p17.

can be when there is merriment, or determined and brave when there is danger.]

If the *nooientjie* represented this ideal of Afrikaner women as *volksmoeders*, it is interesting that so many readers rejected this cover picture. However, on closer examination it appears that it was not so much the concept of an "ideal woman" as such that they rejected. They were rejecting the specific image of this ideal. Instead of the traditional image which reflects a passive and silent woman, they wanted a more realistic and contemporary representation. A more realistic image, they argued, would be the image of a woman who is busy and active, but only in the sphere of the household in service of her husband and children. Mrs Rabie wrote:

...Die Boerevrou is al moeg om so stil te staan, dit is nie in haar natuur nie. Se bv u verander die prentjie in 'n mooi vrou tjie wat sit en kouse stop en langs haar 'n waentjie met 'n babetjie daarin. Die regte boerevrou is mos altoos besig met werkies vir haar man en kinders.<sup>60</sup>

[...The *Boerevrou* is tired of standing so quietly; it is not characteristic of her. Say, for example, you change the picture to an attractive woman sitting down while darning socks, and next to her a perambulator with a baby inside. The true *boerevrou* is indeed always busy with small tasks for her husband and children.]

Other readers too rejected the passive, inactive nature of the Afrikaner woman in the symbolic depiction on the front page.<sup>61</sup> Mrs C J Prinsloo, for instance, thought that the *nooientjie* looked

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<sup>60</sup> Die Boerevrou, April 1925, p15.

<sup>61</sup> Mrs Ries wanted to see the Boer woman depicted with tables loaded with homemade bread and cake; Mrs Brummelkamp saw the Boer woman as a laughing woman cooking soap; Miss Elsie Bekker wanted the Boer woman to be portrayed as a smiling woman, feeding chicken or making porridge; Mrs Joubert proposed different clothes for every season, but "...veral moet sy kindertjies om haar he, liewe goedjies wat sy met weerliefde beskou" [...she especially must have small children around her, dear little things, whom she looks upon with love]. Die Boerevrou, April 1923, p15.

Mrs Van Vuuren wrote:

Wat vir my dus 'n mooi buiteblad vir die Boerevrou sal wees is: 'n voorstelling van 'n kamer in 'n boerewoning. By die tafel sit die vader en moeder. Sy is besig met 'n stukkie naaldwerk terwyl 'n tevrede glimlag om haar lippe speel en sy luister naar wat haar man aan 'n klein krulkoppie vertel. Die kind staan by pa se knie met haar ken op haar hand. Hy sit met sy pyp in sy hand, 'n klein seuntjie speel met dolosse op die vloer.

[Therefore, what to me would be an attractive cover for Die Boerevrou is: a portrayal of a room in a *boer* home. At the table the mother and father are sitting. She is busy with a piece of needlework while a satisfied smile plays around her lips, and she listens to her husband talking to a small curly-head child. The child stands at daddy's knee with her chin in her hand. He sits with his pipe in his hand; a small boy plays with knuckle-bones on the floor.]

Die Boerevrou, April 1923, p17.

too depressed and said, "Sy moet haar hoenders kosgee of haar seeppot roer" [She should feed her chickens or stir her soap cauldron].<sup>62</sup> The women the readers described were always busy, always smiling and forever satisfied. They wanted the representation to be similarly modernised, to depict the circumstances in which they lived and worked and suffered. These readers had no problem imagining that they did or should share interests, concerns and characteristics with other Afrikaans women and that this may be represented in an idealised depiction.

The point of the *volksmoeder* discourse, however, was to translate the ordinary life of the ordinary mother in more dramatic terms linking it with the history of the nation. The purpose of introducing the heroines of the past was to compare the ordinary mother's suffering in child-bearing and her daily sacrifices for her husband and children to the more dramatic suffering of her foremothers. The ideal woman represented by the *boerenooientjie* was not adverse to the readers' experiences and aspirations, but was rather to inspire them to continue with those ordinary tasks. The readers' images were never denied, but rather appropriated in the *volksmoeder* discourse.

Throughout the history of Die Boerevrou, there was never a letter or article that questioned the image of the ideal woman as such in any fundamental way. It was always implicitly accepted by readers and contributors that there is a *boerevrou* and that in some way she leads a life of sacrifice for husband, children and volk. The concept is questioned only once in this rather humorous letter of Mrs G M Joubert:

As die arme vrou tjie haar drag moet verander na wat baie van ons op die plaas dra sou sy erger wees as 'n sprinkaan wat glo al om die anderdag vervel. Nou ja wat dra die Boerevrou? Een dra 'n ou kerkhoed, een 'n kappie, 'n ''keps', Pietie se hoed, manlief se kerkhoed, 'n 'sunbonnet' a la mode, 'n doek, 'n handdoek ens. ens. te veel om op te noem. Ek myself loop kaalkop...

[If the poor woman had to change her dress to what many of us wear on the farms she could be worse off than a grasshopper which apparently casts off its skin every other day. So, what does the *Boerevrou* wear? One wears an old church hat, one a bonnet, a cap, Pietie's hat, hubby's church hat, a sunbonnet a la mode, a kerchief, a towel, etc, etc, too many to mention. I go hatless...]

A few remarks should also be made about the critique that the *nooientjie* looks old-fashioned. While the *kappie* and "Voortrekker dress" have immediate symbolic significance for the modern South African reader, this criticism of the image on the cover page very strongly suggests that the *kappie* did not yet have this symbolic meaning for the 1923 readers. In the previous chapter we have seen how the boer woman's *kappie*, along with her other clothes, because it was practical and useful, became, for Olive Schreiner, a symbol of women's work and thus women's liberation.

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<sup>62</sup> Die Boerevrou, April 1923, p15.

During the 1915 women's march the women wore very smart hats<sup>63</sup> and in 1926, with Emily Hobhouse's funeral in Bloemfontein women were also not yet wearing *kappies*.<sup>64</sup> However, at the centenary celebrations of the "Great Trek" (1936), as well as at the second march of Afrikaner women to the Union buildings in 1940, the women all appeared fully clad in "Voortrekker dresses" and *kappies*.<sup>65</sup> In 1949 Malherbe would say: "Noudat dit oral mode is om op die feeste dié drag te dra, kan 'n mens amper nie besef hoe kort gelede dit was dat daar 'n begin gemaak is nie." [Now that it is fashionable everywhere to wear this dress at festivals, one almost does not realise how recently a start was made.]<sup>66</sup> The *kappie* only gradually became symbol of the *volksmoeder* in the 1920s and the debate about the front page is but one example of how this symbol was constructed. In December 1922, in an article "Die herinnering van 'n ou kappie" [The memories of an old *kappie*], the *kappie* was literally given a life of its own by making it the first-person narrator of the story of a young Voortrekker woman:

En die verlede wat daar agter my le, wat 'n groot weiveld is daar nie vir die gedagtes van 'n ou kappie, wat soveel deurgemaak het en die wisselende lotgevalle van soveel meesteresse gedeel het...Dit is byna 85 jaar gelede dat ek die eerste lewenslig aanskou het op die trek uit die ou Kolonie...Sannie se ma het my gemaak op die lang trekpad na die Noorde.

[And the past which lies behind me, what a big pasture it is for the memories of a poor *kappie*, that experienced so much of the changing fortunes of so many mistresses...It is almost 85 years ago that I saw the first light of day on the *trek* from the old Colony...Sannie's mother made me on the long *trek* road to the north.]

The *kappie* then relates the love story of Sannie and Piet which ended with Piet being "murdered" with Retief and Sannie also being killed at the hands of the Zulus. The *kappie* remarked:

Ja, dit is beter so vir Sannie en vir Piet - hulle Trek is oor - maar vir die ou Kappie? Menig wisselende lotgevalle, en eindelijk, hierdie ou plekkie in die koue Museum, met herinnerings, herinnerings - niks as herinnerings!

[Yes, it is better for Sannie and for Piet - their *Trek* is over- but for the poor *kappie*? Many changing fortunes, and eventually, this little place in the cold museum, with memories, memories - nothing but memories!]

The *kappie* not only became symbol of the general story of Sannie and Piet and the Voortrekkers,

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<sup>63</sup> See Die Brandwag, 1 September 1915, p102.

<sup>64</sup> See photographs 10, 11 and 12 between p58 and 59 in Van Reenen R, Heldin uit die vreemde.

<sup>65</sup> See photographs published in the pamphlet Die vroue-optog van 22 Junie 1940.

<sup>66</sup> Malherbe M, "Ek sien haar win" in Sarie Marais, 6 Julie 1949.

but more particularly she came to symbolise the sufferings of Sannie. Even a more important episode in the construction of the symbol of the *kappie* was Mrs Steyn's request in 1929 that women should wear national costume to the Dingaan's festival. In September 1929 a letter by Rikie Postma about the Dingaan's festival was given editorial prominence. She asked that women, as far as possible, wear correct replicas of Voortrekker clothes to the festival. For this purpose examples of these clothes would be exhibited in the archives in Pretoria so that women could copy them. Pictures would also be published in magazines. Die Boerevrou put its full weight behind this endeavour.<sup>67</sup> A letter written by Mrs R T Steyn to the mothers and the daughters of the *volk* stressed the importance of the *kappies* (a prime example of a physical object from the past) in representing the history that Afrikaans women shared:

As al die moeders en dogters hulle egter wil beywer om vir hulle kleredrag op Dingaansdag iets kenmerkends van die Voortrekkersdrag aan te skaf, dan kan dit onsaglik veel doen om die feesdag op te luister en ons te laat inlewe in die geskiedenis van ons volk, wat vir ons 'n blywende besieling moet bly...**Die kleredrag van die Afrikaanse vrou, wat die Voortrekkers-geskiedenis voorstel, sal nie uit sy plek wees nie in die skaduwee van die monument, wat maar net 'n verdere trek voorstel op die lydensweg, wat die Afrikaanse vrou bewandel het op die pad na vryheid en onafhanklikheid.**<sup>68</sup>

[If all the mothers and daughters, however, do their best to obtain something characteristic of *Voortrekker* dress for their dress on Dingaans's Day, it will do an incredible lot to add lustre to the festival day and to let us enter the history of our *volk*, which must be a lasting inspiration for us...**The dress of the Afrikaans woman, which represents the Voortrekker history, will not be out of place in the shadow of the monument, which only represents another *trek* on the way of suffering, which the Afrikaans woman walked upon on the road to freedom and independence.**] (My emphasis.)

### 5.3.2 Implications: Home, house and household

What are the crucial connotations of the Afrikaner woman as "mother" in the *volksmoeder* discourse? The first important series of notions invoked by the *volksmoeder* discourse was that of home, house or household. In other words, mothering and the work mothers did, were strongly related to the private domestic sphere.

The household was regarded to be a particularly important area for the nationalist struggle. Because of the importance of home and house, architecture and interior decorating became very prominent topics of discussion in Die Boerevrou. The importance of these topics was elaborated

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<sup>67</sup> Die Boerevrou, November 1929, p2.

<sup>68</sup> Die Boerevrou, September 1929, p37.

in philosophical and ideological terms. In an article entitled "Praatjies oor bouery" [Talks about building], a prominent architect of the time, Gerhard Moerdyk wrote:

Die meeste van ons weet, sonder die advies van staatsmanne, filosowe of predikante watter rol die woonhuis en familielewe speel in die vorming en stabiliteit van 'n land en volk. Die tuiste is die fontein van alle deug, en die famielielewe is die hoeksteen waarop 'n gesonde en blywende staat gebou word.<sup>69</sup>

[Most of us know, without the advice of statesmen, philosophers or ministers what role the house and family life play in the development and stability of a country and *volk*. The home is the source of all virtue, and family life is the corner-stone on which a healthy and lasting state is built.]

Also in articles about interior decorating the importance of house and home is stressed, as an excerpt from an article "Smaakvolle wonings" [Tasteful homes] by Mr Marshall of Jocelyns Furniture, illustrates:

Die huislike lewe het deur al die eeue heen 'n belangrike rol gespeel in die vorming van karakter; en die nasies wat die meeste sukses het vandag is die waar die ouerlike woning iets lewends en skoon is, - 'n plek om lief te he en te waardeer, 'n toevlugsoord van die wereld daarbuite; 'n plaas van vrolikheid en geluk, sonnige ure, hoer inspirasies.<sup>70</sup>

[Through the ages domestic life has played an important role in the shaping of character; and the nations which today have the most success are those where the parental home is alive and pure, - a place to love and appreciate, a refuge from the outside world; a place of cheerfulness and happiness, sunny hours, higher inspirations.]

Happy homes were associated with successful and powerful nations and therefore the Afrikaner home had direct importance for the Afrikaner nation. As Moerdijk said:

Ons kan daarvan verseker wees, dat as die Afrikaanse woning verval, ook die Afrikaanse nasie sal verval, terwyl ons net so seker is dat ons vooruit sal gaan, en tot groter bloei sal kom as ons tuiste en huislike lewe wyer, groter en van dieper morele waarde word.<sup>71</sup>

[We can be assured that if the Afrikaner home declines, the Afrikaner nation will also decline, while we are as sure that we will progress and become more prosperous if our home and domestic life become broader, bigger and of more moral value.]

As mothers, women were responsible for creating these homes. To do this properly they had to stay in the domestic sphere.<sup>72</sup> Mothers had to create homes for their husbands and children. The

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<sup>69</sup> Die Boerevrou, June 1925, p16.

<sup>70</sup> Die Boerevrou, May 1925, p6.

<sup>71</sup> Die Boerevrou, June 1925, p16.

<sup>72</sup> Totius, in a 1932 article, not only invoked God to justify women's confinement to the domestic sphere, he also referred to Hitler and Mussolini and their gender policies:

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<sup>72</sup> Totius, in a 1932 article, not only invoked God to justify women's confinement to the domestic sphere, he also referred to Hitler and Mussolini and their gender policies:

home was a place where children and husband could feel safe and secure, where they were protected and nurtured.

Within the domestic sphere the mother was defined in terms of her children, but as a wife she was also defined in terms of her husband. Postma stated:

Die vrou is moeder van haar kind, lewensgesellin van haar man, suster van haar broer, nooi van haar jonkman - en haar invloed in al hierdie betrekings is geweldig sterk.<sup>73</sup>  
 [The woman is mother of her child, partner for life of her husband, sister to her brother, (the) girlfriend of her young man - and her influence in all these relations is immensely strong.]

Although the mothering role of a woman was usually regarded to be her first priority, being a mother necessarily also implied being a wife. While motherhood was regarded to be a woman's highest calling, out of wedlock it was considered to be shameful. Jane Lewis' remark about ideal women in Victorian England applies also in South Africa of the time: "Marriage and motherhood were Victorian woman's 'natural' destiny and it was considered a tragedy if they were not achieved, or if one was achieved without the other."<sup>74</sup> An unmarried mother was regarded to be a "gevalle vrou" [fallen woman]. The home for unmarried mothers, established by the SAVF in 1905, was significantly called the "Reddingshuis" [Rescue home].

Not only was a mother by implication also a wife, she had to be the wife of a Boer. Within this

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Hitler, die voorman van 'n magtige volksgroep in die Duitse Ryk, soek die oplossing van die vrouekwessie en van die werkloosheid in drie woorde wat elkeen met 'n K begin: *Kinder, Kuche und Kirche* (kinders, kombuis en kerk).

Mussolini, 'n ander groot man...(i)n verband met sy skema om 'n groot Italiaanse staat op te bou, roep hy die vrou terug na die huis en sien hy liefste dat sy by die wieg sit.  
 [Hitler, the leader of a powerful national group in the German Empire, looks for the solution to the women's question and unemployment in three words, each starting with a K: *Kinder, Kuche and Kirche* (children, kitchen and church).]

Mussolini, another great man...in connection with his scheme to build a great Italian state, calls the woman back home; he would rather see her next to the cradle.]

Die Kerkblad, 17 February 1932. Reprinted in D'Assonville V E, Totius. Versamelde werke 7, pp312-313.

<sup>73</sup> Postma W, op cit, p179.

<sup>74</sup> Lewis J, "Introduction: Reconstructing women's experience of women and family" in Lewis J (ed), Labour and love. Women's experience of home and family, 1850-1940, p5.

discourse it was taken for granted that a Boer woman would marry a Boer and in poems, stories and jokes women that married or had relationships with English men, "came to sticky ends".<sup>75</sup> Although little mention is ever made of Afrikaans women having sexual relationships across the colour bar, this type of relationship was severely sanctioned. At the 1927 SAVF congress, Minister Roos's "Ontugwet" [Immorality Act] was approved with a standing ovation.<sup>76</sup>

Within the *volksmoeder* discourse the woman's sexuality was thus tightly controlled. She could only have sexual relations with the man that she was married to and she was not supposed to marry someone who was not an Afrikaner.

The word *boerevrou* as used in the title of Postma's book and in the title of the magazine is suggestive in this respect. The Afrikaans term *boerevrou* can have two meanings. The word "boer" was usually used to refer to Afrikaner men. The word *boerevrou* might thus refer to the female of the Boer species, that is a "boer woman". As the word "vrou" in Afrikaans also means "wife", the "boerevrou" could also refer to "wife of the boer". Effectively the two meanings were equated with one another.

As a wife a woman had certain duties to fulfill. These duties were firstly the duties that a contributor, Sylvia Moerdijk, in an article on "Die vrou van vandag" [The woman of today] called the "material" duties like mending clothes and darning socks, cooking and baking.<sup>77</sup> But there were also the other "groter en gewigtiger pligte" [bigger and more important duties]:

Sy moet in die eerste plek 'n tuiste vir hom maak, 'n plek heeltemal na sy besondere eienaardighede ingerig, waar hy ongestoor sy besigheidskemas kan uitwerk, sy professionele moeilikhede kan oorweeg, of sy artistieke lugkastele kan bou. Sy moet sy inspirasie wees en sy ambisie wakker hou, sy moet belangstelling toon in sy werk, as sy dit nie verstaan nie moet sy dit leer; sy moet in sy plesier deel; as sy nie van hulle hou nie, moet sy taktvol wees om dit nie te laat merk nie, of slim genoeg om hom na haar sienswyse om te haal. Verder moet sy probeer om die vriendskap te wen van die mense van wie hy hou.<sup>78</sup>

[In the first place, she must make a home for him, a place arranged according to his particular idiosyncrasies, where he unhindered can work out his business schemes,

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<sup>75</sup> Hofmeyr I, Building a nation from words: Afrikaans language, literature and "ethnic identity", 1902-1924, p34.

<sup>76</sup> Die Boerevrou, October 1927, p77.

<sup>77</sup> Die Boerevrou, August 1925, p43.

<sup>78</sup> Die Boerevrou, August 1925, p43.

consider his professional problems, or build his artistic castles in the air. She must be his inspiration and keep his ambitions alive, she must show an interest in his work, if she does not understand it she must learn it; she must share in his pleasure; if she does not like them she must be tactful enough not to let him notice it, or clever enough to persuade him of her opinion. Furthermore, she must try to make friends with the people whom he likes.]

In spite of the fact that she should be obedient to her husband and take his advice, she should also make sure to develop as a person and challenge him intellectually.<sup>79</sup>

For the readers of Die Boerevrou the creation of a happy supportive home for their husbands was held out as one of the first priorities of a woman. In 1920 this was illustrated in a debate on the letter pages started by a reader with the pseudonym "Newlywed". This very disillusioned reader asked advice about the role of the woman in marriage and how a woman should react if her husband's was short-tempered and treated her with disrespect. The following letter, which was published under the pseudonym "A happy couple", is an example of the standard response to "Newlywed's" question:

Volgens mij insien ontstaan die meeste ongelukkige huwelike deur die vrou. Die man, tog, als is hij hoe verkeerd, is die hoof van die vrou. Sij moet onderdanig wees, want sij begint maar bij die skouers.

'n Goeie raad is, als die man doodmoeg van die werk af kom, staan in die deur en wag op hom met 'n mooi glimlag op die gesig. Als dit al is gee hom 'n soen, en gaan haal hom 'n heerlike koppie koffie voordat hij vra.

Wees so vriendelik en gesels, dan sal hij dadelik sij moeg en harde werk vergeet; sij hart voel lekker, en hij gaat weer opgeruimd werk toe. Die harde werk sal dan vir hom 'n plesier wees, want hij weet daar bij die huis klop vir hom 'n warm hart vol liefde. Dit sal baie beter wees, als met 'n suur gesig te sit en 'n bietjie koue koffie vir hom te gee.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Die Boerevrou, August 1925, p43.

<sup>80</sup> Die Boerevrou, March 1920, p6.

Another example of a similar letter is the following letter of Mrs R Frick:

...ek dink 'n vrou moet haar huispligte nooit versuim nie. Maak die huis, hoe arm en eenvoudig ook, dat dit voel als thuis...doet jou plig en wees maar plesierig.

Ons vrouwe is nie meer soos vroeger net die vrou en moeder om te slaaf en kinders groot te maak. Ons het baie voorregte, maar ons moet darem nie vergeet dat ons nog daar is om die man te help, sij huis voor hom aangenaam te maak, self skoon en netjies te wees en vriendelik voral.

[I think a woman must never neglect her domestic duties. Make of the house a home, however poor and simple...do your duty and be jolly.

moet sij liever swijg. Wat besef haar meisiemens verstand van politiek of sulke manssake? Sij moet maar liever bij de kagel blij sit, en vir die mansmense leer skrywe dat die mijnhere naar die stembus kan gaan.<sup>82</sup>

[Uncle Dirk visits us regularly: sometimes on business, sometimes just to chat. Ask about his daughter, Lenie. "Oh," Uncle Dirk says, "Lenie is at home, a girl and a fireplace belong together." Uncle Dirk is good to his family, but to travel with a girl - in that he does not believe. Now and then to church yes, but not just to visit. She belongs at the fireplace to make him some nice coffee before he leaves; and when he is with us then the girls of our house belong at the fireplace to make him some more coffee. When her work is finished she can join the conversation, but when national affairs are discussed she must rather keep quiet. What can a girl's mind understand about politics or such men's affairs? She must rather remain at the fireplace and teach the men to write so that the men can go to the ballot-box.]

It was the attitudes and sentiments of this archetypal "Oom Dirk" that, in the *volksmoeder* discourse, became the norm regulating women's involvement in the public sphere. In 1916 Totius, in order to show that woman should be confined to the domestic sphere, related a similar story:

Spreker herinner hom die voorval van 'n predikant wat nogal dikwels by 'n ampsbroeder gaan kuier het maar altyd alleen. Totdat laasgenoemde uiteindelik gevra het: "Maar, broeder, waarom kom jy altyd alleen; hoekom bring jy nie jou vrou eenkeer saam nie?" Die antwoord was: "Ek het met 'n huisvrou getrou, nie met 'n reisvrou nie."<sup>83</sup>

[Speaker calls to mind the incident of a minister who quite often visited a colleague, but always on his own. Until the latter eventually asked: "But brother, why do you always come alone; why don't you bring your wife along for a change?" The answer was: "I married a housewife, not a travelwife.]

While mothering was closely linked to home and husband within the *volksmoeder* discourse, mothering and the public sphere were not associated. In Totius's quote two concepts, "huis" [house] and "reis" [travel], were used as literal opposites. In the same way mothering and politics and mothering and the labour market were consistently contrasted with one another. About political activities and women, Postma wrote:

Nie in stemreg, nie in publieke rumoer, nie in groot praat en vlaggeswaai soek die Boervrou haar krag, maar in die besef en aanvaarde van haar roeping als moeder in stil vertrouwe op God.<sup>84</sup>

[Not in suffrage, not in (a) public row, not in boasting or waving flags does the *boervrou* look for her strength, but in the realisation and acceptance of her vocation as mother with quiet trust in God.]

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<sup>82</sup> The Woman's Outlook, November 1913, pp8-9.

<sup>83</sup> Het Kerkblad, 15 February 1916. Reproduced in D'Assonville (ed), op cit, p314.

<sup>84</sup> Postma W, op cit, p163.

Within this gender discourse, women's activities in the public sphere had to be explained in terms of their roles as mothers. The issue of the women's march of 1915<sup>86</sup> and even *Helpmekaar*<sup>86</sup> presented Postma with a major problem. In both these instances women had taken political action and were respected for it. Postma solved the contradiction by citing the march as "een voorbeeld van hierdie moederskap" [an example of this motherhood], thus denying that it was a political act and describing it as an example of how women did not only mother their own children but the whole nation. He then proceeded to quote the poem about the march, written by Jan F E Celliers, and the description of the march that appeared in Die Brandwag of 4 August 1915.<sup>87</sup> Although he did not condemn the march ("Beoordeel wil ik dit nie. Dit moet die toekoms doen." / I don't want to judge it. That the future should do.) or some of the women's activities in *Helpmekaar*,<sup>88</sup> he evidently did not approve.

In Chapter four we saw that an increasing number of white Afrikaans-speaking women joined the labour market during the first decades of the century. How was this new reality dealt with in the *volksmoeder* discourse? A clear distinction was made between educated middle-class women working in professional jobs and working class women working in blue-collar and other non-professional jobs. In the first years of Die Boerevrou the relatively new phenomenon of working women was discussed mainly as a social problem. Concern was expressed in Die Boerevrou about young women being exposed to influences that might be morally detrimental. The practical problems of working women were also discussed to some extent, but, at least when discussed by the middle-class women who were the readers of Die Boerevrou and members of the SAVF,<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> See 4.3.3.

<sup>86</sup> See 4.3.4.

<sup>87</sup> ibid, pp164-166.

<sup>88</sup> Concerning a speech of Mrs General De Wet at a Helpmekaar function Postma wrote that "sij het ekskuus gemaak, dat sij geen publieke spreker is nie, maar swijg kan sij nie bij so 'n geleentheid nie. Nou of haar saak nou al goed of reg is beoordeel ons nie hier nie, die laat ons aan die nageslag..." [she apologised and said that although she was no public speaker, she could not be silent at such a meeting. I will not judge whether her case is good and just. That our descendants will do...].  
ibid, p111.

<sup>89</sup> For a discussion of the exploitation of women workers in the factories, see Brink E, The Afrikaner women of the Garment Workers Union, 1918-1939, pp66-73. For the women workers themselves, the issue of bad conditions in the factories was a very real and practical issue and was not in the first place a moral concern.

the issue of working women were usually raised because of a concern with possible moral degeneration. Moral degradation was regarded as anything that deviated slightly from, in Postma's words, "onse kristelik-nasionale lewensbeskouing en lewenspraktijk" [our christian nationalist beliefs and practices]<sup>90</sup>. Postma described the process of moral degeneration in the following terms, with a particular emphasis on the fact that women were the most vulnerable:

Dieselfde verskijnsel tref ons ook aan onder die verarmde klasse, wat in die stede, veral onder die uitlandse werksmense, aanlande. Dis verbasend hoe spoedig 'n deel van hierdie klas mense die uitlander in alles navolg en so vir ons volk en kerk verlore gaan. Hulle verlore eers hulle Boerekarakter en dan die hele lewe...So word 'n klein deel van ons volk gedenasionaliseer en van alle karakter beroof, 'n gevaar vir ons volkslewe. Hierdie fout of gebrek heers vernaamlik onder die meisie en vrouwmense.<sup>91</sup>

[We also find the same phenomenon among the impoverished classes, who arrive in the cities, especially among foreign labourers. It is amazing how soon a section of this class follows the foreigner in everything and so is lost to our *volk* and church. They first lose their Boer character and then the way of life...In this way a small section of our *volk* is denationalised and robbed of all character, a danger to our national life. This fault or flaw is especially prevalent among the girls and women.]

Even the still quite young Afrikaner Broederbond concerned itself with the topic of immorality in a series of lectures published in 1919. The lectures dealt with young women and young men and provided two separate sets of rules. From these and similar texts it is clear that the woman was assumed to be the victim of of the dangerous city.<sup>92</sup>

In June 1920, in a revealing editorial of Die Boerevrou, the problems of a young girl staying in a boarding house in the city, not knowing whether it was correct for her boyfriend to visit her in her room, were discussed. Malherbe, expressing much concern, wrote:

Die arme kind! Vandat ons die brief gekrij het, denk ons gedurig daaroor. Dit help nou eenmaal nie om te se, "die meisies moet thuis blij bij moeder, dan sal die vrage nie hoof gestel te word nie". Ons kan die klok nie agteruit set nie en die enigste verstandige ding om te doen is om die feite duidelik te sien en dan te probeer om te doen wat ons kan...Soos dinge nou is, kom baie jong mense naar die dorpe en stede op 'n leeftijid wanneer hulle die moedersorg en huislike omgewing die meeste nodig het. Partij kom om te studeer en ander weer om te werk in kantore, in winkels, in koffiekamers en waar nog

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<sup>90</sup> Postma W, op cit, p177.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid, p176.

<sup>92</sup> Roos J de V, Die toenemende onzedelikhaid uit 'n rechts- en maatschappelijk oogpunt beskouwd, pp24-25.

meer.<sup>93</sup>

[The poor child! Since we received the letter we have been constantly thinking about it. It does not help at all to say "the girls must stay at home with mother, then these questions will not have to be asked". We cannot put the clock back, and the only sensible thing to do is to look at the facts clearly and to try to do what we can...As things are now, many young people come to the towns and cities at an age when they need maternal care and (a) domestic environment most. Some come to study and others to work in offices, in shops, in coffee-rooms and where else?]

Malherbe, in this editorial, put the new reality of working women on the agenda and also directly criticised the denial of this reality. It was especially on SAVF-pages where the problems of young working women were discussed in more detail. The Fordsburg branch of the SAVF reported in June 1926 that they were working on providing a dormitory for poor working girls.<sup>94</sup> In the January 1928 issue Mrs Mimie Nicol of the Johannesburg branch of the SAVF wrote about the need for a dormitory for working girls on the Rand, asking other branches to help fund this project. She also asked the other branches to help avoid the problem:

Elkeen wat enigsins met die lewe hier in aanraking kom, sien hoe die minder opgevoede meisies, wat maar vir 'n klein salaris moet werk, gedwonge is om op minderwaardige plekke huisvesting te soek. Wat hieruit voortspruit kan 'n mens ook al lig begryp...Verder wil ons ook versoek, dat lede plaaslik sal toesig hou, dat daar nie jong meisies van hulle dorpe of distrikte na die Goudstad sal kom, sonder daar vooraf eers behoorlike voorsiening gemaak is vir tuisplek nie.

[Everyone who, even slightly, comes into contact with life here sees how the less educated girls, who must work for a small salary, are forced to look for accommodation at inferior places. The consequences of this one can understand...Furthermore we want to request that members keep an eye on (it) locally, that young girls from their towns or districts do not come to the Golden City before proper arrangements for accommodation have been made.]

This theme was to recur constantly in different versions.<sup>95</sup> However, despite the fact that the problems that working women encountered were discussed, the reality of working women was never addressed in any other way. In other words the phenomenon of working women was not incorporated into the *volksmoeder* ideal.

In 1928 Malherbe, in an attempt to redress this awkward silence, directly asked the readers of Die Boerevrou whether women should work outside the house. This can be seen as an attempt of

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<sup>93</sup> Die Boerevrou, June 1920, pp2 and 15.

<sup>94</sup> Die Boerevrou, June 1926, p54.

<sup>95</sup> See for instance Die Boerevrou, July 1929, pp2 and 4 and Die Boerevrou, May 1928, p54.

*volksmoeder* discourse so that it can include this reality. The responses to Malherbe's question, however, were predominantly negative with the arguments again quite revealing. In the first place, since mothering and domestic work were seen as women's major roles, readers thought that these activities would automatically suffer if women were employed outside the house. A reader, Joan Theron, explained this view in 1928:

Dit neem al u tyd om moeders te wees; want om vir liggame te sorg, neem tyd, om vir die verstande te sorg deur wel doorlese te bly, neem tyd, om vir siele te bid en te arbei aan hul karakters, neem tyd, baie tyd...My opinie is dat as 'n vrou haar roeping wil beantwoord om 'n moeder te wees vir haar huis en volk, kan sy nie tyd he om uit die huis te wees nie.<sup>96</sup>

[It occupies all your time to be mothers; because to care for bodies take time, to care for minds by being well-read takes time, to pray for souls and to work on their characters take time, a lot of time...My opinion is that if a woman wants to be true to her vocation to be a mother for her home and *volk*, she cannot have time to be out of her house.]

Mothering was thus understood as an all-encompassing and all-consuming role. It left no time or space for any other commitments outside the house.

Another problem that readers of and contributors to Die Boerevrou expressed about working women, was that women flooding the labour market were creating an unemployment problem for men. Such a view assumed that the employment market in the first place belonged to men and that unemployment was therefore a male problem. Representative of this view is a letter, written by MB, in 1928:

Ons moet tog almal erken in vroeer dae toe die vrou nie so algemeen uitgegaan het om te werk nie, was daar g'n werkloosheid nie. Is mededinging van die vrou nie meer oorsaak van werkloosheid nie?<sup>97</sup>

[We must all admit that earlier, when women did not generally go out to work, there was no unemployment. Is competition from the women not actually the cause of unemployment?]

According to Johannes Joubert in his analysis of labour at this time, this problem was enhanced by the fact that women were paid much lower wages than men. To solve this problem it was suggested that legislation should be passed to set the ratio of men and women in the respective industries and to make equal wages for women and men compulsory. Especially women whose husbands already earned a substantial wage or salary were severely criticised. It was felt that

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<sup>96</sup> Die Boerevrou, May 1928, p37.

<sup>97</sup> Die Boerevrou, May 1928, p35.

these women should not be working, in order to make jobs available for unemployed women or married women who needed the work. The municipality of Germiston decided, for instance, that a woman could not be employed if her husband could maintain her.<sup>98</sup>

Only one reader of Die Boerevrou acknowledged the fact that women might have very good reasons to work outside the house:

As ons iemand wil veroordeel om sy uitgaan om te verdien, wat weet ons hoe hul omstandighede is, soos die ou spreekwoord se "Anderman se briewe is duister om te lees". Dit kan wees 'n sieklike man, of 'n vreksuinige of 'n agterstevoor een, daar is die vrou verplig om te verdien.<sup>99</sup>

[If we want to condemn someone because she goes out to earn, how do we know what their circumstances are, as the old proverb says "No one can read another's mind". It can be an ailing man or a miserly or a back to front one, there the woman is forced to earn.]

It seems that these responses to the issue did not satisfy Malherbe. In March 1931 Malherbe, in an attempt to force her readers to address the issue, changed the question and asked what types of work women should do if they were forced to work outside the house. Instead of asking whether women should work outside the house, she asked the readers to assume that they had to. In this second debate about working women, Malherbe raised the following questions: What type of work is suitable for women? What training should one have for this work? What should one do to get this work?<sup>100</sup> The following month she called for more letters on this topic arguing:

Daar is honderde, nee, duisende meisies wat in ons tyd genoodsaak is om te werk, en wat miskien sal hulp kry uit sulke briewe.<sup>101</sup>

[There are hundreds, no thousands of girls who are now forced to work, and who could maybe get help from such letters.]

The prize-winning letters both argued that even if she had a choice, a woman should choose

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<sup>98</sup> Joubert J, Blanke arbeid in die sekondere industrie aan die Witwatersrand, 1924-1933, p148.

This attitude to working women was, of course, not unique to Afrikaner communities. For example, Koonz describes how in Germany women who had taken up men's jobs during the First World War were considered to be a threat to men in the labour market. The result was that "open war" was declared between men and women.

Koonz C, Mothers in the fatherland. Women, the family and Nazi politics, p26.

<sup>99</sup> Die Boerevrou, May 1928, p33.

<sup>100</sup> Die Boerevrou, March 1931, p2.

<sup>101</sup> Die Boerevrou, April 1931, p2.

staying at home and be a mother. If she really needed to earn some money, she should try and do it working from home or do something that is related to the field of housework and mothering in preparation for the time when she would be able to assume the role of a full-time mother.

