

RE-FIGHTING THE SECOND ANGLO-BOER WAR: HISTORIANS IN THE TRENCHES¹

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Some one hundred years ago, South Africa was torn apart by the Second Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902). The war was a colossal psychological experience fought at great expense. It cost Britain twenty-two thousand men and £223 million. The social, economic and political cost to South Africa was greater than the statistics immediately indicate: at least ten thousand fighting men in addition to the camp deaths, where a combination of indifference and incompetence resulted in the deaths of 27 927 Boers and at least 14 154 black South Africans. Yet these numbers belie the consequences. It was easy for the British to "forget" the pain of the war, which seemed so insignificant after the losses sustained in 1914-18. With a long history of far-off battles and foreign wars, the British casualties of the Anglo-Boer War became increasingly insignificant as opposed to the lesser numbers held in the collective Afrikaner mind. This impact may be stated somewhat more candidly in terms of the war participation ratio for the belligerent populations. After all, not all South Africans fought in uniform. For the Australian colonies these varied between 4,5 per thousand (New South Wales) to 42,3 per thousand (Tasmania). For New Zealand there were 8 per thousand, for Britain 8,5 per thousand, and for Canada 12,3 per thousand; while in parts of South Africa this was perhaps as high as 900 per thousand.² The deaths and high South African participation ratio, together with the unjustness of the war in the eyes of most Afrikaners, introduced bitterness, if not hatred, which cast long shadows upon twentieth-century South Africa.

The prominent place the war occupies in Afrikaner historiography and collective consciousness was underlined at a conference hosted by the War Museum of the Boer Republics, in Bloemfontein, in 1998. During the proceedings, an appeal was

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² P Dennis and J Grey (eds), *The Boer War: Army, nation and empire* (Canberra, 2000); J Crawford, *To fight for the empire: An illustrated history of New Zealand and the South African War, 1899-1902* (Wellington, 1999); R Stowers, *Kiwi versus Boer: The First New Zealand Mounted Rifles in the Anglo-Boer War, 1899-1902* (Hamilton, 1992); C Miller, *Painting the map red: Canada and the South African War, 1899-1902* (Pietermaritzburg, 1998); and O Coetzer, *Fire in the sky: The destruction of the Orange Free State, 1899-1902* (Weltevreden Park, 2000).

made for the identification of all the descendants of the Boers who had collaborated in one way or the other with the British. The lady, who made the politically impassioned call, argued that treachery was hereditary and that the Afrikaner people should know whom of their number carried the traitors' gene. Cooler minds and reasoned arguments made little impression. For her the war had not ended at Vereeniging. While she was inferring that loyalist Afrikaners had been "sold out" again in 1994, her statements more importantly reflect that the scars left by the Anglo-Boer War still run very deep through certain, if diminishing, portions of South African society. This "long war" phenomenon is not surprising. Arthur Marwick explained, not perfectly, the interrelationship between war and society in terms of a four-tier model: based upon the examination of the disruptive and destructive aspects, the test set, the participation levels, and the psychological impact of the war.³ Using this or any other argument, few will argue that the war had little social, economic and political impact.

According to Andreski's notion of the military participation ratio, the wartime gains by the less privileged members of society are dependent upon "the proportion of militarily utilised individuals in the total population".⁴ The greater the participation of the less privileged, the more the social pyramid is flattened. This did not happen in South Africa, despite a reasonably wide participation by the entire population. The *hensoppers* and joiners enjoyed many benefits, mostly financial, while Milner and his successors were forced to resuscitate the rudimentary structure of Boer society after the war. Black people oppositely were sacrificed for the improvement of Anglo-Boer relations and their participation was not rewarded.

The three years war, which broke out on 11 October 1899, was not the first encounter between the Boer republics and the British Empire. In fact, on the eve of the war, officials of the South African Republic assembled a long list of grievances against the British and published this in Amsterdam as *A century of wrong*.⁵ The Second Anglo-Boer War added new ordeals to the existing catalogue - the most important being the concentration camp issue - and history became the major incendiary in the fire of twentieth-century Afrikaner nationalism. This Joseph Chamberlain foresaw as early as 1896:

³ A Marwick, *War and social change in the twentieth century: A comparative study of Britain, France, Germany, Russia and the United States* (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 1974), pp. 11-4.

⁴ R Pope, *War and society in Britain, 1899-1948* (Longman: London and New York, 1991), p. 9.

⁵ This was first published in Dutch under the title *Het Eeuw van Onrecht*, and a year later in English. J de V Roos and JC Smuts are thought to be the authors.

"A war in South Africa ... would be a long war, a bitter war, and a costly war; and it would leave behind it the embers of a strife which I believe generations could hardly be long enough to extinguish."⁶

He could not have been more correct. In South Africa, the Anglo-Boer War has always been controversial and the battle for the history of the war, fought throughout much of the twentieth century, has been marked by the different ideologies and methodologies employed by the historians - all making a common meeting ground difficult.

The war and Afrikaner society

The war began disastrously for Britain. Before the long-drawn-out negotiations were quite played out, the Boers had launched an already-delayed, pre-emptive strike against British forces in the Cape and Natal colonies. Their vigour and the distance of the conflict from Europe taxed the resources of the United Kingdom, as they had not been burdened since their wars against Napoleon. Although excellent marksmen, horsemen and fieldcraftsmen, the Boers were unable to resist the growing stream of men and equipment that Britain poured into the country. There were no great battles; the war was characterised by a series of ambushes, skirmishes and sieges. The last set battle was fought on 8 September 1900 at Spitzkop; and the British achieved their main objective, the re-annexation of the Transvaal, during the following month.

Having lost all hope of winning the war, the Boers harassed the British with guerilla tactics, denying battle and concentrating, where and whenever possible, against British weakness. Frustrated at having no centre of gravity at which to strike, the British attempted to deny the commandos their source of physical and emotional succour. Wolseley, referring to colonial warfare, said:

"Your first object should be the capture of whatever they prize most, and the destruction or deprivation of which will probably bring the war most rapidly to a conclusion."⁷

Farms were burned and women, children and older menfolk of the two republics herded into concentration camps. This included Boers as well as black southern Africans: indeed all those who rendered (or were suspected of rendering) assistance

⁶ Joseph Chamberlain in May 1896, quoted in FA van Jaarsveld, *The Afrikaner's interpretation of South African history* (Simondium Publishers: Cape Town, 1964), p. 94.

⁷ Quoted by Hew Strachan, *European armies and the conduct of war* (Routledge: London and New York, 1993), p. 78.

of any kind to the commandos in the field. The country was compartmentalised using barbed wire and blockhouses. In the camps, a combination of indifference and incompetence resulted in the deaths of 27 927 Boers and 14 154 black South Africans.⁸ As mentioned before, this, together with the unjustness of the war in the eyes of most Afrikaners, introduced bitterness and hatred. The war heightened Anglo-Boer tensions and resulted in the growth of Afrikaner nationalism and the development of an Afrikaner-specific historical consciousness.

The Second Anglo-Boer War, immediately historicised as the Second War of Independence, was extremely traumatic for all citizens of the two Boer republics and many in the neighbouring colonies. The Boer way of life was severely disrupted. The impact on individuals and whole communities was acute: every facet of life was disrupted. Farms, livestock and human life were destroyed on a scale the Afrikaners had never before experienced. The republican governments together with the commando system - the cornerstone of personal security - ceased to exist. The two republics had "failed the test of war".⁹ The psychological impact of the loss upon a defeated, humiliated people dragged into an Empire that had "killed" so many of their brethren in the field and, more particularly, in the camps, was also severe. Language, religion and history became the bastions of self-preservation and the most important means of maintaining an own identity. Until at least 1961 and the restoration of the republic (but over all of South Africa), historical consciousness dominated South African politics. For many Afrikaners their history became a cult.¹⁰

This was not new. A strong historical consciousness and a historically based nationalism were perceptible in the South African Republic before 1899. This was anti-colonial, anti-imperialist, and anti-British: the Great Trek (the flight from British "misrule" and "oppression") and the First Anglo-Boer War were poles. Through comparison and identification with Old Testament Israel it also had a strong religious substructure of predestiny and vocation (*uitverkorenheid en geroepenheid*), strengthened by a value system based upon freedom, independence and a separate identity. The Afrikaner had a role to play in Africa and his history was a "struggle for independence" against the British: the "guilty party", the "op-

⁸ See SV Kessler, "The black and coloured concentration camps of the Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902: Shifting the paradigm from sole martyrdom to mutual suffering", *Historia* 44(1) 1999, pp. 110-47; and JA du Pisani and BE Mongalo, "Victims of a White man's war: Blacks in concentration camps during the South African War 1899-1902", *Historia* 44(1) 1999, pp 148-82.

