

Imagining National Unity: South African Propaganda Efforts during the Second World War

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This article focuses on the use of propaganda by the South African government during the Second World War in its attempt to create a unified nation from a society fractured by racial, gendered and class divisions. These divisions were evident in the unequal nature of war work for black and white men, as well as for white women recruited into the Union Defence Force and its auxiliary services. A war ostensibly fought for the principles of democracy also highlighted the inequalities of South African society and marginalised South Africans responded by making greater demands for equal treatment, particularly in terms of combat which was itself associated with masculinity and citizenship. In the course of attempting to maintain high levels of recruitment for the Second World War state propaganda underwent a number of shifts, corresponding to the changing fortunes of the South African military in the war, as well as to changes in the political and social circumstances of South African society. This essay traces these shifts using a combination of archival and secondary sources. Still and moving images drawn from official films, photographs and military publications are analysed in order to understand the changing nature of war propaganda and, with it, a society in flux. It is through these images that one is able to grapple with the complex constructions of identity by the war's participants – the possibilities, the limitations, and the ultimate failure of war propaganda.

Introduction

The growth of mass media in the early twentieth century had a tremendous impact on the use and value of propaganda during the Second World War. In the early decades of the century there was an increase in the circulation of newspapers in the United States, Australia and, in particular, Britain which were devoured voraciously by the literate public.¹ A second medium of mass communication was radio which was able to appeal to the working classes in places like Britain as it was cheap, providing an affordable means of entertainment. It was film, however, which overcame barriers of literacy to appeal to a truly mass audience.² By the 1930s, those who would play the largest part in the Second World War – Britain, the United States, the Soviet Union, Germany and Japan – were poised to make use of all of these forms of mass communication.

The South African state was not impervious to the value of propaganda in creating a particular vision of the nation during the Second World War. In a lecture

1 Eric Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century 1914-1991* (London: Abacus, 2000), 194.

2 *Ibid.*, 195.

on propaganda in late 1940 the Director of Military Intelligence, E.G. Malherbe, authoritatively declared that, 'You cannot answer the film back.'³ Malherbe, who played a key role in the creation of propaganda during the Second World War in South Africa, envisioned propaganda as flowing from the state and the military to the public, an easily manipulated audience. From the outset, however, this proved impossible in South Africa. Propaganda had to be tailored to specific audiences as the divisions and competing interests in South African society meant that there was no single audience, but a complex mix of beliefs and aspirations regarding the war effort. Moreover, as the six-year conflict progressed with no end in sight, the state had to constantly adjust its propaganda efforts in order to continue to attract recruitment. The sections that follow trace the way in which propaganda – and, in particular, visual propaganda – was based on a complex relationship between the state and its perceived South African audiences, often with very varied results.

The article divides the Second World War into three periods, which I associate with shifts in propaganda. The first period is that from the outbreak of war in 1939 to early 1942. These were the initial attempts at raising support for the war effort within a society wracked by racial and ethnic tensions. In 1942 the military defeat at Tobruk initiated a change in propaganda efforts compounded by 'war weariness'. Recruitment and support for the war were at their lowest ebb, just as demands for equal participation on the part of black South Africans were becoming increasingly vociferous. The final stage was the period between late 1944 and the end of the war. The tide of war had turned in favour of the Allies and with victory assured, propaganda efforts were now aimed at minimizing the disruption brought about by the war.

Simultaneously, the tensions within South Africa between the various strands of society – between white South Africans who supported Smuts' entry into the war and those who vehemently opposed it, between black South Africans and white South Africans, between white South African men and white South African women – meant that the role of propaganda was always complex one. The ultimate aim was to create the sense of a united nation fully behind the war effort while acknowledging the competing interests of these segments of society. It was an unenviable task and one that ultimately had limited success.

In 1933 the Germans were the first to take full advantage of mass media to manipulate public opinion. After Adolf Hitler's assumption of power in Germany in 1933, a Ministry of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda under the leadership of Joseph Goebbels was created. Invoking the visual, the Nazis were able to turn their political and military agenda into a spectacle and film played a significant part here. Obviously propaganda found a more receptive – or perhaps captive – audience in totalitarian states. Propaganda was viewed as an imposition on democratic freedom of choice and was abandoned in interwar Britain for instance, which felt itself playing a game of catch-up to the slick machinations of Goebbels at the outbreak of the Second World War.⁴

In South Africa, at the outbreak of war, the role of propaganda was envisaged as important by the state especially as, in September 1939, the reaction of many South Africans towards the war was less than unified. This was due in part to the hostility of many Afrikaners towards the English a generation after the South African War which

3 E.G. Malherbe Collection, 'Lecture to Union Unity Truth Service, 14 Dec. 1940', KCM 596974 (583), File 438-2, Killie Campbell Africana Library (KCAL), Durban.

4 Anthony Rhodes, *Propaganda: The Art of Persuasion: World War II* (London: Angus and Robertson Publishers, 1976), 107.

predisposed many towards actually supporting the German war effort or, at the very least, to remaining neutral.⁵ In addition, black men were uncertain about joining a war effort partly because their participation in earlier wars had met with marginal, if any, long term benefits.⁶ There was an uneasy balance between their desire to show their patriotism and their wish to win concessions from the state.

A schism developed between those who wanted to adopt a neutral position, the Prime Minister of the Union, J.B.M. Hertzog, and five other members of Cabinet, and those remaining seven members headed by General J.C. Smuts who wished to enter the war in support of the Allies. After a heated debate in the Union Assembly, the Smuts coalition won the day and a proclamation was introduced announcing the country's entry into the war. Hertzog was relegated to the opposition and Smuts assumed the role of the Prime Minister of the Union. The conflict between these two key figures in Parliament, however, was representative of the tensions inherent in white politics, in spite of it appearing as if white South Africa formed a united front. The outbreak of war brought these tensions to the fore. It was in this controversial fashion that South Africa entered the war.

The First Phase: Recruitment, 1939-1942

With South Africa's less than whole-hearted entry into the war came the setting up of an official propaganda organisation – The National Advisory Committee on Government Policy. It consisted of six members and was established in 1940 under the leadership of Mr. S. Cooper who had been drawn from the Argus Company. An additional representative drawn from another newspaper was Mr. E.B. Dawson of the *Sunday Express* who was also the vice-chairman of the Committee. This demonstrates the connection between the newspapers and the war effort. This Committee was replaced in 1942 by The Defence Recruiting and Publicity Committee under Colonel Werdmuller – a body composed almost solely of military personnel.⁷ This body was responsible for the creation and dissemination of films promoting the war effort. In addition to local information films and newsreels, South Africans were exposed to British and American films – ostensibly viewed as entertainment but working closely with state organisations responsible for propaganda.

Two companies were key in the production of films during the interwar period and would later play a role in the production of films during the war. The first was the African Films Trust, initiated by Isadore Schlesinger in 1913 and responsible in that same year for the creation of *The African Mirror*, a newsreel which was the first of its kind in South Africa. From the outset this company worked closely with the state in its production of 'fictional, documentary and historical films' which functioned as agents of propaganda and education.⁸ By the time of the outbreak of the Second World War an outshoot of African Films Trust, the African Film Corporation, produced propaganda films for the state. These included films such as the Afrikaans film *Noordwaarts* produced for the Union Unity Truth Service which

5 See Albert Grundlingh, "'The King's Afrikaners'? Enlistment and Ethnic Identity in the Union of South Africa's Defence Force during the Second World War, 1939-45', *Journal of African History*, 40, 3 (1999).

6 Albert Grundlingh, *Fighting their Own War: South African Blacks and the First World War* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1987). BNS 1/1/266 C17/73. 1. Sentrale Argies Bewaarplek/Central Archives Depot.

8 Elaine Binedell, 'Film and the State: Control, Ideology and Space, 1914-1978' (Unpublished M.A. Thesis, University of Natal, Durban, 2000), 18-19.