Jeanne du Plessis, the prize winner, whose answer was echoed by most of the other contributions, suggested the following alternatives should it become necessary: domestic work, nursing, teaching, office work, chicken farming and bee farming.<sup>102</sup> The winner of the second prize, Mrs Van Gent, ended her letter of two and a half pages as follows:

Suid-Afrika het nie kantoor- of winkelmeisies nodig nie, maar wel meisies met 'n gesins-en moederinstink, omdat die toekoms van Suid-Afrika nie in die kantoor of winkel lê nie, maar wel in die gesin. Laat ons dan ons dogters aanmoedig om hul werk in die rigting te kry.<sup>103</sup>

[South Africa does not need office or shop-girls, but girls with a family and mother instinct, because the future of South Africa does not lie in the office or shop, but in the family. Let us then encourage our daughters to find work in that direction.]

But it was in the debate around working women that two features of the *volksmoeder* discourse became apparent: firstly, it had a very clear middle-class basis and secondly, it was not so rigid so as not to stay in touch with the women it had as subjects. The class basis of the discourse was clear in the exceptions that were made for educated women. In the same issue of Die Boerevrou in which many letters condemning working women were published, the following apparently dissenting opinion of "Agnes" also appeared:

Dit neem totaal niks weg van die vroulikheid en moederlikheid van die geleerde vrou om buitenshuis haar geld te verdien nie...Die siel van die vrou en moeder is baie breed! Baie dinge kan daarin opgeneem word, sonder dat dit te vol sal wees om nog haar pligte te

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<sup>102</sup> Most of the letters published displayed a distinct lack of understanding for the position of working class women. They did not even consider the fact that any kind of farming would require some kind of capital outlay and that it was thus out of the question for most of the women who really needed to work. H Cornelius, one of the many readers who advocated chicken farming as alternative employment for women, wrote:

In die begin sal u eers moet geld uitgee, maar hou maar moed, u kry dit dubbeld terug. Party tannies sal ook se: maar dit vat so lank voor u die geld weer kan terugkry...Natuurlik in die begin moet u geld he om alles te koop, soos die hoenders, kos en kampe... [In the beginning you will first have to spend money, but keep heart, you get it back over and again. Some aunties will also say: but it takes so long before you get the money back...Obviously, in the beginning you must have money to buy everything with, such as the chickens, feed and coops...]

Die Boerevrou, May 1928, p35.

<sup>103</sup> Die Boerevrou, June 1931, p4.

beseft en te volbring.<sup>104</sup>

[It does not at all detract from the femininity or motherliness of an educated woman to earn her money away from the house...The soul of the woman and mother is very broad! Many things can be accommodated in it without it getting too full for her to still be aware of her duties and to accomplish them.]

Although "Agnes" felt that women could manage a job outside the house, she did not question the importance of motherliness and femininity. Even more important is the fact that she made this exception only for educated women. Professional careers for women were discussed a few times in Die Boerevrou, even if those professions that bore the most relation to a woman's role as mother were regarded as preferable.<sup>105</sup> In November 1924 EMW wrote an article entitled "Die vrou se plek in die wereld" [The woman's place in the world] and discussed the position of women in South African society by looking at different occupations. According to her there were at that time 35 registered women doctors in the Cape province and 20 women studying medicine at the University of Cape Town. The writer saw a correspondence between the work of women doctors and the decrease in infant mortality and tried to relate this to their "natural" mothering aptitudes as women:

Sentra vir Kinderwelsyn, munisipale gesondheidsbesoekers, fabriek-inspekteurs, mediese inspeksie van skole, en meer as een ander beweging wat die mensdom 'n beter kans gee om gesond te bly, is aan die gang gesit. Is 'n deel van die verandering nie te danke aan die invloed van vrouedokters nie? ...Dit is hoogs waarskynlik die geval, want dit is in hierdie ondernemings dat vrouedokters hulle **natuurlike aanleg** kan gebruik.<sup>106</sup> (My emphasis.)  
[Centres for child welfare, municipal health (officers), factory inspectors, (the) medical inspection of schools, and more than one other movement which give humanity a better chance to stay healthy, have been initiated. Is a part of the change not due the influence of women doctors? It is most probably the case because it is in these undertakings that women doctors can use their natural ability.]

The role that women lawyers could play she did not regard with as much enthusiasm. In the one year since women had been allowed to practice law, only one woman, a Mrs Geffen, had entered the legal profession. Once again the suitability of this profession for women was judged on the

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<sup>104</sup> Die Boerevrou, May 1928, p33.

<sup>105</sup> In a similar article entitled "Die vrou van vandag", published in August 1925, Sylvia Moerdijk, discussed professions which were regarded as "besonder geskik" (particularly suitable) for women. She discussed domestic science, the "groot ou professie van die huwelik" [the big old profession of marriage], gardening, dairy farming, poultry farming, photography, art and music (which were not regarded as very desirable) and lastly, oculists.  
Die Boerevrou, August 1925, pp39 and 41.

<sup>106</sup> Die Boerevrou, November 1924, p19.

basis of assumptions regarding the "mothering" aptitudes of women:

Oppervlakkig beskou, lyk dit nie asof 'n vrou as advokaat ooit soveel nuttige werk kan verrig as 'n vrouedokter nie. Maar dit het lank geneem voor die mensdom uitgevind het **hoeveel meer sy kan uitrig in die geval van vroue en kinders as wat 'n man ooit sou regkry**. Oor 'n tydjie sal ons waarskynlik uitvind dat vroue as advokate net soveel sal doen om vroue en kinders te beskerm as wat die dokters nou doen.<sup>107</sup>

[Superficially regarded, it does not seem as if a woman advocate can ever do as much useful work as a female doctor. But it took a long time before humanity discovered **how much more she can accomplish in the case of women and children than a man ever would**. In a while we will most probably discover that women advocates will do as much to protect women and children as the doctors are doing now.] (My emphasis.)

This allowance (even if it was conditional) for women to pursue professional careers is also an indication of one of the most important characteristics of the *volksmoeder* discourse: the discourse was flexible within a certain framework. As long as certain fundamental values were not threatened it could adapt and accommodate. It was this flexibility that we also saw in the debate about the front page of Die Boerevrou. Postma wrote about inflexibility:

Daar is mense, wat meen dat vashoudendheid en bekrompenheid woorde van dieselfde betekenis is. Dit is 'n vergissing...Ons moet en mag ontwikkel tot die hoogste toppunt, maar nooit met verlies van ons kristelik-nasionale lewensbeskouing en lewenspraktijk nie...Die jonge dame mag BA doen en tog 'n egte dogter van die Voortrekkers wees...Bekrompenheid, verwaarloosheid, ongeletterdheid is nie selfstandigheid, is geen deug nie.<sup>108</sup>

[There are people who think that tenacity and narrow-mindedness are words with the same meaning. It is a mistake...We must and can develop to the highest peak, but never with the loss of our Christian national outlook on life and conduct in our lives...The young lady can do a BA and be a true daughter of the *Voortrekkers*...Narrow-mindedness, neglect, illiteracy is not independence, is no virtue.]

Still, despite Malherbe's own efforts, the flexibility of the discourse could not stretch so far as to include the realities of working class women. In June 1931 the editor, saying that so many readers wrote in about "what women should do" that it was impossible to place the letters, expressed surprise about the fact that no one recommended factory work for girls although there were so many opportunities for girls in the factories:

Ons stem natuurlik saam dat huiswerk en ander eg vroulike werk (en veral werk waar 'n meisie tegelyk 'n goeie tuiste kry) die beste en vernaamste is, - maar ons dink ook aan hulle wat nie besonder aanleg vir sulke werk het nie en ook aan hulle wat nie sulke werk sal kan

<sup>107</sup> Die Boerevrou, November 1924, p21.

<sup>108</sup> Postma W, op cit, p13.

kry nie, want die aantal werkgewers in die rigting is nie genoeg nie.<sup>109</sup>

[We, of course, agree that household work and other truly feminine work (and especially where the girl also gets a good home) are the best and most important - but we also think of them who do not have a particular flair for such work, and also of them who will not be able to get such work because there are not enough employers in that area.]

Again it seems that Malherbe was frustrated because her readers did not acknowledge the changing position of women. She subsequently encouraged readers to write letters about factory work for young women, undertaking to publish all letters about the topic.<sup>110</sup> The fact that no letters were published in this regard indicates that Malherbe's readers did not see the necessity to acknowledge the fact that women were employed in the industrial sector. While the presence of working Afrikaner women was denied the problems of "poor women" and "poor girls" were frequently discussed. Likewise, as Brink points out, the existence of an Afrikaans working class (men and women) was often denied by equating this class with the poor white problem.<sup>111</sup>

From the preceding material one can see how the issue of working women led to a tension in the *volksmoeder* discourse. The reality of working class women was acknowledged only insofar as it was perceived as another social problem. When Malherbe tried to persuade her readers that the *volksmoeder* discourse should be broadened to also include this new reality of many women, most of her readers denied that this was necessary and insisted that the phenomenon of women working in the public sphere was incompatible with their specific image of ideal motherhood and womanhood.

#### 5.3.4 Mothering and the community

In what can be regarded as a paradoxical move, the *volksmoeder* discourse closely associated mothering, which in practice clearly excluded most activities in the public sphere, with a function for the community. Through this association the domestic role of mothering was given public significance.

The connection between mothering and the community was already suggested in the two most common terms referring to Afrikaner woman: the terms *boerevrou* and *volksmoeder*.

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<sup>109</sup> Die Boerevrou, June 1931, p2.

<sup>110</sup> Die Boerevrou, June 1931, p4.

<sup>111</sup> Brink E, op cit, p6.

In Chapter three some attention was paid to the concepts of nation and nationalism. As discussed, defining oneself in terms of membership of the nation as an ethnic community implies a communal identity. The term *volk* [nation] in the word *volksmoeder* thus in the first place indicated a positive communal identity. On the other hand, the word also excluded, it set up certain ethnic boundaries.

What is the link between mothering and the nation? The linkage between women's domestic functions or private roles, on the one hand, and the public significance for the nation was brought about in different ways. Postma suggested that by being mothers in the private sphere of their households, women were quite literally bearing and rearing the nation of the future and became mothers of the nation. In effect this amount to the claim that Afrikaner women's reproductive function belonged to the *volk*. In bearing and rearing their own children, in the ostensibly private sphere of her home, Afrikaner women were actually working for the *volk*. As Postma explained:

En tog was vir die Boervrouw die moederskap haar eer, haar roem, haar grootste vreugde...Die Boervrouw besef haar roeping teenoor land en volk sowel als in verband met Gods koninkrijk. **Sij weet dat sij in haar skoot dra die toekoms van haar volk** en haar kerk en haar roeping teenoor God en mens wil sij met vreugde vervul.<sup>112</sup>

And yet, for the boervrouw her motherhood was her honour, her fame, her greatest joy...The *Boerevrou* realises what the duties of her vocation involves for country and *volk*, as well as for God's kingdom. **She knows that in her womb she carries the future of her volk** and her church, and she wants to fulfil her vocation to God and man with joy.] (My emphasis.)

Understood like this, mothering was the fulfillment of a duty to the country and the *volk*. To mother was not a personal role, it was a community service.

Secondly, the term *volksmoeder* also suggested that by doing welfare and social work for the nation, women could also become mothers of the nation. This lent a whole new dimension to the mothering role: not only was the woman responsible for her own children and husband; as mother of the nation, she was also responsible for her *volk*. The suitable context for this kind of mothering was regarded to be welfare organisations. This aspect of being mother of the nation was explained by Mrs A R Bisschop, a founding member of the SAVF:

Maar wy waren ervan overtuigd, dat sy de beste moeder is, die niet alleen aan eigen kinderen denkt, maar haar groot moederhart laat oopen gaan voor de minder bevoorrechten, en daarom zyn sy moeders van ons volk.<sup>113</sup>

[But we are convinced that she is the best mother, who not only thinks of her own children but who opens her big mother's heart for the underprivileged, and therefore she is mother

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<sup>112</sup> Postma W, op cit, pp157-158.

<sup>113</sup> Suid-Afrikaanse Vrouefederasie 1904-1929, p91.

of our *volk*.]

A reader, Joan Theron, likewise, compared the welfare functions of women's organisations with the domestic role of mothers in order to express the notion of mothering the nation:

Maar wat van die eensames, krankes, bedroefdes wat u nodig het om vir hulle 'n bietjie moederlikheid te betoon? En sien u nie die groot "Moeder" van Suid-Afrika daar staan met uitgestrekte arms om 'n moeder te wees vir die verstotenes, armes, die wesies van ons volk nie? Ons noem haar "Federasie"; ander het die naam vir haar gegee van OVV en ACVV.<sup>114</sup>

[But what about those who are lonely, sick, grieved who need you to display a bit of motherliness to them? And do you not see the great "Mother" of South Africa standing there with outstretched arms to be a mother for the outcasts, (the) poor, the orphans of our *volk*? We call her "Federation"; others gave her the name of OVV and ACVV.]

Postma was more reluctant to lend his approval to the women's welfare organisations. His comments clearly indicate that he did not expect very much to come from them. They were potentially divisive, and moreover, he thought that this kind of political participation might prove to be dangerous to the character of the *boerevrou*.<sup>115</sup> He indicated that he would accept social and welfare organisations as long as the activities of such organisation were not political and did not interfere with the work of the church<sup>116</sup>:

Die vroulike roeping en vrouelike gees moet heers in al hierdie bedrijwigheid, dan is daar hoop op goeie vrugte vir ons volkslewe. En die vrouelike roeping, soos in onse geskiedenis geopenbaar en hiervoor beskrywe is - om moeder van haar volk te wees.

[The feminine vocation and feminine spirit must reign in all these activities; then there is hope for good results in national life. And the feminine vocation, as revealed in our history and described above, is to be mother of her volk.]

In July 1927 a reader wrote the following about women's organisations:

'n Vroue-vereniging is darem maar 'n goeie ding...Om saam met ander vrouens te werk vir die vooruitgang van jou volk en die welsyn van jou kinders (en dis maar meesal hiervoor wat vroue-verenigings ywer) moet 'n heilsame uitwerking op enige vrou hê.<sup>117</sup>

[A women's organisation is really a good thing...To work together with other women for the prosperity of your *volk* and the welfare of your children (and it is mostly for this cause that women's organisations work) must have a beneficial effect on women.]

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<sup>114</sup> Die Boerevrou, May 1928, p37.

<sup>115</sup> Postma W, op cit, p171.

<sup>116</sup> The SAVF had several disagreements with the church about the overlapping of their roles.

<sup>117</sup> Die Boerevrou, July 1927, p12.

Although the term *volksmoeder* was coined by Postma, the idea that mothering was not a private role but a public duty, was not unique to South Africa. In England, where at the time there was also a sudden concern about the rearing and bearing of children, Davin found that the same argument was used to give more importance to the mothering role:

Since parents were bringing up the next generation of citizens the state had an interest in how they did it. Child-rearing was becoming a national duty not just a moral one: if it was done badly the state could intervene...and if it was done well parents should be rewarded at least by approval for their patriotic contribution.<sup>118</sup>

The fact that mothering had public significance, thus had two important implications. On the one hand this meant that mothering should be honoured by the community, but on the other hand it meant that the community could interfere with the mothering role. The introduction of the concept of *volksmoeder* thus involved a dual process: on the one hand a new importance and a new dignity was given to the role of mothering but on the other hand the duty of the mother to be informed, educated and trained for the mothering role is emphasised. To be a mother was an honour, but it was also a responsibility and a duty.<sup>119</sup>

In Die Boerevrou Malherbe emphasised the responsibilities and duties that mothering entailed:

As die Afrikaanse vrou nou gaat in sien dat haar roeping as moeder en vrou tog wel degelik eis dat sy dink en leer sal dit vir ons volk van baie groot waarde wees. Dan groei ons seker tot 'n groot volk, want dit hang tog alles van die moeders af.<sup>120</sup>

[If the Afrikaans woman realises that her vocation as mother and wife really demands that she thinks and learns, it will be of great value to our *volk*. Then we shall certainly grow into a great *volk*, because it really all depends on the mothers.]

Die Boerevrou often carried articles suggesting that mothering was a public duty rather than a private role. In the April 1920 issue of Die Boerevrou a long article appeared on the issue of state allowances for mothers in households where the father had died. The writer argued that instead of sending the orphans to institutions when their mother did not have the financial means to look after them, the mother should be given an allowance in order to raise the children herself, because "wat kan die plek inneem van die liefde en sorg van 'n moeder in die lewe van 'n kind?" [what can take the place of a mother's love and care in the life of a child?]<sup>121</sup> The writer was adamant that

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<sup>118</sup> Davin A, "Imperialism and motherhood" in History Workshop Journal, p13.

<sup>119</sup> Loc cit.

<sup>120</sup> Die Boerevrou, March 1919, p2.

<sup>121</sup> Die Boerevrou, April 1920, pp10-12.

such a grant should not be seen as charity:

...die toekenning aan die moeders van hulle wettige werk vir die staat en hulle word daarvoor betaal nes die soldate betaal word vir krygsdiens. (In beide gevalle word ook gereken op die onbetaalbare idealisme, die liefde vir die taak wat geen geld kan koop maar wat vir die staat die waarborg is dat hij sij geld goed beleg.)<sup>122</sup>

[...the allocation of their lawful work for the state to the mothers, and they are paid for it just like the soldiers are paid for military service. (In both cases there is also a dependence on the priceless idealism, the love for the task, which money cannot buy but which is a guarantee for the state that it has invested its money well.)]

This, according to the writer, was because a happy household was the cornerstone of a country and a happy household was one "waar die vader werk om die nodige geld vir onderhoud te verdien en die moeder haar huis en haar kinders versorg en hulle so gesamentlik die toekomstige burgers van die staat opvoed, sodat hulle gesond van liggaam en siel is" [where the father works to earn the money necessary to support the family, and the mother cares for her house and children, and where together they rear the future citizens of the state so that they are healthy of body and soul].<sup>123</sup> Although this article referred to the state rather than to the nation, the writer in the end specifically (and crudely) linked mothering with the nation:

Nes daar nou veel geld en tijd en sorg bestee word aan die invoer en behou van goeie stamboekvee, so moet nou gesorg word dat die toekomstige Afrikaanse volk sterk en gesond is.<sup>124</sup>

[Just as a lot of money and time are spent on the import and maintenance of pedigree stock, so it must be ensured that the future Afrikaans *volk* is strong and healthy.]

This public significance of domestic functions became a constant theme. In October 1920 an article about the "Simplifying of domestic work" was placed in Die Boerevrou. The writer of the article, A H van Gent of Bethlehem, argued that the household as the foundation of the state was more important than any political party. The work women did for the nation was compared to the work of a soldier or the work of a politician. Although there was no distinct feminist or marxist understanding, there was a clear consciousness that mothers fulfilled a very necessary material function for the state, or in this case, more specifically for the nation.<sup>125</sup> It also served to

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<sup>122</sup> Loc cit.

<sup>123</sup> Loc cit.

<sup>124</sup> Loc cit.

<sup>125</sup> This is similar to the marxist argument that because housework and child-rearing are essential for the reproduction of the wage-labour force, women by assuming the roles of mothers, housekeepers and wives, perform activities which are beneficial for capitalism without any

establish that the mother's work in the private domain of the household was in fact public work which benefited the nation.<sup>126</sup>

Koonz's perceptive observations about the revival of motherhood in Nazi-Germany seems relevant to the new emphasis on motherhood in Afrikaans society. She argues that despite the reactionary Nazi rhetoric about the restoration of family life, "Nazi policy was deeply revolutionary because it aimed at the creation of a family unit that was not a defense against public invasion as much as the gateway to intervention".<sup>127</sup>

In part this was true of Afrikaner nationalism as well. While there were constant calls for a return to traditional family life with men and women assuming traditional roles, Afrikaner nationalism also denied the sanctity of the family in that its most private decisions in principle became public property. Although the woman had to stay in the private sphere, her activities in this sphere were

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remuneration. The fact that domestic labour is not quantified in terms of productive labour "entails an enormous saving for the capitalist class, which is able to extract a far greater volume of surplus value than would be possible if its wage-costs included housework and child-rearing". Balbus I D, Marxism and domination. A neo-Hegelian, feminist, psychoanalytic theory of sexual, political and technological liberation, p68. See also Ferguson A, Blood at the root, p25.

<sup>126</sup> Focusing on the monetary value of domestic labour, a contributor in 1930 (after South African women had been granted the vote) wrote as follows about the importance of the housewife and mother for the state:

"Maar die waarde van die vrou se arbeid kan gewoonlik nie in geld gemeet word nie; dit wil nie sê dat vrouearbeid van minder belang vir die staat is nie; dikwels wel die teenoorgestelde. Die man se werk is miskien van belang tot na die volgende oes; die van die vrou vir die hele toekoms van ons volk...Het die feit dat sy 'n goeie huisvrou en 'n goeie moeder is dan vir die staat g'n waarde nie; is dit van meer belang vir die staat dat haar man 'n paar vergankelike pondjies per jaar verdien dan dat sy 'n nuwe geslag van staatsburgers in die wêreld bring en die grondslag lê van hulle liggamelike, geestelike en burgerlike gesondheid?"

[But the value of the woman's labour can usually not be measured in money; this does not say that women's labour is of less importance to the state, often rather the opposite. The man's work is perhaps of importance until after the next harvest; that of the woman for the whole future of our *volk*...Is the fact that she is a good housewife and a good mother of no value for the state; is it of more importance for the state that her husband earns a few perishable pounds a year than that she brings a new generation of state citizens into the world and that she lays the foundation of their physical, spiritual and civilian health.

Die Boerevrou, August 1931, p5.

<sup>127</sup> Koonz C, Mothers in the fatherland, p160. This reference does not, like the other references to this book, refer to the edition listed in the bibliography. It refers to the 1987 edition of the book printed in New York by St Martin's Press.

controlled by the community. In the final instance, as a mother, she was accountable to the nation.

#### 5.4 Conclusion

In the *volksmoeder* discourse being a woman meant being a mother. Thus motherhood for women was not a choice or an option, it was portrayed as the biological, religious and national vocation of women. Mothering was not simply associated with the bearing and rearing of children, it also necessarily invoked images of home, household and husband. It necessarily included self-denial, sacrifice and suffering, as the mother's life was centred around her children and her husband. Thus the woman's existence as mother was firmly rooted in the private domestic sphere.

But mothering, in this gender discourse, acquired further connotations, not only in the domestic sphere, but with regard to the Afrikaner nation. The Afrikaner woman as *volksmoeder* also had a distinctive ethnic identity. Paradoxically, although mothering was a role that could only be fulfilled in the private domestic sphere, this private role was invested with public significance. The mothering role, in the context of the *volksmoeder* discourse, became a community service. On the one hand this implied a form of public recognition, on the other hand it also meant public accountability.

After having looked at the contents of the *volksmoeder* discourse, the central constructs and notions, the different texts have to be denaturalised. Where the texts were accepted as true reflections of reality, we have to look again at the constructs as constructs and ask why they appeared in this specific context and what were the ends that they achieved or attempted to achieve. In Chapters six and seven we will examine the ways in which the *volksmoeder* discourse can be related to the gender and ethnic issues that became salient in Afrikaner politics in the 1910s.

## CHAPTER SIX

### THE *VOLKSMOEDER* DISCOURSE AS NATIONALIST DISCOURSE

In Chapters three and four we traced in general terms how both ethnic issues and gender issues became salient in Afrikaner politics through the 1910s. Chapter five provided a descriptive account of some of the main features of the *volksmoeder* discourse as a gender discourse fusing gender and ethnic identities in particular ways. In this chapter the *volksmoeder* discourse, which emerged around 1920, will be analysed as a nationalist discourse, ie construed as a "response" in gender terms to the ethnic issues that became salient within the broader discourse of Afrikaner nationalism. In the next chapter we will conduct a complementary investigation into the underlying gender issues generating this discourse. This will be done by specifically looking at Die Boerevrou texts.

This chapter will focus on how, in Die Boerevrou, these gender identities and roles were constructed as nationalist responses, ie generated by certain underlying ethnic issues, and how they were portrayed and presented to the readers. Conversely, we will discuss how women accepted these gender and ethnic identities, made them their own and thus themselves became involved in the construction of the discourse by seeing themselves as Afrikaners and mothers. Because we are looking at the work-like aspects of Die Boerevrou texts, we are not only interested to see how they "mark" the different functions that women with certain identities and in certain gender roles can fulfill for nationalism. We are rather interested in how these identities and roles were constructed, created, presented, accepted, re-presented and re-constructed in specific and unique ways in Die Boerevrou texts.<sup>1</sup> In a sense we are thus looking at how the *volksmoeder* discourse worked in practice in Die Boerevrou.

#### 6.1 The need for unity: boerevroue around the coffee table imagine a new community

In the *volksmoeder* discourse Afrikaans women's gender identity to a large extent became synonymous with motherhood. It was also deliberately constructed and presented as being a

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<sup>1</sup> Compare the citation from LaCapra used in Chapter one. He says that in functioning as a "work-like" text, a text is "critical and transformative, for it deconstructs and reconstructs the given, in a sense repeating it but also bringing into the world something that did not exist before in that significant variation, alteration, or transformation".  
LaCapra D, Rethinking intellectual history, p30.

unifying factor, and as such of special significance for the emergent Afrikaner nationalism. Anna Davin explains how motherhood was presented as being universal to all classes in the Britain of the early twentieth century:

Motherhood was so powerful a symbol that often class differences disappeared, along with the realities of working-class life. All the individual real mothers were subsumed into one ideal figure, the Queen Bee, protected and fertile, producing the next generation for the good of the hive. The home was "the cradle of the race...Empire's first line of defence".<sup>2</sup>

In the *volksmoeder* discourse women were led to believe that mothering was so important that it encompassed all other differences that might exist between women - with one exception: motherhood did not and could not transcend ethnic and racial boundaries. What Afrikaans women had in common was emphasised, while individual and class differences within this group were denied, ignored or suppressed. In her opening speech at the 1929 congress of the Suid-Afrikaanse Vrouefederasie (SAVF), the president of the SAVF, Mrs S B Broers, expressed this belief:

Die vroue van ons volk staan hier saam en werk saam, nie teenstaande verskil van politiek of kerk. Mag dit so bly en die moeders altyd saamstaan, om die werk van volksmoeders te doen sonder aansien van persoon.<sup>3</sup>

[Here the women of our *volkstand* together and work together in spite of church and political differences. May this always be so that mothers stand together, to do the work of *volksmoeders*, without regard to persons.]

In 1919, with the establishment of the magazine, *Die Boerevrou*, the relatively new *volksmoeder* discourse expressly took on the task of constituting a discursive communal identity. Afrikaans women were to become members of a community of *volksmoeders*. In *Die Boerevrou* the *volksmoeder* discourse set out to create a community that was defined by gender and ethnicity. It was neither a question of the community of women or simply of the Afrikaans community. Afrikaner women were constituted in relation to a community of *volksmoeders*, thus involving both ethnic and gender identity.

In this section we will investigate the construction of this particular gender and ethnic community in and through the *volksmoeder* discourse. This involves both an analysis of the ways in which Afrikaans women were discursively constituted as **subjects** of this discourse as well as the discursive procedures through which the readers of *Die Boerevrou* came to participate in an "imagined community" centred around this journal. For the former we will draw on the

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<sup>2</sup> Davin A, "Imperialism and motherhood" in *History Workshop Journal*, Issue 5, Spring 1978, p53.

<sup>3</sup> *SAVF. 25 jaar. 1904-1929*, p87.

Althusserian sense of the ideological interpellation of discursive subjects, and in the latter case we will apply Benedict Anderson's notion of nations as imagined communities.

### 6.1.1 The "hailing" of the readers

There can be no discourse without subjects.<sup>4</sup> Malherbe, as a writer, was a subject in the traditional or humanist sense insofar as she helped to generate the discourse. But the readers of Die Boerevrou were constituted as subjects of this discourse in a different and more basic sense, and it is this process that we have to investigate. To become subjects of the discourse, potential readers had, of course, quite literally to read what Malherbe had written. But not everyone who literally picked up and read Die Boerevrou became a committed reader of the journal in the double sense that, on the one hand, she was the kind of reader for whom the journal was intended and, on the other hand, she was inclined to identify with the discursive constructs represented in the journal. It is this further process, of how the journal identified and acquired not just casual but committed readers or, more generally, how Afrikaans women became subjects of the *volksmoeder* discourse, in which we are interested. In Althusserian terms it is a question of how the discourse of Die Boerevrou "hailed" or "recruited" subjects among a larger set of individuals or "transformed" individuals into particular discursive subjects. By calling the magazine Die Boerevrou Malherbe was already addressing a certain category of readers, "hailing" them among individuals in general. By responding and becoming committed readers of the magazine individual Afrikaans women were in turn identified as *boerevrou* and became constituted as subjects of the discourse of the magazine. This discursive process is what Althusser calls the process of interpellation.

It is important to grasp both the constitutive nature and the limitations of this process of interpellation. In one sense discursive hailing of this kind presupposes the existence of *boerevroue* as a social reality. It is not coincidental that the individuals who responded by casually picking up the magazine, or even more by becoming committed readers of it, were overwhelmingly Afrikaans and female, and not, eg, English, black or male. In this sense the interpellation embodied in the

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<sup>4</sup> In this section I make use of Althusser's description of the interpellation of the individual as a subject (Althusser L, "Ideological state apparatuses ....." in Lenin and philosophy and other essays, pp160-163). Where he uses the term "ideology" I have used the term "discourse", for an individual can be constituted as a subject by a discourse without the discourse necessarily being ideological. An ideological discourse, in short, is one which "will try and reconstitute a new ideological unity using a 'system of narration' as a vehicle which disarticulates the ideological discourses of the opposing forces". This distinction is explained in detail in chapter two. See also Laclau E, Politics and ideology in marxist discourse, pp100-104.

name of the magazine did not, and could not, create *boerevroue* where none had existed before. On the other hand and in another sense responding to this discursive hailing, by becoming a committed reader of the magazine, amounted to an act of recognition, and even more, to a sense of identity to an extent which had not been the case before. Becoming readers of Die Boerevrou brought readers to recognise themselves as *boerevroue*; they were constituted as subjects of a particular gender discourse, and moreover one which construed their gender identity in ethnic terms.

In becoming subjects of this discourse they remained subjects of many other discourses, ie some of them were workers, they supported different political parties, they were members of different churches and they belonged to different women's organisations.

The founding of a magazine with the name Die Boerevrou brought individuals to think of themselves explicitly as *boerevroue*. As readers and contributors they defined themselves in ethnic (*boere*/Afrikaner) and gender (*vrou*/woman) categories. They had already been Afrikaans and they had been woman, but their identities had not been explicitly bound up with those terms.

#### 6.1.2 A monthly ritual

The process through which individual readers became members of a community (a community that as such had not existed before) can best be explained by using Anderson's idea of contact through representation creating the possibility of imagining a community. Anderson's account was specifically concerned with daily newspapers as a technical instrument that can represent an imagined community in particular ways:

The obsolescence of the newspaper on the morrow of its printing...creates this extraordinary mass ceremony: the almost precisely simultaneous consumption ("imagining") of the newspaper-as-fiction. We know that particular morning and evening editions will be consumed between this hour and that, only on this day, not that. The significance of this mass ceremony...is paradoxical. It is performed in silent privacy, in the lair of the skull. Yet the communicant is well aware that the ceremony he performs is being replicated simultaneously by thousands (or millions) of others of whose existence he is confident, yet of whose identity he has not the slightest notion. Furthermore this ceremony is incessantly repeated at daily or half-daily intervals throughout the calendar...At the same time, the newspaper reader, observing exact replicas of his own paper being consumed by his subway, barbershop, or residential neighbours, is continually reassured that the imagined world is visibly rooted in everyday life...fiction seeps quietly and continuously into reality, creating that remarkable confidence of community in anonymity which is the

hallmark of the modern nation.<sup>5</sup> (My emphasis.)

Although the reading of a paper is an individual act, it becomes a communal ceremony when the reader knows that it is an act performed almost simultaneously by others. The reader then imagines that she shares some kind of bond with the people who are also part of the ceremony. With a monthly magazine the consumption is not as literally simultaneous as in the case of a daily paper, but if the bond of contemporality is more tenuous there are, as we shall see, other ways and means in which the discursive community of readers can be accentuated so that the reading of the magazine can still be experienced as a symbolic and communal ritual. If the ritual of reading Die Boerevrou was also performed in privacy, even in isolation, it also functioned to establish a sense of (imagined) community, as the following extracts from letters indicate:

Ek vind Die Boerevrou so aangenaam, want ons woon in die Bosveld, alleen op 'n plaas: ons naaste mense is 1 ½ uur te perd van ons af en ek kan die tyd nie afwag om Die Boerevrou te krij. Dit is maar stil hier in die Bosveld...<sup>6</sup> (Miss M E Meyer)

Ons leef hier so ver van die woelige, gesiviliseerde wereld en is soms so verlangend naar leesstof. Die "Vroutjie" voorsiet hierin grotendeels, en is altijd 'n seer welkom gas.<sup>7</sup> (Mrs M van der Merwe)

Ek sien hier nooit van een maand naar die ander 'n wit vrou nie om mee te gesels nie, maar as Die Boerevrou inkom, dan smaak dit of ek in 'n hele geselskap van vrouens is.<sup>8</sup> (Mrs Pay)

[I appreciate Die Boerevrou, for we live in the Bushveld, alone on a farm, one hour on horseback from the nearest people, and I can barely wait to receive Die Boerevrou. It is very isolated here in the Bushveld...]

We live here so far away from the hustle and bustle of the civilised world, and sometimes one longs for something to read. The *Vroutjie* [little woman] provides me with this, and is always a most welcome guest.

For months on end I never see a white woman with whom I can discuss things, but when Die Boerevrou arrives, it feels as if I have a whole gathering of women to talk to.]

Anderson's paradox of a community imagined in anonymous privacy is very clear in the letter of

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<sup>5</sup> Anderson B, Imagined communities. Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism, pp39-40.

<sup>6</sup> Die Boerevrou, August 1920, p14.

<sup>7</sup> Die Boerevrou, May 1921, p6.

<sup>8</sup> Die Boerevrou, August 1920, p15.

Mrs Pay:<sup>9</sup> this isolated act of reading Die Boerevrou connects the reader to the other readers, wherever they might be, "creating that remarkable confidence of community in anonymity".

### 6.1.3 Visiting around the coffee table

The narrative of Die Boerevrou was constructed around a number of rituals and metaphors serving to build and confirm the imagined community. In particular this sense of community was further strengthened by Malherbe's powerful metaphor of women readers gathering around the coffee table which became a regular feature and hallmark of the magazine. Reading Die Boerevrou and contributing articles or letters was represented as a conversation and social occasion which reminded the reader of a visit. Malherbe refers to the letters received as guests coming to visit. She writes:

Baie van die briewe is so hartelik dat daar 'n gevoel ontstaan dat die skryfster self ingestap het om 'n vriendelike praatjie aan te knoop, of om ons iets interessants mee te deel.<sup>10</sup>  
[Many of the letters are so warm and sincere that one feels as if the writer has walked in herself to start a friendly conversation, or to share something interesting.]

By calling the letter column "Om die koffietafel" [Around the coffee table], the ritual of visiting was established as a regular institutional feature.<sup>11</sup> Malherbe was clearly implying that by writing letters and by reading each other's letters, the readers were taking part in a conversation around an imaginary coffee table. The readers quickly picked up this image as the following letter of J Du Toit, published in the February 1923 issue, indicates:

Beste Vroutjie, mag ek ook vandag 'n plekkie in die gesellige kringetjie om die koffietafel inneem.<sup>12</sup>  
[Dear little woman, may I also take a place today in your convivial circle around the coffee table.]

Very soon almost all letters to Die Boerevrou were started with a line about the coffee table, suggesting that the image was appropriated by the readers:

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<sup>9</sup> Mrs Pay's letter is also interesting as an example of the fact that womanhood were given ethnic boundaries. Black women did not count as women sharing a community.

<sup>10</sup> Die Boerevrou, July 1921, p17.

<sup>11</sup> Malherbe, when changing the name of the letters column from "Korrespondensie" to "Om die koffietafel" in July 1920, does not explain the change in name to her readers. This suggests that she expected her readers to understand the allusion of the new name.

<sup>12</sup> Die Boerevrou, February 1923, p19.