⁹ A Marwick, *War and social change in the twentieth century; A comparative study of Britain, France, Germany, Russia and the United States* (Macmillan: Basingstoke, 1974), pp 11-4.

¹⁰ FA van Jaarsveld, *Omstrede Suid-Afrikaanse verlede; Geskiedenisideologie en die historiese skuldvraagstuk* (Lex Patria: Johannesburg en Kaapstad, 1984), p. 16.

pressors", the "land thieves", the "dishonest", the "heartless", the "persecutors", the "greedy", and (in the case of Slachtersnek and Boomplaats) even the "murderers".¹¹

The first chief priest, albeit perhaps a reluctant one, was George McCall Theal, a settler historian of Canadian birth who was highly critical of British action in southern Africa. Republican Afrikaners easily identified with his historical vision and Theal's works were translated into Dutch for use in Transvaal and Free State schools. Amidst an emotive pre-war atmosphere and criticised by pro-British writers, Theal turned down an opportunity to write a history of the Transvaal and a Hollander, JWG van Oordt, was appointed as state historian instead. In the lead-up to the Anglo-Boer War, South Africa and her historians became ever more divided into two hostile camps: one republican and the other British.¹²

Van Oordt's first publication, *Slagtersnek* (1897), marked this division. He saw the Slachtersnek Rebellion of 1815 as the "voorgeschiedenis" of the Transvaal republic. This was a first instance of apparently harsh treatment of a small group of poor, largely landless farmers at the hands of British justice. The ringleaders, amongst them Johannes Bezuidenhout, were hanged and others banished and imprisoned. "The Boers hanged at Slagtersnek were not seen as rebels but as martyrs in the cause of Afrikaner freedom, victims of British inhumanity and cruelty."¹³ From Slachtersnek the "special way" of Afrikaner history moved with the Great Trek - the emigration of Dutch farmers into the hinterland of southern Africa - to Blood River and the defeat of the Zulus; to Boomplaats and their defeat at the hands of Sir Harry Smith; and, finally, to 1881 and their amazing triumph over British forces at Majuba.

Consequently, despite the Anglo-Boer War bringing an end to the writing of a separate history of the South African Republic, there was, by 1897, a strong historical consciousness among many Afrikaners: "Nooit, ja nimmer zullen en moeten wij Bezuidenhout, Boomplaats en Slagtersnek vergeten."¹⁴ After the Anglo-Boer War new memories were added to the old, and these dominated much of twentieth-century South Africa.

¹¹ FA van Jaarsveld, *Omstrede Suid-Afrikaanse verlede*, pp. 13-4.

¹² Christopher Saunders, *The making of the South African past; Major historians on race and class* (David Philip: Cape Town and Johannesburg, 1988), p. 25; Ken Smith, *The changing past; Trends in South African historical writing* (Southern: Johannesburg, 1988), p. 31; and FA van Jaarsveld, *Omstrede Suid-Afrikaanse verlede*, pp. 12-3.

¹³ Smith, p. 60.

¹⁴ BC Lottering in *Volksstem*, 14 September 1898, quoted by FA van Jaarsveld, *Omstrede Suid-Afrikaanse verlede*, p. 14.

Milner and "the importance of history"

Milner recognised the presence of this historical cult. In 1900 he wrote:

"Everything that cramps and confines their views to South Africa only (limits their historical reading, for instance, to Slagter's Nek and Dingaan's Day, and Boomplaats and Majuba) makes for Afrikanerdom and further discord."¹⁵

The British occupation of the two republics thus became, among other things, a conflict over education, a battle to write a new history for South Africa.¹⁶ The teaching of South African history in the conquered territories was at first prohibited and when resumed it was from a British-colonial point of view. This was the cornerstone of Milner's reconstruction: instil British ideals into the Boers so that one day they might be entrusted with self-government.

Milner attached "special importance to school *history books*" with an emphasis upon world and not South African history, as had been the case in the South African Republic.¹⁷ History departments were established in the first decade of the twentieth century in the colleges of higher education at Cape Town and Stellenbosch. The Prince of Wales Chair of History at what is now the University of Cape Town was founded in 1902 "because of concern expressed during the South African War that the study of history be put on a sound footing, at a time when Theal's work was criticised as pro-Boer". While this signalled the beginning of the professionalisation of South African history, "those who set up the history chair at Cape Town hoped for a different approach, and the first generation of English professional historians were to be strikingly pro-British in their approach".¹⁸

The British school was at its height during and immediately after the Anglo-Boer War, when all states in South Africa were British colonies, and it seemed as if South Africa had been won as a permanent part of the Empire. Arthur Conan Doyle opined that the war had brought in its train "at last, we hope, a South Africa of peace and prosperity, with equal rights and equal duties for all men". He also believed that the war had been good for the empire, which had emerged more solid from the conflict.¹⁹ Conan Doyle and other British authors produced several, often

¹⁵ Milner – Hanbury Williams, 27 December 1900 in Cecil Headlam (ed.), *The Milner Papers II; South Africa, 1899-1905* (Cassell: London etc., 1933) p. 243. Milner's parenthesis.

¹⁶ General Douglas Macarthur, under comparable circumstances, stated his post-1945 aims for Japan as the upliftment of "a race long stunted by ancient concepts of mythological teaching". Quoted by RJB Bosworth, *Explaining Auschwitz and Hiroshima*, p. 181.

¹⁷ Milner – Hanbury Williams, 27 December 1900 in Cecil Headlam (ed.), *The Milner Papers II*, p. 243.

¹⁸ C Saunders, *The making of the South African past*, p. 42.

¹⁹ Smith, pp. 29-30.

multi-volumed, histories of the war. Many of these commenced before the signing of the peace at Vereeniging and were written from the perspective of the British commanders.²⁰ Other research - such as Major RH Massie's **The native tribes of the Transvaal** (1905) - was published in response to military necessity. Such works were earmarked either for the instruction of soldiers or for the highlighting of problems associated with conducting campaigns in hostile environments. Official military histories had appeared in Britain since the Crimean war, yet owing to official interference they were generally uncritical.²¹

Milner was right. The war united Afrikaners in South Africa into a single nationalism, disregarding the political boundaries that marked out the Cape, Natal, Transvaal and Orange River colonies. British South Africans perceived this as a threat to the very foundation of the "New South Africa" under "the good old flag that waves over all of us" and one of their spokesmen, Charles Leonard, himself a Jameson conspirator, called for "all discussion of the origins and justice of the war, and of alleged grievances or losses under martial law ... to be dropped; and that an honest endeavour ... be made to build up a new national life, based upon forbearance on both sides and abstention from controversies in regard to the past".²²

Yet, as Afrikaner historians "searched the past for other grievances [and rediscovered] Slagtersnek and the Great Trek", English-medium historians of South Africa "became more attached to the ideal of empire".²³ Such historians, according to Charles Leonard, represented those "elements in the body politic, on both sides, whose work ends in the direction of permanent alienation instead of reconciliation".²⁴

One of these English writers, WM Macmillan (1885-1974), painted in his memoirs a picture of a relatively relaxed Cape society before the war. He grew up in Stellenbosch where he got on well with the Cape Dutch, whom he divorced from the more exclusive Afrikaner nationalism of the North. However, as the war approached, Macmillan naturally associated with the British cause: during the war he served as

²⁰ HW Wilson, *With the flag to Pretoria; A history of the Boer of 1899-1900*, 2 vols (London, 1901); HW Wilson, *After Pretoria; The Guerrilla War*, 2 vols (London, 1902); LS Amery (ed.), *The Times history of the war in South Africa 1899-1902*, 7 vols (London, 1900-9); A Conan Doyle, *The great Boer War* (London, 1902); FM Maurice and MH Grant et al, *History of the War in South Africa 1899-1902*, 4 vols (London, 1906-10).

²¹ K Surridge, "Official History" in C Wilcox (ed.), *Recording the South African War; Journalism and official history, 1899-1914* (London 1999), p. 29.

²² Pretoria Archives (hereinafter PA): Charles Leonard Papers. Leonard - Graaff, 5 March 1903 (ff. 132-8).

²³ Smith, p. 25.

