Cultural Entrepreneurs, Proto-Nationalism and Women's Testimony Writings: From the South African War to 1940*

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Women cultural entrepreneurs were busy in promoting the development of proto-nationalism in South Africa in the aftermath of the 1899–1902 South African War. The work of some key cultural entrepreneurs who solicited and published women’s testimonies about the wartime concentration camps instituted by the British military provides the focus of discussion. Boer testimonies were presented as factual ‘I-witness’ statements; they also followed a proto-nationalist line and were published and distributed in women’s nationalist networks, playing an important part in everyday forms of state formation from 1902 to 1940. During this period, the making of Afrikaner ethnic identity was symbiotic with the making of proto-nationalism and then nationalism with cultural politics mapping closely on to state formation. Within this, women’s role as cultural entrepreneurs and political brokers was crucial, with the centrality of the concentration camp deaths within a mythologised ‘history of Afrikanerdom’ resulting from their activities rather than being provided by masculine nationalism.

Introduction

The ideologicalization of identity depends upon the emergence of cultural entrepreneurs ... the move from the oral repository of the traditional elders to the written page multiplies the potential mobilization of identity ... [The political changes occurring in South Africa were hastened by] ... the efforts of a band of cultural impresarios whose explicit purpose was to speed up the creation of a unified Afrikaner demotic culture. These cultural promoters worked in a variety of fields: historical writing, journalism, religion, and politics ...

Post-1994, there has been a widespread move to rethink South Africa’s history, with the post-apartheid milieu providing welcome opportunities for revisiting not only

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2 D.H. Akenson, God’s Peoples: Covenant and Land in South Africa, Israel and Ulster (New York, Cornell University Press, 1992), p. 70. However, we do not agree with Akenson’s corollary (p. 82), that “Even though women’s informal, home-based affirmations of Afrikaner ethnicity must have been significant, the limited evidence means that we must deal mostly with formally organized and male-dominated institutions”.
the South African past but also how this has been written about within earlier historiography. This process of revisioning is occurring primarily to take account of the African majority, although alongside this a similar project of rethinking women's history has unfolded. The research we discuss shares this impulse to rethink, here concerning the role of Boer (later Afrikaner) women in proto-nationalism and its cultural politics, with the work of Marijke Du Toit and Louise Vincent, in particular, resonating with our own and that of Isabel Hofmeyr and Helen Bradford providing strong background influences.

Our focus concerns the activities of women cultural entrepreneurs over the period from the South African War (1899–1902) to 1940, during which the country industrialised, gained independence from Britain, experienced the rise of Afrikaner nationalist politics and instituted segregation. Women with nationalist political convictions were active in cultural politics across this period, around the making and re-making of memory about the deaths in the concentration camps of the South African War and also regarding the racial 'other'. This was partly for its own sake, partly a contribution to a distinct Afrikaner ethnic identity, and was also related to the development of spoken and written Afrikaans and associated cultural developments, including the production of history according to proto/nationalist views. An important aspect involved the writing and publication of women's testimonies about their wartime experiences, one of the prime

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4 In relation to our research on 'post/memory' and the concentration camps, the rethinking involved has concerned black people and 'writing a wider war'; see Cathiberton et al., Writing a Wider War and E. Brink, 1899: The Long March Home (Cape Town, Kwela Books, 1999) for influential examples. See also H. Dampier 'Women's Testimonies of the Concentration Camps of the South African War, 1899–1902 And After' (PhD thesis, University of Newcastle, 2005); L. Stanley, Mourning Becomes . . . Post/Memory and the Concentration Camps of the South African War (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2000).


6 Literally, 'boer' means farmer, implicitly of European extraction; with a capital 'B' it was used of the people now known as Afrikaners from approximately the 1880s to the 1910s.

7 While Du Toit’s work sees women’s political activism ceasing around 1929, focusing on women cultural entrepreneurs indicates it persisted for another two decades. And while Vincent’s work and ours have much in common, we see Afrikaner women’s national parties and involvement in franchise activities occurring significantly earlier, their influence persisting longer and throughout intertwined with women’s cultural activities more widely. The influences of Hofmeyr and Bradford are discussed later.

8 As a result of the ‘sorecded earth’ phase of the war, the British military formed camps along the main rail routes where these people were ‘concentrated’ in camps of tents. Largely because of epidemics of measles, pneumonia, typhoid and enteritis, in a short period of around four months mortality rates soared. Subsequently, 26,370 deaths of women and children in the ‘white’ camps were later commemorated by emergent Afrikaner nationalism. The key reference remains S.B. Spies, Methods of Barbarism: Roberts, Khakaner and Civilians in the Boer Republics January 1900 – May 1902 (Kaapstad, South Africa, Harman and Rousseau, 1977; republished 2001); useful centenary ‘revisioning’ work includes B. Nasson, The South African War 1899–1902 (London, Arnold, 1999); D. Lowry, The South African War Reappraised (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2000); D. Omhini and A. Thompson (eds), The Impact of the South African War (Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2002).

9 We use ‘proto-nationalism’ from pre-war to approximately 1924, ‘nationalism’ thereafter, and ‘proto/nationalism’ for the entire period.
concerns of the cultural entrepreneurs discussed later. This activity commenced in 1902 immediately the war ended. However, by the middle and later 1930s the initial meaning given the earlier testimony publications had changed markedly, for re-publications and new work became located around the competing splinter-groupings associated with different incarnations of the National Party (NP), with the last burst of testimony publication between 1936 and 1940, in support of Hertzog and also the ‘purified’ nationalist views associated with D.F. Malan and his supporters.

The idea of ‘cultural entrepreneurs’ has been used by Hermann Gilmore in discussing Afrikaner nationalism, drawing on Crawford Young’s work in theorising cultural pluralism. Gilmore’s account uses Young’s term in passing, while for us Young’s detailed ideas are helpful in getting analytical purchase on women’s role in proto-nationalism. Young comments that,

…the cultural entrepreneur commits his [sic] energies to multiplying the capital. Language is a crucial expression of identity and will command much of his attention… Literature is of prime importance to an ideological culture… where a catechism of identity is elaborated. The history of the group must be unravelled and re-woven… The founding fathers must be rescued from obscurity and accorded their place of veneration in the cultural hagiography. A passionate challenge thus awaits the cultural entrepreneur.

We pursue this ‘passionate challenge’ as expressed in the cultural-political careers of women cultural entrepreneurs initially encountered in the records of the ‘concentration system’ established during the South African War. The term ‘cultural entrepreneur’ provides a fruitful way of highlighting the role of these women in the making of memory, identity and culture within the framework of proto-nationalism, and also shows that Young’s distinction between cultural entrepreneurs and political brokers does not work in our particular research context:

A distinction is worth making between the cultural entrepreneur, who devotes himself [sic] to enlarging the solidarity resources of a community, and the political broker, who mobilizes ethnicity in a given situation, crystallizing collective aspiration in the social and political realm. The latter archetype, the cultural politician, applies his skills to the optimum combination of the

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12 Young, The Politics, p. 46.