I discuss below.⁹ However, by the late 1930s, the African Film Corporation which had dominated the industry was losing out to the growing Union Film Productions Ltd. Union Film Productions produced English and Afrikaans propaganda films for state agencies such as the UDF Film Unit and the Bureau of Information. Prior to the outbreak of war, in line with their collaboration with the South African state, both companies produced films that buttressed government policies on race, particularly those relating to the reserves as well as emphasising a spirit of reconciliation between English and Afrikaans-speaking white South Africans.¹⁰

To disseminate information and function as a means of propaganda, newsreels created by African Films and Union Films were shown to troops on the frontlines as well as to civilians on the home front.¹¹ These films were usually divided into segments where a particular theme or event was emphasized. Along with actual footage taken from the frontlines were voiceovers describing the scenes and they followed the conventional newsreel format familiar to civilian audiences. E.G. Malherbe was a key figure here. Malherbe was intensely aware of the role that film could play as an instrument of propaganda. This is evident in a lecture he delivered to the Union Unity Truth Service in December 1940 where he explicitly stated the value of film as a form of propaganda or persuasion, as quoted above. For Malherbe a 'semblance of truth' was a defining feature of film, given its alleged representation of 'direct reality'.¹² Simultaneously film propaganda, as envisaged by Malherbe, functioned as a means of disseminating information, allowing audiences to develop a 'knowledge of facts' while 'building [or shaping] attitudes' – the use of factual information or argument in order to persuade through the medium of film.¹³ Most significantly, he noted that film functioned as a source of authority which was difficult to contradict, delivering an official message which would then be disseminated to others.¹⁴

The very first element apparent in these films and other forms of propaganda is a re-envisioning of war. This is very different to the imagery of destruction and disillusion evident in the aftermath of the First World War, which had perhaps been most vivid in the writings of war poets.¹⁵ The visual propaganda of the Second World War returned, in a sense, to pre-First World War notions of honour, glory and duty. Where death was mentioned at all, it was as a glorious death in combat. Usually death itself – especially one's own casualties – was rendered invisible. For South Africans the distance of the frontlines was ignored in favour of holding true to the convention of defending home and country from the enemy horde.

Appeals to the unity of the nation had its limitations. The members of the Non-European Army Services – all of them volunteers, whether motivated solely by patriotism or a desire to prove themselves as equal citizens in the hopes of winning concessions from the state at the end of the war – found themselves in an unenviably ambiguous position. The propaganda films produced by the state portrayed them in their pre-war roles as manual labourers, holding true to the racial hierarchy. Most visual footage kept them subservient to white male supervisors. The films, by showing

9 *Ibid.*, 20, 22.

10 *Ibid.*, 34.

11 E.G. Malherbe Collection, 'Films for Publicity and Propaganda', KCM 56974(531) a, File 438/1, Killie Campbell Africana Library.

12 E.G. Malherbe Collection, 'Lecture to Union Unity Truth Service 14 Dec, 1940', KCM 596974 (583), File 438-2, Killie Campbell Africana Library.

13 *Ibid.*

14 'Lecture to Union Unity Truth Service', KCM 596974 (583), Killie Campbell Africana Library.

15 See Jon Stallworthy, ed., *The Oxford Book of War Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984).

them at work but failing to acknowledge their contribution in the narrative, rendered them anonymous and devalued their contribution to the war effort.

The portrayal of white women in films was similar. Co-existing uneasily with their new roles in the auxiliary services and positions as wage labourers, was the strong sense that their work was of a temporary nature, lasting only for the duration of the war. In many cases the training they had received would only be of benefit during the post-war era in the home or in socially acceptable roles. The appeal made to both these groups, as well as to those Afrikaner men who felt uneasy about joining a war on the side of the British, was by a strategic use of the past.

In terms of print media allied with state interests during the war, an important publication was *Libertas*. Published by the Union Unity Truth Service under the directorship of T.C. Robertson, *Libertas* had close links to the state. This is evident in the appointment of Constance Stuart as a photojournalist for *Libertas* by E.G. Malherbe. Further requests were made to Malherbe by Robertson to obtain photographs on the front lines for publication in the magazine.¹⁶ *Libertas* is a key source for an understanding of the portrayal of white identity during the war which stemmed from its stance as a liberal, pro-war publication with close links to the state. Moreover, its extensive use of photographs offers interesting possibilities for analysis to complement the written text.¹⁷ A reading of the *Libertas* published in South Africa until the late 1940s demonstrates its employment of specific kinds of identity for men and women engaging in war work. These were, in many instances, not essentially different to that advocated by the more official publications – or those that were created by the military for the military. Of course, the high degree of censorship exerted by states during the Second World War, as well as the control of movement of photographers and journalists in war zones, was necessarily a limiting factor. It placed constraints both on what it was possible to capture as well as publish for a general audience. The magazine itself, like many South African publications during the war, presupposed a white audience.

An emphasis on the physical aspect of white masculinity was a strong theme in *Libertas*. It is highlighted by the recruiting poster (Figure 1) with the caption 'Join the Springbok Army of Sportsmen' with its portrayal of physical activity and the inset of Danie Craven, a South African rugby hero. A feature appearing in December 1941 considered the issue of 'poor whiteism'. The economic and social status of this sector of the population created significant problems for a state promoting a certain standard of living for its white population which served to differentiate them from Africans, coloureds and Indians. From the end of the nineteenth century to the 1930s, fears of 'poor whiteism' had become increasingly predominant, leading to an intensive investigation into the problem. The solution was to remedy the economic status of the poor whites by extending social welfare services to them as well as privileged employment.¹⁸ The article in *Libertas* revealed a concern with racial and physical degeneration as a result of the poor white problem.

16 E.G. Malherbe Collection. Letter by T. C. Robertson to E.G. Malherbe, 30 October 1944 in 'Film and Radio Broadcast Units', Miscellaneous Correspondence, 1941-44', KCM 56974(569) File 438/1, Killie Campbell Africana Library.

17 Other magazines published in this period included *Trek*, a magazine focused on the war but with a relatively small readership as well as more mainstream magazines such as *Huis Genoot*. The rationing of paper during the war made publications such as *Libertas* a valuable resource.

18 T.R.H. Davenport, *South Africa: A Modern History* (Johannesburg: Macmillan South Africa Publishers, 1978), 225.

Sluit aan by die Springbok-leër van Sportmanne

Majoor Danie Craven, Direkteur van Liggaams oefening, en beroemde Springbok-skrumskedel, het die ou formele oefeninge vervang deur mededingende spele vir die opleiding van die Unie se nuwe leër. Die Suid-Afrikaanse soldaat van vandag is liggaamlik geskik, gesond en gelukkig.

Daar is 'n plek vir u in die geledere van die Sportsmansleër.

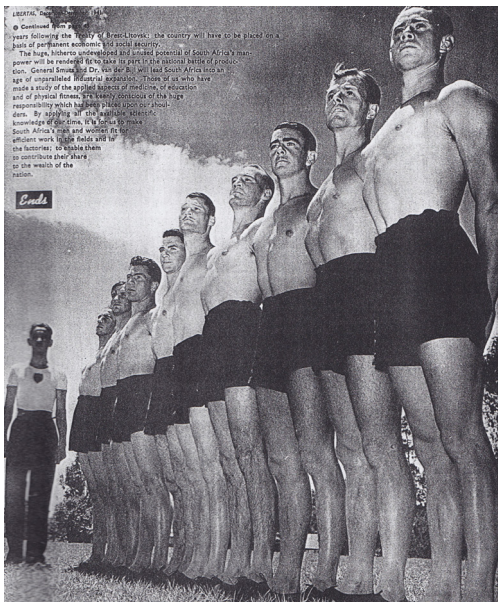


"Legs Over": One of the many training games played in the army. "Bene Oor": Een van die baie opvoedingspele wat in die leër gespeel word. Inset: Majoor Danie Craven. Byvoorteen: Majoor Danie Craven.

Join the Springbok Army of Sportsmen

Majoor Danie Craven, Director of Physical Training, and famous Springbok scrum-half, has replaced the old formal exercises with competitive games for the training of the new Union army. The South African soldier of to-day is fit, vigorous and happy.

There is a place for you in the ranks of the Sportsmen's Army.



Figures 1 and 2: 'Join the Springbok Army of Sportsmen', *Libertas*, Dec. 1940, Dec. 1941.¹⁹

The fine physique of early settlers was no longer apparent in their children and grandchildren. Mental apathy which modern research has revealed to be associated with dietary deficiencies, became widespread, if not characteristic of the poor sections of the population.²⁰

The remedy lay with physical training under the auspices of the Physical Training Battalion. Numerous images appeared in the article of young men engaging in various types of physical training with an emphasis on youth, health and physical activity.