Ek is al 'n jaar lid van ons goeie Boerevrou, en het nog nooit die vrymoedigheid gehad om saam te gesels nie, daar is seker nog 'n plek om die koffietafel, al is ek nie 'n groot koffiedrinker nie, sal ek maar nader sit, ek het die geselskap van die tannies om die koffietafel so geniet...

Ek het al baie lankal lus gehad om ook saam met julle om die koffietafel te gaan sit en gesels want ek is baie lief vir 'n koppie koffie en ook vir gesels.

Mag ek aansit? Dit lyk tog so gesellig by julle! Dankie!<sup>13</sup>

[For a year now I have been a member of our good Boerevrou, but I have never had the courage to participate in the discussion - so if there is still a place open at the coffee table, I would like to move closer, though I am not a great coffee drinker - I so much enjoyed the conversation of the ladies around the table...

For quite a while I've felt like joining in your conversation at the coffee table, for I appreciate a good cup of coffee, and I like a good conversation.

May I join in? It looks so cosy there with you! Thank you!]

The metaphor was even more effective because it suggested a ritual with a certain continuity with the past.<sup>14</sup> The image of visiting around a coffee table was a familiar feature of Afrikaans social life and readers could easily identify with it. Cachet, in his 1896 description of the "Transvalers" often referred to the habit of visiting and drinking coffee and referred to coffee as "die volksdrank" [the national drink].<sup>15</sup> He says:

Er moet hem tijd overblijven om het leven, naar's lands wijs, te genieten, door bij vrienden en magen te gaan "kuieren" of hunne bezoeken te ontvangen; om rustig een pijp extra te rooken en wat meer koffie te drinken...<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> All three examples are from Die Boerevrou, January 1927, p5.

<sup>14</sup> See Chapter two about the invention of traditions. Hobsbawm E, "Introduction: inventing traditions" in Hobsbawm E and Ranger T (eds), The invention of tradition, p1.

<sup>15</sup> Cachet F C, De worstelstrijd der Transvalers. Aan het volk van Nederland verhaald, pp424-425.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, p418.

In his description of the typical house in the Transvaal, Cachet also refers to the specific place of the coffee table and the coffee pot:

Tot de onmisbare dingen in het voorhuis, behoort de koffiekkan, op het tafeltje, waaraan de vrouw des huizes gezeten is, en die zelden "koud" is.

[One of the basics in the sitting room was the coffee-pot. It was on the table next to where the woman of the house was seated. The pot was seldom cold.]

Ibid, p424.

[They must reserve time to enjoy life in their customary manner - by visiting friends and cronies, by receiving visits in return, by leisurely smoking another pipe and drinking some more coffee...]

The familiarity of the image was acknowledged in a letter of Miss C Kloppers published in February 1925:

Dis goed dat daar 'n seker rubriek in Die Boerevrou "Om die koffietafel" genoem word, en nie "Om die teetafel" nie. Dit sou anders so opsters geklink het, dat 'n eenvoudige Bosvelders soos ek nie die moed sou gehad het om ook 'n woordjie te praat nie. Maar koffie! A, nee, dis Afrikaans, en klink somer gesellig. Hier in die Bosveld ontbreek ons baie geriewe en genietinge, waarvan die dorping te oor het; maar die Boer se nasionale drank, koffie, is gelukkig nog volop, en nie te duur nie.<sup>17</sup>

[It is fitting that a column in Die Boerevrou is called "Around the Coffee Table" and not "Around the Tea Table". It would have sounded so uppity that a plain Bushveld woman like me wouldn't have the courage to put in one word. But coffee! Ah, that is Afrikaans, it sounds really convivial. Here in the Bushveld we lack many amenities and enjoyments which the townspeople have in abundance, but fortunately the Boer's national beverage, coffee, is still freely available and not too expensive either.]

The symbolic ritual of drinking coffee around the coffee table in reading each monthly edition of Die Boerevrou suggested a whole set of social values that had strong resemblances to the idealised relationships of past communities. Reading Die Boerevrou and writing letters to the editor (ie taking a place around the coffee table) became symbolic of membership of a specific community, an imagined community of *boerevroue*. The editor explicitly encouraged her readers to form such bonds of imagining:

Nou vriende gee onder mekaar een vir die ander 'n aandenkinkie, en so wil ons ook maak. Aan die skryfster van die brief wat ons drie die meeste plesier gee, wil ons graag 'n klein lepeltjie stuur, om bij haar eie koffietafel te gebruik...dan moet sij aan ons denk as dit in haar pierinkie klink, en ons 'n vriendelike wens stuur; ons glo daar baie aan.<sup>18</sup>

[As friends exchange keepsakes, let us do the same. To the author of the letter that delights us most, we would like to send a small spoon for use at her coffee table...and when it tinkles in her saucer, she should remember us and send us a friendly wish; we sincerely believe in this.]

If participation in the discourse of Die Boerevrou thus became symbolic of belonging to a community, this also had specific implications for the subjects of this discourse in a variety of

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When describing a visit to a "Boeren" home, Olive Schreiner also referred to the coffee drinking ritual in great detail.

See Schreiner O, Losse gedachten over Zuid-Afrika, pp108-109.

<sup>17</sup> Die Boerevrou, February 1925, p9.

<sup>18</sup> Die Boerevrou, July 1921, p17.

contexts. It is therefore necessary to have a closer look at the nature of this discursive community.

#### 6.1.4 A magazine as representative of a whole community

Anderson defines a community as a "deep horizontal comradeship".<sup>19</sup> Bozzoli comments on the fact that even and especially in the context of industrialised society the concept of community usually has good connotations: it is thought of as a support base, a place of kinship ties, a source of rest and rejuvenation and an area of cross-class cooperation.<sup>20</sup> Even in contemporary society, also in contemporary South Africa, the concept of "community" retains these idealised connotations. This positive orientation towards community can be understood in the light of Tonnies's analysis of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*<sup>21</sup> and, paradoxically, is indeed a feature of the latter. In the anonymous mass conditions of *Gesellschaft* people long for the intimate bonds of *Gemeinschaft*: in the context of an industrialising and urbanising South Africa, Afrikaners had a need for the (imagined) community of rural Boer society.

The community that the readers of Die Boerevrou imagined probably corresponded to Eugene Marais's notion of his childhood community experience in Pretoria:

Elke mens het elke ander mens intiem geken. Almal is op hulle doopname genoem, of oom of tante so en so. Ons het nooit by 'n huis aangeklop nie. Jy het eenvoudig ingestap en deurgeloopt tot na die kombuis as jy nie voor die tyd een van die huisgenote teenkom nie.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Anderson B, op cit, p13.

<sup>20</sup> Bozzoli B, "Introduction" in Bozzoli B, Class, community and conflict, p5.

<sup>21</sup> See 2.2.

<sup>22</sup> Rousseau L, Die groot verlanse, p6.

A similar description can be found in M E Rothmann's autobiography:

En soos jy is, is jy tot vriend aangeneem. Vriendskap, so op grondeienskappe gebou, was meesal iets blywends, lewenslank, dikwels oorerflik; onse vriendskap met genoemde families was in al die gevalle oorgeerf, en dit het ook also 'n heel besondere band aangeneem, soos ou wyn wat met die jare in gehalte en fynheid toeneem. Ons, kinders, het hierdie mense as 'n soort familie aangeneem, in wie se huise ons sekere voorregte geniet het, soos hulle ook by ons. Dit sal jammer wees as sulke geestesbesittings deur slytasie teen die wereld verlore gaan.

[You were accepted as a friend just the way you were. Friendships were founded upon basic humanity, and they usually lasted for life. Frequently they were even hereditary - all our friendships with the above-mentioned families were indeed hereditary, and it became

[Everyone knew everyone else personally. Everyone was addressed by his or her first name, or as uncle or aunt such and such. We never knocked at a door. You simply walked through to the kitchen, except if you ran into the occupants beforehand.]

Typically this notion of an imagined community takes the form of a small old village, where everyone knows everyone, where people share the same church, the same butcher and the same barber. Apart from being in close physical proximity to each other, such people have many things in common. Because they literally have a lot to do with each other, they get to know and understand each other. People have fixed places and fixed functions in such a community and are very much inter-dependent. They rely on each other to fulfil not only their material needs but also their emotional needs. A community, then, is mainly characterised by the special, close and concrete bonds that exist between community members. Community members are expected to know each other well and to accept and support each other unconditionally. The image of this traditional and rural community corresponds with Tonnies' idea of the pre-industrial community or *Gemeinschaft*.<sup>23</sup>

The fact that this was the image people had of a community, does not mean that these communities ever really existed. It is very difficult to establish to what extent the idea of such communities is anachronistic, ie to what extent they are a projection of modern times. Rousseau, explaining that relationships in old Pretoria were not always as simple and innocent as Marais remembered these to be, refers to the "rooskleurige bril van die tyd" [rose-coloured spectacles of time] through which Marais remembered the old Pretoria.<sup>24</sup> The communities that the women of Die Boerevrou imagined their ancestors to have belonged to might not (and most probably did not - see Chapter three) have actually existed in just this way and form.

Whether this image of community corresponded to reality or not, in modern South Africa the traditional communities (*Gemeinschaft*) were increasingly idealised. In the anonymity of industrialised society or *Gesellschaft*, where people did not have personalised day to day contact with each other, where people did not feel that they belonged or were important, the pre-industrial

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something very special, like good wine that refines and improves with age. We as children accepted these people as some kind of family, in whose homes we had special privileges, like they had in ours. It will be a great loss if these riches of the spirit will wear away in a changing world.]

Rothmann M E, My beskeie deel, p34.

<sup>23</sup> See Tonnies F, Community and society. Gemeinschaft und gesellschaft, pp34 and 35.

<sup>24</sup> Rousseau L, op cit, p6.

community was idealised. This idealisation often took place on an unconscious level; the ideal of community corresponded to very real and deeply felt social needs in the contexts of modern urban and industrial society.

It is then, to this pervasive need for a concrete representation of the traditional ideal of community that the magazine Die Boerevrou responded. The spirit of friendly and loving cooperation, supposed to be typical of the community, was also the bond that Malherbe and her readers imagined to exist between them. Around the imaginary coffee table the women looked at each other's photographs, lived through each other's journeys, gave advice, complained, shared ideas and insights and laughed at each other's jokes. In this way the magazine itself came to be a representative of that sense of community so avidly sought by its readers. This transference was further encouraged by the custom of personalised references to the magazine as *Vroutjie* [little woman] or *Boerevroutjie* [little *boerevrou*], which effectively functioned as a second powerful metaphor, though on a different level from the one of the coffee table. Here, Malherbe and her readers transformed the magazine itself, through the term *Vroutjie*, into a symbol or representative of all the other members of the community. The magazine became a person in her own right and was affectionately referred to as *Vroutjie* or *Boerevroutjie*.<sup>26</sup> In this way Die Boerevrou became a "guest" in the houses of her readers - like a close friend or a family member (sister and mother). She was friendly, accommodating and understanding. She stimulated debate without ever really challenging any fundamental values. She advised and helped without criticising. She inspired, encouraged and

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<sup>26</sup> This idea of the magazine as a real person was very strongly suggested by a letter from Mrs Lenie Boshoff, published in Die Boerevrou of May 1922:

...dat die Boerevroutjie eenmaal aan my gese het: "Waarom skryf jy nie ook eenmaal iets vir ons nie?"

"Maar mij liewe vroutjie," het ek geantwoord, "hoe kan ek nou iets vir so 'n blad skryf as die van jou? Daarvoor is ek mos nie geleerd genoeg nie."

En sij het net liefies geglimlag en gese: "Probeer maar net."

Wel, nou sien ek sij het nie alleen tyd vir moderne skrywers nie, maar ook vir ons, wat net so kan skryf, dat ons harte lekker kan uitpraat om die koffietafel.

[...once the *Boerevroutjie* asked me: "Why don't you write us something for a change?"

"But my dear," I answered, "How can I write for a paper like yours? For that I am too poorly educated."

And she just smiled sweetly and said, "Why don't you just try?"

And now I see that she not merely allows modern writers, but that she also has time for us, who merely write to express the feelings of our hearts around the coffee table.]

supported.<sup>26</sup> "Die Boerevrou laat mens so op jou gemak voel en dit lijk of ons mekaar goed ken," [Die Boerevrou really puts you at ease - it feels as if you've known each other for a long time] Mrs Stiglingh wrote in August 1920.<sup>27</sup> Similar sentiments were expressed by readers in the following years. In October 1920 Mrs L Jacobs wrote:

...ek is so bly dat ek ons liewe Boerevrou ontmoet het en met haar kennis gemaak het, en elke keer as ek haar bij die deur sien inkom is ek blijer...Sij is waarlik soos 'n ou moeder in huis, altijd gereed met rate en wenke wanneer van nodig, onmisbaar vir ons.

[I am so happy to have met our dear *Boerevrou*, and every time I see her enter the door, I am happy again...She really is like an old mother in the house, always ready with advice and tips when we need her - she is really indispensable.]

In August 1922 Mrs P J Vorster writes:

Ons staan so ver hier in die eensame Bosveld by die beeste, in tente. Dit is verder al te eensaam. Ek het net vandag die ou Vroutjie gekry, toe voel ek of ek tussen my moeder en susters is. Toe ek lees die lekker gesels om die koffietafel toe moes ek ook gesels en verbeel ek my ek is by hulle.<sup>28</sup>

[We are very isolated here in the distant Bushveld with the cattle, living in tents. It is very

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<sup>26</sup> The intimate nature of the relationship between readers and magazine, and between readers and readers, is revealed in letters in which readers shared their most personal problems and related the stories of their lives in detail. For example, Emka writes in November 1929:

O, Vroutjie, is dit tog nie bemoedigend nie, om te weet, dat daar orals in ons land ander vrouens en moeders is, wat ook swaar sukkel om hulle mans te help, en hulle kindertjies op te voed. Van u laas van my gehoor het, het ons van woning verander - 'n plaas gekoop, en toe die betaaldag kom, trek die verbandhouer kop-uit, en weier om die geld voor te skiet. Toe moes ons weer die grond teruggee, en dit huur van die nuwe kopers. Maar, ai, wie besef ooit die teleurstelling! - en u kan self dink dat die moeilikhede toe nie maklik te oorkom was nie. Ons had die ou betrekking opgegee, waar my man en ek albei 'n vaste salaris had, ons het skuld gemaak om meubels en gereedskap en dies meer te koop, en daar sit ons, sonder iets.

[Oh, *Vroutjie*, isn't it encouraging to know that all over our country there are other women and mothers who also struggle to help their husbands and to raise their children. Since hearing from me the last time, we moved - we bought a farm, but when he had to pay, the mortgagee backed out of the deal, and refused to lend the money. We had to return the land and rent it from the new buyers. What a disappointment! And you can imagine what difficulties we had to face then. We had already given up our old job, where both my husband and I had received fixed incomes, we plunged ourselves into debt to buy furniture and tools and such, and there we were, without anything.]

Die Boerevrou, November 1929, p31. Another good example is the letter of Mrs A B van Zyl published in Die Boerevrou, November 1929, p33.

<sup>27</sup> Die Boerevrou, August 1920, p15.

<sup>28</sup> Die Boerevrou, August 1922, p13.

lonely. Just today I received the old *Vroutjie*, and I felt as if I were among my mother and sisters again. Reading the wonderful conversation around the coffee table, I felt like joining in, imagining to be there myself.]

The personification of the magazine was so real that when ceased publication in 1931, *Die Huisgenoot* reported the discontinuation under the heading "*Die Boerevrou se heengaan*" [Death of *Die Boerevrou*].<sup>29</sup> Malherbe later recalled how the "demise" of the magazine caused women to write "asof daar sterfte in eie huis gekom het" [as if there was death in the house].<sup>30</sup>

Because the magazine became the concrete representative of all the members of the (ethnic) community, the feelings expressed about the magazine actually expressed the feelings about that idealised community. In September 1921 Mrs C J Roos wrote:

Ek het ons Boerevroutjie hartelik lief, nie alleen om al haar nuttige resepte en wenke nie, maar ook omdat sij in meer as een ding vir ons 'n ligstraal in ons huis is, met al haar gewaardeerde raadgewings vir ons huislike lewe. Want ag! die ou baantjie wat vir 'n vrou afgebaan is, is baie dage maar moeilik en maak mens dan ook baie maal ontevrede met jou lot. Maar as die liewe ou Boervroutjie dan weer kom en sê: Kijk, so moet julle met julle kinders werk en so met julle bediendes, en dit en dat moet julle doen, en so moet julle self wees om julle huise vir julle mans aangenaam en aantreklik te maak - dan het ons weer nuwe moed om die skouer aan die wiel te set en te se: Vooruit!

[I dearly love our *Boerevroutjie*, not merely due to her useful recipes and household tips, but also because, with her valuable advise, she is in more than one respect a ray of light in our home. For oh! the road that is laid out for a woman, is frequently steep, and it is easy to be dissatisfied with one's share in life. But if the dear *Boerevroutjie* comes along again and says, "Listen, this is how you should deal with your children and your servants, and this is what you should do, and this is how you should make yourselves and your homes attractive for your husbands" - then we are inspired to forge ahead with renewed vigour.]

Malherbe reacted to this letter:

So 'n brief egter is nie die prijs van *Die Boerevrou* nie, maar net 'n bewijs van die waarde van ons **vrouens se verkeer met mekaar deur middel van ons blad**. Dit is tog waar, dat as 'n vrou vertel van haar lewe en werk, haar moeilikheid of plesier, daar ver in die veld of waar ook, vind dit 'n weerklank in 'n ander se hart...<sup>31</sup>

[A letter like this is not praise for the *Boerevrou*, but it merely proves the value of the **social interaction our women have through our magazine**. Indeed, if a woman relates her life and work, her joys and troubles, then there will be a heart far away in the lonely fields where her heart will find an echo...] (My emphasis.)

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<sup>29</sup> *Die Huisgenoot*, January 1932, p1.

<sup>30</sup> *Sarie Marais*, 6 Julie 1949, p48.

<sup>31</sup> *Die Boerevrou*, September 1921, p19.

Malherbe clearly indicated that she did not only see a relationship between reader and magazine, but also a relationship between reader and reader through the magazine. The readers shared this view. Mrs S Jerling wrote in May 1923:

As ek sien in Die Boerevrou hoe dat haar intekenaars wyd en syd oor die hele land is, dan kom daar 'n wonderlike liefdegevoel in my op, asof ek hulle almal ken.<sup>32</sup>  
 [When I see how the Boerevrou has subscribers all over the country, then I experience a feeling of wonderful love, as if I know them all.]

The idea of the magazine as representative of a whole community of Afrikaans women and the idea that the very individual ritual of reading the magazine became symbolic of communality, are both examples of how important representation becomes in modern society. Representation enabled the Boerevrou readers to imagine themselves as belonging to a community with a specific ethnic and gender identity.

#### 6.1.5 Dealing with the divisions

While we have so far concentrated on how the construction of a community of *volksmoeders* was articulated and represented certain social needs of Afrikaans women, we will now explore the more overtly nationalist functions that the community was to fulfil. Against the background of very real divisions and differences between Afrikaners, the community of *volksmoeders* was also to fulfil the important function of contributing to the creation of a united Afrikaner nation.

The bond between community members, whether real or imagined implies a shared belief that all members have certain things in common, a common identity. Readers of Die Boerevrou, sharing in the imagined community, were led to believe that as Afrikaans women they were members of the same ethnic group. As such it followed that existing differences or divisions among Afrikaans women were "problems" that had to be overcome, and that ethnic unity was a special responsibility of women. In the discourse of Die Boerevrou we accordingly consistently find that the factors that divided Afrikaans women (eg their class membership, their church affiliation, their political parties) were rendered insignificant. Those differences were ignored, suppressed and denied. Malherbe directly and indirectly tried to eliminate the divisions among her readers. This was accomplished in a variety of ways.

Most basically the unity of all Afrikaans women was postulated simply by addressing her target

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<sup>32</sup> Die Boerevrou, May 1923, p25.

readership as the community of all Afrikaans women, regardless of class, religion, political alignment etc.<sup>33</sup> The discourse of Die Boerevrou proceeds from the assumption that all Afrikaans-speaking women were part of a happy community and that they were not divided into classes, provinces, parties and churches (see Chapter 3). Women living in the remote rural areas, young women working in the cities, school girls, middle class women from the urban areas, the poor unemployed women living in the slum areas in cities, old grandmothers - all of these were addressed **as if** they were members of a community of Afrikaans-speaking women. Effectively this functioned as a powerful discursive means to establish the imagined commonality despite the actual differences and divisions.

A second way of fostering the unity of this ethnic community of Afrikaans women, was by systematically avoiding all potentially divisive issues in the pages of Die Boerevrou. In June 1922 Malherbe directly stated that she avoided publishing anything in Die Boerevrou that could lead to dissatisfaction and discontent:

In die drie jaar van ons bestaan het ons tot dusver alles vermy wat enigsins 'n wanklank in Die Boerevrou sou kon bring. Baie van ons vriende vind die houding nie goed nie, maar na ons deurgelees het wat alreeds ingekom het oor die sake het ons besluit om by ons ou plan te bly. Dit het tot dusver goed gegaan en almal voel ewe vriendelik en blymoedig om die koffietafel, niemand word geprikkel of onaangenaam opgewonde nie.<sup>34</sup>

[In the three years since we began, we have steered clear of everything that could sound a false note in Die Boerevrou. Many of our friends do not approve of this policy, but having read everything that has been written in this regard, we decided to continue our policy. Thus far everything has gone smoothly, and everyone feels happy and content around the coffee table, and no one gets irritated or unduly excited.]

Her readers supported her for similar reasons of building ethnic unity. The editorial quoted above led to the following response from Tootjie Wolmarans in August 1922:

Gistraand sit ek die stukkie om die Koffietafel te lees en terwyl my man en kinders luister, lees ek dat Die Boerevrou alles wil vermy, wat 'n wanklank kan gee. En ons stem almal daarmee in, want daar is genoeg wanklanke tussen ons boere en alles behoort vermy te word, wat onaangenaamheid kan veroorsaak.

[Last night I was reading the contributions to the Coffee table, and while my husband and children listened, I read that Die Boerevrou wants to avoid everything that can sound a false note. And all of us agree, for there is enough discord among our people, and everything should be avoided that could cause any unpleasantness.]

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<sup>33</sup> Whether she reaches them all and whether they in fact ever read Die Boerevrou is another issue.

<sup>34</sup> Die Boerevrou, June 1922, p8.

What were the potentially divisive issues that were avoided? Differences in religious affiliations among Afrikaners was one such issue. Although there were regular religious contributions, the issue of church denomination was never discussed. Party political affiliation was another. Malherbe was a member of the Women's National Party throughout her involvement with Die Boerevrou, but party politics was never reported on and not even the Women's National Party was covered in the magazine. It was interesting that the issue of the suffrage for women was also regarded as an issue that was potentially divisive (see Chapter seven). After women were enfranchised in 1930, Malherbe explained why the issue was never raised in Die Boerevrou:

...want dit was 'n saak waaroor ons baie van mening verskil het en op so 'n saak loop die gemoedere al gou te vol en ons hat altyd gevoel ons het so 'n groot en gewigtige werk om te doen - om die vrou aan die lees en aan die dink te kry - sal ons nou daaraan skuldig wees om 'n twisappel tussen hulle in te gooi? Maar nou is dit anders...<sup>35</sup>  
 [...for this was an issue on which we had a wide range of opinions, and an issue about which people become very excited. Being convinced that we had such a solemn duty - teaching our women to read and to think - would we be guilty of creating a bone of contention? But now it is different...]

Other divisions were confronted more directly but always in an effort to overcome them. There were many references to the "poor white problem" and to less privileged Afrikaans people. Although class divisions and particular class interests were not acknowledged as such, a distinction was made between less privileged and more privileged Afrikaners. In Die Boerevrou it was argued that all the different groups should cooperate: in the *volksmoeder* discourse, as in other nationalist discourses a cross-class ethnic alliance was advocated. As will become clear in subsequent sections, Die Boerevrou emphasised the duty of better-off Afrikaans people to help the less privileged Afrikaners. The women's organisations that had monthly columns in Die Boerevrou also encouraged readers to take the burden of the Afrikaans poor upon them. (See Chapter 4.)

Another set of divisions that was quite directly addressed in Die Boerevrou, were provincial divisions, though again with a view to more cooperation. The issue of provincial strife was mainly addressed by advocating the cooperation and amalgamation of the four Afrikaans women's organisations, the SAVF, the ACVV, the OVV and the NCVV. While Die Boerevrou was the official organ of the SAVF from 1921 onwards, the reports of the OVV were also printed in Die Boerevrou from January 1930. Malherbe argued that by doing this there would be better co-operation between the two provinces.<sup>36</sup> In January 1931 she noted:

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<sup>35</sup> Die Boerevrou, June 1931, p2.

<sup>36</sup> Die Boerevrou, January 1930, p2.

Dit was van die begin af ons ideaal om die mondstuk te wees van die Afrikaanse vroueverenigings van ons land, want ons besef meer en meer dat ons op die manier baie van die provinsiale gevoel sal help wegsmyt en met die tyd sal daardie ware eendrag kom wat ons magtig sal maak.<sup>37</sup>

[Since our inception we strove to be the mouthpiece of the women's organizations in our country, for we became convinced that in such a way we would eventually help people to get rid of those feelings of provincialism, paving the way for real unity to empower us.]

While some of the divisions between the women were ignored and some addressed, the main aim of the narrative of Die Boerevrou was to create a consciousness of a common identity - thus focusing on everything that Afrikaans women had in common.

#### 6.1.5 Conclusion

Die Boerevrou brought individual women (readers and contributors) to think of themselves as *boerevroue*, therefore defining themselves in ethnic and gender terms. Simultaneously, reading Die Boerevrou connected individual readers to other readers and reading Die Boerevrou thus became symbolic of belonging to an "imagined community". A common identity or community was created, a community characterised by its important ethnic and racial boundaries. In the construction of a community of *boerevroue* we thus see a clear fusion of gender and ethnic identities.

#### 6.2 The reproduction of a healthy volk

As we have seen, the *volksmoeder* discourse not only fused gender and ethnic identities but also linked traditional notions of mothering with the concerns of the nationalist movement. In this section it will be argued that one of the reasons why mothering acquired such a central place in the new gender discourse that was constructed from 1918, was a nationalist concern with the growth of the Afrikaner nation. Anthias and Yuval-Davis point out that women are central in any nationalist struggle not only as biological reproducers of members of ethnic collectivities, but also as reproducers of the boundaries of ethnic/national groups.<sup>38</sup>

As mothers Afrikaner women, too, were held responsible for the reproduction of a healthy volk. This included marrying an Afrikaner, bearing Afrikaner children and rearing them to be healthy and

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<sup>37</sup> Die Boerevrou, January 1931, p47.

<sup>38</sup> Anthias F and Yuval-Davis N, "Introduction" in Anthias F and Yuval-Davis N (eds), Women - Nation - State, pp8-9.

educated Afrikaners. We will firstly discuss the Afrikaans women's responsibility to **bear** children for the nation and then the responsibility to **rear** children.

### 6.2.1 The "Transvaal lioness" and the reproduction of the volk

In a nationalist discourse the most basic physical resource of the nation is perceived to be numbers. One can explain this concern with reference to Nairn's notion of a "development war"<sup>39</sup>: a small and numerically declining nation would stand no chance in such a war or struggle. In such a struggle population is regarded to be power, for the babies of the present are the nation's soldiers and workers and thinkers of the future. Therefore one of the reasons why mothering was so closely linked to the national interest was that women were regarded as the key to demographic trends. The belief was that if women could be convinced that mothering was their most important or only role and that their reproductive function belonged to the nation, population growth and thus the future of the nation would be ensured.

Practices of birth control, or their absence, are always a significant indication of a society's attitude to sex and the status of women, but it is under particular conditions that birth control tends to become an issue of public concern. These are closely associated with the process of modernisation, both in so far as technological developments make new forms of birth control available to increasing numbers of people as well as the concomitant emergence of a social morality which permits the separation of sexual intercourse from procreation. This is, of course, closely related to the extent to which women become valued for roles other than those of wives and mothers. The new social morality associated with modernity often conflicts with more traditional religious and social moralities, and it is typically in such contexts that birth control becomes an issue of public concern.<sup>40</sup>

But the process can also work the other way: under modernising conditions, where birth control is an increasing option, women's mothering role may in fact become more rather than less accentuated. In a society where the means of birth control become more readily available but the birth rate is regarded as too low, birth control clearly is a matter of general public concern and women's mothering role may become a political duty. This suggests that the issue of birth control

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<sup>39</sup> See Chapter two.

<sup>40</sup> Greenwood K and King L, "Contraception and abortion" in the Cambridge Women's Studies Group, Women in society. Interdisciplinary essays, pp168-169.

is not only a matter of private sexual morality but is charged with political and demographical significance. Accordingly this suggests that roles incumbent on women in society are not only related to morality or the dynamics of the private sphere of the household but also have a definite political significance.

In Chapter three the concern during the early decades of the 20th century with falling birth rates in the Afrikaner community was briefly discussed (see 3.2.4). One can infer that the dropping birth rate should be ascribed to an increase in the practice of birth control, but few historical studies investigating fertility and birth control exist to substantiate this claim. There is very little information available about contraception and abortion (which was probably one of the main methods of birth control) in the publications of the time. Helen Bradford, in her recent paper on abortion, argues that the fact that white fertility rates at the beginning of the century were rapidly falling and that other reliable contraception was not readily available, indicate that abortion was widely used.<sup>41</sup> By the 1910s the abortion rate became even higher with surgical abortions becoming safer and more available.<sup>42</sup> Just how acceptable abortion became, how much it became "part of the South African way of life",<sup>43</sup> can be deduced from a 1910 editorial of the South African Medical Record:

There are, in all our large towns, and some of our small ones, both women and men (for our profession is by no means free from stain in this connection) whom the police, the

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<sup>41</sup> Bradford, H, Herbs, knives and plastic: 150 years of abortion in South Africa, p6. Similar observations were made about birth control in Victorian and Edwardian England. Priscilla Knight stated that contraceptives were expensive and had a high failure rate, leaving abortion as the only means of birth control. Birth control and abortion were thus less sharply separated than they are today.

Knight P, "Women and abortion in Victorian and Edwardian England", History workshop. A journal of socialist historians, Issue 4, Autumn 1977, p58.

<sup>42</sup> Bradford states that around the turn of the century a new chapter opened in the story of abortion: "If the story began with herbs and black doctors, and continued with pills and white storekeepers, the new chapter opened with surgery and white doctors." Bradford H, op cit, pp5 and 6.

In 1917 various articles supporting legislation against contraception appeared in The South African Medical Record. An editorial stated that the use of contraceptives "by anyone is harmful to the community, because it restricts the production of children, and does so most especially amongst the best breeding stock". "Traffic in contraceptives", South African Medical Record, Volume 15 Number 2, 27 January 1917, pp17-18 and "Legislation against contraceptives", South African Medical Record, Volume 15, Number 6, 24 March 1917, pp81-83.

<sup>43</sup> ibid, p1.

medical profession and hundreds of other people, know are "doing a roaring trade" in abortion...The whole thing is as well known as if the parties advertised in the public press...the police officials make no secret whatever of the fact of six names of medical practitioners being on their books as regularly carrying on this unlawful trade, to say nothing about a much larger number of midwives...**we may also say that most women also know those names just as well as they know those of their drapers and milliners.**<sup>44</sup> (My emphasis.)

In the *volksmoeder* discourse the concern about birth control was supposedly based on traditional moral and Calvinist attitudes towards sex. However, on closer examination of Afrikaner ideologues' strict condemnations of birth control, it becomes clear that the rejection of birth control indeed (also) had a political basis, and was closely linked with the project of Afrikaner nationalism.

The notion that fertility meant political power already surfaced in the South African War. Kitchener bitterly complained about the uncivilised "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'". He said that she "is a type of savage produced by generations of wild lonely life".<sup>45</sup>

Totius, in his 1913 collection of poems entitled *Rachel*, significantly did not only picture the Afrikaans woman as mother, but as the mother of many:

O skone beeld van boerevrou  
met kinders letterlik oordek:  
een op die arm, een vasgehou  
en een wat aan die rok loop trek.<sup>46</sup>  
[Oh beautiful image of *boerevrou*  
literally covered with children:  
one on your arm, another at your hand  
and one pulling on the dress.]

He condemned women that remained childless:

Vervloek is die glanslose ster!  
Vervloek is die vislose see  
Vervloek is die bron, wat g'n water uit wel

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<sup>44</sup> South African Medical Record, 22 October 1910, Volume 8 Number 20, p1.

<sup>45</sup> Quoted by Spies S B, "Women and the war" in Warwick P (ed), The South African War, p174.

<sup>46</sup> Totius, Rachel (seventh revised edition, 1950), p70.

Vervloek is die boom waar g'n knoppe aan swel!<sup>47</sup>  
 [Cursed be lacklustre stars!  
 Cursed be a fishless see  
 Cursed be a source whence water does not pour  
 Cursed be a tree where blossoms can't be seen!]

In his poetry he suggested that the Afrikaner woman, as reproducer of the *volk*, guaranteed a new future for the *volk*:<sup>48</sup>

O onverwinbre moederskoot!  
 Geblakerd deur die oorlogsvlam,  
 maar al weer spruit 'n nuwe loot  
 uit onverdelgbre lewensstam!<sup>49</sup>

Jou stryd is seker, groot jou loon!  
 Jou stille daad is streng gedug.  
 Ons wye land word weer bewoon  
 Die land is vol kindergerug!<sup>60</sup>  
 [Oh, womb invincible!  
 singed by flames of war,  
 Whence life will ever spring anew  
 where life is indestructible!

Certain is your victory, large your reward  
 Your silent deed is important  
 Our empty land is inhabited again  
 The land is filled with children's voices!]

As discussed in Chapter three, the strongest and most pronounced positions against birth control in Afrikaner nationalist discourse were formulated in the 1930s, but these were prepared by earlier pronouncements. Postma already wrote against birth control in 1919. A regular contributor to the religious columns of Die Boerevrou<sup>61</sup>, the Rev Du Plessis, also brought up the issue before 1930. Although both ministers justified their stand against birth control by referring to God, nature and even tradition, it is clear that they also saw fertility as a "weapon" in the nationalist struggle.

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<sup>47</sup> Totius, Rachel (first edition, 1913), p85. This poem does not appear in later editions of the collection.

<sup>48</sup> De Villiers I L, Die siening van die vrou in die poesie van Totius en D J Opperman met verwysing na Elizabeth Eybers, p20.

<sup>49</sup> Totius, Rachel (first edition, 1913), p81.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, p20.

<sup>61</sup> Except for this one article, the topic was never again brought up in Die Boerevrou.

Postma quotes Kuyper as saying:

Misskien kan Engeland die manne ontwapen, nooit kan hij die vrugbaarheid van die Boervrouw verwoes nie. Dank sij die vrugbaarheid is die Boere in een eeuw gestijg van 60 000 siele tot 500 000. In die komende eeuw sal hulle groei tot drie, vier, vijf miljoen - en dan is Suid-Afrika hulle s'n...Solang die Transvaalse leeuwin (die boervrouw), tussen haar welpes (kinders) Engeland aanbrul van die Drakensberge, so lang sal die Boere nie vir goed te onderwerpe wees nie.<sup>52</sup>

[Britain might disarm the men, but the fertility of the Boer women it cannot destroy. Due to their fertility the Boer population increased within one century from 60 000 to 500 000 souls. In the coming century they will grow to three, four, five million, and then South Africa will belong to them...As long as the Transvaal lioness (Boer woman) surrounded by her cubs (children), roars from the Drakensberg against the British, the Boers will never be subjected.]