13 ‘Concentration system’ is Emily Hobhouse’s term for the combination of martial law, scorched earth, concentration of the populations of the Boer Republics, and the use of African labour; see Chapter 4 in Stanley, Mourning Becomes.
existing stock of factors of cultural mobilization... [while] the cultural entrepreneur commits his [sic] energies to multiplying the capital.\textsuperscript{14}

Thanks to the early work of, especially, Hofmeyr and Sparks, the importance of cultural production more generally in the formation of proto-nationalism and then nationalism in South Africa up to 1948 is now widely acknowledged.\textsuperscript{15} Our research builds on this, using the records of the concentration system, women's published and unpublished testimonies and women's post-war organisations to show that women played an important role as both cultural entrepreneurs and political brokers.\textsuperscript{16} The cultural work of a number of women cultural entrepreneurs is explored, showing that the centrality of the concentration camp deaths\textsuperscript{17} within the mythologised nationalist history of Afrikanerdom resulted from their activities and was not provided by masculine versions of nationalism, while three examples of how women cultural entrepreneurs marshalled memory-making in relation to 'big P' mainstream politics and proto-nationalism from 1902 are also sketched out.

Ideas about the state in South Africa are usually thought of around 'big structures, large processes, huge comparisons', to quote Charles Tilly, with the emphasis on capitalism, imperialism, colonialism and apartheid, all 'big P' politics rather than the 'small forms' Philip Abrams advocated focusing on.\textsuperscript{18} However, Abrams' approach is productive in rethinking the processes of state formation, which we explore from below and in connection with the everyday and 'small p' cultural politics, using this with ideas drawn from Eric Hobsbawm's discussion of proto-nationalism as well as Young's theorisation of cultural entrepreneurs.\textsuperscript{19}

Voices From the Women's Camps: Cultural Entrepreneurs and Texts In Context

Women's networks, parties, organisations and congresses started almost immediately post-war in each of the four provinces of British-governed South Africa. These included

\textsuperscript{14} Young, The Politics, p. 46.
\textsuperscript{17} Much subsequent political capital has been made from the camp deaths, particularly post-1945, with the 'hidden history' here that various of the architects of nationalism and apartheid were in Nazi Germany in the 1930s and influenced Goebbels, who deliberately named the Nazi extermination camps as concentration camps as a 'the British had them, you can't criticise us' pre-emptive propaganda move.
the politically hawkish Afrikaans Christian Women’s Society or ACVV, founded in 1903 by some of the women whose testimonies appeared in published collections, which supported ‘zuijer Afrikaans’ [pure Afrikaans] and an ethnically-specific definition of volk and was opposed to any rapprochement with English-speakers; and the South African Women’s Federation or SAVF, formed in 1906 by women from elite backgrounds as a national organisation with branches down to dorp or village and farm levels, concerned with what would now be called social work but politically focused on the volk and its needs, and with some branches involving English- as well as Afrikaans-speakers. There were also local branches of women’s nationalist parties, often started by women who had been activists in the camps; and then in 1914 a pan-South African Women’s Party was formed by women who had been wartime activists.21

The women in these networks had forged close political and other bonds during the war. In the concentration camps, women from radically different social backgrounds necessarily lived in close proximity. In doing so, many recognised political affinities which were, not surprisingly, sharpened by their wartime experiences, in particular the topsy-turvy nature of wartime events, a theme that recurs across women’s testimonies, as does the need to ensure that no such inversion of the assumed ‘natural [implicitly, racial] order’ of Boer society happened again. Post-war, local and province-level meetings and annual congresses instituted by different women’s organisations emerged, enabling cooperation across the large geographical distances these women often lived from each other. These structures provided a supportive milieu for ‘telling the tale’ about the war and its injustices – the archived as well as published testimonies clearly show the mark of ‘the oral’ in their phrasing, forms of address and rhetoric: features. Many of these testimonies were written around guidelines suggested to the authors, while others who could not write instead told their stories by word of mouth” as sworn statements before magistrates and notaries and legally authorised their names to be attached to these, with the cultural entrepreneurs discussed later playing an important role regarding both.22

The women’s organisations relatedly became involved in the promotion of Afrikaans both as a written and a spoken language and also in encouraging written and published cultural production more widely. They supported, for example, the founding of popular mass-selling magazines in Afrikaans, in which many women’s testimonies were published; the growth of Afrikaans newspapers, many of which also published women’s testimonies; the use of Afrikaans as a teaching medium in schools and as the language of public life; and increasingly, as political control was gained first in coalition governments and then rule by the National Party after 1948, the institution of a core curriculum of Christian National education together with specified teaching texts in schools.

Cultural production and politics with both a ‘small p’ and a ‘large P’ are indivisible in relation to the testimonies Boer/Afrikaner women produced about their wartime experiences.23 Interrogations of text always needs to be situated in relation to context. At the start of this period involved the distribution and consumption of these cultural texts, around which many individuals, groups and organisations were busy in promoting a distinct Afrikaner ethnic identity, as well as concerning the wider political frame. And by 1940 the published testimonies had effectively achieved canonical status as ‘the facts’ about

21 One of its founders, Johanna Brand-Van Warraclo, was an important cultural entrepreneur within women’s proto-nationalist circles whose cultural career is discussed later.
22 The attestations before magistrates and public notaries are attached to a number of the testimonies in Stemme uit die Vrouekampe and also to others which are archived but never published.
23 See references in footnote 10.
‘the history’ of the Afrikaner people, although these were actually ‘facts’ and ‘history’ crafted within earlier proto-nationalist political ideology-making.

Cultural entrepreneurship by women was crucial to forming and maintaining the interconnections between cultural production and political life over the period 1902 to 1940, by politicising ideas about culture and identity through ‘small p’ political practices, which included everyday folk on farms and villages. It involved large numbers of Boer/Afrikaner women in the women’s organisations and the related burgeoning of (largely nationalist-originating) Afrikaans-language magazines, newspapers and books, many of which featured nationalist-inflected accounts of history and the past, including women’s experiences during the South African War and the concentration camps as a particularly resonant ‘moment’ in the life of the volk or People in a nationalist sense.

Mrs. Postma, of Middelburg, Transvaal, collected these testimonies and now gives them out in pamphlet form ... to remind the readers anew of the deep waters through which God has led our volk — also in the Second War of Independence — and how the women of South Africa also contributed their part ... Our women always stood by the men in the struggle for Freedom and Right and still today the part which they play in the building up of Country and Volk is of great importance, yes indispensable.\(^{24}\)

This quotation comes from a collection of testimonies edited by M.M. (Magdalina Margaritaha) Postma, *Stemme uit die Verlede* [Voices From the Past], which was re-published in 1939. First published in 1926, in an earlier and rather different form of Afrikaans as *Stemme uit Die Vrouekampe* [Voices From the Women’s Camps], it was distributed through the membership of the various women’s nationalist parties which had combined that year.\(^ {25}\)

The collection contains over 30 women’s testimonies about their wartime experiences, especially concerning ‘scorched earth’.\(^ {26}\)

Tilly Fick, chair of the SAVF, emphasises the importance of the past and remembrance of it in the extract above from her ‘Foreword’.\(^ {27}\) For Mrs Fick, this specifically concerned the ‘deep waters through which God has led our volk’ — meaning the deaths of women and children in the concentration camps — although this was still so well remembered when she wrote that it did not need to be explicitly named by her. Clear nationalist sentiments are invoked, with the ‘Foreword’ mentioning ‘our volk’, and ‘Country and Volk’, with volk having a particular resonance at that time and suggesting something of the complex links that existed between Christian Nationalism and National Socialism.\(^ {28}\) In addition, there is a specific nationalist inflection, because referring to the South African War as the ‘Second War of Independence’ provided a coded indication of political sentiment. Another ‘silent’ aspect of nationalist sentiment here is that the 1939 book is in ‘modern’ Afrikaans, unlike its 1926 incarnation, and is in part an emanation of the ‘Second Language Movement’ which closely mapped on to nationalist cultural politics from the 1920s to the 1940s.\(^ {29}\)