²⁴ PA: Charles Leonard Papers. Leonard-Graaff, 17 February 1903 (ff. 114-21). Underlining is Leonard's.

a member of the Stellenbosch town guard. His brother Bertie was killed in action in September 1900 and his father was dismissed from Victoria College (later the University of Stellenbosch) for being British.²⁵ It was owing to Macmillan's teaching in the 1920s at the University of the Witwatersrand, one of his students, CW de Kiewiet, later recalled that "the whole unhistorical architecture of Theal and Cory broke down, so that I began to see that really there was no South African history. It had to be rewritten around a fresh architecture."²⁶

De Kiewiet, a Dutch-born liberal historian, lamented the passing of a unitary constitution in 1909, in which, he believed, the principles of repression and equality contained in the Treaty of Vereeniging were taken up. To his mind, this signalled the triumph of the frontier tradition and the establishment of Afrikaner hegemony over all of South Africa: of the exclusive, narrow, northern kind. This exclusive Afrikaner nationalism, being anti-British and anti-black, contrasted with the liberal Cape tradition, which "gave an assured place to Coloureds and Africans". Afrikaner nationalist historians of the ensuing decades, for whom the main theme in South African history was the epic story of Afrikaner survival and the struggle for unity, took over many of Theal's ideas, and like him blamed the British and their interfering missionaries for much of what had "gone wrong" in South Africa's past.²⁷

Early Afrikaner nationalist historians

Milner could remove history from the school syllabi. He could even attempt to control the availability of certain books on the war. But he could not prevent the sharing of war stories and the building of a collective memory among the Boer veterans and their families. While the centenary of the Great Trek in 1938 heightened nationalist fervour and sparked the appearance of a number of historical studies by Afrikaner historians, these men commenced their labours soon after the war. Their dual purpose - to show the guilt of Britain and prevent the Afrikaner from losing his separate identity - is reflected in the work of three historians.

Among the first was Dr WJ Leyds, one of Kruger's former diplomats, who made a study of Anglo-Boer relations to 1884, which was published in 1906 as *De Eerste Annexatie van de Transvaal*. In that year he explained its purpose to HC Bredell:

²⁵ Saunders, *The making of the South African past*, pp. 47-8; and Smith, *The changing past*, p. 105.

²⁶ CW de Kiewiet quoted by Saunders, *The making of the South African past*, p. 81.

²⁷ Saunders, *The making of the South African past*, pp. 42, 48, 89.

"It is my intention to provide the Afrikaner people with a vademecum, with a collection of documentary items of evidence that have hitherto not been available. I have in mind those documentary items that have reference to the way in which the English always acted towards the Boers. And that is something the Boers should not forget or lose sight of if they wish to safeguard their existence in future and their own interests - They must not let themselves be taken in by friendly appearances!"²⁸

Leyds summoned the English before the court of history and showed their guilt. Afrikaner history was a collection of evidence proving how the English had robbed and defrauded the Afrikaner: the purpose of his history was to ensure the future of the Afrikaner by fighting the English and everything that was English.²⁹ **De Eerste Annexatie** and his subsequent study on the encirclement by Britain of the republics (in essence taking his study of Anglo-Boer relations through to 1895), were "a release of his anguish of mind and appeared at a time when the Afrikaners seemed to have absolutely no future in store, at a period when they sought a foothold and an outlet for the future". This, and the fact that Leyds was writing so close to the time, gave his works a strongly subjective quality.³⁰

A second book appeared in 1906. This was Gustav Preller's **Piet Retief**, which saw no less than eleven impressions. Preller, a journalist and member of the old Transvaal oligarchy,³¹ attempted to restore the apparent discontinuity in the history of the Afrikaner since his incorporation into the British Empire. By means of retro-projection, Preller tried to show that the Afrikaners were already a nation at the time of the Great Trek. An event in the first half of the nineteenth century gave birth to the Afrikaner nation and the annexation of the two republics therefore did nothing to Afrikaner nationhood. The mobilisation of history would ensure that the Afrikaner remained an indissoluble in the British melting pot: no longer a state but still a nation.

²⁸ Quoted and translated by FA van Jaarsveld, *The Afrikaner's interpretation of South African history* (Simondium: Cape Town, 1964), p. 94.

²⁹ FA van Jaarsveld, *The Afrikaner's interpretation of South African history*, chapter: "The Anglo-Boer War and the historical writings of Dr WJ Leyds."

³⁰ WJ Leyds, *Het insluiten van de Boeren Republieken* (1914, published in English in 1919). FA van Jaarsveld, *The Afrikaner's interpretation of South African history*, p. 105-6.

³¹ GS Preller was the son of Cmdt RCL Preller and Stephina, daughter of Cmdt Gen. Stephanus Schoeman. The incompetent General Hendrik Schoeman was his uncle. His wife, whom he married in 1898, was the daughter of Lt Col HPN Pretorius, the commandant of the Transvaal State Artillery, who (in turn) was a grandson of both Piet Retief and Piet Pretorius, brother of Cmdt Gen. AWJ Pretorius; and a cousin of President MW Pretorius. See I Van der Waag, "Boer generalship and the politics of command" (paper presented at the "War & Society in Africa Conference", Faculty of Military Science, University of Stellenbosch (SA Military Academy), Saldanha, 12-14 September 2001).

Preller, during his time with *De Volkstem*, collected a vast amount of historical material based upon the war memories of Boer veterans and inmates of the concentration camps. To him history was not the actions of great men but of "a great many small people like ourselves."³² Preller interviewed veterans and participants; recorded their recollections; and created an extremely useful oral-history data bank, now deposited in the Transvaal Archives Depot. In so doing, Preller saved much original documentation for posterity, including old correspondence, copy-books of letters and telegrams, war bulletins, council-of-war minutes, war diaries of private persons, scrap books, and war memoirs. Preller, not an academic historian, collated these primary sources in the compilation of *Scheepers se dagboek en die stryd in Kaapland* (1938) and *Talana: Die drie generaals-slag by Dundee* (1942). As Ken Smith has pointed out, they are therefore "sources for the study of history [rather] than real historical narrative".³³

Preller, furthermore, wrote as an Afrikaner nationalist and for this he made no apology. His expressed aim was to familiarise the Afrikaner with his own history, so that in the dark days of British domination they would obtain encouragement from the past. In Preller's version of the past, the Afrikaners made no mistakes and he had no good word to say about the British, or black and English-speaking South Africans. The history of South Africa was simplified into the clash between British imperialism, Afrikaner nationalism and African "barbarism". Preller contemptuously dismissed the view that the historian should remain objective as doctrinaire pedantry. History had a utilitarian function: if it taught nothing it was meaningless and if it did not accord with the fulfilment of a national calling it was ignored. Ken Smith rightly states that Preller's "contribution to the stimulation of Afrikaner nationalism was more noteworthy than his contribution to South African historical writing".³⁴ Yet popular writers exercised more influence than trained historians in the shaping of the post-war historical consciousness and the emergence of Afrikaner nationalism, renditions which were often infused with religion.

An incident in 1932 illustrates the function of history in the Afrikaner consciousness and the reverence in which Boer leaders were held. The matter started when Preller's wife, a proud descendant of Piet Retief and a kinswoman of two Transvaal presidents, took exception to a piece of fiction written by Henry Lamont (*War, wine and women*), a professor of French at the University of Pretoria, and published under a pseudonym in 1931. The Boers and their ancestors were criticised (somewhat harshly) on six pages of this six hundred page book. This was enough to light a fire that Mrs Preller and other ladies of the Afrikaans Women's Federation

³² *Dictionary of South African Biography*, I (HSRC: Pretoria, 1976), p. 647.

³³ Smith, pp. 67-8.