The image of the line of young men adopting a confident and proud posture (Figure 2) suggests a robust and physically healthy image of white masculinity. This image can be set within the context of the focus on the male body exemplified in the images originating from fascist countries. At the same, British images focused on the male body in terms of physical exertion, a visual imagery that dated from the Victorian era. This took on new impetus in the wake of Britain's poor performance in the Olympic Games of 1936. A fitness campaign was initiated with the impetus on physical exercise as beneficial to the 'national well-being'.²¹ A Festival of Youth took place in London in 1937 with 11000 participants emphasizing the physical prowess of young men and women.²² The image above, therefore, emphasizing white masculinity and physical prowess, can be set squarely within existing conventions evident in both Axis and Allied countries.

Simultaneously, within the South African context, this was, in many ways, a reaction to the threat to the notion of white racial superiority presented by the poor white problem of the previous decade. The imagery can be contrasted with that in an article

19 Images obtained from *Libertas*, 1, 1 (Dec. 1940), 19; *Libertas*, 2, 1 (Dec. 1941), 47.

20 *Libertas*, 2, 1 (Dec. 1941), 41.

21 Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, 'Building a British Superman: Physical Culture in Interwar Britain', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 41, 4 (Oct. 2006), 608.

22 *Ibid.*, 595.



Figure 3: 'Health Conditions in the Reserves', *Libertas*, 2, 1 (Dec. 1941), 61.

in the same issue describing poor health conditions in the reserves. The images here are of African men in poor health waiting patiently to be attended to by overworked doctors.²³

While adopting a form of liberalism by acknowledging the poor social and economic conditions in the reserves, the article and its accompanying images with a representation of a subservient black masculinity, serve nevertheless to invite a comparison between the vigorous white men in the previous piece. This is strengthened by the observation that although 'poor whiteism' is discussed in detail, the images do not correspond to the description of the problem but instead give prominence to the positive effects initiated by military training. This distanced them from the physical degeneration that was believed to be characteristic of 'poor whiteism' as well as from African men suffering from similar economic and social deprivations. This issue thus serves to reinforce the ambivalent nature of *Libertas*. On the one hand, it adopted a paternalistic liberal viewpoint towards black South Africans in the spirit of national patriotism brought about by the war. It simultaneously advocated the notion of white superiority as stated in 'Africa's Challenge',²⁴ allocating black South Africans the role of followers in the wake of the march of progress and civilisation, and retaining the distance between the two groups.²⁵ Simultaneously, black men served as the means by which the masculinity of white soldiers was defined.

The image on the following page is of a soldier in the South African infantry training with a bayonet. This was used for close-quarters fighting when shooting was no longer an option. The accompanying caption stated: 'In the present push up north the deeds of our fighters, who charge with fixed bayonets singing and shouting native war-cries as they go, have astonished their friends and terrified their foes.'²⁶

²³ *Libertas*, 2, 1 (Dec. 1941), 60-61.

²⁴ Here the challenge to white South Africans was the bringing of 'civilisation' to Africa.

²⁵ 'Africa's Challenge', *Libertas*, 3, 1 (Dec. 1942), 19.

²⁶ 'Steady', *Libertas*, 2, 1 (Dec. 1941), 18.



Figure 4: 'Training with Bayonets', *Libertas*, 2, 1 (Dec. 1941), 18.

Interestingly enough, the 'native war-cries' originated with the historical settler enemy yet is here appropriated by white soldiers in a combat situation which excluded black soldiers. The emphasis is on heroism on the part of the individual which still exerted a strong hold on the imagination despite the alienation of modern warfare. Military propaganda appealed to this, drawing upon heroic figures like Quintin Smythe in an attempt to drum up support for the war effort in the wake of the defeat at Tobruk (see below). Similarly, appeals were made based on the glamour of war work for women as I discuss later in this paper. Alternatively, war work was placed within an already existing historical framework.

Two images were juxtaposed in an article in *Libertas* appearing in January 1941 (Figures 5 and 6). The image on the left is of an Afrikaner woman taking part in a commemoration of the Great Trek. This is suggested by the date accompanying the image – '1836'. She is leading a team of oxen and is attired in nineteenth century garb. Alongside it is an image of Janie Malherbe, a female transport driver in military uniform dated to 1941. The two images indicate a continuum between the nationalist *volksmoeder* and the patriotic activities of the auxiliary woman. Both women were in service to the nation, even if the idea of 'the nation' had changed to incorporate English-speaking white South Africans. The image of the *volksmoeder* originated in the South African War and was drawn upon by Afrikaner nationalists to represent 'the mother of the nation' who had overcome the adversity of the concentration camps. It became an enduring theme in the political mythology of Afrikaner nationalism but, as Albert Grundlingh suggests, the cultural history of Afrikaners was not the sole prerogative of the right-wing nationalists during the war and was appropriated by the state in a variety of ways.²⁷ It was further evident in the recruitment drives using the terminology of the commando (as I discuss below), the use of Danie Craven, a rugby hero, to encourage men to join 'The Springbok Army of Sportsmen' (see above), and

27 Grundlingh, 'The King's Afrikaners?', 358.



Figures 5 and 6: From '1836' to 1941, *Libertas*, 2, 2 (Jan. 1941), 58-59.

the appropriation of the term *volksmoeder* for Issie Smuts.²⁸ Simultaneously, in the images above, both women are portrayed as being engaged in similar tasks suggesting that the differences between the work of a Boer woman a century earlier and that of a female transport driver during the Second World War were minimal.

The portrayal of Janie Malherbe takes on an added significance. She was married to E.G. Malherbe, the Director of Military Intelligence during the Second World War. Prior to the war she had worked as a freelance journalist and, in 1939, volunteered as a private in the transport service. One of her tasks involved transporting right-wing rebels responsible for committing acts of sabotage against state installations as a protest for South Africa's participation in the war where she had experienced the antagonism of right-wing Afrikaner nationalists to the members of the Union Defence Force.²⁹ She subsequently moved to military intelligence, playing a role in recruitment efforts.³⁰ She was heavily involved in recruiting drives, travelling the country in order to recruit Afrikaner women in particular.³¹

The juxtaposition of the images tapped into an already existing understanding of the role of South African women in war. At the outbreak of the South African War the place of Afrikaner women was not in the military as 'imperial aggression was to be met with male, not female, militarism'.³² However, according to Helen Bradford, as the war progressed and men were not always so eager to participate, women played an active role in encouraging men to fight. They used their own positions as wives, mothers and daughters to argue that it was the duty of Afrikaner men to protect them and their homes from the ravages of British troops. 'Deserters were not merely faithless:

²⁸ See Grundlingh, 'The King's Afrikaners?'

²⁹ E.G. Malherbe, *Never a Dull Moment* (Cape Town, 1981), 211.

³⁰ 'A Day in the Life of a Woman Transport Driver', *Libertas*, December 1942, 51.

³¹ E.G. Malherbe Collection. Janie Malherbe, 'General Report: Recruiting Tour Undertaken Through Northern and Eastern Transvaal by Lieut. (Mrs) J. Malherbe', 18 December, 1941, KCM 56992(16), File 143/2. Killie Campbell Africana Library.