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24 Fick, ‘Voortvoer’, in Postma, *Stemme uit die Verlede*, p. i. All translations are ours.
25 Also published a few months before this was Mrs Le Clus’ *Lief en Leed*, a full-length criticism of the ‘joiners’ and traitors who ‘lost us the war’.
26 That is, the farm burnings and forced removals to internment or concentration camps which were part of the second phase of the war.
27 L.M. (Tilly) Fick was very involved in women’s organisations; as President of the SAVF, she opened the Gedenktuin at Pietersburg, where Johanna Brandt-Van Warmelo, one of the cultural entrepreneurs discussed later, was politically active in the 1900s and 1910s.
The years 1936 to 1940 formed a key 'moment' in a cultural as well as 'big P' political sense for Afrikaner nationalism. 1936 to 1938 saw Great Trek re-enactments across the country, with many volksfeeste [people's folk-festivals] associated with this. In 1938, the Voortrekker monument foundation-stone (featuring three women's names) was commemo-rated. Between 1936 and 1940, the nationalist publishing house Nasionale Pers engaged in publishing initiatives that celebrated the Afrikaner past and helped shape it in a nationalist way.30 In addition, new books about women's wartime experiences were published and some earlier ones republished, including not only Postuma's Stemme Uit Die Vrouekampe but also Mrs Neethling's 1917 Vergeet?, re-published in 1938 as Mag Ons Vergeet? [Should We Forget?]. A related development over this period involved members of the Rapportyers, a nationalist youth movement, instituting a programme of commemorating the concentration camp dead in different areas of the country.

Hendrina Rabie-Van der Merwe's Omhou! In die Shadawee van die Galg [Remember! In the Shadow of the Gallows] was published in 1940 and concerns her South African War experiences, including accompanying a commando, springing her husband Sarel from prison, shooting a black prison warden, being sent to a concentration camp but absconding, and other exploits. Its 'Foreword' invokes sentiments of patriotism connected with the fatherland:

May my book contribute to cultivating patriotism in the bosom of the upcoming generations, until they reach the zenith, and are also prepared to lay down their lives, as our ancestors did, for FATHERLAND, FREEDOM and JUSTICE.31

There are strong echoes here of another book, serialised in the key nationalist newspaper Die Burger in 1936 and then published in book form in 1938 and becoming a cause célèbre because of its claims about deliberate mistreatment and poisonings of Afrikaners by the British during the war.32 This is Sarah Raal's Met Die Boere in Die Veld [With the Boers in the Veld], with its original 'Foreword' giving the book a specific nationalist purpose:

My hope and expectation is that it will be worth the effort and will contribute to awakening love of fatherland and awareness of nation in our young generation and to draw the ties closer that bind us together as an Afrikaner volk.33

Omhou! and Met Die Boere in Die Veld are written as daring adventure stories about the brave and (in 1930s/40s nationalist terms) politically correct exploits of their patriot fatherland-loving authors back in the 1900s.34 Both authors were in concentration camps for short periods but absconded; both travelled with commando groups and took part in dangerous exploits, including front-line fighting. Both texts are strongly inflected with the racial assumptions of the later 1930s concerning stark racial hierarchies and both also feature celebrations of summary killings by Boers of black men who opposed their 'natural superiors'. Nationalist sentiment is inscribed into both 'Forewords', including stressing the importance of reaching the youth of the volk. Omhou! emphasises in ringing phrases the volk


31 Rabie-Van der Merwe, Omhou!, pp. 4–5, original emphasis.

32 Concerning its claims about ground glass and vitriol in food; see Cape Argus August 1938.

33 Raal, Met die Boere, 'Foreword'. The recently-published English translation of this text, discussed later, uses 'nation' rather than the clearly-indicated 'fatherland'.

34 Regarding both, there are strong hints of an earlier publishing success — Johanna Brandt's The Petticoat Commando, discussed later.
and fatherland, freedom and independence, with the latter implying ‘we overcame the natives, we overcame the British earlier, and eventually full independence will be restored to us’. And when Rabie-Van der Merwe’s ‘Foreword’ mentions the laying down of lives, this was not empty rhetoric because at that point there was the possibility of a pro-German/anti-Allied uprising.

There are some interesting aspects of the publication contexts of the three books mentioned so far. Postma’s collection was published by the Voortrekkerpers [Voortrekker Press], founded around the Great Trek65 centenary (thus its name) as a publishing house for the promotion of the brand of nationalism represented by the Gesuiwerde Nasionale Party [Purified National Party] under D.F. Malan. Rabie-Van der Merwe’s and Raal’s books were published by the Nasionale Pers – this was controlled by a section of the Nationalists which remained loyal to Hertzog and his version of nationalist politics. These publishing houses were initiated by, and in a sense represented, competing versions of nationalism, with the more hawkish and more overtly racial Gesuiwerde Nasionale Party in the ascendance around 1938 to 1940.

A number of both longer single-authored and also collections of shorter women’s testimonies had appeared between 1902 and approximately 1924.36 However, these had been published within then-small proto-nationalist circles as ‘within group’ accounts, a very different situation from the later 1930s, when such writings achieved mass readership and were received as ‘the facts’ and apparently ‘objective’ accounts of the history of the Afrikaner people. The published testimonies inscribe women in relation to a heroic rather than victim role, and this is as true of the earlier as the later examples; and they also amply convey these women’s full support for continuing the war ‘to the bitter end’. One result was that in cultural production more widely, including in poems, sculpture and films, and importantly in commemoration, the role of the men on commando was positioned as morally (and ‘small p’ politically) secondary to the standing and authority of Boer women.27

This emphasis on women’s moral standing features in the ‘Introduction’ to Mag Ons Vergeet? [Should We Forget?], a collection of women’s shorter testimonies edited by Elizabeth Murray Neethling:

[In response to those who think it is better to forget] But, dear readers and female readers, do you really think that it would be better for our children and children’s children to know nothing of all that their fathers, and particularly their mothers, suffered for country and folk?38

Mag Ons Vergeet? contains over 30 women’s testimonies and, as noted earlier, is a 1938 republication in Afrikaans of a book first published in 1917 as Vergeten? [Forgotten?]. As with the re-publication of Postma’s collection, there is again a ‘silent’ nationalist message here – the original was in Dutch, with Mrs Neethling having translated those original contributions in English or the taal dialect used by many farming people into Dutch, with her daughter later ‘re-translating’ them into 1938-style Afrikaans after Mrs Neethling’s death.