³⁴ Smith, p. 68.

zealously fanned. A furore was unleashed in the Afrikaans press. The honour of the Afrikaner was questioned and *Die Weste* proclaimed that the time that the Afrikaner tolerated insult and domination was past.³⁵ Lamont, eventually exposed, was tarred-and-feathered by a group of four Afrikaner youths - two were descendants of Paul Kruger - and eventually forced to resign from the University of Pretoria, which was fast becoming the northern bastion of Afrikaner education.³⁶

While much writing took place at the universities, no monographs on the war were produced. The official military historians - Buchan, Wyndham and Leipoldt - were contracted to write on the First World War only and, although the Anglo-Boer War was seen as a crucial event, other historians generally concentrated upon longitudinal studies.³⁷ One of the exceptions was GD Scholtz, a journalist by profession but unlike Preller, university-educated. He was "forced" into journalism because he was not admitted to the bar following his refusal to take the oath of allegiance to the British crown. The first book he wrote after completing doctoral studies in Amsterdam was *Europa en die Tweede Vryheidsoorlog* (1941). The appearance of his two-volumed *Die oorsake van die Tweede Vryheidsoorlog 1899-1902* (1947) won him the Stals prize for historical writing from the Suid-Afrikaanse Akademie vir Wetenskap en Kuns. Although one of the old school of Afrikaner historians, Scholtz did try to place events in their full perspective. He concluded that the causes of the war could be traced back to the Great Trek and British imperialism at that time. Although the British, he believed, were ultimately responsible for the war, he absolves neither Kruger, particularly his handling of the Uitlander question, nor Reitz and his diplomacy. He also turned his hand at biography and, in 1941, produced a study on the life of the enigmatic General CF Beyers.³⁸

During this period, the history departments in the English-medium universities also neglected monographs on the war. They were always short of funds, teaching loads were heavy, there was no society to bring professional historians together, and, furthermore, there were few outlets for scholarly articles in South Africa. The Second World War also handicapped research in a number of ways. Many of these historians served in the forces abroad or spent much time on garrison duty in South Africa. Others like Alan Hattersley, the historian of Natal, had personal debts to discharge or were called up to serve in the Union War Histories Section, esta-

³⁵ "Die tyd is verby, dat die Suidafrikaner hom langer laat beledig en domineer" in *Die Weste*, 5 April 1932.

³⁶ D Joubert, *Teer-en-veer In 1932; Rondom die Lamont-saak* (Tafelberg: Kaapstad, 1972).

³⁷ J Ploeger and J van der Waag, "South African state and state-sponsored military historical research, 1924-1995" in R Higham (ed.), *Official military historical offices and sources*, Vol 1: *Europe, Africa, the Middle East and India* (Greenwood: Westport, Connecticut, 2000), pp. 266-71.

³⁸ GD Scholtz, *Generaal Christiaan Frederik Beyers 1869-1914* (1941); Smith, pp. 80-3.

blished by Smuts in 1941 to record South Africa's experience of the Second World War. This unit survived until South Africa's exit from the Commonwealth (1961) and absorbed the energies of Eric Axelson, whose field was the history of Portuguese Africa, LCF Turner, founder of the military history department at the military academy, and JAI Agar-Hamilton, of the University of Pretoria.³⁹ Turner and Agar-Hamilton were both "worked out" of their respective organisations: Turner was too English for the post-1948 Union Defence Force, while Agar-Hamilton had for some time been out of step with the "Voortrekker" character which had been impressed upon his university.⁴⁰

For historians writing in Afrikaans the position was quite different. A younger generation, many trained at Dutch, German or Flemish universities, replaced the older men imported from Europe to establish the history departments at Afrikaans-medium universities. Typical of this time were the men behind the demise of Agar-Hamilton: ID Bosman, a child of the concentration camps, and his protégé, AN Pelzer. Fired by the victory of the National Party on the centenary of the Battle of Boomplaats and impassioned by the war and camp tradition, Afrikaner historians turned to the Anglo-Boer War afresh. The military side of the war, which had received scant attention, now became a focus for research, much of it state-sponsored. A State Historian was appointed in 1959, to produce a military history of the Anglo-Boer War, while a growing number of students and lecturers, particularly those at the newly-established Military Academy and Military History Section of the defence force, also applied themselves to a deeper study of the military issues. Much of this (and other material on the war) was published.⁴¹

The 1954 centennial celebration of the birth of General CR de Wet lent further impetus. A series of publications comprising articles and monographs on the life and times of the great general as well as original sources and diaries relating to the Second Anglo-Boer War and the 1914-15 Rebellion, was commenced. The first of these *Christiaan de Wet Annals* appeared in 1972 under the editorship of Prof. MCE van Schoor, and nine volumes have since appeared.⁴² This has proved a useful vehicle for the publication of archival material.

³⁹ IJ van der Waag, "Contested histories: official history and the South African military in the 20th century" (Workshop on official history, Canberra, October 1998).

⁴⁰ FA van Jaarsveld, *Afrikanergeskiedskrywing*, pp. 48-9; P Harries and C Saunders, "Eric Axelson and the history of Portugal in Africa", *South African Historical Journal* 39(2), pp. 167-75; and Saunders, *The making of the South African past*, p. 129.

⁴¹ Either in the *Archives Year Book for South African History*, a series commenced in 1938 with the purpose of conducting archival debates and presenting the fruits of archival research to the public, or in *Militaria* and Black Publications series of the Military Historical and Archival Section. For a discussion of the Pretoria history department, see chapter 3 of FA van Jaarsveld, *Afrikanergeskiedskrywing*.

⁴² Editorial preface by Prof. MCE Schoor to *Christiaan de Wet-Annale I*, October 1972.

The debate on the concentration camps

Much as the Jews built the state of Israel upon the foundations of Auschwitz, so the prisoner-of-war and concentration camps in South Africa, India, Ceylon and St. Helena heightened Afrikaner nationalism. When JC Otto produced *Die konsentrasiekampe* in 1954, which he dealt with "in somewhat bitter fashion",⁴³ Col. AC Martin responded with *The concentration camps, facts, figures and tables*. In the foreword to the latter, A Keppel-Jones wrote: "The Concentration Camps in the Anglo-Boer War have been an object of bitter denunciation for half a century. Anti-British sentiment among Afrikaners has crystallised round them. There are therefore few subjects in South African history on which it is more difficult to make an objective judgement than this." An Afrikaner responded to Martin's book:

"The subject that is certain to generate political heat in the shortest possible time in South Africa is the concentration camps of the South African War. I go so far as to say that it has been the factor which, more than anything else, kept Afrikaners and English-speaking South Africans divided through the years. If we Afrikaners want to be fair we must admit that we have sometimes been blaming English-speaking South Africans of the second generation, who have not been near that war and can thus not be held responsible for anything that their forefathers did. Also, I think it a bit paradoxical that Afrikaners who have only read about the camps in history books should become so heated that they sometimes hate these English-speaking people who had as much to do with the camps as they did."⁴⁴

This argument came to head again in 1983, following the broadcast of *Then came the English* on the SABC. Reacting on 14 May of that year in *The Star*, a Johannesburg English daily, FW Thorpe wrote:

"Instead of building on the greatness of Louis Botha and Jan Smuts, these narrow-minded vengeful people reverted to the Voortrekkers and the Boer War, dredging up events from the past to incite friction. Bitterness and hatred were fermented. Afrikaans and English children have been separated in schools and universities and fed on a diet of Boer War concentration camps, the burning of farms, the ridiculous stories of powdered glass in the camp food. The historical value of long past events have been boosted to illustrate

⁴³ FA van Jaarsveld, *The Afrikaner's interpretation of South African history*, pp. 133-4.

⁴⁴ Jan Burger in "An Afrikaner's diary", *The Star*, 25 November 1957 quoted by FA van Jaarsveld, *Omstrede Suid-Afrikaanse verlede*, p. 19.

Afrikaner superiority, while the English contribution to South Africa might well have not existed..."⁴⁵

Yet, despite considerable writing, there remained no methodological breakthrough.

The "three centuries of wrong"

While the victory of the National Party in 1948 was the cause for euphoria in Afrikaner circles, it came as a great shock for liberals. With the implementation of apartheid and the return of the NP with a larger majority in 1953, liberal historians began a new search for the causes of their present woes. A number went back to the period between the Jameson Raid and Union, for which new evidence had recently become available. Marais followed Van der Poel in showing how the imperialism of Chamberlain and Milner had been largely responsible for bringing about the South African War, which had served to promote an exclusive Afrikaner nationalism. Thompson examined the making of the Union, the constitution of which made it possible for an Afrikaner nationalist party eventually to capture the South African state. Liberals now argued that the constitution of 1909 had failed and that there should be a new national convention to undo the mistake of the one that had met in 1908-9, and to adopt a federal constitution appropriate for South Africa's multi-cultural society.⁴⁶

In 1958, Gideon Scholtz predicted that, by the turn of the century, the most important event recognised in South African history would be the wakening of a political consciousness among blacks after the First World War. The first signs of this can be seen in SM Molema's **The Bantu, past and present**, published in Edinburgh in 1920, and which he hoped would enlighten black people as to whom they were, from where they had come, of their position in the present, and to inspire them to write their own histories. He also wished his book to introduce South Africa's black people to the British. They had fought for the British in both Anglo-Boer wars as well as the First World War. Yet, despite innumerable sacrifices, they were excluded from the vote: something given to the Boers, notwithstanding their disloyalty shown in the 1914 Rebellion. **The Bantu, past and present**, being the first scientifically-responsible work on blacks and their traditions, was a milestone in black historiography.