³² Helen Bradford, 'Regendering Afrikanerdom: The 1899-1902 Anglo-Boer War' in *Gendered Nations: Nationalisms and Gender Order in the Long Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Berg, 2000), 209.

they were accomplices to murder, cried one woman to her republican “sisters”. The imperial army was about to lay waste to “our country, our houses and also us and our daughters”.³³ Even those women who were taken prisoner along with their children and held under horrendous conditions in concentration camps, refused to submit to the British forces and encourage Afrikaner men to surrender.³⁴ For these women, those men who did surrender were not worthy of being described as men, or as true patriotic members of the nation. In the South African War then, Afrikaner women were perceived as being ‘unconquerable’, unwilling to accept anything less than total victory over the British regardless of the sufferings they endured.³⁵

Afrikaner patriarchal norms as well as Afrikaner law prevented women from engaging directly in war in the form of combat, yet the exigencies of war, the blurring of boundaries between the home and the front lines, and the British advance towards Pretoria meant that women desired to arm themselves, both to protect their homes and to play their part.³⁶ However, instances where women took up combatant roles were few and far between. They usually involved cases where they disguised themselves as men to do so.³⁷ Janie Malherbe had a narrow conception of the potential for a change in women’s roles, holding fast to ideas of domesticity which sat uneasily with her idea of the ‘modern woman’. For her, a woman’s true place lay in the home as wife and mother.³⁸

In an article written for *The Outspan* where she debated the issue of equal pay in the military for men and women, she ultimately gave white men pre-eminence in the war. Janie Malherbe argued that ‘women should not get the same salary as men ... men should be paid a higher salary as they voluntarily gave up their life for their country.’³⁹ For Malherbe, women’s role in the war was simply an extension of their role as wives and mothers, providing support to the key roles played by the men in war and, as such, not necessarily deserving of remuneration. She reminded the women that ‘they were volunteers and implied that the state was generous enough by giving them any payment at all.’⁴⁰ Thus although heavily involved in recruiting women for war work, Malherbe did not envision the roles played by women in war as being permanent nor did she see this as serving as a form of empowerment or even independence. Their work occurred within the framework of wives and mothers.

The recruitment drives in which Malherbe was involved were attempts by the Union Defence Force to mobilize Afrikaner support for the war. To do this, they drew on symbolic moments in Afrikaner nationalism, such as the commemoration of the Great Trek in 1938. ‘The recruiting campaign attempted to tap into the upsurge of Afrikaner nationalist sentiments as refracted through the commemorative celebration of the Great Trek in 1838.’⁴¹ It is in this light that the previous pictures appearing in *Libertas*, of the woman leading the team of oxen at the centenary of the Great Trek juxtaposed with that of Malherbe taking on the role of a transport driver, must be understood. Moreover, the appearance of the article and photographs in *Libertas*

33 *Ibid.*, 211.

34 *Ibid.*, 215.

35 *Ibid.*, 216, 218.

36 Pretorius, *Life on Commando*. 322-323.

37 *Ibid.*, 324.

38 Dunlevey, ‘Janie Antonia Malherbe’, 26.

39 *Ibid.*, 43.

40 *Ibid.*, 43.

41 Neil Roos, ‘From War to Workplace: Class, Race and Gender Amongst White Volunteers, 1939-1953’ (Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis: University of the North West, Mafikeng, 2001), 96.

implies a link between the magazine article and official attempts at recruitment. Recruiting units were known as the 'Steel Commando' and the 'Air Commando' and travelled the interior of South Africa to garner Afrikaner support for the war. The use of the term Commando was not insignificant; neither was Malherbe's Trek image. These were designed to evoke in Afrikaners their history of struggle and conflict, and mobilize them based on an existing 'martial and social tradition', even though the Union Defence Force was a significantly different institution to the commando system which it had replaced.⁴²

This, however, was a selective reading of the tensions of the past. According to Sandra Swart, a key contribution to the Rebellion of 1914 was the new idea of citizenship which had been promulgated in the Defence Act, 13 of 1912. 'To many [Afrikaner men] this Act seemed designed to replace this sense of identity based both on what it meant to be a man in a modern state and the "English" sense of what it meant to be a man.'⁴³ Afrikaner masculine identity was linked to the *commando* system, which the new Act replaced with the modern notion of the military system. Those who supported and participated in the 1914 Rebellion stood therefore in opposition to the idea of the modern state and its perceived attack on their masculine identity.⁴⁴ The failure of the Rebellion marked the triumph of the modern state.

Just as attempts at white recruitment had drawn upon an existing tradition of the *commando*, a tradition of the noble warrior was invoked in war-time imagery of the service of African men. While *Libertas* focused largely on the white participants of the war, an article appeared detailing the exploits of Lucas Majosi, a stretcher-bearer who carried injured men to safety during the Battle of El Alamein. Majosi went on to become the only black South African to win the Distinguished Conduct Medal for bravery under fire. He became an iconic figure, representing black participation in the war and the photograph of him that appears in *Libertas* (Figure 9) is one that went on to form the basis of the official war portrait painted by Neville Lewis which hangs in the South African Military History Museum.⁴⁵ By focusing on the non-combatant, albeit heroic, efforts of Majosi in its remembrance of black participation in the war, the state effectively silenced other types of contributions that did not fit the mould of the idealized black non-combatant.

For instance, the magazine paid scant attention to Job Maseko, a former miner who had been taken prisoner at Tobruk and, while held captive by the Italians, fashioned a rudimentary explosive which he used to destroy a boat. He subsequently escaped from captivity and, when his story was confirmed, was awarded the lesser award of the Military Medal.⁴⁶ In playing the role of a combatant role in the war, using the skills derived from his experiences as a mineworker, Maseko contradicted the idealized visions of the war-work of black men. He represented the possibilities of empowerment offered by military service that the state wanted to curtail and, as such, it was Majosi's rather than Maseko's exploits that formed the site of official memory. In *Libertas*, his portrait appears alongside that of an old Zulu warrior, once again equating war service with a historical past. The age of the warrior, however, indicates in no uncertain terms that this was now an historical enemy that had been subjugated.

42 *Ibid.*, 96-98.

43 Swart, 'The Rebels of 1914', 39.

44 *Ibid.*, 40-41.

45 I. Gleeson, *The Unknown Force – Black, Indian and Coloured Soldiers Through Two World Wars* (Johannesburg, 1994), 220.

46 *Ibid.*, 100-101. This account of Maseko's contribution is derived from the SADF Archives, Union War Histories (UWH), Box 128.



Figures 7-10: 'Zulu Hero: Old Fighting Spirit Lives On,' *Libertas*, 4, 8 (July 1944).

Parallels were drawn between Majozi and the other men of the Non-European Army Service and the exploits of the Zulu under Shaka, but these warriors would be different – their martial nature subordinated to protection and defence, their assegais representing tradition but, simultaneously, useless in modern warfare.

In those days the *impi* – that formed his front-line troops and personal bodyguard – hand-picked by Chaka himself from strapping young volunteers, proved their valour and strength in a death struggle with lions trapped in the Zululand mountains; the young warriors employed no other weapons than their bare hands and *riempies* to overcome and truss up the savaged, rending beasts. That same fearlessness is being turned today to a finer purpose on the battlefields.⁴⁷

In contrast with these images is the use of propagandistic images on the part of the Communist Party of South Africa during the Second World War. A shift is evident from the 1930s to the 1940s where depictions of soldiers change from their being a symbol of repression to being heroes with the emphasis on African soldiers in

47 E.T. Stubbs, NEAS Press Cutting Book, EQ. 355.31 (68) Sou, 'Zulu Hero: Old Fighting Spirit Lives On' in *Libertas*, July 1944, Vol 4, No 8, 58, Johannesburg Military Museum, Johannesburg.

conjunction with Soviet soldiers.⁴⁸ Communist Party propaganda also called for the arming of African soldiers with the slogan, 'Give Him a Gun – Now!'⁴⁹ It was a call to modern warfare and a far cry from the images of the noble Zulu warrior perpetuated by *Libertas*. As the war progressed, propaganda shifted in line with military and recruitment setbacks. From its emphasis on duty and tradition, the visual images of *Libertas* and the recruiting films began to focus instead on the glamour of warfare.

The Second Phase: Tobruk and the Glamour of Warfare, 1942-1944

1942 proved to be a major setback for the Allies and, in particular, for the South African forces. Major-General Erwin Rommel led the Axis forces to victory against the Allies in Tobruk, North Africa. Major-General Klopper was eventually compelled to surrender and 30000 men were taken as prisoners-of-war with South African troops forming a third of the total.⁵⁰ It was in this moment of national stress that the role of propaganda can be most discerned clearly. The repercussions of the defeat were immediately felt. The opposition felt justified in their criticism of a government that had taken them to war. Smuts' supporters, however, were spurred to greater efforts. Under 'The Defence Recruiting and Publicity Committee' the first campaign was 'Avenge Tobruk', which was allocated an allowance of £22 000.⁵¹

In reaction to Tobruk, the film *Fall In* called on South Africans to throw their weight behind the war effort.⁵² Several themes are apparent in *Fall In* regarding the types of appeals made to South Africans to support the country's participation in the war in a time of crisis. The film therefore bears close study.