There are strong if competing political links between Rabie-Van der Merwe’s Onthout!, Raal’s Met Die Boere in Die Veld, the transformation into ‘proper’ Afrikaans of Postma’s

35 The Great Trek of the 1830s involved many Boer people trekking out of British-controlled territories after slavery was abolished and moving beyond such frontiers to establish their own forms of governance. It was also often associated in a celebratory way with the Battle of Blood River of 1838, with this creating Afrikaner political mythology in the 1930s as proof of being ‘chosen’ by God.
36 See footnote 30.
37 The Voortrekkers in Bloemfontein gives concrete form to this sentiment; see Gaidell and Unterhalter, ‘Mothers of the Nation’; A. Grundlingh, ‘The National Women’s Monument: The Making and Mutation of Meaning in Afrikaner Memory of the South African War’, in Cuthbertson et al., Writing a Wider War, pp. 18–36; Stanley, Mourning Becomes.
38 Neethling, Mag Ons Vergeet?, p. i.
1926 Stemme Uit Die Vrouekampe as the 1938 Stemme uit Die Verlede, and republication of Mrs Neethling’s 1917 Vergeten? as the 1938 Mag Ons Vergete?, suggesting somewhat different takes on nationalist ideas. However, all four authors were connected with women’s nationalist parties and related organisations, pointing up the critical importance of overlapping networks across cultural, religious, social work and other activities for the work of cultural entrepreneurs in cultural production more generally.39 And ‘the facts’ in these and other published women’s testimonies about the concentration camps were apparently confirmed by their insistent repetition across these accounts and became of growing importance within the developing nationalistic framework. Indeed, they gradually became a central component of ‘the history’ of the Afrikaner volk as constituted by nationalism and later appeared as such in ‘standard histories’.40

Certainly texts and the ‘what and how’ of their inscription importantly impact on readers and how they comprehend their reading, and elsewhere we have analysed how women’s testimonies achieve their effects in some detail.41 However, our comments about networks, organisations, publishing houses and so on link to our concern not just with texts, but with texts in context. In South Africa from 1902 to 1940, the cultural and the political were so intertwined that focusing on women’s testimonies solely at the level of textuality, as most commentators do, risks misunderstanding the testimonies themselves. Focusing on context and the collective processes by which these texts came into being points up the role of cultural entrepreneurs in promoting a particular version of the South African past and women’s part in it.

Should We Forget? Some Cultural Entrepreneurs at Work

The titles of Mag Ons Vergete? and Vergeten? act as ‘prompts’ to remember an earlier book, also by Mrs Neethling, which was published in early 1903 in English and called Should We Forget? Its closing peroration makes clear its proto-nationalist sentiments and intent:

If we, women of the South African Republic and the Orange Free State, could know that our sufferings served to bring about such results, we should be comforted by the thought that they had not been in vain. For ourselves we already realise that they have not been in vain. The furnace of affliction has proved what was dross, what fine gold. [This] has disciplined and morally strengthened our people. Above all we realise that we, Afrikaners of the Republics and the Colonies from the Cape to the Zambesi, are to-day, more than we ever were before, One People.42

Should We Forget? was written at the end of 1902 at the specific request of Louis Botha, one of the key Boer generals during the South African War, who became Prime Minister of the annexed Transvaal in 1907 and then the Union in 1910. A number of women from elite Republican and Dutch Reform Church or NGK backgrounds43 were also requested by

39 M.M. Postma (formerly Uys, née Bromhorst) was married to Dirk Postma, a grandson of the founder of the Gereformeerde Kerk, Dirk Postma.
40 See J.H. Breytenburch, Die Beteekenis van die Tweede Vryheidsoorlog: Vyfde Jaar, 11 Okt. 1899–11 Okt. 1949 (2 vols) (Johannesburg, P.A.K., 1949); J.H. Breytenburch, Die geskiedenis van die Tweede Vryheidsoorlog in Suid-Afrika, 1899–1902 (6 vols) ( Pretoria, Staatsdrukker Gouw., 1969); J.C. Otto, Die Koncentratiekampe (Kaapstad, Nasionale Boekhandel, 1954). Earlier, their political basis was well-known. However, as time passed and this knowledge was ‘forgotten’, they came to be seen by younger generations as ‘the facts’.
41 In particular, Dampier, ‘Women’s Testimonies’; Stanley, Mourning Becomes.
42 Neethling, Should We Forget?, p. 128, original English and emphasis.
43 The main branches of the ‘Dutch’ Reform Church were the smaller and doctrinally stricter but socially more liberal Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk (NHK); and the much larger and politically dominant Nederlandse Gereformeerde Kerk (NGK), the Dutch Reformed Church, which was incorporated in the Republican constitutions.
Botha to write testimonies of their experiences, including Mrs General De la Rey (1903), who published *A Woman's Wanderings and Trials*, and Johanna van Helsingingen (1904), who published *Vrouwenleed* [Women's Suffering].

Mrs Neethling (born Elizabeth Murray), came from one elite NGK family, the Graaff-Reinet Murrays, and married into another, the Neethlings.44 The Murrays and the Neethlings were closely interconnected over a number of generations with other elite families with high-level Republican political roles or senior administrative or legal positions in the Boer Republics of the Transvaal and Free State, or similar positions within the NGK and its synods and seminaries. Mrs Neethling was also closely-connected, via one of her sisters, with the feminist-inspired women's relief organisations in Cape Town who raised money for and co-ordinated the distribution of relief for men in POW camps and also people in the concentration camps.45

Through this connection, Mrs Neethling was deputed by the Dutch Ladies Committee to distribute relief in a number of camps. While doing so, she used a method of enquiring into people's circumstances that led them to tell her their personal accounts or 'stories by word of mouth'. Mrs Neethling's *Should We Forget?* of 1902 is written as 'E-witness' and in the present tense, with Mrs Neethling and an invented eponymous reader, directly addressed and invited to travel with her, visiting a number of concentration camps. For each visit, Mrs Neethling and her accompanying reader listen to a succession of stories given in quotation marks and so apparently verbatim. Black people in these stories are depicted as happy and living in a pre-war Boer-provided Eden, with only British intervention causing them to oppose their 'rightful' overlords and masters. The concentration camps are presented in one-dimensional biblical terms as places solely of lamentation and death, often drawing directly on well-known biblical phrases and episodes. And all these events are presented as God testing the Afrikaner nation, to encourage them to become 'One People', as in the quotation above.

Mrs Neethling became an important player in proto-nationalism, with her cultural career bringing together networks of women whose lives and activities had previously only infrequently overlapped. These included women's missionary circles, whose members carried out or who fund-raised for others to carry out missionary work among unbelieving Boer farming people rather than Africans; proto-feminist girls' education organisations; networks of uneducated farming or poor urban women of fervent republican and proto-nationalist convictions met through the camps; women from pre-war and new post-war political, religious and cultural elites; and the various women's proto-nationalist networks and organisations founded after 1902.

The key writing strategy of *Should We Forget?* involves presenting seemingly first person orally-told stories of personal experience. Mrs Neethling's approach here was directly modelled on the writings of Emily Hobhouse, who had worked for the London-based South African Women's and Children Distress Fund in South Africa, with extracts from women's spoken testimonies appearing in her *Report* and then *The Brunt of the War*, published in 1901 and 1902 respectively.46 Hobhouse worked closely with the women's relief organisations in Cape Town and had visited Mrs Neethling before the latter commenced her own relief work.

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44 'Elite' rather than 'middle class' because it was really only the 1920s and 1930s that industrialisation and urbanisation became extensive in South Africa, with 'class' in the European sense largely inappropriate up to the 1920s. 'Elite' is free from essential class connotations and also points up the continuity of political power by these groups across the period.