So too was Sol Plaatjes' **Native life in South Africa** (1916). This part-polemic, part-sourcebook, which contained chapters on "Armed Natives in the South African War" and "The Boer Rebellion" of 1914, shared the objectives of **The Bantu, past**

⁴⁵ *The Star*, 14 May 1983 quoted by Van Jaarsveld, *Omstrede Suid-Afrikaanse veriede*, p. 19.

⁴⁶ Saunders, *The making of the South African past*, pp. 129-30.

and present. Plaatje commenced a sequel in England in 1919, including a history of the Native Labour Contingent in the First World War, but this was unfortunately never published.⁴⁷

The National Party's electoral victory, the ensuing banning of the Communist Party and the white-centric Van Riebeeck celebrations of 1952, radicalised liberal and black historians. On the left there was a long tradition of radical writing, some of which had become quite strongly Africanist by the late 1940s.⁴⁸ Liberal Africanists explained the position of black people in South Africa as **Three centuries of wrong**⁴⁹ and the Anglo-Boer War in terms of a conflict between British supremacy and Transvaal nationalism.⁵⁰ Marxists, on the other hand, saw South African history as a struggle between the oppressors and the oppressed; and, for them, the Anglo-Boer War had been fought over access to a valuable material resource - gold - and not mainly for reasons of British supremacy on the subcontinent.⁵¹ The **Oxford History**, produced by a group of liberal historians, had no separate sections on the two main poles of Afrikaner historiography, the Great Trek and the Second Anglo-Boer War, which were "interwoven into the story and given no prominence".⁵²

Radical historians, dismissing the traditional periodisation and moving toward a more interdisciplinary approach, concentrated upon social history and the writing of a total integrated history of all South Africans. As far as they were concerned, the Anglo-Boer War warranted little attention. WM Tsotsi denied the importance of both the Great Trek and Anglo-Boer wars and refused to see them in terms of anti-colonialism and anti-imperialism, and as something comparable to the struggle against apartheid. Black radicals labelled blacks that had collaborated with whites as "traitors" and, when they did refer to the Anglo-Boer War, this was viewed as "a war between English and Afrikaner exploiters fought on someone else's land".⁵³

This has only relatively recently begun to change with a new approach to the war, focusing on the war experiences of black South Africans. With Philip Bonner, B Hankey and Donald Denoon in the van, it culminated in the publication of Sol

⁴⁷ Saunders, *The making of the South African past*, pp. 107-8.

⁴⁸ Saunders, *The making of the South African past*, p. 130.

⁴⁹ Written by Patrick Duncan under the pseudonym Melanchton and published in Cape Town in 1952.

⁵⁰ Wilson and Thompson (eds), *Oxford History*, II, p. 324.

⁵¹ For example S Marks and R Rathbone (eds), *Industrialisation and social change in South Africa; African class formation, culture, and consciousness, 1870-1930* (Longman: London and New York, 1987).

⁵² Smith, p. 139.

⁵³ Smith, pp. 157, 220. This argument came again to the fore at "The Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902); a re-appraisal" conference held in Bloemfontein, 11-15 October 1999.

Plaatje's war diary (1973) and the appearance of Peter Warwick's **Black people and the South African War** in 1978. HT Siwundhla and JS Mohlamme, working at American universities, produced similar works; while SJ Maphalala and Bill Nasson, with their theses on the experiences of black people in Zululand and the Cape Colony, introduced valuable regional studies.⁵⁴ Work on the war by black historians is, however, still rare. For the black people of southern Africa, the war brought suffering and misery, and little more. Political expectations were dashed in May 1902 and again in May 1910. Frustration set in and it was almost as if the war was blanked out of the black consciousness: Fransjohan Pretorius referred to a "blank black memory regarding the war".⁵⁵

Nationalist historians and the official history of the war

But the period after 1948 was to be a golden age in Afrikaner history writing; and in various ways the government sponsored the writing of the history of the Afrikaner, with the Second Anglo-Boer War as the main focus. Leading the van was Frans Erasmus, the first Nationalist minister of defence, who established a military history section at Defence Headquarters. Having been strongly opposed to South African participation in Britain's Second World War, Erasmus instructed the staff to concentrate on the military history of the Afrikaner, and, to facilitate the process, two publications - a military history journal (*Militaria*) and a monographic series - were commenced in 1969. Under the direction of Jan Ploeger, who had worked under Bosman at the University of Pretoria, and Cas Bakkes, the early issues of both *Militaria* and the so-called Black Publications focused on every aspect of South African military history to the exclusion of the two world wars, with the Anglo-Boer wars being prominent.⁵⁶ The composition of both series changed drastically in the early seventies, following the move of Ploeger to the State Archives and Bakkes to Human Sciences Research Council.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ HT Siwundhla, *The participation of Non-Europeans in the Anglo-Boer War, 1899-1902* (Claremont Graduation School, 1977); JS Mohlamme, *Black people in the Boer republics during and in the aftermath of the South African War of 1899-1902* (University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1985); SJ Maphalala (unpublished MA dissertation, UZ 1979); B Nasson, *Abraham Esau's war: A Black South African War in the Cape, 1899-1902* (CUP: Cambridge, 1991).

⁵⁵ F Pretorius, "Historical perspectives on the Anglo-Boer War, 1899-1902" (unpublished paper delivered at "The Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902): a reappraisal", Bloemfontein, October 1999).

⁵⁶ Military Archives: archives of the Minister of Defence, Erasmus and Fouché Collection (hereinafter MVEF), Box 120, file MV78 Krygsargief; and LJ van der Waag, "Military record preservation in South Africa, 1914-1992; A history of Directorate Documentation Service", *Militaria* 23(4) 1993.

⁵⁷ With a single exception - JE Rabie, *Generaal CR de Wet se krygsleiding by Sannaspos en Groenkop* (1980) - the rest of the Black Publications were devoted to South African corps and regimental history; while the editors of *Militaria* published - in increasing volume - material on the two world wars.

At the Human Sciences Research Council, Bakkes - now in charge of the newly established Institute for Historical Research - commenced a series of source publications appertaining to the Anglo-Boer War. Under his guidance, no less than eleven publications containing memoirs, camp diaries and other ego documents, appeared between 1972 and 1986.⁵⁸ At the State Archives, Ploeger became an adjunct to the state-sponsored writing of the official South African history of the Anglo-Boer War, which had been delayed until after the National Party came to power. There he produced, within a short fourteen years (1973 to 1987), no less than one hundred chapters on the civilian experience of the war and compiled histories of all of the concentration camps. In these chapters, printed and distributed by the State Archives, he focused on the life-styles, experiences, morale and the difficulties faced by people in captivity; while his colleague, Johan Breytenbach, produced a handsome run of six detailed volumes covering the first year of the war.⁵⁹

Breytenbach, who had devoted himself to the study of the war, was appointed as state historian in 1959. Cast from the same mould as Leyds, Scholtz and other Afrikaner nationalist historians, he too saw Afrikaner history as a struggle against "foreign domination", a freedom struggle and a "struggle between nationalism and imperialism". In the first of his twin-volumed *Die Tweede Vryheidsoorlog* (Cape Town, 1948-49),⁶⁰ Breytenbach, following the tradition prescribed by Leyds, stressed the "aggressive tenor of British policy towards the South African Republic".⁶¹ He also agreed that this history should not be forgotten: the war was an attempt at the "genocide" of the Afrikaner people. Yet this struggle produced a nation of heroes and the field of defeat against the British was the breeding ground of a

⁵⁸ AG Oberholster (ed.), *Dagboek van HC Bredell 1900-1904* (1972); JP Brits (ed.), *Diary of a National Scout PJ du Toit 1900-1902* (1974); OJO Ferreira (ed.), *Geschiedenis, werken en streven van SPE Trichardt Luitenant Kolonel der vroegere Staatsartillerie Z.A.R. door hemzelve beschreven* (1975); CE Eloff (ed.), *Oorlogsdagboekje van HS Oosterhagen Januarie-Junie 1902* (1976); Thariza van Rensburg (ed.), *Oorlogsjoernaal van SJ Burger 1899-1902* (1977); OJO Ferreira (ed.), *Krygsgevangenschap van LC Ruijsseenaers 1899-1902* (1977); AG Oberholster (ed.), *Oorlogsdagboek van Jan FE Celliers 1899-1902* (1978); Thariza van Rensburg (ed.), *Camp diary of Henrietta EA Armstrong; Experiences of a Boer nurse in the Irene Concentration Camp, 6 April-11 October 1901* (1980); OJO Ferreira (ed.), *Memoirs of General Ben Bouwer as written by PJ le Riche* (1980); AP Smit en L Mare (eds.), *Die beleg van Mafeking* (1985); and A Wessels (ed.), *Anglo-Boer War diary of Herbert Gwynne Howell* (1986).