Characteristically Postma depicted the desire and courage to have big families as an established Afrikaner tradition, though of particular significance to the prospects of the nation under modern conditions:

Groot huisgesinne was en is onder Afrikaners nog altijd reel. 'n Kroos van ses tot 16 kinders is niks ongewoons nie, selfs in onse dage. Die sonde van kinderbepanking is onder ons nog maar net beperk tot die sogenaamde "beskaafde", maar in waarheid gedemoraliseerde Afrikaners. Daar is ook wel klein gesinne, maar in verreweg die meeste gevalle is dit 'n beperking Gods, tot naamlose smart van die wat dit moet ondergaan. Die begeerte, die moed om 'n talrijke kroos te hê is daar nog altijd aanwesig...Solank dit so blij sal ons bewaar worde van die gruwel van beesagtigheid, van kindermoord, van nasionale selfmoord, waaroor selfs Amerika...met die Europese volke al begin klaag.<sup>53</sup>

[Large families have always been the rule among Afrikaners. Six to sixteen children haven't been exceptional, not even in our own day. The sin of limiting children has been restricted to the so-called "civilised", or rather demoralised Afrikaners. Sometimes there are small families, but that would be regarded as a disability imposed by God, the cause of unspeakable pain for those who had to bear it. The desire, the courage to have numerous offspring has always been there...As long as this is our custom, we shall be saved from the abomination of bestiality, infanticide and national suicide - things about which even America along with the European nations are beginning to complain.]

The reference here to birth control as a sin and as child murder and bestiality seems to indicate that Postma's objection to birth control was based on religious and moral grounds. In the same sentence, however, he also described birth control as national suicide - clearly indicating a more political concern.

Postma gave another reason for opposing birth control: he said that the more children a woman had the healthier she was. According to him there were two reasons why people were in favour of contraception. Firstly, they practice birth control in disregard of the Bible and secondly they

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<sup>52</sup> Quoted by Postma W, Die Boervrouw - Moeder van haar volk, p160.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, pp157-158.

follow "die gewetenlose, anti-kristelike raad van sekere geneeshere op sogenaamde wetenskaplike gronde" [the unscrupulous, anti-Christian counsel of certain physicians on so-called scientific grounds].<sup>54</sup> But according to Postma his experience in this regard had taught him that many weak women had been saved by having had a child. He continues:

En die feit staat als 'n paal bo water, dat kinderloosheid bijna altijd 'n vaste teken van ongesondheid of abnormaliteit is. Onse ongetrouwde dames is nie altijd die gesondste nie...Wat nog erger is, alle middels of planne, wat aangewend worde om die natuur te bedrieg, werk uiteindelik groter verwoesting aan siel en liggaam als ooit die uitvoering van Gods wil...<sup>55</sup>

[And the fact is undisputed - childlessness is almost always a certain sign of ill health or abnormality. Our unmarried ladies are not always the epitome of good health...The situation is even worse, because plans and treatments, designed to deceive nature, eventually cause more havoc to body and soul than obeying the will of God can ever do...]

Even for the women of 1918 this argument could hardly have been persuasive: child birth was considered to be highly dangerous, as the number of women who died during or after child birth was very high.

Du Plessis' religious article against birth control showed similar traces of a political concern. He asserted that child birth is woman's punishment for Eve's sin and that a woman had two options when it came to motherhood: the sinful way of having no children or only one or two and the good way of accepting the consequences of sin and to have as many children as possible.<sup>56</sup> Although Du Plessis warned women about choosing the sinful option and thus created the impression that his concern was religious, he showed an even graver concern for what he called "die ondergang van die volk" [the downfall of a volk] or "die dood van 'n volk" [the death of a volk] - a political and demographic concern rather than a moral one. In the South African context, moreover downfall of the *volk* was synonymous with domination by blacks: "In Suid-Afrika sal dit beteken die oorheersing van die swarte ras." [In South Africa that wil mean domination by the black race.]<sup>57</sup>

One of the more interesting differences between the discourse around birth control in South Africa and the nationalist discourse around birth control elsewhere in the world at this time, was that

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid, p158.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, p159.

<sup>56</sup> Die Boerevrou, October 1922, p5.

<sup>57</sup> Loc cit.

while it seemed that birth control continued to be discussed within a religious framework in South Africa, the nationalist discussions elsewhere were much more frank. Incentives for "breeding" were openly offered and it was clearly stated that a higher birth rate would be to the advantage of the nation or the country. Within Afrikaner nationalism, birth control was treated as if it was a religious, moral or even humanitarian issue, with political and demographic factors relatively underplayed.

The political and demographic arguments, when they were used, were premised on the proposition that mothering was a public duty. A mother was also mother of the nation, and the reproductive function of the woman belonged to the nation. It was not her decision whether she wanted to have a baby. Because she was mother of the nation, the nation should have the final say about reproduction.

A most significant feature of the discourse about contraception was that here there seemed to have indeed been an absence of Afrikaans female voices.<sup>58</sup> The topic was never raised by women in Die Boerevrou, not even in the intimate sphere of the coffeetable. It has been part of our argument throughout this thesis that Afrikaans women also contributed to the construction of a new gender discourse which granted mothering a central place, but it is relevant that women themselves were very silent when it came to the issue of big families and contraception. Although the view that women should primarily be mothers was seldom, if ever, challenged at this time, Afrikaans women themselves seldom called for big families.

There are many probable reasons for this silence. Contraception, like sex and sexuality, was probably regarded as a too intimate topic for women to discuss publicly. Also, because it was a controversial topic, Malherbe might have decided not to publish letters on the topic - she did, however, publish Du Plessis's views. The fact is that Afrikaner women kept quiet about these matters but had fewer and fewer children.<sup>59</sup> The emergent norm of smaller families becomes

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<sup>58</sup> It would be very interesting to study Afrikaner women's organisations' views on contraception. Should no views have been expressed, the study would be even more significant.

<sup>59</sup> A quick glance at the lives of some of the high profile middle class women reveals that they certainly did not have "big" families. Mabel Malherbe had two children. Margaretha Ackerman (SAVF) married in 1909 and had two children. Married in 1899, Susanna Broers (SAVF) had one child. Elsie van Broekhuizen (Women's NP and Bond van Afrikaanse moeders) married in 1904 and had four children. M E Rothmann had two children. This trend to have fewer children was not limited to the middle class. Brink found that there was a definite trend amongst the garment workers of the twenties and thirties to have smaller families. She says that most of them were

apparent in this extract from Lea Rompel-Koopman's 1916 interview with Mrs Genl Joubert (Rompel-Koopman was in her late thirties, while Joubert was almost 90):

"Hoeveel kinders hebt U gehad?"

"Net tien," zei Mev Joubert, leutig verkleinerend, "net maar tien."

"Tien kinderen," overpeinsde ik in moderne verwendheid van kleine gezinnen."<sup>60</sup>

["How many children did you have?"

"Only ten", said Mrs Joubert, disparagingly, " only ten."

"Ten children", I mused, spoilt by the smaller size of modern families.]

In 1931 (the year of the folding of Die Boerevrou) Malherbe for the first time expressed her opinion about this issue. Her opinions clearly confirm the tension that existed between the nationalist discourse as articulated by men such as Postma and Totius and the interests of women themselves. With this opinion, she explicitly expressed that which the silences in Die Boerevrou had thus far only suggested. She wrote:

Die eintlike eerste roeping van die vrou om die toekomstige geslagte te baar is nou nie meer op die voorgrond soos voorheen nie. Waar daar 50 jaar gelede in 'n buurt 'n blye opskudding was oor die geboorte van 'n babetjie, is daar helaas nou maar al te dikwels 'n beswaarde gemoed, 'n heimlike vrees of die arme bondeltjie die felle stryd van die lewe nie baie moeilik sal vind nie, of die arme jongmense nie alreeds mekaar verdring in hulle soms wanhopige worsteling om 'n bestaan nie. Dit alles bring mee dat daardie eerste roeping van 'n vrou nie soseer meer op die voorgrond pryk nie - jammer genoeg!...Die tyd kan meebring dat 'n groot famielie nie meer 'n onvervalste seen is nie..<sup>61</sup>

[The proper and primary vocation of a woman to give birth to future generations, is no longer as prominent as it used to be. Fifty years ago the birth of a baby caused a happy commotion in a neighbourhood. Now, alas, the event is often acknowledged with a heavy heart and a secret fear for the poor little bundle who may not survive the harsh struggle for existence, considering the desperate struggle for survival which our young people have to face. Due to all these, that primary vocation of a woman is not as prominent any more - a real loss!...Under these new circumstances large families may not always be a blessing any more...]

Malherbe did not deny that there was a time when the birth of every baby had been a happy event, but stated that in modern times a new baby cannot be welcomed unconditionally - she is thus indirectly questioning the assumption that population is power.

If it is possible to deduce (from the falling birth rates and women's silence in the call for big families) that women were uncomfortable with this aspect of the *volksmoeder* discourse, the

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born into large families with between ten and 12 children, but they themselves had between one and three children.

Brink E, The Afrikaner workers of the Garment Worker's Union, 1918-1939, p85.

Once again it is clear that this topic warrants an independent study.

<sup>60</sup> Rompel-Koopman L, Wat Mev Genl Joubert vertel, p37.

<sup>61</sup> Malherbe M, "Die Afrikaner-vrou" in Oost H (ed), Ons land en ons volk, p30.

deduction supports the claim that women also shaped the discourse and ultimately their own lives. They were not simply the passive victims of a male Afrikaner nationalism. This suggestion will be further explored in Chapter seven.

It should be noted that questioning the desirability of big families and the claim that women's main function is to bear children, is not equivalent to rejecting the mothering role (which also includes the rearing of children) for women. As we will see in the next section, Malherbe, especially in her capacity as the editor of Die Boerevrou, always stressed the importance of mothering and informed mothering. Within the *volksmoeder* discourse Malherbe's emphasis was more on the reproduction of a healthy volk, than on the reproduction of a numerous volk.

### 6.2.2 Informed mothering for a healthy volk

In any nationalist project the leaders (usually the petty bourgeoisie or intellectuals) are primarily concerned with the future of the nation - they thus encourage reproduction, and implicitly mothering. A numerous people, however, is not all they advocate: the people also have to be healthy and educated to be valuable assets to the nation. From a nationalist perspective it does not help if the population is numerous, but sick and illiterate and uneducated. In the context of modernisation and the "development war" mere reproduction of the people is not sufficient. In this context child care become extremely important.

In Chapter three it has been indicated that by 1918 the issues of health, education and literacy were regarded with increasing concern in Afrikaner circles (see 3.2.5 and 3.2.7). In South Africa, as in other modernising countries at the time, full-time and informed mothering for women was encouraged to solve the problem of child care (ie the special role and responsibility of woman in the provision of a healthy environment for the child, a nutritious diet and supervision over his/her education). Anna Davin, explains this attitude in England at the same time as follows:

Middle-class convention of the time took for granted that the proper context of childhood was family, and the person most responsible the mother. So if the survival of the infants and the health of children was in question, it must be the fault of the mother, and if the nation needed healthy future citizens (and soldiers and workers) then mothers must improve.<sup>62</sup>

This view also corresponds with Hitler's views on child care in the context of Nazi-Germany. In Mein Kampf he wrote:

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<sup>62</sup> Davin A, op cit, p12.

The work of care and education must begin with the young mother. Just as it became possible in the course of careful work over a period of decades to achieve antiseptic cleanliness in childbirth and reduce puerperal fever to a few cases, it must and will be possible, by a thorough training of nurses and mothers, to achieve a treatment of the child in his first years that will serve as an excellent basis for future development.<sup>63</sup>

In the *volksmoeder* discourse, too, mothering and child care were regarded as a matter of national survival and the special responsibilities of women. The woman as mother was responsible for applying "to their uses the supplies provided by the father, such as food, clothing, and money, and to manage the house according to the needs of the family" and "bear children and care for them during infancy",<sup>64</sup> therefore she was the one who was in control of hygiene and health, of nutrition and sanitation. She was also responsible for the education and literacy of her children.

In the context of a modernising South Africa, like in other modernising countries, this focus on the mothering role for women was coupled with a heavy emphasis on informed mothering. The assumption was that informed mothering would result in educated healthy children and in a generation that would be able to confront the problem of poor whites. If women as mothers were better informed about these issues, it was argued, conditions would improve. More directly related to the poor white problem, it was argued that if the mother as main consumer was thrifty and frugal, the household would save a lot of money. Paradoxically then, the more traditional and conservative emphasis on the mothering role for women was accompanied by what might seem to be a progressive call for the education of women. Jayawardeena describes the ambiguous consequences of modernisation in a nationalist context as follows: "'Modernity' meant educated women, but educated to uphold the system of the nuclear patriarchal family"<sup>65</sup> and "...as nationalist reformers took over, education also became a conservative influence; it began to hark back to traditional ideals to emphasise the role of women as wives and mothers".<sup>66</sup> In the *volksmoeder* discourse, women then did not only have to be persuaded to be mothers, they also had to be convinced that mothering is a job that required training and knowledge, thinking and planning.

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<sup>63</sup> Quoted by Koonz C, Mothers in the fatherland, p56.

<sup>64</sup> Rothmann M E, "The mother and daughter in the poor family", The poor white problem in South Africa. Report of the Carnegie Commission. Part 5. Sociological report, p172.

<sup>65</sup> Jayawardeena K, Feminism and nationalism in the third world, pp16-17.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid, p19.

The concept of the *volksmoeder*, as honorary title of women, emphasised that Afrikaner mothering was not a private role, but a public responsibility with social relevance. Therefore it was not a private decision whether to become mothers, it was a service that the *volk* could demand of its women. But at the same time such mothering, in the progressive interests of the nation, had to be **informed** mothering and could not be assumed to be a natural or instinctive role; only then would it be possible to nurture and educate a healthy nation under modern conditions.

In the first editorial of Die Boerevrou Malherbe made the connection between the well-being of the nation and informed mothering. She said that if Afrikaner women would realise that their vocations as mothers and wives require knowledge, education and much planning and thought, the nation would benefit.<sup>67</sup>

Malherbe worked with a simple rationalist dictum: if you know what you should do, you will do it. She thus embarked on an ambitious education project for women: education about health; education about the importance of education, literacy and skills; and education about living in a modern industrial society.

From a feminist perspective her education project was conservative in that she did not call for a general education of women, but rather an education specifically preparing women for the mothering role and therefore training them in health and domestic sciences. Her concern with the education of women was mainly based on the rationale that this type of education would be beneficial for the nation. Her expressed concern was not so much for women as such, but rather with the rearing of children -the next generation of Afrikaners. Mothering (the rearing of children) came to be regarded as an important practical aspect, perhaps the most important aspect, of solving the socio-economic crisis that the Afrikaners were in.

In Die Boerevrou's education project, Malherbe pre-empted the Carnegie Commission of Inquiry who, thirteen years later, would introduce and develop the concept of adult education. In Part 5(a) of the report of the Carnegie Commission, The poor white and society, Albertyn and his collaborators mentioned "a national system of adult education" as one of the ways in which poor whites could be rehabilitated. This adult education, they said, should have two sides:

\* Firstly, the more privileged people should be made aware of the plight of the less privileged

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<sup>67</sup> Die Boerevrou, March 1919, p2. The first editorial is quoted in full in Chapter four.

and their duties towards those people; and

- \* the poor should be educated in virtues like thrift, self-help, moderation, respect for their race, and co-operation". It was stressed that the **mothers and daughters** (sic: not the women!) should receive special attention and should be instructed in such matters as house-keeping, hygiene, health, nursing and home-training.<sup>68</sup>

In this section we will discuss the three main aspects of Malherbe's education project in the pages of Die Boerevrou which in important ways anticipated these later notions.

#### 6.2.2.1 Educating mothers

Malherbe constantly reiterated the importance of informed mothering as long as Die Boerevrou was in existence. Mothering was serious work, she said again and again, and mothers should read about it and think about it:

Die Boerevrou is 'n egte vroueblad, dit doen 'n poging om die Afrikaanse moeder te help om haar huishouding, haar opvoeding van die kinders, die maak van haar klere op die beste manier te verrig. Ons gee ook stukke wat meer letterkundig is, omdat ons reken dat op die manier miskien een of ander vrou of meisie meer leeslus sal krij en ook 'n ruimer blik en so **langsamerhand gaan besef dat die daaglikse, gewone werkies ook nadenking vereis.**<sup>69</sup>

[Die Boerevrou is a true women's magazine. It attempts to help the Afrikaans mother with her household, the education of her children and to make her clothes in the best way. We also publish articles which are more literary because we think that in this way a woman or girl will maybe feel like reading and become more broad-minded and will slowly realise that the daily, normal tasks also require reflection.]

Two aspects of mothering were consistently mentioned: a child should have a healthy body which meant that mothers should attend to nutrition, health and sanitation and a child should have a healthy mind which meant that mothers should concentrate on the education of their children. Both these points were made quite clearly in the editorial of the 1927 birthday issue of Die Boerevrou:

Een van ons groot ideale was dat die Afrikaanse vrou sou besef dat haar roeping as moeder

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<sup>68</sup> Albertyn J F, The poor white problem in South Africa. Report of the Carnegie Commission. Part 5 (a). Sociological report. The poor white in society, p45. See also Malherbe E G, The poor white problem in South Africa. Report of the Carnegie Commission. Part 3. Educational report: Education and the poor white, p354.

<sup>69</sup> Die Boerevrou, November 1920, p2.

en vrou wel deeglik eis dat sy self dink en lees. Want, as die vrou haar huis met kennis regeer, - kennis van gesondheidsleer en huishoudkunde, en by die kinders 'n gevoel kan inwortel van die waarde van, op iedere gebied, met vaste kennis te werk te gaan, en niks op goed geluk of toeval te laat nie, sal die kinders dit seker baie ver bring en groot dinge vir land en volk doen.<sup>70</sup>

[One of our great ideals was that the Afrikaans woman would realize that her vocation as mother and woman requires of her that she manages her house with knowledge - knowledge of health and domestic science. She has to be able to install in her children a sense of the value of knowledge in every sphere, and to leave nothing to chance or good fortune, the children will certainly achieve much and do great things for country and *volk*.]

This view found regular support among the readers of Die Boerevrou. An example of such a supportive letter was the following one. It was anonymous and appeared under the title "Die Afrikaanse moeder" [The Afrikaans mother] in the column *Om die koffietafel* of May 1921:

Onwillekeurig het ons gedagte gedwaal naar die verloofde Afrikaanse meisie en toekomstige Afrikaanse moeder, bij wie nog al te veel die opvatting heers dat sij voor alles in die lewe onderrig kan en moet ontvang, behalwe vir haar hoogste en mooiste, maar moeilikste roeping, nl. die van moeder. Daar denk nog so baie van ons nog dat die moeder-instink voldoende is, en ons plaas onself op gelijke voet met die onredelike dier, wat deur die Skepper die instink in plaas van verstand ontvang het. Ons weet almal hoe dikwels 'n jong moeder, met haar moeder-instink, radeloos sit as haar kindjie siek word; sij weet in die meeste gevalle nie eens hoe om deur goeie verpleging van haar skatjie te verlig nie...Hoeveel maal moet die dokter nie ingeroep word omdat die kind verkeerd gevoed word, maar al hierdie foute weeg nog niks teen die foute en misslage wat daar gemaak word met die opvoeding van die kind nie.<sup>71</sup>

[Involuntarily our thoughts strayed to the engaged Afrikaans girl and future Afrikaans mother, in whom the idea still prevails that she can and should receive training for almost everything in life except for her highest and most difficult vocation, namely that of mother. So many of us still think that the maternal instinct is sufficient, and we place ourselves on the same level as the unreasonable animal, which received instinct instead of a mind from the Creator. We all know how often a young mother, with her maternal instinct, is at her wit's end when her child falls ill. In most cases she does not even know how to care for her dearest through proper nursing...How many times must the doctor not be summoned because the child was improperly fed, but all these mistakes do not weigh up against the mistakes which are made in the education of a child.]

Not only was the importance of training for mothers regularly stated and emphasised in Die Boerevrou, but articles about the topics of health, education, nutrition etc were published on a regular basis. The language used in the articles was usually simple so as to make it accessible to

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<sup>70</sup> Die Boerevrou, January 1927, p2.

<sup>71</sup> Die Boerevrou, May 1921, pp5-6.

the readers.<sup>72</sup>

In May 1924 Die Boerevrou embarked on a special project with the goal of training women for their mothering tasks. To justify the need for child and infant care, Malherbe quotes the infant mortality rate of the Union as being 80, and compares it with the rate of 47 in New-Zealand.<sup>73</sup>

The relevance this has for the nation and for women, she explains as follows:

Die toekoms van ons volk berus by die moeders. As ons kinders liggaamlik sterk en gesond is en fris en natuurlik groei in ons heerlike sonnige land, sal dit seer seker verbasend veel doen om land en volk vooruit te help...Dit is deur gebrek aan kennis dat ons volk liggaamlik agteruit gaan...Sal ons saamspan om die groot volkswerk te doen? Ongetwyfeld sal ons dit ver bring as dit ons erns is met die saak... Kom laat ons saamspan om siektes te voorkom, om kennis te versprei, sodat ons jong volkie gesond en lewenslustig die wereld ingaan. Ons doen sonder skroom 'n beroep op al die vrouens van ons land om ons te help en kragtig te ondersteun, want dit is volkswerk wat ons wil doen, wat baie verreikend sal kan wees as dit deeglik gedoen word.<sup>74</sup>

[The future of our *volk* is the hands of the mothers. If our children are physically strong and healthy, and grow up in a robust and natural way in our lovely, sunny country, it will surely do surprisingly much to help our country and *volk* going forward...It is through a lack of knowledge that our *volk* deteriorates physically...Will we stand together to accomplish the mission of the *volk*? Undoubtedly we will achieve much if it is our earnest endeavour...Come let us unite to prevent illness, do disseminate knowledge, so that our young *volk* can go into the world healthy and full of life. Without diffidence we call on all the women of our country to help and support us because it is the mission of the *volk* we want to accomplish. This could be far-reaching if it is done thoroughly.]

Malherbe was in fact describing the health and educational aspects of the poor white problem. She presented the Afrikaner woman, in her role as mother, as a crucial link in solving this problem. Being a good mother was to do "volkswerk" [work for the nation].

As part of this project a monthly column *Dienende liefde* [Serving love] was introduced in 1924. *Dienende liefde* deals with the topics of child care, home nursing and health. The editor said that Miss Marga Gutter, who studied child care in Holland, would be responsible for this section of Die

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<sup>72</sup> A good example is the article "Hoekom huil Bybie" [Why is baby crying?] in Die Boerevrou, February 1924, p54. The sub-headings in the article were "Hoekom bybie opbring" [Why is baby vomiting?] and "Hoekom het bybie winde?" [Why does baby have winds?].

<sup>73</sup> This figure quoted by Malherbe roughly corresponds with the official figures of the same time. See Official yearbook of the Union and of Basutoland, Bechuanaland Protectorate and Swaziland. Number 9. 1927-1927, pp930-931 and Offisiele jaarboek van die Unie en van Basoetoland, Betsjoeanaland-protektoraat en Swaziland. Nommer 14. 1931-1932, pp887-889.

<sup>74</sup> Die Boerevrou, May 1924, pp4-5.

Boerevrou and that the articles will be checked by Dr Betsie Goddefroy, gynaecologist and pediatrician from Pretoria. A wide variety of articles followed under the heading "Dienende liefde". Examples of articles are: "Ondersoek van die geestelike aanleg by kinders" [Investigation into the spiritual aptitudes of children] (June 1924), "Voedingsleer" [Nutrition] (November 1924) and "Tuisverpleging" [Home nursing] (May 1924). The editor also announced that a traveling coordinator would be appointed. This person would travel through the whole country, conducting lectures on the topics. The position was later filled by Miss Gutter.

By taking on these projects Malherbe no doubt did pioneering work in this field. In Die Boerevrou-boek Malherbe humbly noted in a footnote that she thought Die Boerevrou was, in organising and coordinating this project, a pioneer in this field in the Transvaal.<sup>76</sup>

In justifying the project, Malherbe quoted statistics, local experts in the field and also international developments - indications that she was well-informed and took the project seriously. She wrote how British experts claim that infant deaths in England decreased as a result of informed child care. Women in England, she said, were educated through cheap pamphlets, lectures and clinics.<sup>76</sup> This corresponds very much with Davin's description of what was happening in England at this time. Davin describes the enormous effort that was put into advice and instruction on motherhood and mentions four methods of instruction and advice: (a) leaflets on infant management handed out to mothers; (b) lectures to mothers; (c) infant consultations; and (d) lady health visitors.<sup>77</sup>

Not surprisingly, Malherbe's methods corresponded with those in England. It is also interesting to note that two of Davin's observations concerning motherhood in England can also be made about Die Boerevrou's project, in so far as "it was maternal ignorance that was blamed, not paternal"<sup>78</sup> and "not only is all instruction and responsibility relevant only to girls, but it was assumed that the babies were male"<sup>79</sup>. In an article by Sylvia Moerdyk, "Kinderopvoeding" [Child education] (part of the monthly column *Dienende liefde*), she wrote about the role of the father and very clearly

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<sup>76</sup> Malherbe M, Die Boerevrou-boek, p37.

<sup>76</sup> Die Boerevrou, May 1924, p4.

<sup>77</sup> Davin A, op cit, pp36-37.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid, p24.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid, p26.

emphasised the education of the boy:

Besef iedere moeder die verantwoordelikheid wat op haar rus? Ek se "moeder" en nie "ouers" nie omdat dit byna uitsluitend die taak van die moeder is, om die karakter en gesondheidsfondament te le, gedurende die eerste jare van 'n kind se lewe. En dis hierdie jare wat tel. As die fondament nie vas en sterk le nie, sal die grootste moeite van skoolmeester of professor of wie dan al, nie 'n edele karakter vorm nie, en geen dokter in die wereld 'n gesonde liggaam skep nie.<sup>80</sup>

[Does every mother realize the responsibility which rests on her? I say "mother" and not "parents" because it is almost solely the task of the mother to lay the foundations of character and health during the first years of a child's life. And these are the crucial years. If these foundations are firm and solid, not even the most devoted school teacher or professor or whoever else will form a noble character, and no physician in this world will create a healthy body.] (My emphasis)

Om kinders goed op te voed is die moeilikste taak wat van 'n vrou geeis word, 'n taak wat tegelykertyd 'n groot voorreg is. 'n Menselewe is aan die sorg toevertrou. Geen goeie werk gaan onbeloon nie. Haar seuns sal wereldberoemd word<sup>81</sup> en haar dogters sal gewys word as voorbeelde van alles wat edel en goed is. Daarin sal die beloning le vir al haar arbeid en opoffering.<sup>82</sup>

[To educate her children well is the most difficult task which a mother must face, a task which, also, is a great privilege. A human life is entrusted to her care. No good work goes unrewarded. Her sons will become world famous and her daughters will be shown as examples of all that is noble and good. That will be her reward for years of labour and sacrifice.] (My emphasis.)

A speech by Mrs Jan F E Ciliers, entitled "Wat die ontwikkeling van die vrou vir die maatskappy beteken" [What the development of the women means to society], was quoted in full in Die Boerevrou of March 1927. She encouraged women to educate themselves, to be interested in the

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<sup>80</sup> Die Boerevrou, January 1924, p13.

<sup>81</sup> The assumption that the education of the boy was more important than the education of the girl was even more apparent in a later article of Sylvia Moerdijk:

'n Groot gees, 'n leier, 'n hervormer, 'n genie, dis nie toevallig nie. Agter iedere groot man is daar 'n vrou, wat gedink en gesorg het, sy moeder meestal, soms 'n suster, 'n tante, of 'n vriendin, maar altyd 'n vrou...met edele karakter en diepvoelende gemoed. 'n Moeder het die beste geleentheid, sy kry die eerste kans om haar seuntjie 'n man te maak, waarop sy volk sal trots wees.

[A man of significance, a leader, a reformer, a genius - they don't happen by chance. Behind every man there is always a woman, who cared and who thought. Frequently it is his mother, sometimes a sister, an aunt, a friend, but always a woman...with noble character and sensitive soul. A mother has the best opportunity, she has the first chance to mould her little son into a man of whom his people can be proud.]

Die Boerevrou, August 1925, p41.

<sup>82</sup> Die Boerevrou, January 1925, p14.

issues of the day and to read a lot because "die toekoms van jong Suid-Afrika is in die hande van die vrou en moeder, en as ons nie 'n ernstige lewensopvatting het nie, dan sal ons nooit manne met hoe ideale, manne soos 'n President Kruger, 'n President Steyn, 'n Jan Hendrik Hofmeyr vir die volk oplewer nie" [the future of young South Africa is in the hands of the woman and mother, and if we do not have a serious view of life we will never produce men with high ideals for the *volk*- men like a President Kruger, a President Steyn, a Jan Hendrik Hofmeyr].<sup>83</sup> (My emphasis.)

The lead given by Malherbe and her contributors was taken up by her readers. The July 1924 issue *Om die koffietafel* consisted of letters praising the informed mothering education project. A few readers suggested that booklets in Afrikaans on these topics should also be distributed as women in the rural areas ("juis die klas wat dit so nodig het"/precisely the class that needs it)<sup>84</sup> would not be able to attend lectures in towns. Readers reiterated the point that the editor made with the announcement of the project: "As die moeders gered is sal die volk gered wees." [Save the mothers, and you save the *volk*.]<sup>85</sup> (Mrs Cecilia Roos)

One of the more consistent topics throughout the existence of Die Boerevrou was thrift, saving money and the avoidance of waste in administering family resources. The editor endlessly stressed the importance of the individual mother's responsibility in this regard and links the "shrewd and careful management of the family budget"<sup>86</sup> to the improvement of the national economy. Again the simple task of the mother was given national importance.

#### 4.2.2.2 Specialised education for girls

Die Boerevrou's efforts at education was, however, not only aimed at adults. A very conscious effort was made to convince mothers, daughters and education departments of the importance of specialised training in domestic science for girls - the mothers of the future. In the August 1920 editorial young girls were encouraged to study as much as they could:

Die hoogste roeping van 'n vrou, om moeder en huisvrou te wees, eis ook studie van veel

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<sup>83</sup> Die Boerevrou, March 1927, pp9-10.

<sup>84</sup> Die Boerevrou, July 1924, pp27 and 35.

<sup>85</sup> Die Boerevrou, July 1924, p27.

<sup>86</sup> Mason T, "Women in Germany, 1925-1940: Family, welfare and work. Part 1" in History workshop. A journal of socialist historians, Issue 1, Spring 1976, p100.

sake. Nie alleen kennis van koskook of kinderversorging, maar ook kennis wat later te pas sal kom bij die opvoeding van haar eige kinders. Ons wil dus al te graag oral en ten alle tye die jongedogters aanspoor om te leer - dies wat meer daarvoor voel kan gerus huishoudkunde leer en dies wat dan weer daar meer voor voel kan een of ander vak leer - alle kennis veredel en geen kennis is onvanpas vir die moderne moeder.<sup>87</sup>

[The highest vocation of a woman, to be a mother and housewife, also demands a study of many things. Not only knowledge of cooking or child care, but also knowledge which will later come in handy with the education of her own children. We therefore at all times very much want to encourage the young girls to study - those who feel strongly about it and can study domestic science and those who feel even stronger about it can study one or other subject - all knowledge elevates and no knowledge is inappropriate for the modern mother.]

The magazine did not always portray such general knowledge for women. Although this more open-minded attitude might have been a more accurate portrayal of Malherbe's personal position, the position that was usually taken was quite different. Most readers, including Malherbe as well, usually called for more specialised training for girls and for the elimination of all irrelevant subjects from their curricula, irrelevant subjects being all subjects that did not train them for their roles as mothers and houseworkers:

Wat beteken 'n vrou met haar BA, BSc en dies meer as sy nie vir haar man 'n brood kan bak nie? Wat beteken die hooggeletterde dame vir die kind wat sy nie kan opvoed nie?<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Die Boerevrou, August 1920, p2.

<sup>88</sup> Die Boerevrou, May 1923, p21.

Similar views were frequently expressed. We will suffice with the following two examples:

Die meisie, als sij uit die skool kom, is nie vir haar lewenstaak voorberei nie. Baie onnodige dinge het sy geleer, maar 'n huisgesin te versorg het sij nie geleer nie. Ek is daarvan oortuig als die meisies die regte opvoeding gaan krij en gaan leer wat hulle werklik vir hulle lewe nodig het, dat die "arm blanke"-vraagstuk nie meer so onoplosbaar sal lijk nie.

[The girl, when she leaves school, is not prepared to do her life's work. She learned many unnecessary things, but she did not learn how to provide for a family. I am convinced that if girls receive the right education and learn what they really need for their lives, the "poor white" question will appear less irresolvable.]

"Marga" in Die Boerevrou, May 1923, p35.

Ons wil net aanmerk dat vir die gewone moeder, wat nie 'n geleerde opvoedkundige is nie, dit tog lyk asof ons dogters na vyf jaar op skool iets meer behoort te weet omtrent die eise wat die lewe vir hul sal stel en nie net bietjie van somme weet nie en 'n bietjie ander dinge uit boeke gekry het wat hul so min interesseer dat hul dit direk weer vergeet as hul die skool verlaat. Sels na tien jaar op skool skyn hul nie met die oog op hul toekomstige lewe geleer het nie, maar met die oog op universiteite of vir 'n lewe in 'n ander vreemde wereld. [We just want to note that for the ordinary mother, who is not a learned educationist, it seems as if our daughters should, after five years at school, know something more about the demands which life will make on them and not only a little about arithmetic and a little

[What does a woman with her BA, BSc and so forth mean if she cannot bake a bread for her husband? What does the erudite lady mean to the child whom she cannot educate?]

For this special training the so-called *Huishoudskole* [schools for training in domestic work] were recommended.<sup>89</sup> A complementary point was to campaign for more special *Huishoudskole* for girls. In a serious and lengthy editorial in the November 1924 issue of Die Boerevrou Malherbe asked women and women's organisations to demand schools in which girls could be trained in domestic work. She referred to the Administrator of the Transvaal's promise that the education system would be changed so that boys in the rural areas could receive special training in agriculture. She argued that it would not help that men were trained and capable but the women were not able to do their part of the work. Once again she made the point that training in domestic work for girls would in many cases be more beneficial than training in other subjects:

Dit is vir 'n boeremeisie van veel meer belang om alles omtrent pluimveeboerdery te leer, en suiwelboerdery, en byeteelt, en worsmaak en slag en klaarmaak vir die mark van vlees, en die maak van hamme en spek, en ook die kweek van blomme vir die mark, as om so 'n halwe kennis op te doen van baie vakke waarvoor sy tog nie die geleentheid of die lus het om dit deeglik in te studeer nie.<sup>90</sup>

[It is of much more importance for a boer girl to learn everything about poultry, dairy and bee farming; sausage making; slaughtering and preparing meat for the market; making hams and bacon; and cultivating flowers for the market, than to acquire such partial knowledge of many subjects for which she in any case cannot study because she has

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about other things...Even after ten years at school it seems as if they did not learn with an eye on their future lives, but with an eye on universities or for life in another strange world.]

"A E H" in Die Boerevrou, February 1925, p19.

<sup>89</sup> The letters on this topic were numerous. Of these letters the following one of Mrs D M De Villiers is representative:

Op die huishoudskool leer die Afrikaner dogter om 'n Afrikaanse huisvrou te word. Daar leer die Boerenooi om 'n ware moeder te wees van kinders en om 'n ware wederhelfte te word van haar man...Vir alle andere beroepe op die wereld moet sekere opleidingskursusse deurgemaak word alvorens 'n persoon bekwaam is vir so 'n beroep - maar helaas - dit word te weinig besef dat vir die hoogste en edelste beroep op aarde - die beroep van Huisvrou en Moeder - maar 'n beperkte getal dogters 'n opleidingskursus deurmaak.

[In the homecraft school the Afrikaner girl learns to become an Afrikaans housewife. There our young ladies learn to become true mothers for their children and true companions for their husbands...For all other careers in this world training courses are a prerequisite, but alas, too few people are aware that for the highest and noblest career of all - to be a housewife and mother - only a limited number of girls go through any training course.]

Die Boerevrou, May 1923, p21.

<sup>90</sup> Die Boerevrou, November 1924, p6.

neither the inclination nor the opportunity.]