45 Another sister was a high profile educationalist and yet another a key figure in women's missionary circles.

and both Neethling’s way of investigating need in the camps, and her use of the resulting ‘stories by word of mouth’ in publication, came directly from Hobhouse’s example. Hobhouse also toured South Africa after the war ended and, as well as distributing various forms of ‘relief’, she solicited testimonies from many women she met or stayed with.\textsuperscript{47} Written or sworn testimony very quickly became the way of representing women’s wartime experiences.

Echoes of the title of Mrs Neethling’s \textit{Should We Forget?} resound across other books, short stories and the verse of the so-called ‘camp poets’, Totius, Cilliers and Leipoldt;\textsuperscript{48} and it is also echoed and then later ‘answered’ in the titles of other testimony-based accounts of women’s wartime experiences, such as Postma’s answering ‘voices from the women’s camps’ and Rabie-van der Merwe’s insistent response of \textit{Onthou!} [Remember!]. The success of \textit{Should We Forget?} occurred in the context of the networks and organisations already referred to, which brought together large numbers of women from very different backgrounds who shared proto-nationalist views. Their activities spanned the publication and distribution of testimony, memorialisation and commemoration in cemeteries and local towns, working with orphaned and other ‘kampkinders’, encouraging youth organisations to venerate and commemorate the past, promoting literature in Afrikaans, and eventuated in the definitional salience of women’s concentration camp testimonies for public and popular remembrance of the war and state commemoration of it, and also for popular understandings of the Afrikaner people and its history.\textsuperscript{49}

Building on the activities of the women’s organisations, other cultural entrepreneurs (including journalists, clergy, teachers, magistrates) issued ‘calls’ in different areas of the country for women to testify about their wartime experiences. One of these was Horak, editor of the \textit{Transvaler} newspaper, which in 1904 published a call for women to commit their testimonies to paper with the intention, never realised, of him publishing these in book-form. On his retirement, Horak offered these testimonies for sale in 1916; these were bought on Mrs Neethling’s behalf, who had also been actively soliciting testimonies herself in this period. In 1917, Mrs Neethling published a selection of Horak’s testimonies, together with some of her own, translated into Dutch in the interrogatively-titled \textit{Vergeten?} [Forgotten?], with many more archived but not published.

\textit{Vergeten?} contains 32 individual testimonies. Their content focuses mainly on the farm burnings and forced removals to the camps. A number of the testimonies don’t comment on the camps at all, although most stress the topsy-turvy overturning of ‘proper’ racial and related hierarchies, as in the following extract, for example:

\begin{quote}
The worst of all were the groups of armed kaffers that they always had with them … Truly, we were treated worse than kaffers. The kaffers got a big wagon with a tarpaulin too; we were without any protection against sun and rain on an open trolley.\textsuperscript{50}
\end{quote}

Those that do comment about the camps depict these as entirely places of lamentation and death, although remarkably few of the testimony-writers experienced the deaths of their children or other family members – these were the elite political few writing about a general ‘they’, the suffering many of the Boer volk. It is also notable that, while the camp populations were very mixed and composed of pro-British and neutrals as well as Boer loyalists, and by

\textsuperscript{47} These eventually appeared in \textit{War Without Glamour} (Bloemfontein, Nasionale Pers), discussed later.

\textsuperscript{48} See A.P. Grove and C.J.D. Harvey (eds), \textit{Afrikaans Poems with English Translations} (Cape Town, Oxford University Press, 1965).

\textsuperscript{49} Perhaps the most visible demonstration of their influence lies in the huge emphasis placed on state commemoration in the concentration camp cemeteries and the institution post-1948 of a major programme of public works in these, which turned many into formalised Gardens of Remembrance designed for state commemorative ceremonies. See Stanley, \textit{Mourning Becomes}.

\textsuperscript{50} Mrs M. Ferreira, in Postma, \textit{Mag Oms Verget}, p. 137–8.
men as well as women and children, there are no testimonies by non-Boer loyalists in any of the collections. There are none by any women from 'hands-upper' families; none from those whose menfolk had surrendered; none from families where there were 'joiners', Boer people who supported the British; none from those who were neutral and just wanted the war to end and get on with their lives; and only a handful by men, all except one by NGK clergymen.  

These testimonies, then, represent the viewpoints of a minority of politically active, indeed militant, women. They were not spontaneously produced outpourings of heart-felt suffering humanity, but were orchestrated and crafted by cultural entrepreneurs like Mrs Neethling, Mrs Postma and others. There was clearly gate-keeping to keep out the insupportable and inadmissible, and the resulting testimonies were in addition translated and edited to serve the political cause of the proto-nationalism. This is not to suggest that what is in these testimonies was not felt and understood to be 'the facts', but it is to point out that they represent only one specific political viewpoint, that of republicanism and proto-nationalism.

In the political ‘moment’ of the later 1930s, the Dutch Vergeetien? was re-published, translated into Afrikaans as Mag Ons Vergeet?, alongside the re-publication of Postmas’s Stemme uit die Vrouekampe in Afrikaans as Stemme uit die Verlede, and the publication of Raal’s Met die Boere… and Rabie-Van der Merwe’s Onthou! A key difference between women’s testimony in this later period and the earlier publications is that latterly testimony was formed by an insistent sea of women’s voices, compared with the more sober and lengthy individual accounts by elite women such as Johanna van Helsdingen and Elizabeth Jacoba De la Rey published earlier. This indicates a very different audience of readers, with the earlier well-educated readers of 'serious' books giving way to a large popular audience of magazine and novel readers. Relatedly, the period of the later 1930s formed a radically different reading context, with nationalist sentiment and Afrikaner notions of identity positioned very differently within political and cultural life. Most of the large popular readership of the 1930s would have had no direct links to the concentration camp experience, with the published women’s testimonies by this time having been handed down as ‘the facts’, with their expression of a particular political position largely forgotten.

Emily Hobhouse, as noted earlier, was the first person to collect and publish Boer women’s testimonies of their South African War experiences. Hobhouse’s purposes were pacifist and humanitarian, viewing first-hand testimony as a powerful way of emphasising the suffering that war occasioned. However, her close friendship with Rachel Isabella (‘Tibbie’) Steyn brought her into close association with many leading (and disagreeing) nationalist politicians, such as Jan Smuts, Barry Hertzog and Nico van der Merwe, while many contributors to her various publications were women who played a high profile role within republican and proto-nationalist cultural politics. Indeed, two of her connections – Neethling and Brandt – were important cultural entrepreneurs whose use of testimony was due to Hobhouse’s influence. Consequently, while Hobhouse herself was certainly not a supporter of nationalism, many of her publications were distributed and read in fairly hawkish proto-nationalist circles and her approach to the use of testimony influenced women cultural entrepreneurs active in such circles.

51 The exception is by Hendrick Dahms, uncle to Hendrina Rabie-Van der Merwe, author of Onthou!; she was due to have supplied a testimony but in the last resort did not, so perhaps her uncle appeared as a substitute.
52 There is clear evidence of such editorial activity inscribed on to manuscript originals.
53 Rachel Isabella Steyn, wife and then after his death in 1915 widow of ex-President Steyn of the Free State.
54 A Broederbond member, he became chair of the Federasie van Afrikaanse Kultuureenigings (F.A.K., Federation of Afrikaans Cultural Associations), which co-ordinated cultural groups and organisations as part of the nationalist project.
Hobhouse’s method of investigation for the Distress Fund elicited detailed stories of their circumstances from women and derived from Hobhouse’s earlier work for the Women’s Industrial Council. Hobhouse’s Report to the Distress Fund contained many of what she termed ‘stories by word of mouth’, which also provided the basis for some of her newspaper articles as well as for the material presented in The Brunt. This latter translated and transformed these women’s stories told by word of mouth into testimonies written by and extracted within Hobhouse’s own narrative.