⁵⁹ J Ploeger and J van der Waag, "South African state and state-sponsored military historical research, 1924-1995" in R Higham (ed.), *Official military historical offices and sources, Vol 1: Europe, Africa, the Middle East and India* (Greenwood: Westport, Connecticut, 2000), pp. 283-5.

⁶⁰ Volume one dealt with the prelude to the struggle ("Voorspel tot die stryd") and the second with the Boer offensive ("Ontploffing van die Boere-offensief, Oktober 1899").

⁶¹ LM Thompson, "South Africa" in RW Winks (ed.), *The Historiography of the British Empire-Commonwealth: trends, interpretations, and resources* (Duke University Press: Durham, N.C., 1966), p. 229.

greater Afrikaner nation: "one of mind and one in purpose".⁶² Afrikaner academics, although opposed to Preller-style popularisation of the war, could not easily distance themselves from the popular perceptions. They had to provide historical proof for the people's truth.

The Nationalist government funded this programme for a number of reasons. In the first place, this was the most extensive and, according to the official historian, "glorious" of all wars ever fought in South Africa. It touched not only the citizens of the two Boer republics but also British subjects in the Cape and Natal colonies, and raised ordinary men to international repute. It had focused the interest of the world upon South Africa like never before. Furthermore, the existing works on the war suffered serious lacunae. The writers were generally in a rush to complete the work and some, like Preller and the writers of the official British history of the war, were not trained historians. Errors slipped in. Fact became confused with fiction. And the archival sources in South Africa were neglected: chiefly the war telegrams in the archives of the State Secretary and the Commandant General of the ZAR. The works were not scientifically responsible and all were out of print. A serious need for a comprehensive work, in which the course of the war was discussed, based upon archival material both within and outside South Africa, and in which all facts were properly referenced, presented itself.⁶³ Finally, the government shared their official historian's sentiment that much published (foreign) material was "propaganda ... and so tendentious that it offered little of importance".⁶⁴ An official, Afrikaner version had to be produced.

The history department of the University of Pretoria supervised the programme. These historians - Pelzer, F du T Spies and TS van Rooyen - were all noted specialists on the history of the Boer republics; while Spies and Pelzer produced anthologies of the political speeches of Hertzog and Verwoerd. Pelzer was a product of a long Second Anglo-Boer War. Having served on the local committee of the National Party, he became head of the history department at the University of Pretoria at the age of 32, and a year later produced his *magnus opus*: the first volume of his history of the South African Republic. He spent the rest of his life in the cause of Afrikaner nationalism. He served in key positions in the Voortrekker Movement, the Nasionale Jeugbond, and the FAK. He was a trustee of the Voortrekker Monument and on the management of the Krugergenootskap (Kruger Society). In 1956 he was co-founder of the *Historiese Genootskap van Suid-Afrika* (Historical Association of South Africa) and, for fourteen years, was editor of its

⁶² See FA van Jaarsveld, *Omstrede Suid-Afrikaanse verlede*, p. 21.

⁶³ JH Breytenbach, *Die Geskiedenis van die Tweede Vryheidsoorlog in Suid-Afrika, 1899-1902, Deel 1: Die Boere-Offensief, Okt.-Nov.1899* (Die Staatsdrukker: Pretoria, 1986), p. ix.

⁶⁴ JH Breytenbach, *Die Geskiedenis van die Tweede Vryheidsoorlog in Suid-Afrika, I*, p. ix. (My translation.)

mouthpiece, *Historia*. Pelzer hoped that the Association would help stave off the decline of the historical consciousness among Afrikaners, following the attainment of a new peak during the Van Riebeck festival.⁶⁵ Nevertheless, the historical importance of the war declined from the 1950s. Social upliftment, the reduction of "poor whitism", fading memories and the consolidation of Afrikaner power after 1948, decreased the need to rely on events such as the Anglo-Boer War for political mobilisation.

Breytenbach's six volumes appeared between 1969 and 1996, the first two being re-working of the two volumes of his early *Die Tweede Vryheidsoorlog*. Unfortunately, the value of the series is compromised by Breytenbach's emotional participation in the events. Van Jaarsveld argued (with regard to his earlier work) that Breytenbach "entered into his work so wholeheartedly that he could not set himself at a distance from it and take a detached view or see that this historical experience, acquired vicariously, had resulted in an image being formed, that both in its structure and the approach to it, failed to coincide altogether with the bounds of historical reality".

One cannot blame the official historian only. He was directed by a group of Afrikaner historians from possibly the most conservative university in the country. Jeff Grey pointed out that in settler societies, official histories were evolving from staff training texts into exercises in nation building.⁶⁶ This was certainly true for South Africa. Her World War official histories were directed primarily to officer training; while the subsequent Anglo-Boer War programme focused on the nurturing of an historical consciousness and the building of Afrikaner nationalism.⁶⁷

Furthermore, the way in which the material was assembled amounts to a compilation, a chronicle, and not a narrative history. Breytenbach seemingly was unable to rise above his data and view it from a height. The reconsideration, remodelling and perspective that would have conferred unity and wholeness on the image are wanting. He also neglects literary sources and concentrates on archival minutiae. He focuses on technical trivia and - perhaps with the exception of the Natal front - says nothing of strategic planning. In fact, the memoirs of Generals Kemp and Smuts are the only two books that actually say anything at all of Boer strategic

⁶⁵ FA van Jaarsveld, *Afrikanergeskedeskrifing: Verlede, hede, toekoms* (Lex Patria: Cape Town and Johannesburg, 1992), pp 54-61.

⁶⁶ C Wilcox, "The Australian official record of the Boer War" in C Wilcox (ed.), *Recording the South African War; Journalism and official history, 1899-1914* (London, 1999), p. 44.

⁶⁷ IJ van der Waag, "Contested histories: official history and the South African military in the 20th century" (Workshop on official histories in the 20th century), Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1998.

thinking.⁶⁸ Few will agree with Van Jaarsveld that "few historians in [South Africa] can match [Breytenbach's] ability to write in such a pleasing style".⁶⁹

Sadly, the evaporation of state funding and Breytenbach's death, brought the series to a stop, after the publication of the sixth volume, at the Battle of Bergendal (Dalmanutha). The series may now never be completed. Hancock's biography of Smuts (1962) opened up "the possibilities of reconsideration by a military historian, drawing upon the experience which we now have of the military potential of other mobile guerrillas operating in friendly countryside against alien forces".⁷⁰ The official historian never got as far as even an attempt at the guerrilla phase of the war, which still seeks a serious historian.

Debate on the origins of the war

While historians writing in Afrikaans had much to say about the war itself, with approximately 128 theses produced by 1986, few made contributions to the debate on its origins. Bar one or two notable exceptions (for example Scholtz's aforementioned *Die oorsake van die Tweede Vryheidsoorlog*, 1947), "Afrikaner historians have probably left the topic to others because they saw Britain as the aggressor and cause of the war, and accepted that the reasons for British action lay mainly in sources in Britain itself".⁷¹

English-medium historians of the period from 1884 to 1899 were, on the other hand, chiefly concerned with the origins of the war. JS Marais, in his *The fall of Kruger's republic*, provides a scholarly, step-by-step analysis of the diplomacy from June 1895, when Joseph Chamberlain became colonial secretary, to the delivery of the October ultimatum. Marais concludes that Chamberlain and Milner, believing that Kruger's Transvaal, empowered by the gold-mining industry, threatened British supremacy in South Africa, decided that this had to be prevented. And when the Transvaal government became convinced that this was so, it declared war. Toward the final phase of diplomacy Milner forced the pace and Chamberlain followed and carried Milner's policy in the British cabinet. Marais also goes to some trouble to assess the extent of Chamberlain's connivance in the plot that led to

⁶⁸ JCG Kemp, *Vir vryheid en vir reg* (Cape Town 1941); and G Nattrass and SB Spies (eds.), *Jan Smuts; Memoirs of the Boer War* (Jonathan Ball: Johannesburg, 1994). The original manuscript is in the custody of the National Archives, Pretoria: Smuts Collection, A1, volume 297/2. The memoirs first appeared in print in WK Hancock and J van der Poel (eds), *Selections from the Smuts Papers I* (CUP, 1966).