While the one assumption of the call for girls to attend *Huishoudskole* was that all girls would become mothers and houseworkers, the other assumption was that *Huishoudskole* would in fact train them to be effective in these roles and would also encourage them to take up these roles. The belief that there was a direct relationship between better health conditions and the training of girls in domestic science was well illustrated in a report of Mrs Meiring, published in Die Boerevrou of January 1931. The report was entitled "Verslag van my poging om die geskikste universiteit in Amerika te vind vir die opleiding van 'n onderwyseres in die algemene huishoukuns" [Report of my efforts to find the most suitable university in America for the training of teachers in general homecrafts] and the conclusion reads as follows:

Die invloed en gevolge van hierdie opleiding in huisbestuur wat Amerikaanse meisies ontvang, is alreeds duidelik sigbaar in die gesondheidstoestand van kinders in New York en ander groot stede, die uitstekende gesonde tande van Amerikaanse skoolkinders, goeie bediening in restaurants en kafees.<sup>91</sup>

[The influence and consequences of this training in home management which American girls receive are already clearly visible in the state of the health of children in New York and other large cities, the excellent, healthy teeth of American schoolchildren, good service in restaurants and cafes.]

Readers and contributors also suggested alternative schemes to help the girls who could not attend these schools. One idea was that the government should appoint women to travel around the country and help with the training of girls as houseworkers. Another idea, which received a lot of support was the idea of a contributor, AEH, who suggested in February 1925 that women who were already mothers should employ young Afrikaans girls as domestic workers and train them for their future role. She suggested that this would be *volkswerk*:

Ons neem nou kaffers in ons huise, betaal hul 'n paar pond per maand, en moet hul dan nog alles leer omtrent hul werk, sou ons dan nie met ons eie rasgenote dieselfde geduld kan gebruik nie? En sodoende ook help in die opheffing van menige behoefte dogter.<sup>92</sup>

[We now take kaffirs into our houses, pay them a few pounds a month, and then still have to teach them everything about their work. Can't we use the same patience with people from our race? And so we can help with the upliftment of many needy girls.]

The advantages were numerous: the girls would be paid, they would be able to lodge with a respectable family in a good area, they would eat well, they would not have to work in their best clothes, they would be able to do their own washing and ironing and they would be nursed should

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<sup>91</sup> Die Boerevrou, January 1930, p43.

<sup>92</sup> Die Boerevrou, February 1925, p55.

they get sick. The main advantage of such a job, it was claimed, would be that the girls would do work similar to the work that they would eventually do as housewives and mothers in their own houses. Not only would the job serve as training for these roles, but would also keep girls out of the cities where "temptations lurk on every corner".<sup>93</sup>

Doing domestic work for a family would thus serve two purposes: Firstly such a job was regarded as the only suitable employment for young women who really needed to work and secondly, by doing this work a woman was at the same time trained for her "real vocation in life" as mother and domestic worker. Both these reasons were based on the idea that a woman should be limited to the domestic sphere. These points were made repeatedly in a debate about what work young women should do if they were forced to work outside the house, initiated by Malherbe in 1931. The readers who did not recommend domestic work for a family, recommended some kind of employment that was related to work in the domestic sphere which would also give them a skill for their eventual work as mothers and housewives eg leatherwork, millinery, dollmaking, gardening, childcare, washing, ironing, sewing, knitting, bee farming, flower farming, dairy farming, chicken farming and canning.<sup>94</sup>

### 3. Social work

The *volksmoeder* discourse also involved the health and education problems of the Afrikaners in another way. As explained in Chapter five, the term *volksmoeder* did not only refer to the work a mother did for the *volk* in the private sphere of her home by bearing and rearing her own children, it also referred to the more "public mothering" a woman did in the context of welfare organisations such as the SAVF, the ACVV, the OVV and the NCVV. The caring and nurturing functions of Afrikaner women were not limited to their own households but also extended to the less privileged children, men and women belonging to the Afrikaner community.

Mothering in welfare organisations was important for two reasons. In the first place the social work Afrikaner women did in those organisations did lead to the improvement of health conditions and general education levels. Secondly, the pronounced ethnic focus of such social work projects undertaken by these women's welfare organisations ("It was a maternalism that concentrated on

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<sup>93</sup> Die Boerevrou, February 1925, p21.

<sup>94</sup> See for instance Die Boerevrou, June 1931, pp32-34; Die Boerevrou, July 1931, pp27, 29 and 31; Die Boerevrou, November 1931, p33.

their 'own'...")<sup>95</sup>, contributed to the poorer Afrikaans-speaking people thinking of themselves in ethnic terms.

That social welfare should in the first instance be concerned with the need of one's own ethnic community was a commonplace with the *volksmoeder* discourse. This letter from Johanna Botha, published in September 1923, is an example of a call that helping "ons kinders hier aan ons deure" [our children at our own doors] should be the first priority:

...laat my baie dink aan die geld en goed wat so weggestuur word na Europa na die kinders daar, en waarlik ons kinders hier aan ons deure vergaan. Vriendinne, wat saam met my om die koffietafel sit, laat ons dink oor die saak en ook sorg vir ons kinders wat in Suid-Afrika verlore gaan vir ons volk. Slaan die koerante op en sien die lang lyste van goed wat weggaan na ander, waar, voor ons deur staan 'n gesiggie wat smeek om hulp.<sup>96</sup>

[...makes me think a lot about the money and things that are sent to the children in Europe while our children perish at our doors. Friends, you who sit with me around the coffee table, let us think about the issue and look after our children who are lost to our volk. Open the newspapers and see the long lists of things going to others, while, at our own door there is a little face pleading for help.]

In April 1930 a letter from G v R Cloete, written to the OVV, was published in Die Boerevrou. The letter poignantly illustrates how the welfare work of women was related to ethnic mobilisation:

Daar moet nog veel gedoen word vir die opvoeding van ons kinders. Ons wil dus 'n Armkoshuis oprig op Kokstad, om al die verwaarloosde en arm kinders in die kaffergebied Pondoland in die koshuis op te neem. Op die manier sal ons in staat gestel word om ons stempel op die kindertjies af te druk en hulle te behoud vir ons volk en kerk. Kokstad is 'n strategiese punt vir ons volk en kerk en daarom moet dit deeglik beset word...Daar is vandag die kaffergevaar, die uitlanderinvloed en die grote Roomse gevaar wat ons bedreig te Kokstad. Sal u nie help om die stryd te voer teen als die gevare in belang van volk en kerk nie. 'n Oorwinning daar, sal wees ook u oorwinning. Ons reken op u as die moeders van die volk.<sup>97</sup>

[A lot still has to be done for the education of our children. We want to build a residence for the poor in Kokstad, to take up all the neglected and poor children from the kaffir area of Pondoland into the residence. In this way we will be able to put our stamp on the little children and preserve them for our *volk* and church. Kokstad is strategically important and therefore it should be thoroughly occupied...Today there is the kaffir danger, the influence of the foreigners and the big Catholic danger that threaten us in Kokstad. Won't you help in the struggle against the dangers in the interest of *volk* and church. A victory there will also be your victory. We rely on you as the mothers of the *volk*.]

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<sup>95</sup> Butler J, "Afrikaner women and the creation of ethnicity in a small South African town, 1902-1950" in Vail L, The creation of tribalism in southern Africa, p70.

<sup>96</sup> Die Boerevrou, September 1923, p17.

<sup>97</sup> Die Boerevrou, April 1930, p40.

By taking up the interests of the "poor Afrikaners" (working class Afrikaners) and catering for their needs in an ethnic context, these classes could also be mobilised for Afrikaner nationalism.

For Malherbe the important point was that this kind of extended mothering also required training. In September 1921 she wrote about the importance of social work and about the importance of training in social work. While emphasising the valuable role that Afrikaans-speaking women had played in women's welfare organisations, she questioned whether this work could be done with love alone. It also required knowledge:

Hier soos elders, hier meer dan elders, is kennis nodig omdat nie alleen die welvaart van die ongelukkiges self nie, maar van die hele volk, op die spel is.

[Here like elsewhere, here more than elsewhere, knowledge is necessary not only because it concerns the prosperity of the unfortunate individuals themselves, but because it also concerns the prosperity of the volk.]

She then called for a training school for "Maatskaplike Staatshuishoudkunde" [Social State Homecraft] in South Africa so that men and women who would like to serve others, can do so in the most effective way.<sup>98</sup>

This kind of extended mothering was also encouraged by constantly making the readers aware of social problems and frequently highlighting the needs and the wants of the Afrikaans population.

In Die Boerevrou Malherbe made the connection between the well-being of the nation by emphasising three types of education for women: the education of women who are mothers, the education of girls who were regarded as the future mothers and the training of women in welfare work.

### 6.3 The ideological reproduction of the volk and the transmission of Afrikaner culture

In the *volksmoeder* discourse mothers were not only regarded as being responsible for the education of their children in the narrow sense of the word; they were also regarded as responsible for the ideological education of the Afrikaner children - and perhaps of their husbands as well. If the *volksmoeder* discourse thus served to keep women from powerful positions in the public sphere, they were allocated powerful positions in the private sphere of the household. As *volksmoeders* they had to see to it that the values and culture transmitted would be that of the *Afrikanervolk*. Through the *volksmoeder* discourse, nationalism thus penetrated the household and

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<sup>98</sup> Die Boerevrou, September 1921, p2.

acquired a powerful agent in this sphere.

Isabel Hofmeyr's claims in this regard can be regarded as something of an understatement: "If Afrikaans women were inclined to internalise an 'Afrikaner' ideology, then **bits of this** were clearly conveyed to the children whom they socialised."<sup>99</sup> and "Their husbands in the workplace mostly subscribed to an 'English' Labour Party political culture which the Nationalist Party did very little to alter...(b)ut these men returned to a household with **at least a few 'Afrikaner' trappings.**"<sup>100</sup> (My emphasis.) It certainly was a central feature of the discourse of Die Boerevrou to project this ideological function of Afrikaner women in the household as a pervasive and systematic task.

One of Malherbe's aims with Die Boerevrou was the creation of a "national consciousness" among women - it was not sufficient for Afrikaans women to be good mothers; they had to be *volksmoeders*. They had to be convinced that they did not only have the mental and physical health of the nation in their hands, they also were responsible for the reproduction of the ideology and culture of the volk. This goal was explicitly expressed in the editorial of July 1920, when the following letter from Mrs Professor Celliers was placed very prominently:

Ek weet deur ondervinding hoe begerig die vroue op die plaas is om wat van alles en almal te weet...Die Boerevrou is die enigste en eerste vroueblad wat in hul eie taal in al die behoeftes voorsien. Ons is almal Afrikaanse vrouens - kinders van een huis en een godsdienst - en daarom denk ons in die eerste plaas aan wat die vrou moet doen tot opheffing van ons volk. Die vrou het in baie opsigte die opbou van haar volk in haar hand...<sup>101</sup>

[From experience I know how women on the farms want to know what is happening around them...Die Boerevrou is the first and only women's magazine to fully provide for this need in their own language. We are all Afrikaans women, coming from one home and one religion, thinking primarily of what women should do to help uplift our *volk*. In many respects women hold the key to the future of her *volk*...]

The editor comments on the letter as follows:

Die (brief) druk ons nou hier, omdat ons denk dat (dit) baie duidelik aantoon wat ons doel is en ook die noue verband tussen ons werk en die van nie alleen die taalmanne nie, maar van almal wat help 'om 'n nasie te bou'. En ons trek almal saam die berge oor tot in die

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<sup>99</sup> Hofmeyr I, Building a nation from words: Afrikaans language, literature and 'ethnic identity', 1902-1924, p36.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid, p35.

<sup>101</sup> Die Boerevrou, July 1920, p2.

verte vort.<sup>102</sup>

[We print this letter, since it is such a clear expression of our own purpose, indicating also the close relationship between our work and the work of those who struggle for our language and those who are 'building a nation'. Together we trek over the mountains into the distance.]

More specifically this ideological project can be followed in Die Boerevrou's concern with various cultural and literary themes and developments at this time. We will continue by discussing how Die Boerevrou became involved in the Afrikaans language movements (6.3.1), in the creation of an Afrikaner history (6.3.2) and in the reproduction of Afrikaner culture (6.3.3). In Die Boerevrou these projects were portrayed as requiring the support, interest and dedication of Afrikaans women specifically.

### 6.3.1 The "third language movement"

Retrospectively, Malherbe in 1950 referred to Die Boerevrou's vocabulary project as "ons deel in die derde taalbeweging" [our share in the third language movement].<sup>103</sup> The reference to the "third language movement" (see 3.1.5) indicates that Malherbe saw her concern with Afrikaans in Die Boerevrou as an extension of the work done by the "second language movement", usually associated with people such as Preller, Langenhoven and Totius. Her work concerning language was special in that she concentrated specifically on women, thus setting out to make the work of language entrepreneurs like Preller and Totius relevant to women's work in the domestic sphere. Effectively, she was the entrepreneurs' agent in the household and was marketing Afrikaans to a very specific audience: Afrikaans women in the households. In doing this, her approach was careful and calculated. She took up the following language issues:

#### 6.3.1.1 The standardisation of Afrikaans

While she supported the standardisation of Afrikaans - a characteristic nationalist concern - Malherbe also made sure that she did not alienate her readers from using Afrikaans. She was careful to keep a fine balance between forcing her readers into using rules and words that they did not fully understand and helping to develop the vernacular into one that was more standardised. On the one hand she encouraged people to handle language with care:

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<sup>102</sup> Loc cit.

<sup>103</sup> Malherbe M, Die Boerevrou-boek, p101.

Omdat ons duidlik besef, dat ons vandag besig is om 'n groot volk te word, besef ons ook dat ons in die kleinste ding met sorg en bewus van die gewig van ons taak moet werk. Ons is nie taalgeleerdes nie, maar sien natuurlik in dat ons taal so goed en fijn en beskaafd as moontlik moet maak...<sup>104</sup>

[Knowing that we are developing into a big *volk*, we are aware of how important it is to pay attention to detail when working at even the smallest task. Though we are not linguists, we nonetheless understand that we should create as fine and as civilised a language as possible...]

On the other hand, very aware of the fact that her readers were not highly educated, Malherbe encouraged them to write in their own words and not to be too concerned with rules of grammar. In the same issue, discussing spelling rules, she says:

...ons weet almal goed dat ons uit die briewe van sulke ou moeders veel kan leer wat ons van onskatbare waarde sal wees, al ken hulle geen enkele spelreel. Hulle geestesontwikkeling, wat tog feitelik altijd veel meer beteken as enige boekgeleerdheid, en hulle duur opgedane wereld- en lewenskennis is die hoekstene van ons volkstempel.<sup>105</sup>

[...Even though they may not know much about the rules of spelling, we thoroughly appreciate how much we can learn from the letters of these venerable mothers. Their dearly won experience and their maturity of spirit, usually being much more valuable than anything learn from a book, are the corner stones of what we as a *volk* regard to be holy.]

In May 1922 Malherbe announced that henceforth the new spelling rules of the *Suid-Afrikaanse Akademie vir Taal, Lettere en Kuns* would be followed in Die Boerevrou. In spite of this she kept on reiterating her call for people to write, even if their letters were simple and not in accordance with the rules. She saw the simplicity and honesty of their language as a virtue.<sup>106</sup> In October

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<sup>104</sup> Die Boerevrou, July 1920, p2.

<sup>105</sup> Loc cit.

<sup>106</sup> MER also displays this ambiguous attitude towards spelling rules:

...hy (Louis Hiemstra) het ook onse Afrikaans van Die Boerevrou bewaak - het al ons kopie nagesien. Dit was ook deeglik nodig. Van ons drie was ek eintlik die skrywer, en my Afrikaans was nooit van die sekuurste nie; in die stilligheid het ek maar saamgestem met president Reitz, wat in daardie dae gesê het: "Laat die mense tog spel soos hulle wil!" Hierdie geheime verlange van my, net soos van die president, kon natuurlik nooit tot vervulling kom nie, maar dit het ons albei seker in die weg gestaan by die aanleer van suiwer taal, soos van tyd tot tyd weer vasgestel deur die deskundiges (onder wie ook Louis)...Louis moes my kopie goed deurstreep en ek moes telkens erken dat dit nodig was. Net een maal, sover ek kon onthou, het ek my versit. Ek het naamlik in die ingestuurde resepte altyd die eiers laat **klits**: Louis het volgehou dat hulle **gekluts** sou word, iets wat my so onnatuurlik geklink het dat ek op my tande gebyt en dit weer na **klits** verander het. Ek meen dat ek daar gewen het, want vandag **klits** alle Afrikaners hulle eiers.

[...he (Louis Hiemstra) guarded over the Afrikaans of Die Boerevrou - he edited our copy.

1927 she wrote:

Een van ons grootste en mees geliefde Afrikaanse skrywers het een dag gesê dat party van die Koffietafelbriewe in Die Boerevrou onder die mooiste juweeltjies van ons letterkunde kan getel word. Hoekom sou dit wees? Ons dink dit is omdat die Tannies om die Koffietafel voel hulle hoef nie hoog en geleerd te praat nie, of lang woorde te gebruik nie. Die groot ding wat hulle in die oog het, is om die ding te vertel net soos dit gebeur het.<sup>107</sup>

[One of our most respected and beloved Afrikaans authors once said that some of the coffee table letters in Die Boerevrou can be regarded as some of the most exquisite jewels of our literature. Why would this be? We think it is because the *Tannies* around the coffee table do not feel any obligation either to speak in learned phrases or to display any verbosity. They are merely concerned to relate it as it happened.]

In spite of this appreciation of the simplicity of her readers' letters and her continuing efforts to encourage them to write down their experiences and thoughts, Malherbe, by applying the spelling rules in Die Boerevrou, also continued to promote the standardisation of Afrikaans as a necessary contribution to nation-building and the nationalist project.

#### 6.3.1.2 The expansion of the vocabulary

Malherbe embarked upon various projects aimed at expanding the vocabulary of Afrikaans as a young and developing language, more particularly in the domestic sphere. She succeeded in compiling valuable lists of words, but also involved her readers in these projects, thus leading them to believe that they themselves as ordinary people were contributing to the language. If they believed that they contributed to the language, they would also feel more possessive and protective about the language. By taking the everyday words and domestic usages of her readership seriously, Malherbe also played an important role in popularising the language. A formalised language that reflected the natural conversations of its speakers would be more popular

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It was indeed necessary. Of the three of us, I was the writer, and my Afrikaans has never been impeccable. I silently agreed with President Reitz, who said in those days, "Oh, let the people spell as they please!" This silent wish of me, shared by the president, has not been granted, and I think it hampered us both in learning to use the language correctly, as those who knew had to discover all too frequently (amongst them Louis)...Louis frequently had to paint my copy red, and I frequently had to agree that it was necessary. I can recall only one occasion when I could not agree. In the recipes we received for publication, I always had them "klits" the eggs, and Louis insisted to have them "gekluts". It sounded so unnatural that I braced myself and changed it back to "klits". I think I won on that count, for today all Afrikaners "klits" their eggs.]

Rothmann M E, My beskeie deel, p208.

<sup>107</sup> Die Boerevrou, October 1927, p2.

than an artificial and imposed language.

Over the years she initiated several such projects which were aimed at the expansion of Afrikaans vocabulary. The first of these projects was announced in August 1920 and its aim was to compile a list of everyday words.<sup>108</sup> In May 1925 readers were again asked to send in Afrikaans words, especially words concerning the household, so that they could be published for discussion.<sup>109</sup> A new, more specific project linking gender and ethnic concerns in linguistic terms was announced in March 1926. The editor wrote that Professor J J Smith requested Die Boerevrou to help with the collection of "in die eerste plaas, van woorde in verband met die vrouewêreld" [primarily, words that are related to the world of women].<sup>110</sup> Malherbe also announced that a monthly prize would be awarded for the best list. The project was justified by saying that many words live in the "volksmond" [vernacular] and that, in the end, it was the *volk* that created the language.

The readers reacted enthusiastically and the first list was published in May 1926. The list included words like "boerbeskuit" ("die heerlikste soort beskuit, 'n deeg van meel botter en melk word eers gebak dan weer uitgedroog in 'n oond"/the most delicious kind of rusks, the dough made of flour,

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<sup>108</sup> Ons wil met behulp van ons leseresse - en lesers - 'n deeglike lijs saamstel van opregte Afrikaanse woorde vir die dinge van daaglikse gebruik. So baie van die egte volksbenaminge het al in onbruik geraak en word stadigaan vervang deur allerhande vreemde terme wat die jonger geslag maar aanneem omdat hulle nie van beter weet nie. Tog het ons ou mense vir baie van die dinge selfs meer as een Afrikaanse naam gehad, en ons wil graag dat ons leserskring ons help om daar 'n volledige versameling van te maak.

[With the aid of our readers we want to compile a list of genuine Afrikaans words used for everyday things. So much of our genuine, home grown terminology have been supplanted by all kinds of strange words. The younger generations use these new words, because they do not know any better - even though older people sometimes had more than one word for the same object. We would like our readers to help us to make a complete collection of these older words.]

Die Boerevrou, August 1920, p2.

<sup>109</sup> Die Boerevrou, May 1925, p5.

<sup>110</sup> In an article by M S Kritzinger, one of the compilers of the Afrikaans dictionary, the words associated with women were defined:

Maar laat ons veral bepaal by die woorde wat op die gebied van die vrou gebruik word, byvoorbeeld in verband met kosse, gebak, konfyte, kledingstukke, drank, blomme, groentes, medisyne, kinders, die uitrusting van die huis, modes ens.

[Let us pay special attention to the words used in a woman's world, eg those words related to food, baking, cooking, clothing, beverages, flowers, vegetables, medicines, children, home equipment, fashion, etc.]

butter and milk, is first baked and then dried in the oven) and "boerseep" ("’n soort seep wat deur boervrouens gekook word"/a kind of soap cooked by boer women).<sup>111</sup> These words were important as they were not only unrecorded Afrikaans words, they were also words that gave a specific ethnic character to ordinary objects.

In July 1926 "Neulpotjie" wrote that the popular Afrikaans author C J Langenhoven had recently commented on the lists in his column "Langs stille waters" in Die Burger. She said:

Ek is bly daaroor. Dit laat ons weer ’n slag voel, dat ons met ’n volksaak besig is...<sup>112</sup>  
[I am delighted. This makes me feel, once again, as if we are involved in an issue of the *volk*.]

In this way these linguistic projects and concerns were consistently linked to the larger movement of ethnic mobilisation.

### 6.3.1.3 The maintenance of Afrikaans

Throughout the existence of the magazine Malherbe took the "handhaaf" [maintenance] of the language seriously as a general patriotic duty. Die Boerevrou, and specifically Malherbe's, concern with the maintenance of Afrikaans is even the more interesting as Malherbe and her family members themselves hardly ever spoke Afrikaans.

The fact that Afrikaans had been recognized as an official language of the Union was proudly announced in the column "Wereldspieel" [World mirror] in June 1925. The editor said:

Dit is dus nou net vir ons om te handhaaf...om ons taal te praat so suiwer as ons kan, en net wanneer ons kan.<sup>113</sup>  
[Now it is up to us to maintain our language, to speak it as correctly as we can, whenever we can.]

In this regard the Afrikaner woman was considered to be especially important. M S B Kritzinger wrote in Die Boerevrou of March 1919:

Algemeen word aangeneem dat as die vrou sorg dat die taal wat in die huiskring gepraat

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<sup>111</sup> Die Boerevrou, May 1926, p4.

<sup>112</sup> Die Boerevrou, July 1926, p6.

<sup>113</sup> Die Boerevrou, June 1925, p12.

word suiwer is, daar nie veel moeilikheid sal wees om later te handhaaf nie.<sup>114</sup>

[It is generally agreed that, should the women see to it that the language is spoken correctly at home, it ought not be too difficult to maintain it elsewhere.]

Once more, gender and ethnic issues were thus fused in terms of a private and public duty within this discourse, even if this did not correspond to Malherbe's own practice.

#### 6.3.1.4 The promotion of an Afrikaans literature

Die Boerevrou, and Malherbe in particular, also played an important part in the conscious promotion of Afrikaans literary works. Although not a very good writer herself, she encouraged other writers to produce and publish their work. Some of the writers who made regular contributions to Die Boerevrou were J F E Celliers, Eugene N Marais<sup>115</sup>, A G Visser, C M van den Heever, C Louis Leipoldt, MER and Toon van den Heever. Marais' famous "Dwaalstories" was first

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<sup>114</sup> Die Boerevrou, March 1929, p25.

<sup>115</sup> There are many accounts of how Mrs Malherbe "bullied" her uncle, the poet Eugene Marais, into writing something for the magazine. She herself quoted from Francois Marais Du Toit's Eugene N Marais, sy bydrae tot die Afrikaanse letterkunde:

Die gedig Lalasini is so gebore. Toe Marais een oggend die redaksielokantoor van Die Boerevrou besoek, het Mev Malherbe daarop aangedring dat hy iets moet skryf voordat hy loop. Hy het ingewillig en "die gedig is by haar op kantoor geskrywe, daar en dan, sonder verandering of verbetering".

[The poem Lalasini came about in this way. Once Marais paid a visit to the editorial offices of Die Boerevrou. Mrs Malherbe insisted that he should first write them a poem before he left. He agreed, and he "wrote this poem right there and then, without any changes or additions.]

The last phrase is Marais' own words. Malherbe M, Die Boerevrou-boek, p68.

Malherbe also wrote:

Ek self voel dat Die Boerevrou sy bestaan geregtig sowel as 'n groot diens aan ons letterkunde betoon het deur soveel uit Eugene Marais (dikwels met baie moeite en soebat) uit te lok...Ek het my soms verwyt dat ek hom so lastig geval het, maar nou skep ek troos uit die gedagte dat ons op die manier 'n erfenis vir ons volk vergader het wat nie oorskakel kan word nie.

[I feel that Die Boerevrou justified its existence and rendered an important service to our literature by coaxing so much out of Marais (very often with a lot of pleading and effort) even if we had to plead sometimes)...I even blamed myself for bothering him like that, but now I reassure myself with the knowledge that we helped to create a priceless inheritance for our *volk*.]

ibid, p12.

published in Die Boerevrou. As editor of Die Boerevrou Malherbe often proudly referred to the contribution of her magazine to the building of an Afrikaans literature.

In an article, "Oor twee nuwe Afrikaanse boeke", published in Die Boerevrou of July 1925, E C Pienaar discussed the state of Afrikaans literature. He compared the Afrikaans literature to a flower garden which has to survive droughts and storms. As the flower garden was a domestic enterprise strongly associated with women, Pienaar's imagery sentimentally connects the ethnic concern with Afrikaans literature to the specific concerns and tasks of women in the household:

Dis 'n lus om te sien hoe dit orals groei en bloei in die tuin van ons Afrikaanse letterkunde. Dis nog nouliks 20 jaar gelede dat die tuin aangelê is, en dat ons met innige vreugde die eerste ontluikende blommities sien verskyn het...<sup>116</sup>

[It is pure joy to see the garden of the Afrikaans literature grow and bloom. It has been a mere twenty years since the garden was planted, and since then we have with great wonder seen the first blossoms appear...]

This article is but an example of how the Afrikaans language was encouraged, praised and supported in Die Boerevrou.

#### 6.3.1.5 The building of a community of readers

Malherbe went further than just encouraging writers to write; she also encouraged her readers to read, and in particular to read Afrikaans literature. Like Die Huisgenoot, Die Boerevrou carried monthly book reviews in a column, *Die boerevrou se boekrak* [The *boerevrou's* bookshelf], and numerous articles about the importance of reading. While on the one hand this was explicitly aimed at persuading people to read Afrikaans, thus providing a market for Afrikaans literature, it was also aimed at making Afrikaans-speakers more literate (see 3.2.4). E C Pienaar, in a July 1925 article about the importance of reading and books, explained the importance of reading as follows:

'n Volk wat nie lees nie, gaan dood aan geestelike armoede. Die handhawing van ons volksbestaan, die oplossing van ons groot vraagstukke - lê in daardie boekrak. In hoeveel huise vind ons daardie boekrak?<sup>117</sup>

[A *volk* that does not read, will perish of spiritual poverty. The care and survival of our *volk*, the solution to our tremendous problems - all lies in this bookcase. In how many homes do we find this bookcase?]

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<sup>116</sup> Die Boerevrou, July 1925, p19.

<sup>117</sup> Die Boerevrou, July 1925, p20.

Pienaar not only linked reading to spiritual growth and intellectual stimulation; he also saw a direct connection between the survival of the nation and the literacy of its people.

Because reading was regarded as important to the building of the nation, the bad reading habits of Afrikaans speakers led to many concerned articles in Die Boerevrou. M S B Kritzinger writes in Die Boerevrou of July 1928 about the reading habits of Afrikaners:

Daar word nog aldeur gekla dat die Afrikaner te min lees. Ons uitgewers gaan selfs sover om te beweer dat enige boek glad nie verkoop as dit nie juis voorgeskryf word nie. Dis miskien skerp uitgedruk, tog is daar ongetwyfeld 'n kern van waarheid in.<sup>118</sup>

[We hear a constant complaint that Afrikaners read too little. Publishers even go as far as claiming that that no book will sell unless it is prescribed. It may be an overstatement, but there is undoubtedly a grain of truth in it.]

In February 1926 the concept of "lees-unies" [reading unions] was explained: a group of people get together on a monthly basis and discuss an Afrikaans or Dutch book.<sup>119</sup> Malherbe started the first reading union in Pretoria and Die Boerevrou published a monthly discussion of particular books.<sup>120</sup> Die Boerevrou frequently discussed and often supported the Pretoria reading union during its short lifetime.<sup>121</sup>

Moreover, Die Boerevrou made a special effort to introduce its readers to literature written for women or about women.<sup>122</sup> In this way its efforts to stimulate reading was also part of a specific concern with women. Although a great variety of books were reviewed, special attention was paid to recipe books, books about children's education, children's books and love stories. This seemed to help to perpetuate the ideal stereotype of woman while encouraging women to read.

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<sup>118</sup> Die Boerevrou, July 1928, p4.

<sup>119</sup> Neethling-Pohl A, op cit, p33.

<sup>120</sup> Die Boerevrou, February 1926, p4.

<sup>121</sup> See for instance the discussions in Die Boerevrou, May 1927, pp4-5 and Die Boerevrou, September 1928, p2.

<sup>122</sup> See for instance the two-part series on "Die vrou in ons letterkunde", published Die Boerevrou in March and April 1929.

en warm liefde vir hulle land en volk.<sup>125</sup>

[Are there not some of the older readers who would write us something about their experiences in life? Frequently we hear older ladies tell us, "If only I had a better education, then I would have written novels better than all these insipid novels, and everything I would have written, would have been true." Well, no special education is required, only this: She should have a crystal clear picture of the history that is to be written. She shouldn't bother about the impression her story makes, and she should worry neither about literary style nor spelling. She should only write what is fresh in her memory, and she should write just like she usually speaks, not trying to create an impression by the use of artificial trimmings. Who is ready to write us such stories? Healthy food for our sons and daughters, to inspire them with high ideals and a love for their country and their *volk*.]

In June 1921 the call for stories was reiterated, but this time the editor specifically wanted readers to focus on Afrikaner social or cultural history (my terminology). She wrote that although the increase in formal history and Afrikaans books should be welcomed, "wat ons vrouens wil weet is iets meer as die blote geskiedenis soos dit gewoonlik in die boeke staan" [what women want to know, is more than just the history you can read in books]. Women, she said, wanted to know more about the "huislike lewe - wat die vroumense gedra het, hoe hulle klaar gekom het sonder wat bij ons nou gereken word vir onmisbaar, huislinne en breekgoed en meubelment [domestic life - what women used to wear, how they coped without what we regard as necessities like linen, crockery and furniture]."<sup>126</sup> This view was also expressed in Die Boerevrou of January 1925 by C G Botha in an article "Gewoontes van ons voorouers":

Die geskiedenis van ons land is die geskiedenis van ons voorouers van twee eeue gelede, want hulle was die pioniers wat ons geskiedenis gemaak het, Die storie van Suid-Afrika bevat nie alleen die aankoms en vertrek van goewerneurs of van Kafferoorloe nie, maar ook die maatskaplike lewe van ons volk. Dit is in die sin dat ons die geskiedenis van ons land moet beskou.<sup>127</sup>

[The history of our country is the history of our ancestors from two centuries ago, for they were the pioneers who made history. The story of South Africa does not only contain the arrival and departure of governors or Kaffir wars, but it includes the social life of our people. This is the perspective in which we must see the history of our country.]

The importance of a popular history, written from below, Malherbe wrote in the editorial of February 1928, was both that ordinary women could identify with this and historians could use it.<sup>128</sup> She recognised that consciousness of a shared history was an important binding factor.

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<sup>125</sup> Die Boerevrou, November 1920, p2.

<sup>126</sup> Die Boerevrou, June 1921, p2.

<sup>127</sup> Die Boerevrou, January 1925, p6.

<sup>128</sup> Die Boerevrou, February 1928, p2.

For Malherbe it was important that public history should reflect the experiences of ordinary people, including (and especially) ordinary women in the domestic sphere, in order for them to identify with it.<sup>129</sup>

Although the idea that women would only or primarily be interested in the history of domestic life is inherently sexist, the project of writing the history of the domestic sphere can be appreciated from a feminist perspective,<sup>130</sup> as a definite acknowledgement that women's activities should also be recorded.<sup>131</sup> However, even though women and especially their activities in the domestic sphere were acknowledged in the history projects of the Die Boerevrou, these activities were always interpreted in nationalist terms.

In Chapter four we discussed how, although the emphasis at the opening of the *Vrouemonument* was on national unity, there was also a considerable emphasis on women as **women** (as opposed to women as mothers) - notably so in the speech of Emily Hobhouse. Ironically, Die Boerevrou, a women's magazine, accepted and endorsed the nationalist appropriation of the meaning of the monument and the meaning of women's experiences during the South African War. Forgotten was

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<sup>129</sup> Even if this was not her conscious intention, this strategy of Malherbe was important in the process of nation-building in the sense that to make people aware of the fact that they had a history was to remind them of the fact that they made decisions, that they chose certain actions and in this way had some control over their lives. To help them realise this was to empower them for the future.

<sup>130</sup> When we evaluate the *volksmoeder* discourse from a feminist point of view in Chapter eight, we will see that although this discourse was important in that a women's sphere - where women's power cannot be tampered with - was created, the basic patriarchal nature of social power in general is not challenged. As a feminist strategy it can thus not be regarded as adequate.

<sup>131</sup> It is interesting that the editor of Die Brandwag, in commenting on a letter received from a "Voortrekker" from Portuguese West Africa, wrote:

Hoe min weet ons mense tog van wat ons eie is...Dit is die huisvader wat skryf. Van die moeder hoor ons niks; sij swijg, maar sij is daar en op haar pos, en op haar meer dan op its anders is ons hoop gevestig dat die afrikanerplantjie in daardie geweste nie vernietig sal word nie.

[How little do we know about what is our own! The father in the house is the one who writes. From the mother we hear nothing, she is silent. But she is there, at her post, and on her, more than anything else, we pin our hope that the tender Afrikaner shoot will not perish in these parts.]

See also Mrs Genl Joubert's comment about women's role in history (4.1.2). Rompel-Koopman L, Wat Mevrouw Generaal Joubert vertelt, p84.

Hobhouse's urgent call for all women to stand together. The impact of the 1913 opening of the *Vrouemonument* was thus described as follows:

Van iemand wat daardeur diep getref was, het ons haar indruk van die onthulling van die Vrouemonument gehoor, van haar sielontroering toe die duifies so rondom die statige, eenvoudige kolom gevlieg het. Sulke herinneringe is onuitwisbaar en veredelend. 'n Kind wat op so 'n oomblik 'n besef kry van vaderlandsliefde, van plig teenoor sy medemens, is vir sy lewe lank verryk, en is 'n beter burger van die staat, omdat hy 'n besef gekry het van hoe ideale!<sup>132</sup>

[From someone who was deeply moved, we heard her impressions when the Women's Memorial was unveiled, how her spirit soared when the small doves took to the air around the stately, singular column. Memories like these ennoble and last forever. In moments like these a child can become aware of patriotism and his duty towards his fellow men, and enriched for life, he will be a better citizen because he has been touched by noble ideals!]