The next aspect of Hobhouse’s work as a cultural entrepreneur involved her collecting and seeing into publication women’s testimonies ‘written by themselves’, solicited and collected during her 1903 tour of the ‘ruined areas’ of South Africa. They include 30 shorter testimonies published in 1927 in War Without Glamour and a much longer one by Aletta Badenhorst, published in 1923 as Tant’ Alie of Transvaal.55 None of them was published at the time because of a specific request from Smuts, who thought doing so would exacerbate tensions between English- and Afrikaans-speaking whites. However, returning to England in 1919 after her relief work during the First World War in Europe, Hobhouse translated into English and edited for publication the text that became Tant’ Alie. She then edited and where necessary translated into English the testimonies she had collected in 1903, published posthumously as War Without Glamour. Hobhouse followed this by writing a memoir of her wartime experiences, again with Mrs Steyn providing the idea and encouragement for this. Hobhouse died before the draft had been completed.56

These activities were closely connected with Hobhouse’s friendship with Mrs Steyn, who moved in elite political circles and was part of both the new guard of Afrikaner nationalism and the post-war networks of women’s congresses and local women’s parties. Mrs Steyn also played a significant entrepreneurial role in cultural activities herself. Like the other women discussed here, her ‘small p’ political activities brought the cultural together with her political sentiments and involvements. Mrs Steyn found a translator for Hobhouse’s The Brunt – Nico van der Merwe, who had become her son-in-law. It was published in 1923 in Afrikaans as Die Smart van die Oorlog by the Nasionale Pers.57 She was also chair of the Free State women’s congress and arranged for some hundreds of copies of Hobhouse’s translated Die Smart as well as Tant’ Alie to be bought and distributed to its country members, as she similarly did Postma’s Stemme uit die Vrouekampe. Mrs Steyn had also wanted War Without to be published in Afrikaans so that it would ‘return’ to the kind of women who had contributed their testimonies. Hobhouse wanted it to reach a wider English-speaking readership because she positioned her writings within a pacifist framework, and recognised the contributors to the book would disavow this. However, it was distributed posthumously in 1927 through the women’s congresses; and Hobhouse’s ashes were also interred at the Vrouemonument [Women’s Monument] in Bloemfontein as part of the commemorative activities promoted by women’s organisations noted earlier, with a large nationalist political ceremony occurring around this event.

Mrs Nethling was part of, and Emily Hobhouse was associated with, the elite women’s networks that formed after 1902. Both were also connected with non-elite networks through their wartime experiences, through which they solicited and collected testimonies at local level from more ‘ordinary’ Boer women. This enmeshing of the cultural, religious and political in supporting proto-nationalism and in bridging the earlier divide between educated elites and ‘het volk’ can also be demonstrated by reference to another cultural entrepreneur,

55 Hobhouse, War Without, Tant’ Alie.
56 For more detail, see Chapter 4, Stanley, Mourning Becomes and Dampier, ‘Women’s Testimonies’.
57 E. Hobhouse, Die Smart van die Oorlog en Wie Dit Gely Hei (Translated by N.J. van der Merwe) (Cape Town, Nasionale Pers, 1923a).
Johanna Brandt-Van Warmelo, culturally and politically involved throughout the entire period discussed here.

The first appearance of Johanna van Warmelo as a testimony-writer is in Hobhouse’s *The Brunt*, which includes her short written account of Irene camp where she did volunteer work for six weeks.58 Between the end of 1902 and mid 1903, after her marriage to Louis Brandt and living in Holland, she worked on and produced *Het Concentratie-Kamp van Irene* [The Concentration Camp at Irene], its concluding perforation insistently proposing:

O, women of South Africa, write about everything you have suffered at the hands of our mighty oppressors. Nothing may be lost, nothing may be forgotten. Even if your language is simple, even if your words are poor, write about all your experiences, make them known to children and grandchildren, and do not be afraid, so long as you are with God the Truth will stay before your eyes.59

*Het Concentratie-Kamp* is ostensibly an ‘original’ diary in Dutch and implicitly a factual, because ‘written at the time’, account; and therefore on both counts is presented as providing more truth than the British Government’s ‘Blue Books’, which the book dams as ‘blue books and black lies’. But actually it is neither – there was no ‘original’ diary that was ‘written at the time’, with both the English and the Dutch having been written together post-war, although based on Van Warmelo’s wartime experiences.60 In this sense, *Het Concentratie-Kamp* traverses the borders between fiction and fact, something that characterises nearly all Boer women’s testimonies – they really do not fit European literary notions of distinct genres, but rather mix elements usually considered as mutually-exclusive in genre terms.

Johanna van Warmelo came from a Dutch Re-Reform Church [Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk or NHK, rather than the Nederduits Gereformeerd Kerk or NGK] background, with a clergyman father well-known in NHK circles and marrying an NHK domicile herself. On returning to South Africa with Louis Brandt in late 1903, Johanna Brandt-Van Warmelo (as she styled herself in early publications) started a SAVF branch in Pietersburg in 1904, then in 1906 she started a women’s nationalist group in Johannesburg, and in 1914 she was co-founder of the pan-South African Women’s National Party. Like Mrs Neethling, Johanna Brandt was from an elite Transvaal background, in her case the higher echelons of the NHK rather than NGK schism of the Dutch Reform Church, had close connections with political elites, and also wartime experiences which brought her into contact with women in very different networks and circles.

Brandt became a successful professional writer, publishing across a number of different genres of writing. She was the author of the multiply-published *The Petticoat Commando,*61 which sits on the borders of fact and fiction and is presented as an adventure story. She was also a novelist, and wrote on health matters such as naturopathy, diet, ‘cures’ and cancer; and also a pundit on race issues, with her *The Millenium*, a ‘warning to the native tribes’, published in English and Dutch by different publishers in 1918.62 Brandt’s literary prowess was widely recognised: in 1938 she was awarded honorary membership of the Eugene Field

60 Both versions, but seemingly with the English coming slightly first, were based in part on the letters she has written to her mother while in the camp and her case workbook, but also materials sent to her in Holland by a doctor and some of the volunteers at Irene, including Dr Neethling and Henrietta Armstrong. Brandt-Van Warmelo concurrently produced the similar but not coterminous English version of her ‘diary’, and a ‘translation’ of this made with her husband Louis Brandt in Dutch (that is, what was published as *Het concentratie-kamp* .).
61 It was serialised between October 1912 and August 1913 in the magazine *Die Brandweer*, published in English as *The Petticoat Commando* in 1913 and in Dutch as *Kappiecommando* later in 1913, and then in Afrikaans only in 1958.
62 For details of Brandt’s many publications, see. Dampier and Stanley, ‘Knowledge’. 
Society; and she also received an honorary degree from the US-based American School of Natural Physic for her work in naturopathy.