⁶⁹ FA van Jaarsveld, *The Afrikaner's interpretation of South African history*, p. 105.

⁷⁰ LM Thompson, "South Africa" in RW Winks (ed.), *The historiography of the British Empire-Commonwealth*, p. 230.

⁷¹ C Saunders, *Writing history; South Africa's urban past and other essays* (HSRC: Pretoria, 1992), p. 87.

the abortive Jameson Raid, and concludes that it was considerable. And of late British historians have taken an even more critical view.⁷²

While the origins of the war were placed in a broader perspective by a number of Anglo-American historians,⁷³ none of these works is based on the same intimate knowledge of South Africa and her history as is that of Marais. And, as Leonard Thompson pointed out, Robinson, Gallagher and Denny are also "wrong in viewing the war as the product of a clash between Afrikaner and British South African nationalisms, because in so far as there ever was a British South African national spirit it was largely the creation of a representative of the British government, Lord Milner".⁷⁴ Christopher Saunders correctly said, "historians must bring the broadest possible perspectives to bear" when investigating the causes of any war. Any convincing explanation must be comprehensive, plural and multi-factored.⁷⁵

"There are no South Africans"

Yet this lack of plural and multi-factored explanation has been characteristic of South African historiography on the Second Anglo-Boer War. For one hundred years, with few exceptions, "different" South Africans wrote their "separate histories". And when the official South African history was written, this was tackled from a narrow Afrikaner perspective: a viewpoint generally uncritical of the Boers. When it came to the questioning of his traditions, the Afrikaner was thin-skinned and even showed an aggressive intolerance. Stuart Cloete's *Turning wheels* was banned and Professor Henry Lamont, as we have seen, was tarred and feathered in 1932, following the publication of his novel *War, wine and women*. These different, jealously guarded versions of the past, stressed the uniqueness and separate-ness of South Africa's multi-cultural people and lead to the perception that "there are no South Africans". A book by that name, published in 1942, commences:

"The worst of South Africa is that you never come across a South African. There is no surprise in the discovery that the United States produces Americans; or China, Chinese; or Lapland, Laplanders. The naturalness of so natural a condition does not strike one until its exception appears. The exception is South Africa.

⁷² See for example JWM Chapman, "British use of 'dirty tricks' in external policy prior to 1914", *War in History* 2002, 9(1), pp. 60-81.

⁷³ RI Lovell in *The struggle for South Africa, 1875-1899: A study in economic imperialism* (New York, 1934); WL Langer in *The diplomacy of imperialism, 1890-1902*, 2 vols. (New York, 1935); R Robinson, J Gallagher and A Denny, *Africa and the Victorians: The official mind of imperialism* (London, 1961).

⁷⁴ LM Thompson, "South Africa" in RW Winks (ed.), *The historiography of the British Empire-Commonwealth*, pp. 228-9.

⁷⁵ C Saunders, *Writing history*, pp. 89-90.

"You may travel the thousand miles of garden route from Cape Town to Durban, and thence along the white-lined road fringed with white-washed boulders to guide you through the night; or you may leave the highways that radiate from the City of Gold; and never, at petrol bowser, hospitable farm, the ubiquitous tea room, or gaunt hotel, meet a South African."⁷⁶

In many respects the position has been slow to change. An Institute for Historical Research was established at the University of the Western Cape in 1976 to study what were called "inter-group relations". An historian at this institute, Hans Heese, produced his *Groep sonder grense* in 1984.⁷⁷ This work, like those of his father,⁷⁸ penetrated beyond the myths of Afrikaner exclusivity and racial purity. For the first time in Afrikaner history writing, Heese exposed, in detailed, genealogical exegesis, the origins of the Afrikaner people and explained how all the people of the late seventeenth-century Cape became entwined through marriage, so giving more than one population group a basis for a new identity. This radical departure threatened the traditional view that the Afrikaner was of pure or practically pure European descent.⁷⁹ A political storm broke. At its centre was the Conservative Party and its leader, Dr Andries Treurnicht, who himself had published thoughts on the matter. In *Credo van 'n Afrikaner*, Treurnicht claimed: "Nooit sedert die volkplanting in 1652 is die gekleurde volksgroep tot die volksgelidere van die Afrikaner of as deel van die blanke gemeenskap aanvaar nie."⁸⁰ Glaringly, the first addendum to *Groep sonder grense*, a list of marriages and liaisons between Europeans and so-called "Coloureds" (1652-c.1795), contained at least two references to ancestors of the good doctor. Over a period of fourteen years the Heeses chipped away at the questions of racial superiority and exclusivity, at separateness; in fact at the theoretical foundations of *apartheid*.

Until this time, the war was depicted in South African historiography as almost exclusively a white man's war. In around 1980 an historiographic refocus took place. Whereas books had contained very little information on black participation in the war and blacks were perceived as being mere spectators, after this date they drew increasing attention. Historians, such as Bill Nasson and Peter Warwick, have since shown that black South Africans were not only active participants but played a role

⁷⁶ GH Galpin, *There are no South Africans* (Thomas Nelson: London etc, 1942), p. 9.

⁷⁷ HF Heese, *Groep sonder grense; Die rol en status van die gemengde bevolking aan die Kaap, 1652-1795* (UWC: Bellville, 1984).

⁷⁸ JA Heese, *Die herkoms van die Afrikaner, 1657-1867* [The origin of the Afrikaner] (Cape Town, 1971); and his *Slagtersnek en sy mense* [Slagtersnek and the people concerned] (Cape Town, 1973).

⁷⁹ See HT Colenbrander, *De afkomst der Boeren* (1902), as well as the discussion in the Introduction to HF Heese, *Groep sonder grense*, pp. 1-4.

⁸⁰ AP Treurnicht, *Credo van 'n Afrikaner*, p. 18.

of no little significance.⁸¹ Afrikaans historians were part of the revision. Yet unfortunately many of their key texts, a notable exception is Fransjohan Pretorius' *Life on Commando*, have not been published in English. These publications and the stories they told were crucial in the debunking of myths, appertaining to amongst other things the Second Anglo-Boer War, and the preparation of many South Africans for the second national convention and the dawning of the third "New" South Africa.

The British Empire and Commonwealth

However, all this is not to say that the Anglo-Boer War had little to no impact upon the Dominions. In the case of Australia and New Zealand, this was their first foreign war and, as with Canada, a crucial nation-building experience. Today the wartime prime minister who despatched six New Zealand contingents to South Africa, Richard Seddon, dominates the parliamentary lawns in Wellington. To mark the event, several centennial conferences were held, new books appeared and numerous old titles were republished. In all, five Boer War conferences were held during the last half of 1999, one each in the case of the United Kingdom, South Africa and Australia and two in New Zealand. For some, in the words of a well-known English historian of the war, this was fast becoming the "Bore War". Yet each occasion drew a surprisingly large crowd. In Britain and South Africa the gathering was largely academic: almost 100 historians from 17 countries presented papers at the Bloemfontein conference. In Australia it comprised a majority of military history buffs. In New Zealand, most astonishingly, the audiences largely embraced descendants of soldiers who had served in South Africa. Some proudly wearing the medals of their ancestors posed a number of informative questions relating to "the methods of barbarism" as well as the virtues of colonial as opposed to imperial troops.

This swell of popular support was also seen in the launch of a new New Zealand official history of the war⁸² and a re-enactment on 21 October 1999 of the march of the 1st Contingent from Karori down to Queen's Wharf in Wellington, the point of embarkation for South Africa. At the Queen's Wharf speeches were made and wreaths thrown into Wellington's harbour. The Governor General, Sir Michael Hardie Boys, used the opportunity to honour those who left on later service: "As the century has passed, we have learned that while there is genuine honour in military service, there is never, ever, any glory in war." Prime Minister Jenny Shipley

⁸¹ See for example, P Warwick, *Black people and the South African War 1899-1902* (Ravan: Johannesburg, 1983) and B Nasson, *Abraham Esau's war: A black South African War in the Cape, 1899-1902* (CUP: Cambridge, 1991).