The opening of the *Vrouemonument* was by no means the only national festival that was remembered. Coupled with the retrieval and manufacturing of history is the manufacturing of national heroes and national days. To create national days and national heroes is to popularise history, to lead people to recognise the value and the importance the manufactured history has for them. This is even more so in the project of nationalist mobilisation. In the discussion of the development of Afrikaner nationalism the importance of contact (direct contact or contact through representation) between the members of a nation community was stressed. Although this contact cannot take the actual place of the community of the nation, it makes its imagining possible. Because national festivals are the only occasions where community members can have more direct contact with each other, the actual celebrations can be very important for building that sense of community.

Malherbe was acutely aware of the importance of such national festivals for Afrikaner nationalism and *Die Boerevrou* propagated, advertised and reported on all of them on a regular basis.<sup>133</sup> On

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<sup>132</sup> *Die Boerevrou*, April 1925, pp2 and 54.

<sup>133</sup> The reminding, advertising, publicising and reporting of the celebrations of Kruger Day will serve as a good illustration of how Malherbe propagated Afrikaner national festivals. She announced in April 1925 that the celebrations of Paul Kruger's 100th birthday will take place in October and wrote that it was expected to be a meaningful day for Afrikaners from all over the country. Evoking the historical memory of Kruger in this context, she wrote:

Onuitwisbaar is by ons die herinnering aan 'n dag, toe die President weer herkies was vir sy hoe amp, en op die balkon van die ou Goewermentsgebou verskyn het om die skare toe te spreek. Nog hoor ons die klank van die volkslied wat weergalm het van alle kante. Ons sien weer in die verbeelding die mense staan voor die gebou en by die groot kerk.  
[Bright shine the memories of a day, when the President was re-elected to his high office,

more than one occasion she stressed the importance of such festivals and acknowledged the emotional impact of gathering with people whom one did not necessarily know personally but with whom one shared a common national past. About the Day of the Vow she wrote: "Wat het Dingaansdag nie al vir ons beteken nie - om die belangstelling in ons heldegeskiedenis warm te hou, om 'n gevoel van nasionale trots by die geslag in te boesem!"<sup>134</sup> [Look how much we have gained from Dingaans' Day - keeping the interest alive for our heroic history, inspiring a generation with a feeling of national pride!]

Hofmeyr notes how Preller emphasised the physical objects of the past in his effort to popularise history. He had an "obsession with clothing", she says.<sup>135</sup> In Die Boerevrou the same interest in physical details of the past can be discerned. It is important to understand the significance of physical objects for the popularisation of history. Anderson's notion of the imagined community is again useful. In the collective project of imagining the community of the "nation" any physical object will encourage people to either imagine or to strengthen their imaginings. At a national festival, for instance, if people are dressed up in national costume, the visual impact would make it easier for them to imagine a bond between them or to imagine that they share a history. Die Boerevrou thus supported different calls to honour certain kinds of historical clothing as the national costume. The national costume chosen was the "Voortrekker dress", with the *kappie* as

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and when he appeared on the balcony of the old Government Buildings to address the crowd. Again we hear the sounds of the national anthem, flowing in wave upon wave over the people. Again we see the people gathered in front of the building and at the great church.]

Die Brandwag, 1 August 1915, pi.

But also readers who did not have such memories of Kruger himself or lived far from Pretoria were drawn into these national celebrations through the pages of Die Boerevrou. Much attention was also given to local celebrations of Kruger Day. See for instance the detailed descriptions of "Tant Lettie" and "Tant Ellie" of the 1925 celebrations in Die Boerevrou of January 1926. A special competition for children to commemorate the day is announced in Die Boerevrou of May 1925. Primary school pupils could write an article about any event in the life of Paul Kruger while high school pupils had to write an essay about the influence of Paul Kruger on "our" history. The prize? A framed portrait of Paul Kruger! Furthermore, a special "Paul Kruger edition" of Die Boerevrou appeared in October 1925 and Afrikaner women were thus given another way of sharing in the nationalist adoration of Kruger.

<sup>134</sup> Die Boerevrou, December 1924, pp6-7.

<sup>135</sup> Hofmeyr I, op cit, p528.

the most significant part of the costume.<sup>136</sup>

In this section we have looked at but a few of the instances in which Die Boerevrou encouraged its readers to remember a common national past. The reverse side of the remembering, however, is the falsification and mystification, the suppression of the negative and unclear aspects, the aspects that do not fit. Hofmeyr remarks that while through mystification people are made to remember, the "inversions, repressions, ellipses and displacements...institutionalise forgetfulness as much as recall".<sup>137</sup> Hence, amnesia, a trait that almost all nationalisms have in common (see 2.4), had become a common trait of Afrikaner history, also as it was represented in Die Boerevrou. This is even more true about the nationalist history of Afrikaans women.

### 6.3.3 The recreation of the present: the manufacturing of a national culture

The ideological project of reproducing an Afrikaner culture through the magazine was not confined to language and history only, crucially it extended to the domain of ordinary life. Hofmeyr argues that the "redefinition of everyday life" in which "every imaginable phenomena of peoples' world" was "repackaged" as being Afrikaans, was an important endeavour of the entrepreneurs of the "second language movement". It ensured that every aspect of life acquired ethnic significance. In this respect, as well, Malherbe lent Die Boerevrou to similar tasks.

A basic feature of this ideological redefinition of everyday life was the idea of "an Afrikaner culture". Malherbe was quite explicit in stating that there was an **Afrikaner way of life** and an **Afrikaner philosophy**. She expressed this view most explicitly after a six-month trip overseas in 1926:

Uit alle ondervindings, uit alles wat ek gesien het of gehoor het kom daar al hoe sterker en vaster gedagte dat ons moet saamspan en onophoudend moet werk om Afrikaner te bly - **Afrikaner in lewenswyse en gedagte**, in ons maatskaplike omgang - in alle opsigte. Ons het 'n **besliste eienaardige volkskarakter** en dit sou jammer wees om dit prys te gee, en ons sou in waardigheid verloor as ons dit sou afskaf om 'n nagemaakte kulturele of maatskaplike lewenswyse van oor die see aan te skaf.<sup>138</sup> (My emphasis.)

[Having heard all this, having seen all this, having had all these experiences, there is in me an ever growing and stronger conviction that we should ceaselessly work together to stay

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<sup>136</sup> See the discussion of the significance of the "kappie" in 5.3.1.

<sup>137</sup> Hofmeyr I, op cit, p534.

<sup>138</sup> Die Boerevrou, December 1927, p2.

Afrikaners - Afrikaners in lifestyle and thinking, in our social life, Afrikaners in all regards. We definitely possess a unique national character, and it would be a great loss should we give it up - we would lose much dignity should we exchange it for a pseudo social and cultural style from overseas.]

Note that she advocated the **maintenance** of an Afrikaner way of life and urged people to **stay** Afrikaners - this while cultural entrepreneurs like herself were still struggling to define the concept Afrikaner and to create an Afrikaner way of life. Seen against the background of the fundamental divisions among Afrikaners at the time, the claim of an "Afrikaner character", an "Afrikaner philosophy" and an "Afrikaner way of life" is important. In practice, of course, the life styles and cultural practices of Afrikaans farming communities, rural *bywoners*, urban poor whites and workers, and the modernising petty bourgeoisie differed sharply, while there were also significant regional contrasts between the Cape and the Transvaal, etc. This is not to deny that there were no similarities between people who were being labeled "Afrikaners". For instance, it was to be expected that recognisably similar building styles would be predominant in certain areas (eg the Transvaal) -as a result of the climate and the availability of certain building materials.

Given the diversity of the Afrikaans-speaking community and differences in lifestyle (regional, rural and urban, educated and illiterate, class positions etc), what exactly was defined as Afrikaans inevitably involved a deliberate choice as well as a conscious attempt towards standardisation. The Afrikaner lifestyle and philosophy did not correspond directly to contemporary social realities but was derived from history and an idealised "traditional" lifestyle and philosophy was constructed and projected as typically Afrikaans.

What was this Afrikaans way of life? Malherbe, who was a city-dweller herself and never lived in a rural area, idealised traditional rural life and perceived it as the Afrikaans way of life. In the July 1924 issue of Die Boerevrou the editor describes a peaceful rural scene and projected it as the basis for a national community in a modern context:

Ons is 'n landelike volk, en van karakter eenvoudig en sterk; en sterkte lê juis daarin dat ons die karaktertrekke behou en ons nie laat meesleep met allerhande nuwe en onbeduidende gewoontes en begeertes nie...Helderdenkend en sterk en dapper is 'n volk wat na aan die natuur leef. Hier onder die bome is dit maklik om te droom van 'n toekoms wanneer ons land digbewoon sal wees, met pragtige plase aanmekaar, en mooi boerewonings, groot wee wat die verkeer vergemaklik, allerlei vermake en verenigings, en leeskringe en sportsgenootskappe wat die jongmense deur die hele land tot een groot familie saambind, en hulle soveel geluk en bedrywigheid verskaf, dat hulle gelukkig sal wees in die plaaslewe. Droom ons nie almal die droom nie? En help ons almal om die droom

te verwesenlik? Dit is binne ons bereik. As ons maar net aanhou, wen ons seker!<sup>139</sup>  
 [This is a rural people, austere and strong of character. It is the source of our strength that we maintain our character and that we are not taken in tow by insignificant habits and desires...Clear of mind, powerful, brave is a *volk* who lives close to nature. Under these trees it is easy to dream of a day when our country will be well populated, with neat farms and stately homes, major highways to improve traffic, various forms of entertainment and societies, readers' forums and sports clubs bringing together the youth in the country into one, big family, everyone active, happy and content with the farming lifestyle. Are we not all dreaming this dream? Are we all involved in bringing this dream about? It is within our reach. If we persevere, we will succeed!]

Many letters depicting scenes from Afrikaner rural life were placed in confirmation of this pastoral dream<sup>140</sup> and when, in November 1922, *Om die Koffietafel* took up five full pages, the editor explained:

Die briewe weerspieel so sprekend die daaglikse lewe van die gewone Afrikaanse gesin, veral op die platteland, dat hulle werklik baie waardevol is en nog meer sal word, in die toekoms.<sup>141</sup>

[The letters provide such a lifelike image of the daily life of the normal Afrikaans family, specially in the rural areas - it makes these letters most valuable, and in future they will be valued even more.]

There were numerous other examples of the modelling of an Afrikaans lifestyle on the rural ideal. The significance of the redefinition of everyday life was that the discourse of ethnicity increasingly penetrated the lives of people - they were led to think in ethnic terms, even in the intimate sphere

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<sup>139</sup> Die Boerevrou, July 1924, p2.

<sup>140</sup> The following letter of Malie Smith, published in Die Boerevrou of February 1928, is an example of such a letter:

Ek het nou so lus vir die lekker koffie wat u altyd drink, Dit gaan met ons nog goed en opgeruimd want die Heer het ons hier in die noordelike kant van Soutpansberg met baie mooi reens geseen, dit lyk hier by ons soos 'n paradys. Ons gesaides is baie mooi, al vol in die saad. Sommige van ons bure eet al waatlemoen. Ons eet al van laasmaand af ryp druie. Die vee, klein en groot, is hier baie vet. Die boere maak hier baie geld van room.  
 [I feel like trying your splendid coffee. We are happy and quite prosperous, for the Lord has blessed us with most welcome rain in these northern parts of the Soutpansberg - it looks like paradise! Our crops are a joy to behold, and right now it is coming into tassel. Already some of our neighbours have eaten their first watermelons. For a month now we have been eating ripe grapes. The livestock, both small and large, are plump with fat. The farmers make good money from selling cream.]

Die Boerevrou, February 1928, p17.

See also the letter of "Dinges" in Die Boerevrou, February 1923, p17.

<sup>141</sup> Die Boerevrou, November 1922, p2.

of the household. This is again an example of how nationalism enters the supposedly private sphere of the household on the one hand, while advocating the sanctity of this sphere on the other hand. Given the role that was traditionally ascribed to women in the household, the mother was the key to the redefinition of everyday life. If the "queen of the household", the mother, homemaker and cook set out to create a "boerewoning" [boer house], served "boerekos" [boer food], decorated her house in the "boere" way with Afrikaans paintings and Afrikaans sculptures and taught her children "boeremaniere" [boer manners], it was very likely that her husband and children **would** live in a Boer house, eat Boer food and have Boer manners.<sup>142</sup> Hofmeyr provides a "brief list" of phenomena that were transformed into Afrikaans phenomena in the magazines Die Huisgenoot and Die Brandwag: food, architecture, interior decoration, dress, etiquette, health, humour, landscape, monuments, the plastic arts, music, handicrafts, transport, agriculture and nature study.<sup>143</sup> Similarly, in Die Boerevrou a wide range of topics were covered, from etiquette<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> Even proper names became an issue: children had to have traditional Afrikaner names. In September 1923 "Lenie" writes in Die Boerevrou about whether one should give one's child boer names or not:

Nou is hulle twee tog so trots op die mooi name (Erika en Monica) van hulle dogters en trek hulle neuse op vir my Johanna, wat na my ma vernoem is. Dit is natuurlik nie aangenaam nie, want die wasmeid is ook 'n Johanna. Maar ek troos my maar met die gedagte, as Johanna groot is, dan is die meid aja. En die meide gaan nou ook hulle kinders Monica en Erica noem, as Johanna groot is dan sal haar naam net so seldsaam wees as Erica nou. Want my beste Boerevrou, wat is dan nou eintlik verkeerd met ons ou name?...As hulle dan nie juis hulle famielie wil vernoem nie hoekom dan nie name soek in ons eie geskiedenis nie?

[The two of them are really proud of the beautiful names (Erika and Monica) of their two daughters, but they are condescending about my Johanna, who was named after my mother. What makes it even more difficult, is the fact that the washing maid is also called Johanna. But I tell myself that, once she grows up, the maid will be called *aja*, and then the maids will be calling their children Monica and Erica, so once Johanna grows up, Johanna will be as scarce a name as Erica is now. For, my dearest Boerevrou, is there really anything wrong with our old names?...If they do not want to use family names, why don't they look for names in our own history?]

Die Boerevrou, July 1923, p17.

<sup>143</sup> Hofmeyr I, Building a nation from words: Afrikaans language, literature and identity, 1902-1924, p29.

<sup>144</sup> One contributor commented:

Ons moet in alles Afrikaans blij en vrij wees in ons bewegings, en ons nie laat bind nie deur alle bogterigheid. Dit is verblijvend dat sover ek weet daar nog nie Afrikaanse etiketteboek is nie, en als daar een verskijn hoop ek sal hij nie vra naar Engelse etikette, maar naar die beste gewoontes en gebruike van ons nasie. Ons moet selfstandig blij en in hierdie vrij,

and fashion<sup>145</sup> to food<sup>146</sup> and architecture. To illustrate how all-encompassing and serious this effort to provide models of "Afrikaner" culture based on the idealised rural lifestyle was in Die Boerevrou, a few examples will be given.

As indicated in Chapter five, the domestic sphere or household and home was very closely associated with the woman as mother in the *volksmoeder* discourse. The well-being of the family home was portrayed as being in the national interest of the *volk*. To illustrate the redefinition of everyday life in Die Boerevrou, we will briefly examine how home and house, so closely associated with the Afrikaner mother, was ethnicised in Die Boerevrou. In the early years of Die Boerevrou there were several photographic competitions. The competitions usually centred around a specific theme, taken from everyday life but given an ethnic definition. There was a competition for photographs of Afrikaans children and one for photographs of Afrikaans landscapes. In the context it was taken for granted that this meant rural rather than urban or industrial scenes. Typically, in August 1928 the editor asked for photographs of "(e)nige werksaamheid wat op die werf, of in die huis van 'n boereplaas aan die gang is - soos seep kook, skape skeer, brood bak, vrugte inmaak, mielies dors, stryk ens" [any activity around or in a typical farm house - like making soap, shearing sheep, baking bread, canning fruit, harvesting maize, planing clothes, etc.] with prizes for the best photographs.<sup>147</sup>

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sonnige ou land van ons, waar alles ons lok om vrij en natuurlik onself te wees, moet ons nie laat bind nie...

[In everything we should remain Afrikaans, we should be free to be ourselves, we should not let ourselves be ensnared in any fickleness. It is a good sign that, as far as I know, there isn't any book on etiquette in Afrikaans yet, and should one be published, I hope it won't propagate English etiquette, but the best customs and habits of our people. We must remain independent. In this land of sun and freedom, where everything urges us to be our free and natural selves, here we should not let ourselves be tied to any fetters...]

<sup>145</sup> See for instance Die Boerevrou, March 1920, p8.

<sup>146</sup> For example, in August 1920 the editor asked for recipes for Afrikaans food:

Ons vra die beste en oorspronklike resepte vir lekker ete vir die nuwejaarsfees. Egte ouderwetse Afrikaanse kos wil ons hê - lekker melktert en pasteitjies ens.

[We request the best and most original recipes for good eating at the New Year's festival. Genuine, traditional Afrikaans food is what we are looking for - delicious custard pie and pastries, etc.]

Die Boerevrou, August 1920, p5.

<sup>147</sup> Die Boerevrou, August 1928, p2.

industry...first we shall have to build special art schools, and from that beginning of an indigenous Afrikaans art a true artistic style can be developed to compete with those of other nations.]

In this way the idea of a comprehensive Afrikaner lifestyle encompassing all aspects of everyday life and deliberately informed by Afrikaner models, was systematically projected. This redefinition of everyday life was one aspect of the comprehensive cultural project undertaken by Die Boerevrou. Other aspects of this project discussed in this chapter was Die Boerevrou's cooperation with the "second language movement" and its contribution to the creation of an Afrikaner history. This focus on everything inclusive to Afrikaner culture was complemented by a parallel focus on that which was excluded, in Die Boerevrou most notably black people and black cultures.

#### 6.4 The "black problem"

In the first section of this chapter (6.1) we dealt with the construction of the Afrikaner nation as an imagined community with specific ethnic and gender boundaries. The previous section of this chapter dealt with the introspective focus of the *volksmoeder* discourse on everything "Afrikaans". By looking at certain texts in Die Boerevrou we saw how an Afrikaans language, history and lifestyle were artificially reproduced and thus an ethnic community was created for women as if it constituted a total self-contained social reality. However, this process took place in a far more complex social and political context: the emerging Afrikaner *volk* was but a segment of the South African society and was constituted in interaction with a variety of other individuals and groups, also black people. Although much attention was paid to black people in the Die Boerevrou, this was rarely if ever with a view to obtain a better understanding of them. Rather, black people were observed and discussed to find out what their lives, histories and languages said about the lives, history and language of the Afrikaner. Thus, black people became the "other" in the ideological process of creating an Afrikaner identity.

In this respect the theoretical concepts of "antagonism" and "chain of equivalence", as introduced by Ernesto Laclau and Chantalle Mouffe in their discussion of the discursive constitution of the social subject, are relevant. They explain that some discourses succeed in constructing a chain of equivalence which refers to the "establishment of a relation amongst a series of subjects such that their individual differences are annulled and a new common identity acquired on the basis of

their common antagonism to another social identity".<sup>161</sup> In other words: social identities are constructed on the basis of certain subjects having some characteristics in common which distinguish them from those to which they are opposed. The systems of equivalence thus discursively create or construct a frontier between the new common identity and the social identity of the "other". This externalisation of the opposed group is referred to as "antagonism".

How were black people externalised and "antagonism" created in Die Boerevrou? The specific process in Die Boerevrou occurred against the background of the segregation policy of General Hertzog and a much larger and more formal process of the externalisation of black people which was gradually becoming part of the creation of a new common Afrikaner identity. R De Villiers writes about the "almost paranoid persistence with which some enemy or threat or peril appear in the story of Afrikaner nationalism".<sup>162</sup> The conversations about black people in Die Boerevrou did not generalise nor were they overtly political,<sup>163</sup> but true to the nature of Die Boerevrou as a women's magazine, they were more concerned with those spheres where white Afrikaner women were most likely to encounter black people: the domestic sphere. We will firstly deal with the portrayal of blacks as posing an ideological threat in the household (6.4.1) and secondly with the perception and projection of blacks as a socio-economic threat to Afrikaners (6.4.2).

#### 6.4.1 The dangerous domestic worker

In this section we will briefly be concerned with how the relationship between white Afrikaner women and black domestic employees were "constructed and reconstructed, and used to create a unified group identity always in opposition to some perceived (real or illusory) threat".<sup>164</sup> In Chapter four of this thesis we looked at how white women employed black domestic workers to do domestic work and the extent to which especially middle-class women were dependent on those domestic workers. Charles van Onselen states that middle- and ruling-class families

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<sup>161</sup> Hudson P, "Causality and the subject in a discourse-theoretical approach to Marxism" in Studies in Marxisme, Number 7, December 1986, p8.

<sup>162</sup> Quoted by Norval A, The construction of social identities and political frontiers in apartheid discourse (1958-1978), p20.

<sup>163</sup> The only exception was when, in the monthly report of the *Algemene Vroueraad van Suid-Afrika* in Die Boerevrou of February 1931, a speech by Mrs L A Collenbrander about segregation was discussed. The speech was an appeal for women to support segregation. Die Boerevrou, February 1931, p39.

<sup>164</sup> Norval A, op cit, p20.

considered domestic workers "to be part of their colonial birthright",<sup>155</sup> while even the white proletariat demanded servants, building "the price of a black servant into the cost of reproducing itself (the proletariat)".<sup>156</sup>

In the process of the construction of an Afrikaner nation in the rapidly developing South Africa, this dependency on and proximity of black people, which used to be a "right", became problematic. Various texts in Die Boerevrou clearly shows how certain forms of personal and cultural contact, which had been customarily accepted as unproblematic, were now portrayed as threatening and dangerous. Above all blacks were perceived to pose an ideological threat to the western values and ideals which predominated in the emerging Afrikaner discourse. The concern about how blacks threatened an emerging Afrikaner identity and culture can particularly clearly be discerned in a number of letters that appeared in Die Boerevrou in the last months of 1920. In October 1920 an article about the "Simplifying of domestic work" was published in Die Boerevrou. The writer of the article, A H van Gent of Bethlehem, argued that the household was the foundation of the state and that in that sense it was more important than any political party. Significantly the value of the household is stressed in terms of a number of "threats" to which it was exposed, of which the writer was most concerned with "de slechte en demoraliserende invloed" van "onze kombuiskaffer of -meid" [the bad and demoralising influence of our kitchen kaffir and maid].

Lieve lezeressen, ik neem aan, dat ge geen enkele gemeenzaamheid toelaat tussen uw huisgezin en uw bedienden, dat daar de juiste verhouding bestaat tussen meesteres, kinderen en bedienden, en dan nog houd ik vol, dat 't niet uitblijven kan, of 't minderwaardige ras oefent 'n, misschien nu nog onmerkbare, maar tog zekere invloed uit. En daaraan mogen we ons huisgezin en kinderen niet blootstellen.

[Dear readers, I presume that you do not allow any familiarity between your family and your servants, that correct relations are maintained among mistress, children and servants - and then still I maintain that the lesser race will inevitably exert some, even if it is not yet noticeable, influence. And to that we dare not expose our families and children.]

Elaborating on this statement she quoted J de V Roos, auditor-general of the Union, who said that

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<sup>155</sup> Van Onselen C, Studies in the social and economic history of the Witwatersrand, 1886-1914. One: New Babylon, p7.

<sup>156</sup> Van Onselen C, Studies in the social and economic history of the Witwatersrand, 1886-1914. Two: New Nineveh, p22.

70% of all black people in South Africa were "besmet" [contaminated] with venereal disease. She also said that because black people were employed to do domestic work, the work is "niet goed, niet beknopt, niet zuinig, en vooral niet higienies gedaan" [done neither well, nor frugally, nor quickly, nor with any hygiene] and "'n koude rilling loopt over mijn rug als ik't begrip 'hygiene' met 'n kaffer of meid moet verenigen." [cold shivers run down my back if I have to associate a kaffir or maid with hygiene]

Van Gent's article led to many letters: all agreeing with and elaborating on Van Gent's views. The common sentiment was, however, that although blacks posed a serious threat, especially to children, it was impossible to do without their labour. Mrs F G A Wolmarans' letter was representative of most of the letters published:

Omtrent die kafferarbeid waarvan Mev Van Gent skryf, is alles waar, en die gevare waarop sij ons wijs word elke dag sekerder. In elke opsig is die kaffer 'n gevaar, so nie vir ons nie, dan wel vir ons kinders. Maar hoe sal ons ons nou sonder die nasie behelp? Op die dorp verstaan ek nog hoe dit kan gebeur, maar op 'n plaas is dit tot nog toe ondoenlik...Daar is twee planne met die kaffer: hij moet die land uit, of hij moet werk.<sup>157</sup>

[Regarding the kaffir labour which Mrs Van Gent mentions - she writes truthfully, and day by day the dangers which she identifies, are on the increase. In every way the kaffirs are dangerous, be it not for us, then indeed for our children. But how shall we cope without them? I can still see it happen in the towns, but on a farm it is still quite impractical...With the kaffirs there are only two options: either they must leave the country, or they work.]

Her suggestion was that women should do their own domestic work and if they needed help they should rather use and develop "werktuigen" [appliances] than employ blacks.<sup>158</sup> In March 1921 "Leseres" [Reader] also expressed the concern that certain forms of contact with black workers were dangerous:

...maar wat ons kan doen is om sekere werke nooit aan die Kaffers oor te laat nie, soos kos in die potte set en klaarmaak. Laat ons self met kos, slaapkamer en kinders werk. Gee die Kaffer sij eie eetgereedskap en laat nie toe dat hij jou koppies, borde en lepels gebruik nie. Voer so min moontlik geselskap met hom; so blij hij vreemd; en laat die kinders so min moontlik met hom omgaan.<sup>159</sup>

[...what we can do, though, is never to allow the Kaffirs to do certain types of work, like putting food in pots or preparing food. Let us do the work with food, bedrooms and children ourselves. Let the Kaffirs have their own utensils, and don't allow them to use your cups, plates or spoons. Socialise as little as possible with them, keeping up the

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<sup>157</sup> Die Boerevrou, January 1921, p24.

<sup>158</sup> Die Boerevrou, October 1920, pp25-29.

<sup>159</sup> Die Boerevrou, March 1921, p29.

distance, and let the children do likewise.]

What is the significance of the transition in Van Gent's article and the above letters from a general concern with blacks as an ideological threat to a more specific preoccupation with hygiene and contamination? Mary Douglas in her book Purity and danger asserts that preoccupation with dirt and hygiene, contamination and purity, is firstly instrumental for people who are trying to influence one another's behaviour: "Thus we find that certain moral values are upheld and certain social rules defined by beliefs in dangerous contagion..."<sup>160</sup> But such language have a second, more expressive function if one understands the body as "a symbol of society, and to see the powers and dangers credited to social structure reproduced in small on the human body".<sup>161</sup> The concern with threats of contamination and impurities thus become analogies for expressing threats to specific social orders as "we find that the kind of contacts which are thought dangerous also carry a symbolic load".<sup>162</sup> The newly constructed "order" of Afrikanerdom was threatened by everything that did not fit in or conform: "That which is not with it, part of it and subject to its laws, is potentially against it."<sup>163</sup>

The preoccupation with purity and contamination should thus not be taken at face value and should not merely be interpreted as simply a concern with hygiene based on racist beliefs about black people. Not only was the danger of contamination and the treat to health and hygiene presented as a reason for practising segregation, this concern also becomes symbolic of the more general concern with the ideological threat of blacks to Afrikanerdom.

In South African of the time, at first the presence of "houseboys", according to Van Onselen, "gave rise to periodic outbursts of great sexual hysteria"<sup>164</sup>, while later "(w)hite women were deeply disturbed by the possibility that black housemaids would develop sexual liaisons with their husbands".<sup>165</sup> The presence of black workers in the house, especially in more intimate areas,

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<sup>160</sup> Douglas M, Purity and danger, p3.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid, p115.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid, p3.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid, p4.

<sup>164</sup> Van Onselen C, Studies in the social and economic history of the Witwatersrand, 1886-1914. One: New Babylon, p34.

<sup>165</sup> Van Onselen C, Studies in the social and economic history of the Witwatersrand, 1886-1914. Two: New Nineveh, p17.

thus also increased, as The Star suggested in 1908, the risk of a "bastard population".<sup>166</sup> While these kinds of concerns were not unique to Afrikaner women, they acquired an even more potent charge and become more urgent when raised in the context of a new Afrikaner nationalist discourse. The Afrikaner identity that was defined as pure was susceptible to the threat of contamination by blacks. Not only was the purity of the ethnic group (the race) threatened, but also the "civilised Afrikaner culture". Such fears of the projected forces of barbarity in their midst are strongly suggested in this revealing passage from a 1924 article "Wat van ons dogters" [What about our daughters?], written by "AEH":

Sou dit nie vir ons en ons kinders beter wees om nie sulke ongesiviliseerde elemente so intiem in ons familieewe op te neem nie? 'n Kaffer is nie 'n masjien nie; hy is 'n lewende wese, met gevoelens en gedagtes van sy eie. Is dit reg om die ongekende, ons kan byna sê, geheime wese so los te laat in ons huise? Het die gebruik van die gewaande masjien nie al dikwels op die treurigste ongelukke uitgeloop nie? Daar is kaffers wat goeie getroue werk doen maar sulke uitsonderings tel nie in ons redenering nie. Leesus word ook getem en loop skadeloos rond, tot tyd en wyl dat hul wilde natuur los bars.<sup>167</sup>

[Wouldn't it be better for us and our children not to assimilate so closely such uncivilised elements into our family lives? A kaffir is not a machine, they are living beings, with feelings and thoughts of their own. Is it right to turn loose these unknown, these secret beings into our homes? Hasn't the use of this so-called machine caused frequent disasters? There are kaffirs who work well and faithfully, but we are not concerned about these exceptions. Lions are also tamed and may wander around harmlessly, till suddenly their wild nature erupts.]

While the language of dirt and purity were often used to justify and express margins and boundaries, the externalisation of blacks were also expressed in the denial of a common humanity. If black people were different, they had to be either stupid (child-like)<sup>168</sup> or crazy. Significantly, "Marie", a reader, in the following letter advises readers to employ the crazy and child-like blacks, while "die slimmes" [the clever kind] are considered to be a threat and not appropriate for employment. The "clever" blacks were probably those who were more westernised and were therefore perceived to be threatening to cross the boundaries, while the "crazy" and "child-like" blacks were probably the more traditional blacks:

Ek moet jou 'n bietjie vertel van ons kaffers. Ons het nou net twee - die een heet Jackson en die ander Diamond - en altwee is 'n bietjie mal, maar hulle is uitstekende werkers, dus in die toekoms as hulle ons verlaat, sal ons maar weer probeer om twee malles te kry. Behalwe mal, is hulle ook dom. Geeneen van hulle verstaan enige ander taal as hul eie nie,

<sup>166</sup> Van Onselen C, op cit, p17.

<sup>167</sup> Die Boerevrou, February 1925, p23.

<sup>168</sup> See also Van Onselen C, op cit, p40.

en ons kan nie kaffertaal praat nie, dus sukkel ons nogal om hulle te laat verstaan; maar as hulle eens verstaan dan kry ons tog al te lekker, want hulle doen presies wat ons hulle sê en net soos ons dit wil hê, wat vir ons baie beteken. Ons het, van ons hier is, al verskillende kaffers gehad, maar die meeste was van die slim soort wat laat slaap, bang is om te werk en vroeg in die middag wil ophou werk. Nee, gee vir my maar die dom kaffer, en as hy nog 'n bietjie mal is boonop soveel te beter, hy is gewoonlik fluks, eerbiedig, praat nie tee nie en is baie dankbaar vir die minste dingetjie wat 'n mens vir hom doen. Ons merk dat kaffers dol is op 'n bietjie lekkergoed. Ons hou dus 'n pakkie goedkoop lekkergoed daarop na en menige moeilikheid het ons al met 'n handjie lekkergoed reggemaak. Dis 'n wenk wat jy gerus kan onthou.<sup>169</sup>

[Let me tell you something about our kaffirs. We only have two here, Jackson and Diamond, and both are slightly crazy, but excellent workers. Should they leave us, we think we'll try to get two loony ones again. They are not only crazy, they are also stupid. They cannot understand any language but their own, and we don't speak any black language, so we have difficulty making them understand, but once they understand, we are pleased, for they do exactly what we want, which means a lot to us. Since coming here, we've had many kaffirs, but most of them were of the smart type, sleeping late, afraid to work, and always trying to stop work early in the afternoon. Given the choice, I'll take the stupid kaffir, every time. And should he be a little crazy, so much the better. And usually he is diligent, respectful, he doesn't object, and is grateful for the smallest favour. We notice that kaffirs are especially fond of candy. So we keep a small amount of cheap candy ready, and many were the times that we solved trouble with a handful of candy. You may do well to remember this tip.]

#### 6.4.2 Blacks as a socio-economic threat

But blacks were not only portrayed as posing an ideological threat. Black workers, including domestic workers, many writers in Die Boerevrou claimed, were taking away employment opportunities from white Afrikaners. In particular the employment of blacks as domestic workers was presented as an alternative to providing employment opportunities for poor whites and fellow Afrikaners. "AEH" wrote specifically about black domestic workers:

As 'n huisvrou nou vind dat een paar hande nie die pligte aan haar kant kan vervul nie, waarom sou sy nou verkies om die toevlug te neem naar 'n paar swart hande, waarom nie naar die hande van rasgenote wat dit so brood nodig het om gebruik te word nie? Nou nog iets vir die moeders van die volk...Sal ons nie nou 'n volkswerk wil doen nie, en waar dit moontlik is, enkele dogters van ons volk in ons huise neem en hulle leer en lei en aanmoedig tot dat hul ook geskik en vaardig genoeg is om iets vir hulle self te verdien nie?<sup>170</sup>

[Should a housewife find that one pair of hands does not suffice, why should she take her refuge in a pair of black hands, why not hire the hands of her own race, who are so greatly in need of employment? Something else for the mothers of our nation...Let us render a

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<sup>169</sup> Die Boerevrou, February 1923, p13.

<sup>170</sup> Die Boerevrou, February 1925, p55.

service to our people - let us take young girls into our homes and teach them and lead them and encourage them till they can do something worthwhile for themselves.

While "AEH" and other were specifically concerned with domestic employment, Malherbe herself addressed the problem of white unemployment in general. Instead of portraying blacks as morally inferior, she approached the problem from a socio-economic point of view projecting blacks as representing a threat to the Afrikaner community. Two years after the miner's strike of 1922 (in August 1924) she suggested that blacks were in jobs that could have been occupied by whites. In doing this, she touched a raw nerve for many working class whites.<sup>171</sup> The editor wrote that it is not only the so-called class of poor whites who had to face the problem of unemployment but "honderde, ja duisende mense, wat vroeër kon ordentlik bestaan, is nou sonder werk, of vooruitsig, en op die platteland is die toestand betreurenswaardig" [hundreds, thousands of people who could have made a good living, are now out of jobs and without hope, and in the rural areas the situation is deplorable]. As a solution to the problem, she suggested:

Sou dit nie moontlik wees om orals op ons groot plase waar daar nou woonkaffers is, liewers witmense te sit nie? As daar mense op die plase werk, sal baie van die toestande wat nou die plaaslewe swaar maak verbeter. Waar nou 'n kaffer gehuur word vir 'n paar pond, waarom nie 'n wit seun nie?

[Wouldn't it be possible to replace the kaffirs who live on some large farms with white people? With people working on the farms, many of the present difficulties of farm life would be alleviated. Instead of hiring a kaffir for a few pounds, why not hire a white boy?]