The 'Foreword' to the 1913 English version of The Petticoat Commando positions this book as both a cultural production for a specific audience, and as serving the proto-nationalist cause Brandt espoused:

If, by inspiring feelings of patriotism in the hearts of some of my readers, especially those members of the rising generation to whom this story of adventure may appeal, I succeed in raising the standard of national life, this book will have achieved the purpose for which it was written, and I shall feel more than compensated for having set aside the reluctance with which I faced the thought of the publicity when first I began the work. I have tried to give the public some idea of what was done by Boer women, during the great Anglo-Boer War... 63

Brandt was highly active in cultural activities and very much part of women's nationalist politics at local levels across a number of organisational groupings. The political overlapped with the cultural in demonstrable ways in these involvements – for instance, Brandt's phrase 'kappie kommando' entered popular political parlance, being used widely to describe the unionised working women involved in Great Trek commemoration activities during the later 1930s. The popular ideas about identity Brandt promoted also connected with the political concerns of elite groups closely connected with governance and institutions: she had close family links with other elite families such as the Krugers, Jouberts, Leyds and Bosmans; through her SAVF involvement, she was connected with elite women such as Annie Botha, Mrs Steyn, Mrs Bignault and others; and also her husband Louis achieved the same pivotal role in the Transvaal NHK as her father had had and through which she was connected with elite NHK women's circles.

Brandt's cultural and political activities overlapped with the religious, being not only closely involved in soliciting, collecting and distributing women's testimonies, but also in promoting commemorative activities and the provision of memorials in the concentration camp cemeteries or begraafplase in Pietersburg and Johannesburg. Also, although an English-speaker, by the end of 1902 Brandt made an explicit and politically-motivated decision to write in Dutch, then later in Afrikaans, and indeed to avoid speaking English if she could, promoting a clear 'us and them' separation through language and other cultural apparatus. What Hobbsawn calls 'negative ethnicity' was a strong feature of proto-nationalism and an important aspect of this 'bottom up' making of Afrikaner nationalist identity via separation from its various 'others'. 64 Thus in Brandt-Van Warmelo's family letters of 1902 and 1903, for example, she routinely distinguished Afrikaner people and Afrikaner identities negatively, by means of invoking layers of differences and separations from the British, from English-speakers in South Africa, and from black people, referred to using extremely pejorative terms.

The cultural entrepreneurial activities of not only Brandt but also the other women whose cultural activities have been sketched out – Postma, Rabie-Van der Merwe, Raal, Neethling, Hobhouse, Van Helsing, De la Rey – as well as the many writers of shorter testimonies not individually named, linked up the political and the religious through the cultural and by doing so connected local and supra-local levels of 'small p' politics. Indeed, 'national' better characterises the context that the women's unpublished as well as published testimonies were produced and consumed within, rather than supra-local, because while the women's networks and organisations operated at both local and province levels, they clearly had national as well as nationalist aspirations. It was no accident the women cultural entrepreneurs were involved

63 Brandt, The Petticoat Commando, p. ix, original English.
64 Contra Hobbsawn, who suggests that negative ethnicity is highly atypical and associated only with countries (such as Japan and China) where a state tradition infused proto-nationalism instituted top-down.
in the cultural activities they were – these were engaged in mindfully, because they provided appropriate means to further their political aspirations, and were also an end in themselves because they demonstrated the vibrancy and autonomy of Afrikaner culture and identity.

The importance of cultural production to developing notions of Afrikaner identity and nationalism is incalculable, with woman’s testimonies among other things acting as vehicles for the promotion of Afrikaans as a written as well as spoken language and with their content providing a legitimation of Afrikaner political grievances and aspirations. There was little or no significant Afrikaner cultural work from 1902 to 1940 that was separate from the political project of proto-nationalism – ‘Afrikaner culture’ as it was produced at this time was symbiotic both with the nationalist project and the role of religion within this, although of course there were different strands and also peripheries and dissenters. Overarching the particulars was the emphasis on there being a higher meaning to what happened in the past and that the future of Afrikaner unification was God’s purpose (various of the quotations provided earlier are in this vein), with state- or province-level religious organisations working closely with political ones to achieve this cultural-political end.

The activities of women’s organisations and the work of their cultural entrepreneurs were part of this wider communal endeavour, and the women’s testimonies they solicited, distributed and read can only be properly appreciated when located within this wider proto-nationalist context. Our view, indeed, is that these Boer women’s testimonies are not in fact ‘personal writings’, but rather particular individual expressions of an actually communal ‘small p’ political form, and that recognising this is essential to making sense of them as part and parcel of cultural politics of the day.

The Cultural Meets the Political: A Conclusion

Hermann Gillonée has commented on the role of cultural entrepreneurs in the making of Afrikaner nationalism, that:

The most significant achievement of the National Party in the 1930s was to rally most of the intellectual elite of the Afrikaners behind its cause. These men were ‘cultural entrepreneurs’ who made extensive use of the Afrikaner Broederbond to ideologize Afrikaner identity and history…

However, our research shows it was not solely the National Party, or men, or the Broederbond, or the 1930s, which ‘rallied’ people. This was rather initiated by a prior set of activities around proto-nationalism, which preceded by around a decade the formation of the National Party in 1915. Starting in 1902, it was not men who were the prime movers in rallying the elite and the volk, nor men who were the most important cultural entrepreneurs in ‘ideologizing’ Afrikaner identity, but rather women acting at all levels of ‘small p’ cultural politics, from the domestic through to the women’s congresses and parties. And while members of the Broederbond and the FAK later played an important cultural role, of greater importance at local and everyday levels were the women’s organisations and congresses that were intermeshed with the other cultural apparatus of proto-nationalism. It was women cultural entrepreneurs and the activities and concerns of women’s organisations that provided the interface between the development of Afrikaans as a spoken and written language, the construction of the history of the Afrikaner people and commemoration of its past, and the promotion of a nationalist vision and politics.

66 These were loosely linked by the FAK, with its coordinating role more aspirational than actual.
Giliomee has more recently commented that:

[In the immediate post-war period] The social position of Afrikaner women had indeed undergone a major change. Afrikaner women were remarkably independent, with a strong position in the pre-industrial burger family and agrarian household ... Afrikaner women were prominent in the violent 1922 strike, but two years later the NP came to power and the women, except for some fiery trades unionists, abandoned all political activism. Increasingly Afrikaner women became full-time wives and mothers, staying at home and employing a servant ... They became politically conservative and took little part in the public agitation for the franchise for women.67

We do not see 1924 as a watershed in this way. Through focusing on more everyday cultural activities and events in state formation processes than Giliomee’s ‘top-down’ way of thinking about political life, our research suggests this comment is mistaken. It jars not only with the contents and demonstrable purposes of the earlier women’s testimonies, but also those dating from 1924 to 1940. Women did not ‘abandon’ political activism at some point in the 1920s. There was in fact remarkable continuity of groups, organisations and people, and the maintenance of, rather than a decrease in, their political radicalism and activism (albeit radicalism and activism of the right, and expressed in largely cultural forms) up to 1940. Three examples show this clearly.

In 1914–15, the networks and groups of women we have discussed were importantly involved in fomenting and supporting the Rebellie [Rebellion] of armed revolt against the Botha–Smuts rapprochement with Britain. Following rapid defeat of the Rebellion, they then led large public protests against punishment of the ring-leaders (jail sentences and one execution for treason) and fund-raised to support them.68 For instance, the same Mrs Roos who wrote testimonies in a number of the published collections, and was one of the founders of the ACVV, was also a key figure in fomenting the Rebellion and then in organising demonstrations in support of its male protagonists. And it was out of this agitation by women that the National Party was subsequently founded as a response.