⁸² John Crawford with Ellen Ellis, *To fight for the empire: An illustrated history of New Zealand and the South African War 1899-1902* (Reed: Wellington, 1999).

emphasised that the first of the ten New Zealand contingents that left for South Africa had, without knowing it, started New Zealand on her path to nationhood.⁸³ Memorial plaques were unveiled in several New Zealand towns, from Hamilton, North Island (26 October 1999) to Kaikoura, South Island (23 October 1999). Wing Commander Kevin Baff, RNZAF, compiled a fascinating account of Kaikoura's contribution to the conflict including biographies of all Kaikoura volunteers.⁸⁴

The Wellington conference met in the National Library Auditorium and ran over two days. Thomas Pakenham, the keynote speaker, explained the importance of the colonial forces. With their easy organisation, better physique and fieldcraftsmanship, they were very effective. Yet poor equestrian skills and the lack of trained officers often compromised this. It took a year in the field to learn the skills of war and, this gained, it was then time for the contingent to return home. Dr Ian McGibbon, one of the hosts, addressed the question of New Zealand involvement in a far-away war and ably balanced the imperial and domestic issues. Successive speakers addressed NZ opposition to the war, the composition of the various contingents, the Maori and the war, the colonial commandants, women and the war as well as the impact of the war upon the New Zealand Military Forces and society. These themes were developed at the second New Zealand conference, held in Hamilton and hosted by the History Department of the University of Waikato. The speakers had an opportunity to visit several battlefields of the Waikato war - they followed the British advance from Pokeno through the battles fought at Meremere, Rangiriri to Paterangi and Orakau and on to Rangiaowhia - and noted the historical-political controversy enshrouding the New Zealand Wars (formerly the Maori Wars), and not too dissimilar from recent debates in South Africa, with fascination.

According to the Chief of the Australian Army, Lt Gen FJ Hickling, who opened the Canberra conference, the Anglo-Boer War saw the first use of Australian troops in Empire defence and the birth of the Australian Army on 1 March 1901 was the natural result. The British Empire did not emerge from the war unchanged. Hiatuses in an army designed only to "police" were exposed by the war's unexpected intensity and they faced the dilemma of dealing with guerrilla-type armies without infringing the law of war and its conventions. Breaker Morant, anti-hero of the Stan Kubrick film, illustrated the point all too clearly for Australia.

Not surprisingly, the first Australian books on the war were produced very quickly, in fact long before the war even ended. They were WT Reay's **Australians in war:**

⁸³ "Boer War centenary marked", *The Dominion* (Wellington), 22 October 1999. The event received coverage in the South African press too: see, for example, *Saturday Argus*, 23 October 1999, p. 24.

⁸⁴ K Baff, *In memory of Kaikoura Boer War veterans* (n.p. 1999).

with the Australian regiment from Melbourne to Bloemfontein (Melbourne 1900) and F Wilkinson's *Australia at the front: a colonial view of the Boer War* (London 1901). They were followed a decade later by the official history - PL Murray, *Official records of the Australian military contingents to the war in South Africa* (Melbourne 1911) - which was little more than an inconsistent assemblage of military minutiae by a junior officer who had served in South Africa.⁸⁵ The Australian War Memorial has contracted Craig Wilcox to write a centennial official history and this will appear in May 2002.

Yet the apparent importance of war meant that discussion could not wait until then. The 1999 Chief of Army History Conference, which has over the years become one of the major Commonwealth military-history events on the calendar, focused on the war and Peter Dennis and Jeffrey Grey, of the Australian Defence Force Academy's school of history, co-edited the handsome volume of proceedings. This volume, *The Boer War: Army, nation and empire*, represents the first real attempt at an understanding of the role of the Australian colonial forces, the impact of the war upon the Australian colonial societies as well as the formative experience it proved to be for the Australian commanders of the First World War. The Second Anglo-Boer War was undoubtedly a formative episode in the shaping of Australia and the first of several martial blocks in the building of Australian nationalism, although there was, initially at least, no popular support and no popular imperialism.⁸⁶

Conclusion

The Second Anglo-Boer War impacted severely upon South African and, more particularly, Afrikaner society. It was a watershed in South African history and for this reason it has been for many decades a major focus of South African and particularly Afrikaner history writing.⁸⁷ By any measure, the war affected South African society severely. Smuts wrote some years later that this was one of the first "total" wars of the twentieth century and its impact on South African politics, economics and social life was therefore profound.⁸⁸ He might have added that the more "total" the experience, the heavier the impact of the war upon the historical conscious-

⁸⁵ See C Wilcox, "The Australian official record" in C Wilcox (ed.), *Recording the South African War; Journalism and official history, 1899-1914* (London, 1999), pp. 29-31.

⁸⁶ S Clarke, "Manufacturing spontaneity? The role of the Commandants in the Colonial offers of troops to the South African War" in P Dennis and J Grey (eds.), *The Boer War: Army, nation and empire*, pp. 129-50.

⁸⁷ I question Richard Dale's statement that scholarly research in South Africa focused on the Second Anglo-Boer War in view of the "strict temporal constraints in the use of [younger] archives." See his review of A Seegers, *The military and the making of modern South Africa* (St. Martin's Press: New York, 1996) in *Armed forces & society*, Spring 1998, p. 467.

⁸⁸ G Nattrass and SB Spies (eds), Jan Smuts; *Memoirs of the Boer War* (Jonathan Ball: Johannesburg, 1994), p. 19.

ness.⁸⁹ The twisted path of historicisation and the central place of the war in Afrikaner history writing is therefore no surprise. With one or two exceptions, the topic has been relegated or neglected by English and black historians in South Africa.

In a country like South Africa, where memories are perhaps particularly long, political emotion has been a barrier to a true comprehension of the events surrounding the war. Recent European history would seem to show how quickly foes could befriend each other. Yet the Second Anglo-Boer War had such an impact and its ethical crisis was so profound, that, over the past one hundred years, many issues have insistently demanded historical explanation.

The long "lists of wrongs" emanating from the centuries-old Bantu-Boer-Briton love-hate triangle, face addressing by historians in post-apartheid South Africa. Perhaps with these centennial observations historians will take a fresh look with the impartiality and self-restraint that follow only upon the passage of time. Although some thirty new books on the War have appeared over the past months, many seem to do little more than perpetuate myths. Few have gone back to the primary sources. Most have contented themselves with a scratching through the existing secondary sources in a vain attempt to come to some new perspective. With the passage of one hundred years, the time has surely come for historians, who are in the first place South Africans, to construct a "fresh historical architecture" with more nuanced and balanced views of the past.

Historians took the first tentative steps in the 1970s and have now, with these centenary commemorations, been followed by the politicians. This is clearly reflected in sentiments expressed by President Thabo Mbeki at Brandfort on 9 October 1999 and the high regard former Free State premier, M Lekota, expressed for Boer general CR de Wet. There is increasing recognition for the impact of the Anglo-Boer War upon all South Africans and the war may very well become a powerful instrument for nation building. As Richard Bosworth explained in the case of Second World War historiography:

"History was the most obvious and the best discipline to employ to work through the terror and the horror of those years. Only historical explanation ... could heal the trauma..."⁹⁰

⁸⁹ See RJB Bosworth, *Explaining Auschwitz and Hiroshima; History writing and the Second World War, 1945-1990* (Routledge: London and New York, 1998); and Ian Buruma, *Wages of guilt; memories of war in Germany and Japan* (Vintage: London, 1995).

⁹⁰ Bosworth, p. 194.

The war's tremendous impact, still perceptible over the passage of one hundred years, is no more visible than in the battle for the naming of the war. The South African War, the Second War of Independence, the English War and the Boer War all insufficiently describe the complexities of the conflict. And in any case, although popular, a name referring to the place where the war was fought has heavy imperialist undertones, viz. the Afghan War, the Sikh War, and the South African War. Each of these peoples had experienced several wars before the British entered the lists against them. The Anglo-Boer War - perhaps too simplistically - is taken from the two main belligerents: the parties who declared war. This too is problematic. It excludes the "other" parties: the Cape Afrikaners, Australians, New Zealanders, Dutch, Belgians, Austrians, Russians, Germans, Frenchmen, Canadians, the English-speaking colonials of Natal and the Cape, the so-called *Uitlanders*, and the thousands upon thousands of black South Africans. Furthermore, it was not the second conflict between Boer and Brit on. If one enumerates the events culminating at Boomplaats (1848), the war, which erupted in 1899 must number as the Third Anglo-Boer War. But then Free Staters have and will argue - and with cause - that they were not declared belligerents in 1880 and refer to the Anglo-Transvaal War (1880-81) and the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902). The "Three Years War" (De Wet's terminology) is too vague and for that reason perhaps the best of a poor list. Only once the shadows of the Bantu-Boer-Brit conflicts grow old and eventually disappear, will historians look upon these events with new-found clarity and objectivity. A hundred years from now, historians may very well group and refer to the conflicts of the nineteenth century - and perhaps even through to 1994 - as the wars of South African unification.