It opens with Major-General George Brink standing in front of a map of the African continent. Brink would have been an instantly recognisable figure to both troops and civilians as a significant leader who headed the 1st S.A. Division⁵³ who was affectionately referred to as 'Uncle George'.⁵⁴ Brink began by declaring that it was the role of South Africa's soldiers to stop the Axis advance elsewhere in Africa with the ultimate aim of keeping them from South Africa's borders. South African troops were referred to as 'the policemen of war' whose role was to defend their homes and farms against the Fascists. Images of Italian and German forces marching were accompanied by Brink's description of them as 'gangsters' – as organised criminals of war who did not follow the etiquette of warfare. The war was presented in almost local terms as a conflict between policemen and criminals with the aim of the former as preserving social stability, harmony and safety. Images of the crime itself were conveyed in terms of burnt and bombed buildings with wounded people. The explicit message was that it was necessary for soldiers to go overseas in order to prevent similar crimes being carried out in South Africa. The metaphor of crime functioned as a means of localizing an international conflict, of making it a concern of those living in South Africa and physically distant from all the theatres of war.

48 D. Pretorius, 'The Printed Propaganda of the Communist Party of South Africa, 1921-1950', obtained from <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0>, accessed on 25 July 2012.

49 *Readers' Digest Illustrated History of South Africa: The Real Story* (Cape Town: The Readers' Digest of South Africa Pty. Limited), 362.

50 Nigel Cawthorne, *Turning the Tide: Decisive Battles of the Second World War* (London: Arcturus Publishing, 2002), 51-56.

51 BNS 1/1/266 C17/73, 2, Sentrale Argies Bewaarplek/Central Archives Depot.

52 *Fall In*, Union Films, FA 19, National Film, Video and Sound Archives, Pretoria.

53 E.P. Hartshorn, *Avenge Tobruk* (Cape Town: Purnell and Sons, 1960), 80.

54 Joel Mervis, *South Africa in World War II* (Johannesburg: Times Media Ltd, 1989), 25.

Brink also made reference to Smuts who symbolised the South African decision to enter the war on the side of the Allies, 'And today the world recognises this former Boer general as one of its greatest strategists.'⁵⁵ The reference to Smuts' role as a Boer General in the South African War where he so effectively fought the British was a subtle reminder of his service to the Afrikaner nation when Smuts found himself at odds with right-wing Afrikaners opposed to South Africa's entry into the war. It suggested that Smuts' primary allegiance lay not with Britain, but with South Africa in general and with Afrikaners in particular. This was emphasised by Brink's words: 'General Smuts is always active in the best interests of South Africa,' combined with the image of Smuts saluting departing troops. The overall impression was not of Smuts' loyalty to the British Empire, but of him acting in a protective capacity in South Africa, sending troops with the ultimate aim of defending the country. Simultaneously, the part played by Smuts in the decision to enter the war in 1939 as well as the subsequent deployment of troops to the theatres of combat was downplayed in the line, 'South Africa's people through its parliament endorse these views.'⁵⁶ This emphasised the democratic process where all South African citizens bore responsibility for military decisions and the blame for Tobruk could therefore not be placed on any one person. This was useful when the military setback evident in the fall of Tobruk had South Africans questioning the validity of participation in the war and, in particular, their support of a government which had led them to this point.

This propaganda operated within a general context of concern voiced by E.G. Malherbe over the alienation of the white Afrikaans-speaking sector of the population. For instance with regards to newsreels, he believed that '...Afrikaans-speaking *supporters* of the war effort cannot be blamed if occasionally they feel that they are being slighted. How much more have opposition Afrikaans-speaking citizens cause for criticism?'⁵⁷ His conviction was that films had to portray a particularly South African form of identity so as to prevent 'their [the troops]' identity being lost in the Imperial Forces' as they fought alongside other members of the British Empire.⁵⁸ Moreover, state and military propaganda found itself up against competing propaganda from Germany which did little to reduce the strength of the parliamentary opposition as well as right wing nationalists. Malherbe noted,

A very large proportion of the Afrikaans-speaking population listen exclusively to the Afrikaans service from Zeesen [the radio station that broadcast German propaganda to the rest of the world] for their overseas news regarding the war, and their opinions regarding the whole war situation are moulded very largely by these broadcasts. The fact that they listen to nothing else besides these broadcasts and read no other newspapers other than those which are also anti-government and largely pro-Zeesen ... [lends great] force [to] these impressions ...⁵⁹

55 *Fall In*.

56 *Ibid*.

57 'Films for Publicity and Propaganda', KCM 56974(531)a, File 438-1, KCAL.

58 E.G. Malherbe, 'Films for Publicity and Propaganda', E.G. Malherbe Collection, KCM 56974(531)a, File 438-1, KCAL.

59 Letter by E.G. Malherbe to Mr John A. Davenport, Overseas Division, The British Broadcasting Corporation, 6 May 1941, E.G. Malherbe Collection, KCM 56974(534), File 438-1, KCAL.

To counter this and the anti-war efforts of the opposition and the extremist Ossewabrandwag, propaganda had to be adapted in order to 'side-track much of the anti-war emotion'. The state and military would have to

... help the Afrikaans-speaking section to live out that interest in their cultural distinctiveness rather than give the impression that we oppose their efforts, or carry on as if we were totally indifferent to their cultural heritage and achievements. Here too, a much more positive line should be taken. The film offers many opportunities for remedying this situation, and the palpable blindness and stupidity of those who run the film as a propaganda medium are to blame for the lost opportunities in this respect. For example, every news-reel showing activities of our men in the North should have at least 50% commentary in Afrikaans. Every time *Oom* [Uncle] Jannie Smuts appears on the screen the commentary should be in Afrikaans. This will make people of both sections, including those who hold that this is only an English war, engineered by English capitalists, realise that it is an *Afrikaner war too* and that Afrikaners from the Commander-in-Chief downwards are prepared to give their lives to win it *in the interests of South Africa*.⁶⁰ [emphasis in original]

A key facet of official propaganda then was the need to counter the anti-war effort that occurred largely on the part of Afrikaners hostile to South Africa's role. An important aspect, according to Malherbe, was to make every effort so as not to alienate the Afrikaner segment of the population. This is evident in his reference to Smuts as 'Oom Jannie' and his desire that Afrikaans should be used when Smuts appeared on screen which explicitly associated the South African Prime Minister with an Afrikaner identity. It is in this light that *Fall In* emphasised, in this instance, a South African identity over an imperial one.

Fall In subsequently focused on the threats to, and defence of, South Africa's borders that were the motivation behind recruitment efforts. Further footage was shown of white South African troops fighting and emerging victorious in Addis Ababa. 'Our purpose was not to acquire new territory, but to render that country useless to the enemy as a springboard from which it was an easy jump for Axis planes onto Rhodesia and from there again onto the Union.'⁶¹ In addition to the main theme of defending the Union emphasised by Brink using the map to show the prospective route of Axis troops, the film decidedly refuted any imperial aims on the part of South Africa on the continent. This may have served to detract from the way in which the conflict was portrayed by propaganda internationally and locally, as the 'Good War', a war fought against the evils of fascism rather than for material gain as was the case during the First World War. In the film the defence of the country was placed solely in the hands of white men rendering the contribution of black soldiers and white women invisible. The invisibility of black South Africans and women suggested that combat in the war was a natural aspect of white masculinity and it was here that the greatest contribution to the war effort lay.

60 E.G. Malherbe 'Recognition of the Afrikaans Element in Propaganda', E.G. Malherbe Collection, KCM 56974(544), File 438-1, KCAL.

61 *Fall In*.

South African victories were described in the film as bringing 'new glory to the home of South Africa', portrayed in heroic images of white South African troops marching and traversing sand-dunes as well as in troops smiling at the camera.⁶² The notion of glory and accolades heaped on soldiers and country was emphasised here by their victory over 'troops second to none in the world'.⁶³ This was further indicated by Smuts' words to the men of the 2nd Division prior to their departure, many of whom were subsequently taken prisoner at Tobruk.