Many of these women were involved in franchise activities in women’s suffrage organisations.69 Certainly the support of most of them for women’s suffrage was conditional on ‘solving the race issue’ by removing the more liberal Cape franchise from the Union constitution, supporting Hertzog’s line on this as Prime Minister of coalition governments through the later 1920s and the 1930s,70 but nonetheless they saw themselves as pro-women’s suffrage or more strongly feminist. An example here involves Mrs Neethling’s sister-in-law Minnie or Miemie Murray, a founding member of the Eastern Cape franchise society. She had links with more liberal elements elsewhere in the Cape and was a friend of the radical (of the left) feminist writer and social theorist Olive Schreiner, but was also connected with the

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67 H. Giliomee, *The Afrikaners: Biography of a People* (Cape Town, Tafelberg Publishers, 2003), p. 376. This is described on its cover by another distinguished historian, Richard Elphick, as a book which 'even his critics will regard ... as the definitive history of the Afrikaner for at least a generation', a view we cannot share. See Farthing, ‘Apartheid, Afrikaner Nationalism’ for an assessment we agree with, but add to regarding Giliomee’s failure to adequately cover women in Afrikaner political life.


Hertzog’s strategy was to wait for the NP to have sufficient parliamentary power for it to be able to change the Union constitution; this happened in 1930.
racially more hawkish Transvaal and Free State societies and supported their position on the franchise.\textsuperscript{71}

In addition, women were central to the events around the 1936-8 Great Trek centenary, from commemorating the Voortrekker monument, to organising the volksfeeste, to designing costumes and public spectacles, to organising monuments commemorating the re-enactments. Two of the women involved in orchestrating these activities were Hendrina Rabie-van der Merwe’s niece Hendrika, also a Postma connection by marriage, who devised various of the commemorative forms deployed, such as casts of ox-wheel prints and memorials where the replica wagons visited; and Mrs Neethling’s niece by marriage, Anna Neethling Pohl, who devised costumes and dances for many of the associated volksfeeste. The country-wide success of this extended commemorative cultural ‘moment’ is widely acknowledged to have been crucial in solidifying the popular following and political power of the ‘Purified National Party’ under D.F. Malan and the election success that followed.

The ‘small p’ political activities of these women’s organisations and their cultural entrepreneurs seemingly cannot be ‘seen’ by a ‘big P’ politics approach, giving rise to its conclusion that, because women were not involved in ‘big P’ politics, then women were not politically active at all. It might be thought that commentators writing about women’s testimonies would avoid these problems and recognise the interweaving of the cultural and political in their production and reading contexts. Two such commentators, Anne Emslie and Elizabeth van Heyningen, write about women’s testimonies as follows:

The story of The Lady Who Fought was committed to writing some thirty-five years after the experiences it describes. It is a simple, unvarnished tale, told with deep feeling. It retains the flavour and authenticity of oral history, of personal memory, of events told and retold. It is a singular account of the Anglo-Boer War from the unusual perspective of a young woman unwittingly caught up in the sweeping vortex of unfolding action on the veld. It is unique.\textsuperscript{72}

Driven by external events, [these Boer women’s] … writings had less of the inwardsness which is said to distinguish women’s writing. At the same time, in a situation in which they were often little more than pawns, their diaries and letters may have served an unusually great need to sustain their sense of self. The act of writing not only ordered their disordered lives; it also placed them at the centre of the events from which they were otherwise excluded.\textsuperscript{73}

As these quotations suggest, however, there is something of a converse problem among those primarily interested in women’s concentration camp testimonies. Emslie’s approach valorises these as ‘unvarnished’ and ‘authentic’ and is representative of perhaps most work on these testimonies.\textsuperscript{74} And while Van Heyningen’s discussion is considerably more sophisticated, and relatedly recognises that a ‘heroes of the hour’ flavour characterises women’s testimonies, she still sees women as almost by definition excluded from political life, implicitly seen in ‘big P’ terms. The focus in such discussions is on the texts themselves as sources of information about the wartime oppression of Boer women and does not locate their production, distribution and reading in the wider political and cultural context, as we


\textsuperscript{74} See also P. Marais, Die Vry in Die Anglo-Boereoorlog 1899–1902 ( Pretoria, J.P. van der Walt en Sean Edms, 1999); L. Hanekom and E. Wessels, Valour: Thy Name is Woman: An Overview of the Role of Afrikaner Women and Children Inside and Outside Anglo-Boer War Concentration Camps 1899–1902 ( Bloemfontein, War Museum of the Boer Republics, 2000).
have done. In addition, focusing on women’s testimonies as personal writings about 'trauma' depoliticises them through failing to perceive that they are instances of a collective form with overly proto-nationalist roots, aspirations and readerships.

The cultural entrepreneurs we have discussed and the women's organisations they were connected with were both closely involved with the cultural politics of proto-nationalism (including its strongly racialised vision of the future) and also acted largely independently from the men in such circles. They operated in their own pre-war networks and post-war organisations, they also frequently had more hawkish 'race' politics than their male compatriots, and they provide a challenging example of a racialised proto-feminism. Moreover, through their activities, remembrance of the deaths in the concentration camps and women’s moral authority accruing from this (that is, that women suffered grievously but did not surrender, while the men did) became core to 'the history after the fact' of nationalist identity and politics.

As commented in our Introduction, Young makes a sharp distinction between the roles of cultural entrepreneurs and political brokers. However, from the perspective of our research, this distinction does not really exist: Neethling, Brandt-Van Warmelo, Postma and others repeatedly traversed this boundary, as indeed did their male counterparts. In the South African context over the period 1902 to 1940, cultural activities were a part of politics with both a small and a large 'P' and political brokerage was closely bound up with cultural entrepreneurship and the activities of the women's organisations. We have already sketched out three examples – the 1914–15 Rebellion, franchise activities in the 1920s and 1930s, and the 1936–8 Great Trek centenary events – where these cultural activities crucially impacted on the national political arena and 'big P' politics. Language, literature and 'the history' were bound together with ideas about Afrikaner identity, all of which were promoted by women's cultural networks and organisations, with women's testimonies and remembrance and remembrance of the concentration camp dead being the focus of the cultural entrepreneurs we have discussed. Without grasping the interconnections between 'big P' and 'small p' politics, any account of the rise and successes of Afrikaner nationalism out of 'old style' Boer proto-nationalism will be deficient.

The cultural entrepreneurs discussed here were woman-centred to a marked degree. For them, the 'passionate challenge', in Young's phrase, that motivated them was concerned with the moral authority of the founding mothers of nationalism, the women who died in or survived the concentration camps, rather than the male founding figures of the nation, the Voortrekkers of the 1830s as re-cycled in mainstream cultural politics between 1936–8. Focusing on their cultural activities and cultural entrepreneurship indicates that proto-nationalist and nationalist developments occurred at a significantly earlier stage than does focusing just on 'big P' politics. Recognising these things adds to the 1994 project of revising South African historiography, by returning nationalism to analytical sight in a more nuanced, grounded and a more engendered form.

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75 See M. Halbwachs, On Collective Memory (Edited and translated by L. Coser) (Chicago, University of Chicago, 1992 [1952]).