She described a whole scenario of small white communities on farms with their own schools, mothers' meetings, reading groups, youth organisations and farmers' societies as a solution to the problem of white unemployment. Communal farming and industries were also suggested. Women were urged to play a role:

...maar elke vrou moet haar moue oprol en tuinmaak en haar produkte verkoop, of hoenders hou en die eiers verkoop, of enige ander nuttige belonende werk verrig. Sy is besig om ons volksvraagstuk op te los, haar aandeel is ewe groot as die van staat of kerk -

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<sup>171</sup> Although the causes of the 1922 strike cannot be discussed in detail here, the point should be made that one of the most important reasons for the strike was the suspension of the status quo agreement between the Chamber of Mines and the white unions. According to this agreement of 30 September 1918 all work that was done by white workers on that day would be reserved for whites in future. According to the official history of the National Party 75% of the mineworkers on the Rand were Afrikaners and only 10% of those were skilled workers. This meant that with the partial abolition of the colour bar, it was mainly the unskilled and semi-skilled Afrikaners who would have been threatened by cheap black labour. By 1921 the status quo agreement protected 4 020 white workers in 19 different categories of work. For the white Afrikaans-speaking workers of the 1920s, black labour power thus was a real and immediate threat.

Geyser O and Marais A H, Die Nasionale Party. Deel 1. Agtergrond, stigting en konsolidasie, p435.

sonder haar hulp sal hulle dit tog nie regkry nie.<sup>172</sup>

[...let every woman get into action, let them plant a garden and sell their produce, let them raise chickens and sell eggs, or let them do any work that can bring in some money. In this way they will help us solve a national problem. Her contribution is equal to that of the state and church - without her help they would not succeed in any case.]

Many readers reacted to this editorial and made practical suggestions regarding the unemployment problem. L Saayman, for example, agreed with the editor that whites should be employed instead of blacks:

Die swartes verdring die wittes en as ons eers tot die punt kan kom om liever 'n bietjie meer te betaal en die witmens die kans te gee op ons plase en in huise, dan help ons die persoon alleen nie, maar ook ons hele samelewe, want die witmens, hoe swak ook, behoort tog en kan tog 'n beter invloed op ons kinders uitoefen as die kaffer of die kleurling. Ek stip maar aan.<sup>173</sup>

[The blacks crowd out the whites, and if we can just get so far as to rather pay the white people a little more and give them a chance in our homes and on our farms, then we will not only help the individual, but also our whole society. For the white person, however bad he may be, should eventually have a better influence on our children than the kaffir or the coloured. I am just saying.]

In presenting the black threat as she did, Malherbe did not, like L Saayman, portray blacks as inferior. In the July 1928 editorial, entitled "Bly ons kinders agter?", Malherbe even stated that she was worried that black children were much more hard-working, self-sufficient and independent than their white counterparts:

Nou die dag vertel ons kaffer met trots hoe mooi groot sy oudste klonkie word - hy is al sewe jaar oud en pas al beeste op! Die aand toe ons voor die vuur sit dink ek hieroor - en ook oor 'n vriendin wat vertel het hoe sy vir haar groot seun moes help om klaar te maak vir 'n partytjie -sy handboordjie in sy stywe hemp sit, sy aandpak lug en afborsel en stryk, sy dassie strik - en die kaffertjie moes die skoene poets - alles, alles moes vir hom klaar staan...die kaffertjie wat alreeds op sewejarige leeftyd kan beeste oppas...leer vinnig aan en word so behendig dat (hy) gouer as wat ons besef vir (hom) 'n vaste plek in ons samelewe verower. Toe ek met 'n ou vriendin oor die onderwerp gesels...vertel sy my dat sy ook baie hieroor dink - juis die dag van ons gesprek sien sy hoe 'n paar Afrikanerseuns en 'n trop kaffers besig was met 'n stuk messelwerk. Wat haar getref het was hoe min die seuns uitgerig het, en hoe handig die kaffers al kon messel...Ons moet hieroor nadink, as ons kinders se toekoms nie alleen gelukkig wil maak nie, maar veilig wil maak.<sup>174</sup>

[The other day our kaffir proudly told us about his eldest son, who herds cattle at seven

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<sup>172</sup> Die Boerevrou, August 1924, pp2 and 4.

<sup>173</sup> Die Boerevrou, October 1924, p37.

<sup>174</sup> Die Boerevrou, July 1928, p2.

years of age! The evening in front of the fire, I pondered this, and I recalled a friend telling me how she had to help her big son prepare for a party - she had to help him into his shirt and collar, she had to air and brush his evening suit, she had to tie his bow-tie, and the little kaffir had to brush his shoes - everything had to be prepared for him...While the little seven year old herdbooy quickly gains such skill that he assures his place in our society before we know it. Discussing this with a friend, she told me that she also frequently considers this issue - on the exact same day as our discussion she told me how a few Afrikaner boys and a bunch of kaffirs were doing a piece of masonry work. She was shocked by how little the white boys managed to do, and how skillful the natives were at the craft. Should we want not only to provide our children with a happy future, but also with a safe future, we must think about these things.]

#### 6.4.3 The "black problem": Conclusion

While we have seen in earlier sections of this chapter how "chains of equivalence" were created in the construction of a new *volksmoeder*, we focused in this section on how, simultaneously, "antagonism" was created in different ways. This process of trying to construct an identity, but doing it in opposition to an "other" also operated in the *volksmoeder* discourse. Not only was a new common identity introduced in the *volksmoeder* discourse, this identity was also introduced in opposition to another social group, the blacks.

#### 6.5 Conclusion

In this chapter it has been indicated that as *volksmoeders*, women could be useful for Afrikaner nationalism in various ways. As a community, these *volksmoeders* represented an imaginary community which could transcend the divisions that existed in the Afrikaner community of the time. As mothers they could be responsible for the transmission of Afrikaner culture in the private sphere of the household and thus be instrumental in transmitting the sense of what it means to be an Afrikaner, the content of their new common identity. Conversely, they could, in the domestic sphere, also be made responsible for keeping intact the frontier between the new common Afrikaner identity and the "other", the externalised black identity. Furthermore, as mothers they could be held responsible for the reproduction of a healthy *volk*, therefore not only bearing the nation of the future but also rearing a nation that is physically and psychologically healthy.

Although it has thus been shown that the *volksmoeder* discourse can in fact be understood as partly a response to certain ethnic issues, it would be a gross simplification to claim that the social identities of Afrikaner women were entirely determined by Afrikaner nationalism. It would be a denial of the complexity of social subjectivity if we were to claim that Afrikaans women assumed

the *volksmoeder* identity simply because as *volksmoeders* they performed some essential functions for Afrikaner nationalism. In Chapter one we have asked why and in what respect it was important for Afrikaner nationalism to create certain gender roles and gender identities for women. While this question has been addressed in this chapter, we have not yet addressed the second question of why women **as women** contributed and subscribed to the Afrikaner nationalist movement? It is to this important question that we will turn in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### THE *VOLKSMOEDER* DISCOURSE AS GENDER DISCOURSE

In this chapter we will first discuss the *volksmoeder* discourse as a gender discourse. In Chapters five and six we showed how, in the *volksmoeder* discourse certain identities and roles were constructed for women. In this chapter we will specifically look at how these roles and identities were construed as "answers" to the problems of gender identity and gender roles, as identified in Chapter four.

We will do this in order to address the problem of Afrikaner women's role in the *volksmoeder* discourse. Not only were they subjects of the discourse in the traditional sense of helping to generate it, they were also constituted as subjects in the *volksmoeder* discourse in a more basic sense as they came to identify themselves with the ethnic and gender roles articulated in this discourse. We have to understand Afrikaans women's reasons for helping to construct the *volksmoeder* discourse and/or choosing to associate with the *volksmoeder* discourse.

#### 7.1 The problem of Afrikaans women and the *volksmoeder* discourse as a gender discourse

In Chapter six we construed the *volksmoeder* discourse as providing answers to certain underlying ethnic "questions". We saw that in the domestic sphere Afrikaner women fulfilled crucial functions for the emergent Afrikaner nationalism and therefore it was also in the interest of Afrikaner nationalist leaders (whatever their own motivations were for subscribing to the nationalist ideology) to generate a gender discourse such as the *volksmoeder* discourse that would stress the importance of women's roles as mothers and wives. In these ways, the *volksmoeder* discourse functioned as a nationalist discourse. With this analysis, however, we have not yet answered the most important questions posed in Chapter one of this thesis: Why did a strong woman such as Mabel Malherbe take up the nationalist cause and why did Afrikaner women in such large numbers subscribe to Afrikaner nationalism?

The simple answer, that women became *volksmoeders* because it was in the interest of Afrikaner nationalism that they should do so, is not sufficient. In Chapter one we have pointed out that such answers are functionalist, and in effect assumes that social identity is simple and obvious. Nancy Chodorow says that the notion that women become mothers (and therefore also *volksmoeders*) simply because "they were responding to a pervasive social ideology about the correct role for

women" relies on intentionality: it is assumed that because society wanted women to conform to a certain role, women "somehow" voluntarily agreed to play that role.<sup>1</sup> However, subjectivity is not that transparent and simple. The point that Chodorow makes is that women in some way (consciously or unconsciously) themselves have to have reasons to "choose" a certain identity. There could be many reasons why Afrikaans women might have assumed the identity of *volksmoeder*.

The question that remains unanswered by such functionalist accounts is why Afrikaans women **as women** chose Afrikaner nationalism and the *volksmoeder* identity? To say that women chose the Afrikaner nationalist identity (and therefore also the *volksmoeder* identity) because they were nationalists or believed in the Afrikaner nationalist cause, is not only simplistic, but leaves us with a further unanswered and vital set of questions. Given the distinctly anti-feminist nature of Afrikaner nationalism and specifically of the *volksmoeder* discourse, it is even more problematic that women subscribed to Afrikaner nationalism and the roles and identities the gender discourse articulated for women. Given its women's policy it was surprising that Afrikaner nationalism was supported by so many women - more surprising even was the fact that women who were strong, independent and powerful actively contributed to the articulation of this discourse. It is difficult to understand why women like Mabel Malherbe, Johanna Brandt and MER could support and contribute to a policy or a party that forced women into submission and passivity. Even if they did sincerely believe in the nationalist cause, the gender discourse of *volksmoeder* had, in some way, to address their claims to be respected and useful members of society as **women**.

The political "conservatism" of women, the pervasive tendency to support positions that are inherently anti-feminist, is a familiar phenomenon and has been explained in many ways. It has been ascribed to biology and religious beliefs. Marxists have explained women's support for right-wing or conservative movements to false consciousness or particular class interests. Also in South Africa it has been claimed, by Bozzoli<sup>2</sup> and Hofmeyr<sup>3</sup>, that women's conservatism can be

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted by Eisenstein H, Contemporary feminist thought, p88.

<sup>2</sup> Bozzoli says in this regard:

Most women at home, and to a considerable extent, at work, are not involved in relationships which are of a fully capitalist nature - and we have not even considered the position of women on white farms. No socialism, let alone feminism, is likely to arise from people engaged in these kinds of relationships for a long time to come.

Bozzoli B, Feminist interpretations and South African studies: some suggested avenues of exploration, p30.

explained by their absence from wage labour, or where they are wage labourers, by the fact that they are not fully proletarianised.

In this regard it is instructive to look at the recent work of Campbell (1987)<sup>4</sup> and the work of Claudia Koonz on women and German national-socialism (1988).<sup>5</sup> Beatrix Campbell, in her study of women in Britain's Conservative Party, states that women's conservatism, and thus their appropriation of an identity similar to the *volksmoeder* identity, cannot simply be explained by reference to their class interests, religious beliefs or biology. When explaining women's support for the Conservative Party and the Nazis respectively, they both use similar formulations. Instead of merely describing women as the victims of men, their class position, their biology, political ideologies and history, both Koonz and Campbell ascribe a measure of agency to women. These women, they say, made certain choices. Their choices were based on tactical and realistic calculation and was fed by a certain degree of pessimism, fatalism and cynicism on the one hand and opportunism on the other hand.<sup>6</sup> According to Koonz and Campbell, these women argued that it would never be possible to obtain power in the public sphere by fair competition with men because men were not fair. They accepted that equality was an impossible ideal and that any attempt to achieve it would be in vain. They reasoned, however, that by obtaining a sphere for themselves, they could achieve some degree of autonomy and power, not only in this sphere, but also, indirectly and even directly, in the public sphere.

The problem of the ambivalent relation of Afrikaans women to the *volksmoeder* discourse ie that as women they contributed to a distinctively anti-feminist discourse, may perhaps similarly be investigated as an informal bargain involving a calculated exchange of social significance and power in certain spheres for a decided subordination and limitation in others. This informal bargain could even be compatible with a strategy of women aspiring to ultimately obtain power, indirectly

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<sup>3</sup> Although Hofmeyr does not make this point directly, she certainly implies this when she writes:

Many housewives, in any event the ones most bound to an ethnic community, must have internalised bits of this "Afrikaner" ideology. Their husbands in the workplace mostly subscribed to an "English" Labour Party political culture...

Hofmeyr I, Building a nation from words, p35.

<sup>4</sup> Campbell B, The iron ladies. Why do women vote Tory?.

<sup>5</sup> Koonz C, Mothers in the fatherland. Women, the family and Nazi politics.

<sup>6</sup> Koonz C, op cit, p55 and Campbell B, op cit, pp2 and 298.

and even directly, in other spheres. In other words, women might have subscribed to the *volksmoeder* discourse not only because this discourse was legitimised in ethnic terms, but also because it could be legitimised in gender terms. It appealed to them not only as Afrikaners but also as women. In the next sections we will explore the *volksmoeder* discourse as a gender discourse, specifically in relation to the changing significance given to the role of women in the private and public spheres in terms of this discourse.

## 7.2 The *volksmoeder* discourse as a gender discourse

In Chapter four we attempted to show how women's identity and women's roles became an issue at the beginning of the twentieth century. It was indicated how industrialisation and urbanisation led to changes in the structures and the functions of the household so that women were increasingly excluded from the production process and many of their other functions in the household also became obsolete. Women, also Afrikaans women, had to find new roles and new identities for themselves. Many women, especially those from the working class, entered the labour market, but even more remained in the domestic sphere where the roles which they fulfilled were not as important or as significant as formerly. These changes led to various responses from different groups of women, also in South Africa. Distinct gender discourses, such as the feminist discourse and the suffragette discourse, were generated. It was in this context that Afrikaans women too had to find new identities and new roles for themselves. We saw in Chapter four how Afrikaans women in the five years prior to 1918 acted and organised, partly in response to the growing uncertainty about their positions in society. Their responses had a certain ambivalence in that it included their first open ventures into the public sphere but on the other hand signified a new retreat to the domestic sphere. This ambivalence enhanced the problem of gender identity and gender roles.

In the *volksmoeder* discourse Afrikaner nationalists presented the *volksmoeder* identity and the gender roles that such an identity presupposed and implied (see Chapter five) as an answer to this generalised problem of gender identity and gender roles for women. Apart from its appeal to them as nationalists in ethnic terms, Afrikaner nationalism also had to be projected to them as women in gender terms. Afrikaner nationalist leaders (men and women) had to convince Afrikaans women that the identity and role of *volksmoeder* would be the best solution for those gender problems that they faced as women. As a gender discourse the *volksmoeder* discourse was thus comparable to discourses such as the feminist discourse and the suffragette discourse in that it was also supposed to provide women with new gender identities and gender roles.

Afrikaner nationalism, like all nationalisms, was and is inherently conservative and anti-feminist. In Chapter six we saw that for various reasons it is of prime importance for nationalism that the distinction between the private sphere and the public sphere should be maintained and that women should remain domesticated as mothers and wives. It was when women identified themselves as mothers and wives, or more specifically as *boerevroue* and *volksmoeders* that they could be most valuable for Afrikaner nationalism.<sup>7</sup> In spite (or perhaps because) of this inherently conservative and anti-feminist nature of Afrikaner nationalism, Afrikaner leaders paid very detailed attention to the question of women and when specific gender identities and roles for Afrikaans women were articulated in the *volksmoeder* discourse, they were presented as being particularly beneficial to women as women.<sup>8</sup>

This was done through a conscious attempt to make the women's sphere in some senses and to a certain degree more important and more public. By following this strategy, women would stay within the limits set by nationalism and at the same time gain some freedoms, although not liberation, for themselves. This ambivalence can be traced in the ambiguous relation of the new gender discourse to traditional notions of mothering: on the one hand the discourse remained rooted in notions of mothering as essential to women's identity while on the other hand it transformed these traditional notions investing it with new meanings in different contexts.

In this way not only the *volksmoeder* discourse, but also the Afrikaner nationalist discourse itself, was legitimised. In the *volksmoeder* discourse women were led to believe that promoting the nation would not only benefit them as members of the nation, but would also benefit them as women. We are thus dealing with a double process of legitimation: legitimation in ethnic terms (as discussed in Chapter six) and legitimation in gender terms. On the one hand the positions and roles of Afrikaner women as *volksmoeders* were legitimised in nationalist terms. On the other hand, all women would not be available for such an ethnic appeal and for them the ethnic discourse of Afrikaner nationalism had to be legitimised in gender terms. In Chapter one of this thesis, we in fact suggested that Mabel Malherbe might also have subscribed to Afrikaner nationalism because

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<sup>7</sup> In Chapter six it was indicated why Afrikaner nationalism had to keep women in the mothering role in the domestic sphere - for its own survival it had to anti-feminist.

<sup>8</sup> A pronounced women's policy is a general trait of nationalism. Mason, referring to the Nazi (national-socialist) regime in Germany, states that it had "a more clearly defined and more self-conscious attitude towards women than any other modern government". Mason T, "Women in Germany, 1925-1940: Family, welfare and work. Part 1" in History Workshop. A journal of socialist historians, Issue 1, Spring 1976, p86.

of her interest in women.

### 7.2.1 An informal bargain: the queen of the household becomes the ruler of the world

Elizabeth Janeway, a liberal feminist, explains the problematic "conservatism" of women in terms of the private/public dualism. Women generally accept the distinction between the private and public sphere because limiting themselves to the private sphere hold certain rewards for them. In an informal bargain, private power is exchanged for public submission. She describes this exchange as "the regular orthodox bargain by which men rule the world and allow women to rule in their own place". Because they have power in the domestic sphere women do not demand the intellectual, economic and political power available in the public sphere.<sup>9</sup>

To some extent the same kind of exchange can be identified in the *volksmoeder* discourse: women who are recognised and confirmed as the queens of the household, or who may even be said to provide the government<sup>10</sup> of the household, would not also ask for power elsewhere. We have seen in previous chapters how mothering (which was the traditional role for women within the private sphere) in the *volksmoeder* discourse was reified, politicised and professionalised (Chapter five). In these ways motherhood was given special religious significance, social relevance, professional status and perhaps most importantly within the nationalist context, the honorary title of *volksmoeders* was bestowed upon women who mothered in accordance with the nationalist ideal, thus investing their roles with central significance for the project of nation-building.

However, the *volksmoeder* discourse does not simply offer one more instance of this familiar exchange of domestic power for public subordination. In important ways the traditional significance of private and public roles were also transformed. Because mothering in the *volksmoeder* discourse obtained public importance, such mothering also indirectly promised women a kind of public power. It was thus not just a case of ruling the household **instead of** ruling the world: rather, women were supposed to rule the household and therefore indirectly rule the world as well. In trying to explain how it was possible to gain the consent of women for Nazism ("a politics and an ideology which were profoundly hostile to women"), Koontz claims that this was done precisely by the new practical social importance given to the traditional domestic activities of women. Haug summarises Koontz's argument as follows:

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<sup>9</sup> Janeway E in Man's world, woman's place (p56) quoted by Eisenstein, Contemporary feminist thought, p10.

<sup>10</sup> For a systematic development of this analogy by Totius, see Het Kerkblad, 15 February 1916. Reproduced in D'Assonville V E (ed), op cit, p314.

To be a mother for the Fatherland, to save Germany, to put an end to want - the ideals interlocked, became synonymous with being a woman. Consequently, politics, military affairs and science could be left to men, because hearth and home did not simply promise women something private but made the familiar world of the private itself a public sector.<sup>11</sup>

We saw in Chapter five how the private functions of mothering were given public significance in the *volksmoeder* discourse. The formulations clearly illustrate how women were led to believe that by doing their traditional duties in the household, they were doing much more - they were shaping the future of the nation:

Die toekomst van ons volk berus by die moeders.<sup>12</sup>  
[The future of our *volk* lies with the mothers.] (Mabel Malherbe)

...die toekomst van jong Suid-Afrika is in die hande van die vrou en moeder...<sup>13</sup>  
[...The future of young South Africa rests in the hands of the woman and mother.] (Mev J F E Celliers)

In practice, of course, this more complex exchange still left the status and the everyday life of women virtually unchanged. This "exchange" merely constituted a systematic attempt to **change women's perception of their status and lifestyle**.<sup>14</sup> The split between the private and the public worlds was still accepted and effectively stayed intact, but the relative value and significance of these different worlds were re-interpreted.<sup>15</sup> Mason, in his discussion of women in Nazi Germany, aptly describes the situation:

...drudgery, scrimping and saving, anxiety, self-abnegation and the highly constricted perspective of a life revolving around the household remained, but they were now hallowed by a never-ending stream of compliments from the country's political leaders, attended to by an ever-growing phalanx of governmental and party organisations, endowed with the greatest possible general public significance, and, in the case of the rigours of child-birth, translated through a frenetic vocabulary of adulation into an ideological experience of quasi-religious reverence.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Haug F, "Review of Mothers in the fatherland by Claudia Koonz" in New Left Review, Number 172, November/December 1988, p108.

<sup>12</sup> Die Boerevrou, May 1924, pp4-5.

<sup>13</sup> Die Boerevrou, March 1927, pp9-10.

<sup>14</sup> Mason T, op cit, p100.

<sup>15</sup> Elsthan J B, Public man, private woman. Women in social and political thought, p229.

<sup>16</sup> Mason T, op cit, p100.

For Malherbe, who decidedly wanted to negotiate a better position for women, this "bargain" too could have appeared an excellent solution: she realised that investing the traditional women's sphere with this heightened social and political significance might be women's way to not only gain power in the private domain of the household, but also to gain some kind of influence in the "male sphere". The celebration and elevation of motherhood was thus presented as an alternative to the "unrealistic" goal of the full emancipation of women. The alternative was not just acceptable to men, it was also an easy alternative for women as it was familiar to them and not offensive to their husbands, lovers and fathers - the people who, after all, were still in power.

### 7.2.2 Motherhood as ticket to the public world: the perambulator and the public sphere

Sy het die stemreg vir die Suid-Afrikaanse vrou op 'n kinderwaentjie ingeloods.  
[With a perambulator she launched voting rights for women.]

- Louise Behrens about Mabel Malherbe<sup>17</sup>

In the pages of Die Boerevrou, there was a further development: instead of power in the private sphere merely being used to obtain indirect power in the public sphere, we also find that within the *volksmoeder* discourse power in the private sphere was used to justify some direct power in the public sphere. Three steps can thus be identified: (i) power and influence in the domestic sphere was presented as an alternative to power and influence in the public sphere; (ii) within the *volksmoeder* discourse having power and influence in the domestic sphere implied indirect power in the public sphere; and (iii) women's role in the domestic sphere became the justification for their demand for power and influence in the public sphere.

Although we have seen in Chapter five that the *volksmoeder* discourse as a discourse developed and was by no means static, we have to ask whether, within the *volksmoeder* discourse, this third step was possible and could be accommodated. But after having posed that question, as feminists, we need to go even further. We have to evaluate the meaning of this third step in feminist terms. We have to ask whether power, obtained in such indirect ways, is meaningful and whether it is real power in the feminist sense of the word.

However, before we turn to this crucial question, we will first consider certain relevant debates in Die Boerevrou. What is significant about these debates is that they show how the roles the *volksmoeder* discourse required women to play were used to justify women's admittance to the

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<sup>17</sup> Behrens L, "Mabel Malherbe - die 'boervrou' wat nou promoveer" in Sarie Marais, 15 April 1953, p14.

public sphere. This development can be discerned in the Die Boerevrou's approach to the involvement of women (specifically Mabel Malherbe) in the city council. It was in the articulations concerning women's political involvement on the level of local politics that we can see the progression to the third step. Although the view that the domestic sphere was the sphere of women was still supported, a very significant conceptual shift took place: the definition of the domestic sphere was broadened.

The first article about women in the city council appeared when it was announced in October 1926 that Malherbe and another woman would be running for the city council of Pretoria. Significantly this was presented by relating such political activity to the particular social identities of women in the *volksmoeder* discourse:

Ons reken dat vrouens in **die huishouding van die stad** ook hulle stem moet laat hoor, veral oor werk in verband met kinderversorging, suiwer behandeling van eetware, voldoende en goedkoop water en lig, veral vir die arme ens,ens.

Meer en meer besef ons dat die praktiese ondervinding van vrouens in die huis, hulle omgang met die kinders en met die bediende, hulle verdieping in die netelige sakies van die lewe hulle dikwels nie alleen 'n insig gee in die moeilikhede van die daelikse lewe nie, maar dikwels 'n ingewing gee hoe om verkeerde dinge te verhelp of te verbeter.<sup>18</sup> (My emphasis.)

[ We think that women should also let themselves be heard in the household of the city, especially regarding child care, the management of food, sufficient and affordable water and lights, especially as far as the poor are concerned, etc.

More and more we realise that the practical experience of women in the house, their interaction with children and servants, their involvement with life's thorny little problems - that these provide them not only with insight into life's daily troubles, but it also enlightens them to right or improve what is wrong.]

To justify involvement in the city council, Malherbe thus in this editorial compared the city to a household, the recognised sphere of women. If the city was a household it would be acceptable for women to take an active part in civic politics. Such involvement in politics amounted to a departure from traditional gender roles but this appeared less threatening if it was presented as the extension of women's household duties. Women were not really moving into a new sphere, they were just doing their traditional duty in the extended household of the city.

In the October 1926 editorial Malherbe, in arguing that women should be recognised in the political arena, advanced positions similar to those of the suffragettes (see 4.5) but carefully couched it

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<sup>18</sup> Die Boerevrou, October 1926, p6.

in the categories of the *volksmoeder* discourse. Firstly, women as mothers had special interests such as child care, feeding and household expenses that they should be able to protect. Because the city council's policy had an effect on these matters, the city council was itself an extension of the household. The point that a clean and healthy city was very important for the work that a woman did at home, was made in the March 1929 editorial when Malherbe wrote about the first Urban Women's Congress that took place in Cape Town:

...wat ook opvallend was, was dat soveel van die stedelike aangeleenthede werklik van belang was vir die huisvrou. Die behuising, veral van die armes, die skoonhou van die strate, en asbakke ens, aflewering van kos op 'n skoon manier, die weeshuise, was alles sake wat in nou verband staan met die gesondheid en welvaart van die huisgesin. **Daar het dit duidelik geblyk dat die werk van die stadsrade eintlik maar die werk van 'n huishouding op groot skaal is.** En werklik, ons was daar meer oortuig geraak dat vroue op die stadsrade moet dien...<sup>19</sup> (My emphasis.)

[...it was also quite conspicuous how many of the urban questions also concerned the housewives. Housing, especially housing for the poor, street cleaning and garbage removal, hygienic food delivery, orphanages - these were all issues closely connected to the health and prosperity of the household. **It was clear that the work of city councils was just household work on a larger scale.** Indeed, we became more convinced that women should serve on city councils...]

Secondly, the special skills and insight that women had developed through their work as mothers in the domestic sphere, would provide valuable contributions to the political arena like the city council, exactly because the issues in the city council were so similar to those in a household. In giving her reasons why she wanted women to be elected to the city council, AEC in 1926 said that the domestic roles of women, such as caring for people and cleaning, by analogy qualified them for real government:

'n Vroumens is gewoon om skoon te maak, en aan die kant te maak; en waar sy op 'n bestuur of raad kom, begint sy dadelik die besem en die waslap te gebruik, Sy sien die vuil en ongesonde plekke in 'n stad raak lank voor 'n man dit sou agterkom; - want sy is gewoon om te sorg dat haar man en kinders skoon kos te ete kry, en dat die lug in die kamers vars bly.<sup>20</sup>

[ Women are used to cleaning and tidying, and where she serves on committees or councils, she immediately starts to use the broom and the wash-cloth. She notices the dirty and unhygienic places in a city long before a man does - for she is used to providing clean food for her husband and children, and to ensure that the air in the rooms remain fresh.]

In 1930 Malherbe was elected as a member of the city council for the second time and the other

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<sup>19</sup> Die Boerevrou, March 1928, p2.

<sup>20</sup> Die Boerevrou, November 1926, p2.

two members of the staff, Anna Carinus and Marguerite Pienaar, wrote the October 1930 editorial to congratulate her. Once again, to justify women's participation in local government, they drew the same analogy of the city council as an extended household:

Die stadsraad is maar net 'n huishouding in groter vorm; en waar ons redaktrise gewoon is om huishoudelike wenke uit te skryf, en raad te gee wat betref die opvoeding van kinders, en die voorkoming en genesing van siektes sal dit vir haar seker nie moeilik val om 'n genesende vinger te druk op meer as een seerplek in ons stedelike toestande nie.<sup>21</sup>

[The city council is but a household in a bigger format. Accustomed as she was to provide domestic tips and advice regarding the rearing of children and nursing the sick, it should not be too difficult for her to lay a healing hand on many a painful condition in our city.]

The deliberateness of Malherbe's strategy becomes apparent in a biographical detail related in Sarie Marais of April 1953. She related how in the 1920s, as a committed advocate of the suffrage for women, she was to present the motion in favour of the vote for women at a Women's National Party (WNP) congress. She and other speakers used similar arguments to those quoted above and the WNP for the first time voted in favour of the suffrage for women. That evening she woke up in the middle of the night and woke her roommate for the congress, Elsie van Broekhuizen (who had also been an avid campaigner for the enfranchisement of women): "'Besef jy,' het sy laggend gevra, 'dat ons die stemreg vir die Afrikaanse vrou feitlik op 'n kinderwa ingeloods het?'" ["Do you realise," she asked laughingly, "that we basically launched the vote for women on a perambulator?"]<sup>22</sup>

Thus, in Die Boerevrou, the *volksmoeder* discourse was used to advocate that women should also be allowed to play other roles in a sphere hitherto reserved for men. But the claims and the demands made in the context of this discourse, while progressive for its time, had certain important limitations when evaluated from a feminist perspective. In particular, those arguments remained premised on an assumption of women being necessarily tied to the private sphere. Not one of the writers argued that women should have the choice to leave the private sphere of the household or to enter the public sphere. The writers rather argued that women belonged in the household and that they had specific skills that equipped them to work in the household. They then compared the city to a big household and concluded that women were very well equipped to work in the big household of the city. Also, that which she was protecting in the private household as a mother, should also be protected on a bigger scale in the public household of the

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<sup>21</sup> Die Boerevrou, November 1930, p2.

<sup>22</sup> Behrens L, "Mabel Malherbe - die 'boervroutjie' wat nou promoveer" in Sarie Marais, 15 April 1953, p14.

city. The distinction between the domestic sphere as women's sphere and the political sphere as men's sphere was never questioned, but very subtly the metaphor of the big household of the city altered the boundaries of the domestic sphere. Women remained limited to being mothers but could also play the mothering roles in the city.

The meaning and limitations of these demands can perhaps be best understood if we look at Afrikaner women's reactions to the enfranchisement of women, as articulated in Die Boerevrou. However, before we attempt to understand the meaning that the enfranchisement of women obtained within the *volksmoeder* discourse and compare it to the meaning it had in other gender discourses, we have to look briefly at the context in which the Nationalist government decided to give women the vote and what meaning they ascribed to this move.

The eventual enfranchisement of women was part of General Hertzog and the National Party's larger strategy to establish white supremacy in the whole country. In the Cape province black men still had a qualified franchise, as they had before the Union. According to the constitution blacks could not simply be removed from the voter's roll: according to the Union constitution of 1909 a two-thirds majority of both houses of parliament sitting together was required to amend it.<sup>23</sup> By 1926 the principle of women's suffrage had been accepted by most of the men in parliament. Hertzog's position as early as 1924 was that "women were qualified to vote but they would have to wait till the problem of the Cape franchise had been dealt with" and that the enfranchisement for women was not in the best interest of the country at that point.<sup>24</sup> In 1926 a Nationalist member of the parliamentary Select Committee on the Enfranchisement of Women, Mr Brand Wessels, expressed this attitude as follows:

After all, we who are opposed to women's suffrage are opposed to it not on account of the unfitness of women, but on the grounds of the difficulty in the coloured and native vote.<sup>25</sup>

Giving women (black as well as white) the vote in terms of the existing Cape franchise proved to be problematic for the Nationalist government as this would also result in more black voters. The

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<sup>23</sup> Walker C, "The women's suffrage movement" in Walker C (ed), Women and resistance in southern Africa to 1945, p313.

<sup>24</sup> Walker C, op cit, p335.

<sup>25</sup> Quoted by Walker C, op cit, p334.

suffragette movement itself (except for a few individuals within the movement) by 1926<sup>26</sup> only advocated the enfranchisement of white women, and in so doing confirmed the ethnic boundaries of their "sisterhood". A leading suffragist, Lady Rose-Innes, explained in 1926 that half a loaf (the enfranchisement of white women) was better than none: "We know in our hearts we shall not get all that we ask, but we are very anxious for the half-loaf. The other may come."<sup>27</sup>

Hertzog eventually came to see that giving white women the vote might serve to neutralise the effect of the black vote - and this gave the enfranchisement of women an entirely different social and political significance. Walker calculated that while black men amounted to almost 20% of the Cape voters in 1929, after the enfranchisement they represented less than 11% of them and less than 5% of the national electorate. The enfranchisement of women was rather the result of a calculated and clever political strategy by the National Party in the context of race politics. D F Malan explained Hertzog's move as follows:

Vrouestemreg met sy verdubbeling van die blanke kieserstal...is nie alleen ons enigste kans om die oorheersing van die naturellestem die hoof te bied nie, maar dit was ons laaste kans en ons hoop dat die vrou...die beste gebruik daarvan sal maak.<sup>28</sup>

[The enfranchisement of women doubled the number of white voters...giving us not just our only chance to avoid domination by the native voice, but it was also our last opportunity, and we hope women...will make the best use of it.]

MER, when discussing the suffrage for women in her autobiography, does not mention the neutralisation of the black electorate, but claims that the NP calculated that their chances of staying in power would increase if women could also vote.<sup>29</sup> Although it is not possible to

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<sup>26</sup> Even before this the South African suffragettes were not particularly concerned with the vote for black women. They called for the enfranchisement of women "on the same terms as for men" and as black men were only enfranchised in the Cape province, this position can not be called non-racial.

Walker C, Women and resistance in South Africa, p22.

<sup>27</sup> Quoted by Walker C, op cit, p23.

<sup>28</sup> Scholtz G D, Die ontwikkeling van die politieke denke van die Afrikaner. Deel 7. 1924-1939, p1190.

<sup>29</sup> MER also remarks:

...die SAP, wat seker ook maar hulle berekenings gemaak het, (was) maar lou partydig daarvoor (vroue-stemreg), of openlik teengekant...

...the SAP, who probably also made their calculations, was mildly in favour of it (the suffrage for women), or openly agianst it....

Rothmann M E, My beskeie deel, pp225-226.

ascertain whether her claim was correct,<sup>30</sup> it is important that she also does not ascribe the decision to a change of heart in nationalist circles about the position of women in society.

Within the suffragette discourse the enfranchisement of women in 1930 had a very different significance: it was interpreted as the result of a struggle that lasted 38 years<sup>31</sup>, and most of the women in the suffragette movement understood the Women's Enfranchisement Act as a political victory for them. Not surprisingly then, the Women's Enfranchisement League disbanded in 1930,<sup>32</sup> satisfied that it had reached its goal. Because they were white and middle class these women were satisfied that existing political structures of society would now also incorporate them as white women. Their feminist aspirations did not stretch as far as wanting to abolish the structures (social and economic) that had made it possible for men to withhold the vote from them in the first place.