You [the 2nd Division] are going to be matched with some of the finest soldiers that the world possesses today. The German soldier is not a man to be despised – whether in the air or on the land or even on sea, he is a great fighter whatever other weakness he may have.⁶⁴

South African victories were given greater value by them facing worthy opponents – and their defeats were placed within a similar context. War and combat was presented as a challenge and the opportunity to prove oneself against some of the best fighters in the world. Of course this was a masculine test limited to white men, the sole combatants of the Union Defence Force.

Returning to the theme of defending the Union, *Fall In* showed footage of German planes dropping bombs juxtaposed with images of South African cities which would be destroyed if more men did not enlist. South Africa was depicted as being strategically important due to its ports and materially important due to its gold reserves and its industrial might – resources which would make the Axis powers impossible to defeat should the country be invaded. As the film concluded an appeal was made for support based on the sacrifices of those who had gone before. 'And I who have seen the great sacrifices that our men have made in this campaign, appeal to you on behalf of those who are prisoners-of-war, who have been wounded and killed. Do not let their sacrifice be in vain.'⁶⁵

In *Fall In* the men captured at Tobruk were portrayed as the incentive for South Africans to increase their involvement in the war effort so that the POWs could return home speedily. Using guilt, sympathy as well as the setback at Tobruk, Brink pointed to the camera in a manner reminiscent of recruiting posters during the First World War, calling on South Africans to play their part. 'From their prisons of war camps they are calling *to you and to you* to finish this war as quickly as possible and to speed the day of their happy reunion.'⁶⁶ Pointing at the camera was an attempt for him to make direct contact with the viewer, making each person responsible for the return of the POWs and culpable, should these men not return safely. The use of a finger pointing towards the viewer calling for the public to play its part was a hallmark of military propaganda dating back to Kitchener's appeal *Your Country Needs You* in the First World War. Its form was emulated during the same conflict by countries as diverse as the United States, Germany and the Soviet Union making use of figures such as Trotsky and Uncle Sam.⁶⁷ *Fall In* was thus drawing on a long-standing tradition established decades earlier.

62 *Ibid.*

63 *Ibid.*

64 *Ibid.*

65 *Ibid.*

66 *Ibid.*

67 Carlo Ginzburg, "'Your Country Needs You': A Case Study in Political Iconography", *History Workshop Journal*, 52, (2001), 7.

Another of the war propaganda films, *With Our Men in the North*, features a segment on the repercussions of Tobruk entitled 'Avenge Tobruk!' It is in this light that segments sanitizing the war should be viewed. The death, destruction and defeat which the early years of the war entailed for the Allies was contained by images emphasizing the less ambiguous aspects of war, a position which was applied to both news reels and still photographs. Malherbe was explicit on the need for such sanitized imagery.

The Bureau of Information has in the field two competent photographers who can send back to the Union regular supplies of 'newsy' photographs. Wherever possible, these photographs should show our troops smiling and cheerful. The Middle East weekly publication, 'PARADE', is a good example of cheerful propaganda. Most of the 'PARADE' photographs show the troops bright and happy – 'thumbs up' and 'top of the world' idea.⁶⁸

In this segment images were of South African troops marching through city streets en route to East Africa. They were accompanied by the cheers from the civilian populace who were portrayed as being complicit in sending them off and supporting the volunteers who ultimately made their way to Tobruk.

You cheered them. You were proud of them, you put your faith in them and you were right. For these fellows carried the traditions of South Africa's fighting breed right into the heart of Abyssinia. From every corner of South Africa they came to defend not only the freedom of their own home but yours too. Remember that.⁶⁹

Their sacrifice at Tobruk was done in the service of all South Africans and held true to their heritage. This possibly served to allay hostile feeling toward the state as a result of the defeat as well as growing lack of support for the war effort. Using Tobruk the appeal was made to enlist in order to play their part and not to let the sacrifices of their fellow South Africans be in vain. Smuts, referred to here as 'the grand old fighter', broadcast an appeal to South Africans in similar vein. 'No true South African who honestly and sincerely searches his conscience can now stand aside in the gathering peril to his country.' The scene shows a family – a mother and two children – listening to Smuts' words over the radio, followed by a cut to a photograph of the husband and father in military uniform. The scene thus made use of a very conventional gendered image of men going to war, and women and children remaining behind on the home front, providing the rationale for men's defence of the nation but playing no active role in it. The message was clear – this family had made a sacrifice out of a sense of patriotism and duty and it was therefore up to other South Africans, who had not hitherto done so, to do the same. To recruit more personnel 'Avenge Tobruk!' made an appeal based on a triple nexus of patriotism, guilt and duty, closing with a scene of a silhouetted figure of a South African soldier accompanying by the waving flag.⁷⁰

68 E.G. Malherbe, 'Films for Publicity and Propaganda', E.G. Malherbe Collection, KCM 56974(531)a, File 438-1, KCAL.

69 *With Our Men in the North*, (II) African Film Productions Ltd., South African National Defence Force, FA 45, National Film, Video and Sound Archives, Pretoria.

70 *Ibid.*

The impact of the events at Tobruk on South African society can be ascertained by the many references made to it in the various information films. In *The Years Between* battle scenes at Tobruk show South African troops in alliance with both British and Indian soldiers. Yet the conflict is presented at a distance – men firing guns at an unseen enemy, explosions, diving planes and bombs falling – culminating in Tobruk falling to German forces and the subsequent taking of prisoner of 11000 South African soldiers.⁷¹ Its neglect in presenting the raw combat of the conflict was due to two reasons – first it would be almost impossible to film during pitched combat; second, even if footage existed, seeing wounded and dead South African soldiers would have a devastating impact on morale on the home front. This was particularly the case as the film was largely concerned with showing the contribution of South Africans at home in a segment entitled ‘National Drive to Avenge Tobruk’. This emphasised the voluntary enlistment of a number of men to compensate for those taken prisoner. ‘South Africa was determined to avenge this disaster. A recruiting drive was launched and thousands of men came forward to fill the Springbok ranks.’⁷²

With Our Men in the North contained a segment emphasizing ‘the cult of the hero’ in the form of Quintin Smythe, VC.⁷³ Smythe of the Royal Natal Carbineers was invested with the Victoria Cross for ‘gallantry’ which brought ‘honour to the Union’. He was shown being congratulated by women in uniform and later meeting General Smuts and his wife. His bravery was portrayed as being a credit to the country and ‘as an inspiration to all South Africans’. The film mentioned that his military gear was to be displayed at his school suggesting that it would be used to inspire future generations of young men to similar endeavours, after which it would be placed on display in the War Museum making his heroism immortal.⁷⁴ His exploits were used by government as a means of creating and maintaining support for the war, yet Smythe was himself unwilling to describe those same experiences.

I never even told my own parents what I did in that thing, so that is out completely ... Can one ever really tell people what it was like? You know your mind rejects things that were nasty; you can read up the citation if you like, but you’ll get nothing from me.⁷⁵

His actions had resulted in him being awarded the Victoria Cross for bravery and had led to his being personally congratulated by Jan Smuts. Through this and the information films detailing his exploits, he had achieved military glory yet the price at which this was achieved, both psychological and physical, was high.

While war-time propaganda was not generally geared to convey the actual experiences of individuals it did, at this critical juncture, place an emphasis on the glory and heroism of war. Moreover, this idea was not confined simply to men in combat. By 1943 the number of female recruits had fallen. There were difficulties on the home front in terms of rationing, blackouts and even the constant fear of the rise of National Socialism within the country. For the women on the home front, many with

71 *The Years Between, Part 1*, African Film Productions Ltd, South African National Defence Force, FA92, National Film, Video and Sound Archives, Pretoria.

72 *Ibid.*

73 *With Our Men in the North*, African Film Productions Ltd. South African National Defence Force, FA 45, National Film, Video and Sound Archives, Pretoria.

74 *Ibid.*

75 Sam Sole, ‘The War to End All Wars’, *Sunday Tribune*, 3 Sept. 1989.

male family members on the front lines being taken prisoner-of-war or killed and having to cope with their new roles in the work place and as heads of the family, there appeared to be a drop in enthusiasm for a war which had been going on for almost four years with no conclusion evident.

The first signs of disharmony in the system came as early as 1942 when the Director of Recruiting, Colonel G.C.G. Werdmuller, discouraged W.A.A.S. women to voice their complaints about life in military service as it was contributing to a shortfall in recruits. 'Every time she airs her grouses and grumbles in public she damages that reputation and, consciously or unconsciously, discourages some other woman from joining it [W.A.A.F.] and contributing towards its further success.'⁷⁶ Werdmuller portrayed the Defence Force as an organisation where each woman is 'a shareholder in her country's security'⁷⁷ and, as such, was responsible for maintaining its high status despite any personal misgivings. He called upon these women to overlook the hardship of military life in favour of its benefits and to overlook the individual discomfort in favour of the greater good – doing their bit for a war which was essential for the victory of democracy. Simultaneously, he appealed to the sense of comradeship and camaraderie, similar to that found amongst male soldiers, which was perceived to be the most positive aspect of military service. Not only were current female military personnel expected to emphasize this positive aspect, they were also expected to promulgate it to other prospective recruits.⁷⁸

Werdmmuller continued in similar vein when war weariness and the subsequent shortfall in recruits was a very real problem. In a circular on recruiting he stressed in October 1943 that there had to be a change in the way in which recruiting was carried out.

At this stage of the war recruiting, which has always been a specialised task, has become far more difficult than it was during the early stages of hostilities. The old methods of approach such as public meetings, poster, screen and press advertising, have largely lost their value, and it remains for recruiters to employ other means for finding the volunteers now so badly needed.⁷⁹

Recruiting was to take on a note of greater personal interaction between recruiter and prospective recruit.

During your talk with a prospect find out what appeals to him most, pay, patriotism, a trade etc., and apply the arguments most likely to convince him. He may have to be contacted several times before he makes up his mind. This must be done where it is necessary.⁸⁰

This presents a more clinical and manipulative vision of recruiting where broad sweeping statements such as 'fighting the good fight' were no longer applicable. The individual motivations of the recruit had to be taken into account instead. The vision

⁷⁶ *The Women's Auxiliary*, 22, 5 (June 1942), Documentation Centre, Department of Defence Archives.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ W.A.D.C., Box 11, Ref D.R. (W) F27, 6, Documentation Centre, Department of Defence Archives, Pretoria.

⁸⁰ W.A.D.C., Box 11, Ref D.R. (W) F27, 6.

of manipulation is further strengthened by the way in which recruiting officers were encouraged to behave in the vicinity of the recruit – as ‘courteous and amiable’ where ‘overdone militarism is not appreciated by a new recruit’.⁸¹

In another attempt at recruiting women in the Auxiliary Services, Werdmuller once again made the appeal of freeing men to fight but it was given an added twist.

[W]herever they [the men] go, they will carry with them the magnificent tradition of valour which they have built for themselves and for their country during the past three years. But they cannot go unless the women of South Africa come forward now to release them. Already there are 15000 women on active service in the Union and in the Middle East. Some of these women are actually in the fighting services – the women of the Coastal Artillery and the Anti-Aircraft and Searchlight Batteries. Others are doing important work in offices, in factories, in transport depots, and on air stations throughout the country.⁸²

It appears that it was no longer sufficient to merely ‘free men to fight’ as he elucidated the various opportunities open to women – not only in the conventional roles on the home front in factories, offices and munitions, but in positions near the front lines in the Middle East, or as close to combat roles as possible in the Artillery and Anti-Aircraft Batteries, which gave them a more active role in defence. Moreover, the recruit was portrayed as infinitely important to the war effort and, on joining up, she was to be treated as such.

‘Touch not a hair of her head, for even the ground on which she stands is precious’ is a misquotation which applies aptly to all women recruits. So if ever you have longed to be sought after and cherished, then become a recruit! ... You will become staggeringly popular; you will be at the centre of attention at whatever party you attend; you will be advised, cautioned and encouraged until your head whirls.⁸³

The article went on to demonstrate examples of young women who did not meet the minimum age requirement and older women who fell outside its limits, and the way in which these women went to extraordinary lengths to sign up due to the high level of status given to a new recruit.⁸⁴ Designed largely to appeal to young women, the article indicated a shift for its prospective audience – no longer was it appealing to patriotism or job opportunities, but instead to the enhancement of the social life of the recruit where she was portrayed almost as a celebrity. In addition, the idea of being at the centre of attention where one’s every word was hung on to and the glamour, which was associated with it, would have appealed to women as an alternative to a ‘run-of-the-mill’ existence. For those young women who believed themselves to be awkward and shy, becoming a recruit and the training it involved was portrayed as a finishing school, leading ‘to poise and self-confidence’.⁸⁵ Here the appeal was made

81 *Ibid.*

82 *The Women’s Auxiliary*, 30, 5 (Feb. 1943).

83 *Ibid.*, 13.

84 *Ibid.*, 13.

85 *The Women’s Auxiliary*, 31 (March 1943).

to the girl from the rural area who otherwise would have had little opportunity for acquiring these attributes.

‘Regimentals’ may be the first opportunity a girl has ever had of acquiring poise and self-confidence, smartness in her dress and manner. Imagine the girl from the *platteland* [‘flatlands’ or interior districts] whose previous life has been spent on the isolation of the farm. Her parents are in all probability against her joining up. She has cut herself adrift from home and has no one to advise her.⁸⁶

Entering the world of the regiment the ‘green’ recruit found herself with others just like her, ending her sense of isolation. The NCOs served as guides for these young girls and ‘mothered’ them.⁸⁷ The regiment became a home away from home, a place where the isolated recruit now felt a sense of belonging while being part of the glamorous world of military service. This was reflected in the official photographs of female recruits.

These photographs are somewhat limited as a source due to their lack of context. They exist as isolated negatives in the Defence Force Archives from which prints are made and subsequently given hand-written captions. Some of these official images appeared in secondary sources written about the war such as Ian Gleeson’s *The Unknown Force*, or in primary official sources such as *Complex Country*. However, I have been unable to find any information about the way in which they were created, the photographers involved or the circumstances of their reproduction. There is no additional information outside of the captions. Still, the images are important as they depict the way in which the military imagined the identity of the men and women in the Union Defence Force and, in many instances, the conventions of these images were reproduced in private photographs.

The photograph, ‘Corporal M Beauchamp, Special Signal Services’, (Figure 11) is of a young smiling woman, her curly hair barely held in check by her cap. It accentuates both youth and femininity, and follows the convention of the portrait with her looking into the distance with the light falling on her face. These conventions are also apparent in the photograph on the right above simply titled ‘Lt P Eaton’. Here the figure appears more reserved but, if anything, the conjunction of the lighting and her pose heightens the glamour of the figure, drawing strong parallels with the Hollywood actress publicity shots of the 1930s and 1940s serving, both to glorify women’s roles in the military as well as to emphasise their femininity. The convergence of glamour and femininity which also made its appearance in the Hollywood films of the era was apparently a persuasive factor in the recruitment of women for the war effort.

South Africa’s own film industry had been in decline since the early decades of the twentieth century due to its inability to compete with Hollywood. This was evident in the instance of Union Films which was only able to compete in the limited domestic market when it was tied to the American giant Twentieth Century Fox. This had been a recurring refrain in the South African film industry since its onset.⁸⁸ Although not specifically aimed at South Africans, the widespread release of films made

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ Binedell, ‘Film and the State’, 27.



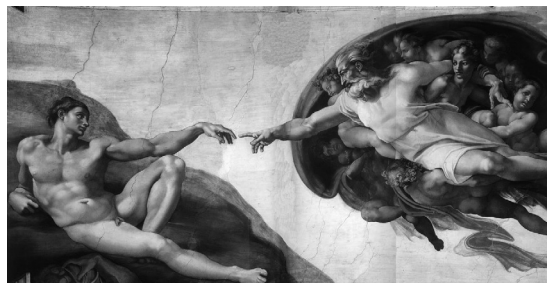
Figures 11 and 12: 'Cpl M Beauchamp, Special Signal Services' 801-1182 and 'Lt P Eaton', 801-1181, Negatives in the South African Defence Force Archive Documentation Centre, Pretoria.

in Hollywood throughout the Allied countries and their popularity dating from the pre-war era make them a useful source of analysis. Simultaneously the production of films in Hollywood was marked by collaboration between studio executives and the American propaganda agency, the Office of War Information. The heavy influence of the government in the production of films, ostensibly solely for entertainment value, gave a strong propagandistic element to studio releases. Many of these films dealt overtly with themes of war. Hollywood films had an impact not only on American but Allied society at large – the glamorous profile photographs of the Second World War was just one such example.⁸⁹

While, in a sense, the official photographs of the war drew on existing portrayals of black and white men as well as white women in other media, there is an added dimension to these photographs. Both in South Africa and internationally, these photographs sometimes tapped into existing imagery in popular consciousness. Drawing upon existing tropes enabled a sense of familiarity on the part of the viewer, making an image more effective, as evident below.