It can be expected that within the *volksmoeder* discourse, as a nationalist discourse, the enfranchisement of women would be interpreted in much the same way as it was interpreted by the leaders of the National Party. But as a gender discourse, presenting Afrikaans women with gender identities and gender roles, this new development also had to be understood in appropriate terms. We saw that in this discourse women as mothers and wives were confined to the private sphere of the household. By becoming enfranchised women were formally admitted to the public sphere. In principle this was contrary to the social identity and role allotted to women in this discourse. Totius, in a 1930 article entitled "Moet ons vroue nou gaan stem?" [Should our women now vote?], solved the contradiction by saying that the enfranchisement of women did not imply that women should now act positively in the public sphere, but that women were only allowed in the public sphere to **neutralise** bad influences in this sphere. The suffrage for women should thus not be regarded as an indication of the advancement of women in society:

Sy moet nie 'n feesdag gaan hou, omdat die vrou uiteindelik gekry het wat haar van Eva

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<sup>30</sup> The elections of 1929 and 1933 differed a lot. The 1933 election tested the attitude towards a coalition of the NP and the SAP. The NP called itself the NP-coalition, while the SAP called itself the SAP-coalition. Also, while 80,8% of the electorate voted in 1929, the voting percentage was only 63,9% in 1933. Because of these factors it is impossible to establish whether the enfranchisement for women broadened the electoral support base of the NP. Schoeman B M, Parlementêre verkiesings in Suid-Afrika, 1910-1976, pp154 and 181-182.

<sup>31</sup> Walker C, "The women's suffrage movement" in Walker C (ed), Women and gender in southern Africa to 1945, p313.

<sup>32</sup> Walker C, Women and resistance in South Africa, pp275-276.

se dae onthou was nie! Inteendeel, sy moet die feministiese suurdeeg uit haar lewe hou. As sy dus gaan stem, dan doen sy dit onder dwang, ek sou haas se, protes. In die noodtoestand waarin sy verkeer kan sy haar huis nie op 'n ander manier behoorlik beskerm nie.<sup>33</sup>

[She should not go out and celebrate, because she received what had been withheld from the days since Eve. On the contrary, she should keep the feminist yeast out of her life. When she votes, it is done under duress, under protest, I would almost say. Considering the emergency she finds herself in, there is no other way to defend her home.]

In a previous section of this chapter, however, we identified certain new developments within the *volksmoeder* discourse itself. We saw that some contributors to Die Boerevrou began to argue that women should be allowed into the public sphere because of their special interest and skills in the household, thus turning the discourse into a legitimation for political participation. Although Totius acknowledged this as a reason why women should have the vote, he emphasised - as opposed to the suffragette interpretation - that the enfranchisement of women should not be celebrated as a victory for women's liberation, but rather be regarded as an inevitable social necessity.

Not surprisingly, then, an article published in Die Boerevrou in 1930 likewise emphasised the fact that the granting of the franchise to women should not be viewed as the result of a struggle for women's rights. "n Onbevooroordeelde regsgeleerde" [An unbiased lawyer] wrote a long article about the vote for women in the August 1930 issue of Die Boerevrou. His opening remark was that South African women were not involved in a major struggle for enfranchisement. He claimed that, although there was an organisation working specifically for the extension of the franchise to women, women had been granted suffrage before they actually seriously started working for it. According to him, "vir die meeste meerderjarige vrouens in Suid-Afrika was dit heeltemal onverskillig was of hulle stem of nie" [for the most women of age in South Africa it was totally irrelevant whether they voted or not]. He asked whether a privilege that was gained so easily would be appreciated.<sup>34</sup>

In this context Die Boerevrou's reaction to the granting of the franchise to women was significant. As indicated in Chapter six, the issue of the suffrage for women was never discussed in Die Boerevrou before the vote was actually granted to them - it was considered to be too controversial

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<sup>33</sup> Het Kerkblad, 4 November 1930. Reproduced in D'Assonville V E, op cit, p328.

<sup>34</sup> Die Boerevrou, August 1930, p2.

an issue.<sup>36</sup> Malherbe, who had been marginally involved in the suffrage campaign, was careful not to be too victorious about the new developments. The first time the topic was discussed in Die Boerevrou was in the June 1930 editorial, "Vrouestemreg". Significantly, Malherbe did not hail it as a right that women acquired, but described it as a new way in which mothers could protect their children and their households. Contrary to Totius, however, she argued that enfranchisement would change women's role in the protection of their children from a passive role to an active role:

En nou dat die deur oop staan vir die moeder, noudat sy ook nie alleen sal kan dink en hoop vir die welvaart van haar kind nie, maar ook sal kan **doen** wat vir hom die welvaart sal verseker - wie weet hoe ver ons dit nie sal bring nie...Sy sal leer en beseef dat haar pligte teenoor haar kinders, haar man, haar famielie, haar land en volk...haar noop om...handelend op te tree om haar deel toe te bring tot ...die veilig maak, die geluk verskaf aan haar kinders en haar medesuster se kinders.<sup>36</sup>

[Now the doors are open to the mother, now that she is not only able to think and hope for the well-being of her children, but also will be able to **act** to guarantee his well-being - who knows how far we might be able to take it...She will learn and realize that her duty towards her husband, children, family, country and *volk* compels her to act by doing her share to safeguard her children, to bring happiness to her children and to those of her sisters.] (My emphasis.)

In the same editorial it became clear that she did see enfranchisement as a way in which women could get back that which they had lost, namely their role and duties in society:

Die vrou het deur moderne toestande sonder pligte teenoor die samelewe, haar ewewig verloor - nou dat sy mondig is, sal sy dit terugkry.<sup>37</sup>

[Modern conditions lessened the responsibility of women to society, thus disturbing their social equilibrium - having come of age, they now will regain that balance.]

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<sup>36</sup> Although Malherbe had a policy not to mention the topic of the suffrage for women, the odd comment did slip through. For instance, E M W, in an article about job opportunities for women, wrote (a bit apologetically):

Dit is moeilik om te verstaan hoekom die vroue in Suid-Afrika nog nie die stemreg het nie...Daar is ook die Internasionale Vrouestemregbond. Op die oog lyk dit na 'n selfsugtige vereniging, want die oogmerk daarvan is om gelyke regte met mans te verkry...Wat hulle na gestreef het was om die huislike lewe soeter en reiner te maak, deur wetgewing in die rigting...

[It is difficult to understand why South African women still can't vote...There is even an International Women's Suffrage Union. At first glance it looks like a selfish organisation, its aim being to gain equal rights with men...What they really wanted to do, was to make domestic life sweeter and purer by encouraging legislation in this regard...]

Die Boerevrou, November 1924, p23.

<sup>36</sup> Die Boerevrou, June 1930, p2.

<sup>37</sup> Loc cit.

In subsequent comments on this topic, Malherbe continued to explain the importance of the suffrage in terms of mothering. Malherbe emphasised the role women, as mothers concerned about their sons, can and will play as voters in the prevention of war. She argued that since a mother would not in the private domain of the household let her son take unnecessary risks and be exposed to danger, the "mothers of the nation" would do the same for the nation and prevent it from getting involved in war. Again there were two arguments at work. First, it is not sufficient for the mother only to protect her son in the domestic sphere of the household. She also has to protect him outside the boundaries of the household - thus her mothering functions in the household force her to become active in other spheres as well. Thus, the whole world become a large household. Secondly, the nation could be compared to a son, and women - who had mothered the nation as they had mothered their sons - should be allowed to be involved in the protection of the nation as they were involved in the protection of their sons. On the one hand Malherbe was making a conceptual shift as she offered a wider definition of the household - the household of the country - and on the other hand she was using a metaphor to make a point: because women were mothers the enfranchisement for women was justified.<sup>38</sup>

In Die Boerevrou of February 1931 the editor reminded women of the importance of registering as voters and of making sure that the less privileged women<sup>39</sup> in their neighbourhood also registered. She said that women would now be able to act when they were dissatisfied with a situation. Her goal was no longer to justify the enfranchisement of women, she was now intent on explaining to her constituency why it was in their interest (as mothers) to register as voters and to vote.

To illustrate why this was so important for her, she told two stories,<sup>40</sup> both with the message

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<sup>38</sup> When she ended the June 1930 editorial with a dramatic question, "Ons het die mag in die hande - susters dit stem to erns en tot nederigheid. Sal ons antwoord op die roepstem van Suid-Afrika? Sal ons offer wat sy vra?" [We have the power in our hands - sisters, this should make us serious and humble. Shall we answer the call of South Africa? Shall we sacrifice what she asks], the context of the question leaves one with the impression that the power she is referring to is the power to protect the household and the children and that voting is regarded simply as performing a duty for the country. In the first part of the phrase, however, the words "power" and "sisters" have a distinct feminist ring to them - which might have been intended.

<sup>39</sup> Is Mrs Malherbe implying here that her readers are mostly from the more affluent classes?

<sup>40</sup> The first story is about a woman whose husband received custody of their four children when they were divorced. The reason the judge gave for this decision was that the husband would earn 22 pounds a month while the wife would have to run a boarding house to earn money. She

that mothers in particular, not women in general, needed to be protected in the domestic sphere. Men, she said, were not capable of doing this as they did not understand mothering and mothers. She stressed that women should be responsible for protecting mothers and their interests and that they should use their votes for these purposes.<sup>41</sup>

This approach to women's enfranchisement in terms of the *volksmoeder* discourse was also followed by the only reader whose view about the extension of the vote to women was published in its pages - Die Boervrou was closed down at the end of 1931. O MacDonald wrote in Die Boerevrou of March 1931:

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commented:

Dink net: Viermaal het daardie vrou by die poorte van die dood omgedraai vir daardie kinders. Tien jaar van haar lewe het sy gewy aan hulle behoeftes. Tien jaar lank het sy hulle aan haar bors gesoog, hulle gebad, vir hulle gekook, klere gemaak, hulle gehelp met hulle lesse, hulle gebedjies saans laat opse, en hulle opgepas as hulle siek was, en nou kom hierdie regter - hierdie man - wat van natuur niks weet van 'n moeder se gevoelens nie, en hy skeur al vier van haar af weg, en laat haar arms leeg en haar hart verlate...  
 [Just consider this: Four times that woman turned at the gates of death for those children. Ten years of her life she dedicated to their needs. Ten long years she fed them at her breast, bathed them, cooked for them, clothed them, helped them with their lessons, let them say their prayers at night, nursed them when they were sick, and now here comes this judge - this man - who by nature knows nothing of a mother's feelings, and he tears them all away from her, and leaves her with empty arms and a destitute heart...]

The other story is about her trip through the rural areas where she saw so many children's graves. When she questioned a woman about this the woman said that she had lost five children at birth as her husband could not spare the oxen to take her to hospital for the delivery. He insisted that his mother and her mother had coped on their own, and so should she. When Malherbe asked one of the leading men in the town whether the government could do something about the situation, the man replied: "Waarlik Mevrou, u is verniet so ontsteld. Wat is vyf kinders uit vyftien?" [My good lady, you are excited about nothing. What difference do five children make out of a total of fifteen?] Malherbe writes:

Wat is vyf uit vyftien? Vyfmaal 'n menslike wese opbou uit jou eie liggaam en senuwees en brein! Vyfmaal die worsteling by die geboorte deurmaak, net om vyf graffies in die kerkhof te vul! Wel, hoekom moet ons daardie mansmense blameer? Hulle het geen maatstaf waarby hulle die onreg kan meet waaronder 'n vrou ly nie.  
 [What is five out of fifteen? Five times building up a human being from your own body and nerves and brain! Five times surviving the struggle at birth, just to fill five small graves in the graveyard! Well, why should we blame those men? They have no criteria against which they can measure the injustice women have to suffer.]

Die Boerevrou, February 1931, p2.

<sup>41</sup> Die Boerevrou, February 1931, pp4 and 6.

En dan moet ons toesien dat daar wette gemaak word om die vroulike gedeelte van ons volk te beskerm... Daar behoort 'n wet gemaak te word om te voorkom dat vrouens verwaarloos word en nie goed voor gesorg word nie gedurende 'n bevalling. Hoeveel jong dogters word nie uit hulle ouers se huis geneem, en na 'n paar jaar was hulle dood, of hulle gesondheid was verwoes. Ek weet nie of dit in ander dele van ons land beter gesteld was nie, maar hier in my omgewing was die helfte van die sterfgevalle in die laaste 28 jaar vroue in die fleur van hulle lewe, wat met of na die bevalling beswyk het.<sup>42</sup>

[We should see to it that laws are made to protect the women of our folk...A law should be made to prevent the neglect of woman during pregnancy and to see that they will be well looked after during the birth. How many young girls are not taken from the homes of their mothers, and a few years later they are dead, or their health has been destroyed? I don't know whether it is different in other parts of our country, but here half of the deaths in the past 28 years were women in the prime of their lives, dying during or after childbirth.]

In short, when Malherbe articulated the significance of the enfranchisement of women for her readers, she did not claim it as a victory for a women's liberation. She explained it as a new way through which women can extend and protect their mothering roles. With the vote, women were better equipped to protect and care for their children. With this interpretation she did not challenge the thesis that there should be a fundamental distinction between women's sphere and men's sphere. The enfranchisement of women was thus encapsulated in the essentially conservative *volksmoeder* discourse as Malherbe was once more merely extending the private role of women into the public world of men. She was still not questioning the distinction itself. Being mothers in the private domain of the household women put an obligation on women to vote as mothers and to help to draw up legislation as mothers. Women's activities in all spheres of society were still necessarily and essentially tied to their roles and activities as mothers.

### Conclusion

In this chapter we have looked at the *volksmoeder* discourse as a gender discourse. We have showed how, as a gender discourse, it was distinctly anti-feminist and conservative. As a discourse, however, it was also a human enterprise and therefore could be changed and modified although within certain limits. With respect to women and their role in society, a definite development can be discerned in the *volksmoeder* discourse. Firstly, power and influence in the private domestic sphere was presented as an alternative to power and influence in the public sphere. In the second place the power and influence women had in the private sphere came to mean that, indirectly, women were also powerful in the public sphere. Finally, women's skills and

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<sup>42</sup> Die Boerevrou, March 1931, p41.

responsibilities in the domestic sphere came to justify a further demand for direct power and influence in the public sphere.

It can not be disputed therefore, that in the context of the *volksmoeder* discourse it was possible to argue for increased power for women. It was also possible, once certain rights, such as the right to vote, had been granted to women, to translate these rights in terms of the *volksmoeder* discourse. To a certain extent we can even say that Afrikaner women assumed the gender identities and roles offered to them in the *volksmoeder* discourse because it had the potential to justify more power for them, not only in the domestic sphere, but also in spheres from which they were previously excluded.

As feminists, however, we still have to question the meaning of such power and rights as could be obtained in the context of the *volksmoeder* discourse. As long as that power remains rooted in women's identities as mothers and wives and as long as the power is justified only in terms of the roles that women play as mothers and wives in the domestic sphere, it remains questionable whether such power liberates women in any significant sense.

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## CHAPTER EIGHT

### A FEMINIST CRITIQUE OF THE *VOLKSMOEDER* DISCOURSE

...women's history should be read as a process of struggle and creative accommodation to social realities and cultural forms, rather than "a tragic story of individual suffering" - under immutable patriarchal and symbolic orders. I want to resist interpretative frameworks that doom women of the past - and of the present - to a relentlessly disempowered relation to political and cultural practices. These [women] poets demonstrate that a relatively privileged feminine subject, although always already caught up in the politics of gender ideology and the grip of dominant signifying systems, could nonetheless be mobile within those systems. To read women writers, is to recognise how variously they negotiated their subordination to men's social power and masculine orders of language.

- Ann Rosalind Jones<sup>1</sup>

In Chapter one of this thesis we questioned the notion that Afrikaner women were not active agents in the development of Afrikaner nationalism and the traditional view that women were only symbolically significant. We also questioned recent feminist analyses which continued to portray Afrikaner women as passive victims of a male Afrikaner nationalism - the notion of "man-made women". In this thesis we explored women's role in Afrikaner nationalism, and specifically their role in the articulation and re-articulation of the *volksmoeder* discourse. If we have proved, through our critical analysis of the *volksmoeder* discourse that Afrikaner women, while being shaped by Afrikaner nationalism, were also actively involved in the shaping of Afrikaner nationalism, we also have to critically evaluate the identities, roles and actions that they helped to construct for themselves. While trying to understand their choices for assuming those identities and to take part in those actions, we also have to be critical of them.

There are many possible perspectives from which to criticise the *volksmoeder* discourse. The problem of women and Afrikaner nationalism was, however, addressed in this thesis because of a feminist concern with the absence of women in history, specifically Afrikaner history, it is also appropriate to conclude this thesis by posing some critical questions from a feminist perspective. It is important to do this, because even though the *volksmoeder* discourse never pretended to be a feminist discourse and was even articulated in direct opposition to both feminist and suffragette discourses, it was a gender discourse which was projected as being in the interest of women. From a feminist point of view it is important not merely to reject the *volksmoeder* discourse as anti-feminist, but to look at the reasons why this gender discourse could not emancipate women

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<sup>1</sup> Jones A R, The currency of Eros. Women's love lyrics in Europe, 1540-1620, pp9-10.

in any real sense. These feminist points of concern can only be worthwhile if posed in a more general framework. Therefore we should apply what we have learned about the relationship between Afrikaner women and nationalism to the relationship between women and nationalism in general. By criticising the discourse of Afrikaner nationalism, or more specifically the *volksmoeder* discourse, as a gender discourse, we can ask some questions about all nationalist discourses as gender discourses.

### 8.1 Gender, identity and difference

One of the major controversies in feminism concerns gender differences. In the liberal feminist discourse gender differences have been of central importance: either they were affirmed and used to justify why women should be granted certain privileges, rights and power (eg "Women are more caring than men and therefore should have some say in the government") or differences were denied to achieve the same goal (eg "Women are just as competent as men therefore they should have some say in the government"). Feminists, and especially radical feminists, are justifiably suspicious of both types of arguments as this emphasis on gender differences in liberal feminism is based on a male norm. Catherine MacKinnon writes that "(d)ifference is the velvet glove on the iron fist of domination".<sup>2</sup> She argues that the concept of difference is a conceptual tool of gender inequality and has consistently been used by patriarchy to keep men in power. Audre Lorde explains why feminists should not use the language of gender difference: "For the master's tool will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change."<sup>3</sup> MacKinnon does not deny the factual existence of gender differences, but argues that "to the degree that women demonstrated these characteristics, it was because they had been subordinated" and consequently, "these characteristics should be regarded as suspect".<sup>4</sup> The only possible solution is thus to get beyond patriarchy to a "free" society, where women's choices of identities, roles and characteristics will for the first time be real and meaningful.<sup>5</sup> Thus women's choices of identities, roles and characteristics are seen as inevitably inauthentic, articulated within the

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<sup>2</sup> MacKinnon C A, Feminism unmodified. Discourses on life and law, p8.

<sup>3</sup> Lorde A, Sister outsider, p112. See also MacKinnon C, op cit, p9.

<sup>4</sup> Cornell D, "The doubly-prized world: myth, allegory and the feminine" in Cornell Law Review, Volume 74, 1990, p698.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, p699.

hegemonic and monolithic context of patriarchal order. The implication is that "true", "free" choices can only be made outside patriarchal discourses and that the feminist ideal should thus be to "escape" from patriarchal discourses. Such an argument, however, poses its own problems: it is based on the assumption that should women escape from those patriarchal discourses of which they are the subjects, it would be possible to speak of an "essential" or "natural" woman. In other words, it is suggested that, when liberated from the bonds of oppressive discourses, women will discover their natural and essential identities in a reality beyond social construction - those identities not affected by patriarchal discourses.<sup>6</sup>

Despite the power and persuasiveness of the notion that "choices" of identities, roles and characteristics within patriarchal discourses are meaningless, the assumption that it is possible to "escape" the gender dimension of patriarchal discourses and thus the genderized context in which we live, is highly problematic.<sup>7</sup> Not only does it dream of a reality beyond social discourses or constructions, it also implies a denial of any possibility for change in a world reigned by patriarchy. Postmodern feminists address this problem by emphasising how gender identity and gender roles ("the Feminine")<sup>8</sup> are socially constructed in language. When talking about gender differences, the important point to grasp is that such differences are socially constructed - otherwise such talk will contain the roots of oppression rather than the roots of liberation. Because gender differences were most often constructed in patriarchal discourses, one can indeed say that the Feminine is a product of patriarchal discourses. Therefore these feminists claim that we do have to contest the essentialist and naturalistic terms in which gender identities and roles are usually articulated and that we should demonstrate that these gender differences are socially constructed. However, they emphasise that we cannot deny or "wish away" the existence of gender differences: they are part and parcel of our socially constructed reality. There is no reality outside social relations. We should rather find a new way to look at the Feminine: we should therefore construct a new gender discourse where "the Feminine" acquires a new meaning. By doing this we can acknowledge the differences and use them, but constantly be aware of the fact that they were socially constructed and that what we know as "the Feminine" cannot and should not be linked with women in essentialist and naturalist terms. We are thus saying that feminist theories should have a

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<sup>6</sup> Harris A P, "Race and essentialism in feminist legal theory" in Stanford Law Review, Volume 42, February 1990, pp591-592.

<sup>7</sup> It is inevitable that this short version of a crucial current debate in feminism does not take into account all the subtleties of the arguments.

<sup>8</sup> Terminology of Cornell D, op cit.

compensatory as well as a critical aspect:

That is, we need to recover and write the histories of women and our activities into the accounts and stories that cultures tell about themselves. Yet, we also need to think about how so-called women's activities are partially constituted by and through their location within the web of social relations that make up any society. That is, we need to know how these activities are affected but also how they effect, enable, or compensate for the consequences of men's activities, as well as their implication in class or race relations.<sup>9</sup>

It is in the light of this debate and from the postmodernist feminist perspective that we will discuss the gender identity and gender roles as they were articulated in the *volksmoeder* discourse.

Within the *volksmoeder* discourse, there was an important re-evaluation of those roles, skills and characteristics that were traditionally associated with women. This celebration of the "Feminine", which is an undeniable and important aspect of the *volksmoeder* discourse, is an important development from a feminist point of view. In a sense, the positive value attached to these "traditional" roles, skills and characteristics of women is a challenge to the male world and therefore might constitute the beginning of resistance.

However, even though such a celebration of the Feminine might contain the potential for real feminist resistance, it also has the potential for affirming the conditions of women's oppression. This is because such affirmations of the female often (and this is indeed the case with the *volksmoeder* discourse) are couched in essentialist and naturalist terms. In Chapter five we saw how, within the *volksmoeder* discourse, gender identities and roles were portrayed as being determined by God and biology. By deconstructing the texts, we attempted to denaturalise gender roles and identities and showed how these identities and roles were in fact socially constructed. The paradox of the *volksmoeder* discourse is thus that although the emphasis on difference and the praise of the Feminine on the one hand elevated women, the constructed nature of the differences were obscured, and therefore the discourse ultimately restricted women because it made it necessary for them to remain in certain biologically determined spheres. In the *volksmoeder* discourse, nationalism was portrayed as an ideology that was beneficial to women as women. However, although in the *volksmoeder* discourse women as women could obtain various benefits, privileges and rights, this was conditional upon them assuming the traditional

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<sup>9</sup> Flax J, op cit, p55.

roles of mothers and wives. If, in this discourse, they were empowered to a certain extent, the empowerment was directly and necessarily related to their identities as mothers in the limited and private sphere of the household. These identities were regarded as essential and natural to women and were not left to choice.

Therefore, while the *volksmoeder* discourse had a compensatory aspect in its celebration of the Feminine and thus contained the potential for resistance, it concealed the fact that the identities and roles of women were part of a "web of social relations". Within the discourse those roles and identities were deemed essential and natural to women and therefore the discourse could not be emancipatory in any real sense.

## 8.2 Gender and community

The *volksmoeder* discourse was not only a discourse characterised by the fact that it constructed a particular gender identity for Afrikaans women; the identity which it constructed was also by definition a communal and ethnic identity. In Chapter six we saw how, as a nationalist discourse, the *volksmoeder* discourse constructed an ideal of unity and mutual identification of Afrikaner women in a particular ethnic sense and context.

As a communal discourse in which the ideal of unity became important, the *volksmoeder* discourse worked with two central notions: motherhood or potential motherhood and being an Afrikaner. In the discourse these two notions were also given a specific content. To belong to the community it was necessary to comply with these two essential requirements. Any other attributes or particulars, such as class position, age and geography were not regarded as essential, but were accidental and not important. In this way absolute boundaries were drawn: what fell inside the boundaries designated "the pure, the authentic, the good" and what fell outside the boundaries was the impure, the inauthentic and the bad. The common identity therefore necessarily required a notion of those excluded as the "other". Constructing, or as Anderson says, imagining the community, thus implies two simultaneous processes. While on the one hand it creates "chains of equivalence", or the construction of a new common identity, this new common identity is based on an antagonism to another social identity, that which lies outside the boundaries.

From a feminist perspective, such a communal discourse is inherently problematic. Iris Young articulates the problem of a feminist community as follows:

Community is an understandable dream, expressing a desire for selves that are transparent

to one another, relationships of mutual identification, social closeness and comfort. The dream is understandable, but politically problematic...because those motivated by it will tend to suppress differences among themselves or implicitly to exclude from their political groups persons with whom they do not identify.<sup>10</sup>

The *volksmoeder* discourse as a communal discourse was firstly problematic in that it, directly or indirectly, suppressed differences between Afrikaner women (see Chapter six). By assuming a shared subjectivity, the discourse also assumed that the subjects of the discourse were transparent to one another. This was of course not true. For example, we see in Die Boerevrou numerous examples of how assumptions were made about working-class Afrikaner women on the basis of the fact that they also belong to the ethnic community. For instance, the ideal of mothering articulated in Die Boerevrou was far removed from the reality of the lives of working-class women. Malherbe's dictum regarding mothering, that if you know what you should do, you would do it, could not be applied to working-class women. Issues such as child care, nutrition and education could not be issues of principle for working class women. They had to work with what was available, affordable and possible. What Davin says about the ideal of motherhood in England is equally applicable to the *volksmoeder* discourse:

The standards set up for motherhood were unrealistic in the context of much working-class accommodation. No amount of instruction and advice...could remove the basic handicaps of overcrowding, of damp, ill-drained, airless, bathless, tapless lodgings, of shared and filthy ash closets and middens. No training for motherhood would ensure a supply of fresh uncontaminated milk, or provide food when there was no money.<sup>11</sup>

This is confirmed by Elsabe Brink's study of the garment workers on the Witwatersrand and their attitude towards mothering.<sup>12</sup> Even if the women themselves had certain ideals, it was seldom possible to live in accordance with them. Brink quotes a Mrs Lategan as saying:

Ek was gewoond om self agter my kind te kyk en hom self skoon en netjies te hou en als, en dit was vir my swaar om hom te los bedags.  
[I was used to looking after my child myself and to keep him clean and neat and everything, and it was hard for me to leave him each day.]<sup>13</sup>

These social realities tended to be absent from the articulation of the ideal of mothering in Die

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<sup>10</sup> Young I M, "The ideal of community and the politics of difference" in Nicholson L J, Feminism/Postmodernism, p300.

<sup>11</sup> Davin A, op cit, p52.

<sup>12</sup> Brink E, The Afrikaner women of the Garment Worker's Union, 1918-1939, pp79-89.

<sup>13</sup> Brink E, op cit, p86.

Boerevrou. In a series of articles about home nursing, for instance, much attention was paid to the sick room and how it should be arranged, what the noise level should be and how dark the room should be. In the first place the article assumed that a separate room in the house would be available for the sick person, while in many poor households whole families lived in one or two rooms. Secondly, many of the rituals (the specific way of making the bed and feeding the patient for instance)<sup>14</sup> were really nothing else than "middle-class ritual and custom"<sup>15</sup> - they might have been useful but were not necessary.<sup>16</sup>

Another example of this lack of understanding for working-class women can be discerned in the astonishment of the middle-class readers of Die Boerevrou that "poor" Afrikaner women were not turning to domestic work in large numbers, despite continuous efforts to convince them to do so. In 1931 M E Rothmann reported that although there is a strong demand for the services of white women in this field of labour, "(t)he majority of the girls fit for this work have a distaste for it".<sup>17</sup> She argued that this was because conditions in domestic service were not standardised with regards to time, treatment, nature of labour etc. When standardised conditions prevailed, she said,

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<sup>14</sup> The prescriptions for the sick room were detailed, for instance:

Die eerste vereiste is 'n groot venster wat oop en toe kan gaan, en wat aan die sonkant is, dus nie aan die noorde nie! Die kamers moet groot en lugtig wees, liefs so ver van die kombuis as moontlik, want nie alleen die geraas hinder die sieke nie, maar as hy bv soos in ingewandskoors niks daarvan mag he nie, is die geure 'n pynlike versoeking...By gewone ligte siektes is dit onnodig om 'n kamer so kaal te maak, 'n mooi prent trek baie keer die aandag van die sieke van die sieke van sy siekte af - maar as prente hom hinder moet dit dadelik weggeneem word.

[The first requirement is a big window which can open and close and which is at the sunny side, therefore not on the north! The rooms should be big and airy, preferably as far as possible from the kitchen, because not only does the noise hinder the sick person, but if he for example has dysentery and is not allowed to eat, all the flavours are a temptation. With ordinary light illnesses it is not necessary to make a room so bare, a beautiful picture often draws the attention of the ill person away from his illness - but if pictures hinder him, they should immediately be taken away.]

Die Boerevrou, May 1924, p5.

<sup>15</sup> Davin A, op cit, p52.

<sup>16</sup> Die Boerevrou, May and June 1924.

<sup>17</sup> See also L Saayman's (OVV) letter in Die Boerevrou, November 1931, p33 and Van Onselen C, Studies in the social and economic history of the Witwatersrand. 1886 - 1914. New Nineveh, pp15-16.

"there are more applicants than posts".<sup>18</sup> Such issues regarding working conditions were of crucial importance for working-class women, but were never addressed in the *volksmoeder* discourse.

The fact that the differences between groups and individuals within the community of Afrikaner women were not acknowledged is problematic. In assuming the transparency of all subjects in the discourse, the complexity of subjectivity was not acknowledged and consequently important dimensions of the subjectivities of community members were denied or suppressed. For instance, working-class women as members of the working class were for all practical purposes, even if not intentionally, excluded from the discourse.<sup>19</sup>

The communal nature of the *volksmoeder* discourse was also problematic for a second important reason: while suppressing differences within the imagined community of "volksmoeders", the communal identity was based on an antagonism towards other social groups, specifically blacks. While all communal discourses to a certain extent are based on inclusion and exclusion, Afrikaner nationalism, as a communal ethnic discourse, was obsessively separatist, sectarian and racist. These properties were reproduced in the *volksmoeder* discourse, which was part of the Afrikaner nationalist discourse. Thus, central in the *volksmoeder* discourse was the fact that it could not include all women, but rather constructed specific ethnic boundaries which involved important repudiations of a common sisterhood of women by women.

Young, in rejecting feminist discourses which try to establish communal identities, states that feminists will only be able to bring about radical change if they "develop discourse and institutions for bringing differently identified groups together without suppressing or subsuming the differences".<sup>20</sup>

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In this thesis we attempted in the first place to compensate for the absence of women in history,

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<sup>18</sup> Rothmann M E, op.cit., p209.

<sup>19</sup> While Elsabe Brink asserts that the garment workers of the Garment Workers Union also adhered to a *volksmoeder* ideology, she actually describes how they construct their own discourse, significantly using the term *volksmoeder*, but giving it a totally new, even alternative, content.

<sup>20</sup> Young I M, op.cit., p320.

specifically Afrikaner history. We have therefore reconstructed the story of Afrikaans middle-class women in the Transvaal and so explored the activities, roles and identities of a specific group of women at a specific time in history. We have showed that in many respects the activities of women in the private sphere of the household and in women's organisations were of crucial importance for Afrikaner nationalism. It was therefore in the interest of Afrikaner nationalists to construct identities and roles for Afrikaans women so that they could fulfil these essential functions. But we also showed that even while being shaped by Afrikaner nationalism, women themselves were active in the shaping of Afrikaner nationalism. While they were subjects of the anti-feminist discourse of Afrikaner nationalism, they remained mobile within this discourse: always negotiating, planning, creating and articulating new possibilities for themselves. We thus denied the image of women as passive victims of male discourses and showed how they were also active in the shaping of their own identities and roles. But we also showed how these activities, roles and identities of women were part of a much greater social reality, that the negotiations, plans and creations were always limited by the boundaries of the patriarchal discourse of Afrikaner nationalism and could therefore never promise any true liberation or empowerment for women.

We have not only placed the *volksmoeder* discourse in its social-historical context and examined how it was generated in this specific context, but also tried to indicate how this discourse in turn legitimised, strengthened and facilitated specific social relations of exclusion and subordination. In short, we looked at how Afrikaans women were shaped by Afrikaner nationalism and how they, in turn, shaped it.

This double problem of ethnicity and gender has not been investigated purely because of an academic or intellectual interest. Rather, the investigation was to a large extent motivated by a specific feminist concern with women in South Africa. In the final chapter we also criticised the *volksmoeder* discourse from a feminist perspective and attempted to articulate this criticism in more general terms so that it can be applied to other attempts to combine feminist projects with ethnic or nationalist projects.

Since a "mother of the nation" discourse has also been constructed as part of the discourse of national liberation of the African National Congress (ANC), one may well ask whether any lessons can be learned from looking at the *volksmoeder* discourse. Although such a comparison justifies a detailed separate study, a few preliminary remarks can be made here. In a recent essay Deborah Gaitskell and Elaine Unterhalter compared the two discourses and their significance within Afrikaner nationalism and the ANC respectively. They assert that there are fundamental differences

between the two discourses. These differences are due to the different concepts of nation, the different circumstances of black and white women, and also because the state itself has given different contents to motherhood according to race and class.

The most important difference between the "mother of the nation" discourse of the ANC and the early *volksmoeder* discourse of Afrikaner nationalists, is the fact that within the latter, appeals to motherhood have been couched in racially inclusive terms, whereas in the former it was articulated in ethnically exclusive terms.<sup>21</sup> While the ANC's "mother of the nation" discourse thus has no ethnic boundaries and make the notion of a common sisterhood possible, the early *volksmoeder* discourse externalised those women who did not have the correct ethnic credentials.

The second difference that Gaitskell and Unterhalter emphasise between the contemporary "mother of the nation" discourse of the ANC and the early *volksmoeder* discourse is that while motherhood in the ANC is portrayed as dynamic and activist with the focus on the strength of the mother, the emphasis in the *volksmoeder* discourse was on the suffering and the sacrifice of the mother. Although we have previously discussed how the focus of the *volksmoeder* discourse was indeed on women's suffering and sacrifices as mothers, we also saw how this focus was often regarded as a way in which women could ultimately become active and obtain power in other spheres. It was further argued that such a strategy, while being important in its celebration of the Feminine, is problematic from a feminist perspective in that it deems certain roles and identities essential to women and could therefore not emancipate them in any real sense.

In the "mother of the nation" discourse of the ANC we find a very powerful celebration of the Feminine. The importance of such a strategy cannot be denied. The struggles and hardships, but also the strengths and dedication of women, and especially black single mothers, have to be acknowledged and appreciated. But, while there are important differences between the social and political contexts of the *volksmoeder* discourse of emerging Afrikaner nationalism and the "mother of the nation" discourse of the ANC, the danger still remains that with a gender discourse focusing on the mothering role and identity of women, women's identities might become viewed as being essentially and naturally tied to their roles as mothers. Such essentialist and naturalist views would make the real empowerment and emancipation of women impossible. It has the potential to again make it impossible for women to choose who they are. It might lead to a denial of the fact that there are many other identities and roles women can assume - even while active in the anti-

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<sup>21</sup> *ibid*, pp75-76.

apartheid struggle in South Africa. Once again, in this discourse, the danger is that the subjectivities of women will be seen as simple and transparent. This danger is enhanced by the fact that the "mother of the nation" discourse is by definition a communal discourse. Although it does not use the language of exclusion, there is a danger that as a communal discourse it will suppress differences between women in order to maintain the sense of community. Again we have a discourse which attempts to capture some kind of "essential" woman.

We, as women, should ensure that the current "mother of the nation" discourse does not merely celebrate motherhood without a promise of emancipation. We have to examine this discourse critically, even if it is part of a progressive political programme, and dare not to make it our own if it does not make possible the liberation of all South African women, of those women who are mothers, but also of those who cannot and choose not to be mothers.

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