The photograph (Figure 13) of 'Women Mechanics' is an interesting one aesthetically. Its depiction of two women mechanics with hands outstretched towards each other in the process of exchanging a piece of equipment bears remarkable resemblance to the Renaissance image 'Creation of Adam' produced by Michelangelo for the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. This resemblance is made stronger by the lighting of the photograph which, from above, bathes the women and carries an almost religious overtone. It gives an impression of their work being an almost higher calling, the

89 Clayton R. Koppes and Gregory D. Black, *Hollywood Goes to War: How Politics, Profits, and Propaganda Shaped World War II Movies* (New York: The Free Press, 1987), vii, 2.



Figures 13 and 14: Women Mechanics, 801-1185, Department of Defence Archives Documentation Centre, Pretoria and Creation of Adam by Michelangelo obtained from <http://sun.science.wayne.edu/~mcogan/Humanities/Sistine/Panels/adam.jpg>, accessed June 18, 2004.

pleasing aesthetic of the image portraying an otherwise unglamorous job in a highly positive light. It too was part of the overall framework of glamour within which propaganda appeals to women were made after 1942.

The Third Phase: 'Don't Rock the Boat', 1944-1945

By 1944 and early 1945 a third phase was apparent in war propaganda aimed at white women. This was to prepare them for the return of men. It was quite clearly a return to conservatism. As the war drew to a close, propaganda attempted to restore the status quo and the 'normality' after the temporary aberration of war. In a speech to SAWAS in January 1945, General Smuts highlighted the distinctions between men and women where the role of the latter would be 'the spiritual uplift of South Africa'.⁹⁰ Women were once again expected to return to their roles as mothers and nurturers at war's end.

A month later, the article 'When Husbands Return' addressed the post-war relationship between men and women. While acknowledging the apprehension felt by women regarding the potential loss of their independence, the emphasis was on the experiences of men and the duty of their wives to support them and forge a new post-war world. Women were to sacrifice their personal ambitions for the greater good of family and society. 'For a few months, perhaps even for a few years, it will be necessary to sacrifice financial, mental and social independence in order to contribute to the welfare not only of the returned soldier, but also, ultimately, to the community.'⁹¹

⁹⁰ Jan Smuts, 'The Greatest is Yet to Come', *The Women's Auxiliary*, 53, 5 (Jan. 1945).

⁹¹ Kachelhoffer, 'When Husbands Return', *The Women's Auxiliary*, 54, Feb. 1945.

The Women's Auxiliary, published by the South African Women's Auxiliary Services and hence an official military publication, colluded in representing the war in a manner which was designed to further recruitment. For the women who believed in this representation, the articles as the war neared its close must have been a major shock. And this ultimately was their aim – to shock women into returning to a conservative and pre-war mindset. The article 'War Leaves its Scars, Sisters' used the guilt inspired by the knowledge of men's experiences to call for women not to 'rock the boat' by making individual and 'selfish' demands on those who had made far greater sacrifices. The article went on to describe in detail the everyday discomforts of a soldier's life, drawing comparisons with the perceived pampered domestic existence of women, making light or, in some cases, rendering invisible, their own struggles in coming to terms with the changes wrought by war on the home front. Another theme was of the possibility of post-traumatic stress syndrome or, as it was described in the article, 'the shock of war [which] has left scars on his mind' experienced by many men in combat. The antidote was deemed to be the patient nurturing care of their spouses engaging in what was now termed their 'great war job'.⁹² These revelations worked in concert to attempt to still the desire in women to carry on the independence afforded them by war to a post-war society. They were largely triumphant – women like the anti-apartheid activists, Helen Joseph and Mary Benson, were the exception rather than the rule.

This attempt to curtail the empowerment of war experiences was less successful in the case of black men. The 1930s had seen the emergence of nationalist political groups within coloured, Indian and African political groups.⁹³ While the Second World War did not initiate these radical tendencies, it did accelerate them. The outbreak of war in September 1939 foregrounded the demands of black South Africans for equality. Debates over equal roles in the military as well as black support for the war effort highlighted ideas of citizenship. There is a real sense then that, despite the use of propaganda in advocating a particular kind of identity for black participants of the Second World War, it failed in its efforts to contain them within these limited roles.

Conclusion

The rise of the apartheid state from 1948 represented the concrete failure of Smuts' government, a failure brought about by its inability to adequately appease the various conflicting segments of South African society during the war years. On the home-front the Second World War hastened the process of black urbanisation as influx control laws were relaxed for the duration of the war in order to meet labour demands that had been exacerbated by the exodus of white men to the front lines.⁹⁴ Moreover, the opportunities brought by the war-time economy – and Prime Minister Smuts – suggested the possibility that the war would bring about greater equality for black men. The war highlighted the disjuncture between citizen and subject. Mobilised as subjects, black men – aided in no small part by the growing radicalism in nationalist politics – instead seized the opportunities presented by the war, using the conflict to call for equal participation which would symbolize citizenship and equal rights. In

⁹² John Hays, 'War Leaves its Scars, Sister', *The Women's Auxiliary*, 56, April 1945.

⁹³ In relation to Indian women in particular, see Surendra Bhana, *Gandhi's Legacy: The Natal Indian Congress, 1894-1994* (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1997), 40-41.

⁹⁴ For an accessible overview see Nigel Worden, *The Making of Modern South Africa* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1994), 61-64.

this case citizenship was inextricably linked to combat and the arming of black men, to which a conservative and apprehensive white South Africa was in no way inclined to concede.

The South African state was thus not wholly in control of the way in which the war was utilised by its participants. This radicalism on the part of black men, their ever increasing numbers in the urban areas of the country and the movements for decolonisation sweeping the continent, once again ignited the fears of a white minority. This was in no small part responsible for the conservatism of some white ex-servicemen and women, leading to their support of Malan's National Party in 1948. For those who remained convinced of the principles for which they had been fighting attempts were made to thwart the policies of the apartheid state through movements like the Torch Commando led by 'Sailor' Malan which ultimately were to prove unsuccessful. There were those participants too, who desired nothing more than a return to 'normality' after six years of upheaval. For black and white participants of the war the dominance of right-wing nationalism in 1948 was a bitter blow and one that did much to undermine their contribution to the fight for liberty and democracy.

At the outbreak of war in 1939, the agents of state propaganda were faced with uniting a number of disparate interests behind the war effort and attempting to manipulate a public that was rent by division. E.G. Malherbe's vision of a passive, receptive audience was a simplistic one which could not be sustained for the duration of the conflict. Over the five and a half year period, the identities of the war's participants shifted and propaganda efforts had to follow suit. This was particularly evident during the mid-war period when a drop in recruitment initiated a change in propaganda that catered to the individual aspirations of potential recruits and used the defeat at Tobruk to draw upon patriotic feeling. At the same time, it was clear that state propaganda could not effectively contain the possibilities presented by war service, particularly for those considered second-class citizens. Black participants and political groups agitated for political equality which would play out increasingly in the political struggles of the 1940s and 1950s. Propaganda was marginally more successful in curtailing the empowerment of war work for white women, but their return to their roles as the nurturers of the nation at the end of 1945 occurred within an already existing framework of conservatism that would culminate in the apartheid state three years later.

The failure of propaganda may be seen in the heightened conservatism that resurfaced at the end of the war – whether in terms of a genuine support for the National Party or a desire for a return to the status quo after the experiences of war. This culminated in the defeat of Smuts in 1948 and the initiation of the apartheid state. While the upheavals of the war led ultimately to the electoral defeat of leaders such as Winston Churchill in Britain, the right-wing conservatism represented by the apartheid state marked something very different. It was in a sense an espousal of the ideology that the Allied forces had fought against and hence a failure of the post-war world envisaged by state and military propaganda between 1940 and 1945.