

'Almost bled to death': the effects of the Anglo Boer War on societal transformation in the Orange River Colony¹

by

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I have seen much war in my lifetime and I hate it profoundly. But there are worse things than war, and all of them come with defeat.

Ernest Hemmingway

Introduction

Paul Kennedy suggests that it was in times of war that the early European state took on its obviously modern features. 'It was war' Kennedy writes, 'and the consequences of war', that provided a much more urgent and continuous pressure toward 'nation building than...philosophical considerations and slowly evolving social tendencies'. Charles Tilly puts it even more succinctly: "War made the state and the state made war".²

In a recent historiographical overview, John Comaroff concluded that ethnic/nationalist identities were articulated largely along four explanatory avenues in South Africa; 1) they were viewed as products of technologies of political control; 2) seen as part of efforts to regulate labour; 3) were believed to be the product of brute racism, or 4) such identities were the result of misdirected models

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1. E. HOBSBAWM, *Age Of Extremes. The Short Twentieth Century 1914-1991*, (Abacus, London,1994), p. 30: "In 1940 France was overrun by inferior German forces with ridiculous ease and speed, and accepted subordination to Hitler without hesitation because the country had almost bled to death in 1914-18. Britain was never the same again after 1918 because the country had ruined its economy by waging a war substantially beyond its resources."
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 2. P. KENNEDY, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000* (Random House, New York,1988), p. 90. C. TILLEY, "Reflections on the History of European State Making" in C. TILLEY (Ed.), *The Formation of National States in Western Europe* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1975), p. 42; and K.J. HOLSTI, *Peace and war: Armed conflicts and international order, 1648-1989* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1991).

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of economic development.³ What is obvious is that despite an extensive and growing literature on war and its effects on the creation of identity, there has been little such research in South Africa.

The impact of war remains a misunderstood and thus neglected aspect of South African history. It tends to be forgotten that industrial South Africa was born during an intense period of warfare, and that wars to suppress black states continued into the twentieth century. During this same period, and within the lifespan of a single generation, South Africans fought four other major wars. These were the First Anglo-Boer War (1880-1881), the Second Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902), the First World War (1914-1918) and the Second World War (1939-1945). Apart from war, this same generation was also faced with all the pain and trauma of industrial transformation.

Perhaps the most recent southern African work dealing with war and its social, psychological and material consequences is Doris Lessing, who observes in her autobiography:

We are all of us made by war, twisted and warped by war, but we seem to forget it. A war does not end with the Armistice. In 1919, all over a Europe filled with graves, hung miasmas and miseries, and over the whole world too...I used to feel there was something like a dark grey cloud, like poison gas, over my early childhood. Later I found people who had the same experience.⁴

Lessing poignantly concludes that her early childhood made her one of life's 'walking wounded'. This pain was occasioned not by cruel parents, or something she personally experienced, but by the First World War which ended before she was born. She notes that it wasn't necessary to have fought in the First World War to have "been done in by it".

The existing historiographical *lacunae* and insights such as those of Doris Lessing, have prompted a reconsideration of the effects of the Second Anglo-Boer War on South African society.

The Anglo-Boer War, Milner and reconstruction in the existing historiography

During the last thirty years, directional history dominated research and historians of this school largely ignored war as a factor in industrialization. Instead, Imperialism and Milner's reconstruction furnished the orthodoxy of why South Africa took the apartheid path. In order to understand why war should largely have been denied, the

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3. J. L. COMAROFF, "Ethnicity, Nationalism and the politics of difference in the age of revolution" in J.L. COMAROFF and F. C. STERN (Eds.), *Perspectives on Nationalism and War* (1995). (Gordon and Breach, Luxembourg, 1995)
 4. D. LESSING, *Under My Skin, Volume One of My Autobiography, to 1949*, (Flamingo, London, 1995), p. 10.

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teleological nature of the various historical schools in South Africa must be explained.

Much South African history has been punitive, concerned with allocating blame for the emergence of the apartheid state. Until 30 years ago the various historiographical positions were relatively clear. On the one side were the Nationalist historians who blamed Imperialism and English-speakers for the Anglo-Boer War and viewed the Afrikaner people as their victims.

Their liberal opponents argued the irrationality of apartheid was the result of an isolated and 'degenerate' Afrikanerdom that was psychologically incapable of adapting to the new industrial reality. The South African state had no alternative but to apply apartheid legislation in order to preserve government and service sector occupations for the many Afrikaner voters who became victims of industrialization.

In the 1970s directional, structural and confrontational history came to South Africa. The focus of the revisionists on the material base of society led them to attack the inherent contradictions in the existing historiography. The revisionists argued that inequality is fundamental to liberalism, an ideology that encourages capitalist competitiveness. The result of this conflict the revisionists argued, was local, regional and international inequalities which liberalism failed to address.

The atomization and alienation of traditional communities is laid at the door of liberalism, as is underdevelopment in the Third World. Within this perspective, neither Afrikanerdom nor Imperialism is to blame for the South African situation but rather capitalism which is viewed as a permanent and constantly revolutionizing force, leading to the disintegration of old values and social relationships and conflict between the various populations over scarce resources.

In terms of their paradigm, the Marxists emphasize Milner's attempts at reconstruction as the crucial factor in societal transformation. They argue that Milner was more successful in South Africa than he realized. These historians stress the demands of capitalism as the major cause of the Second Anglo-Boer War; and maintain the Milner state was ultimately successful in creating an industrial South Africa that has continued to provide the precious metal foundation essential for the stability of the Western world.⁵

Within this perspective, the Anglo-Boer War is interpreted as the means whereby the incompetent government of a conquest state was removed, and much of its

5. A. ATMORE and S. MARKS, "The Imperial Factor in South Africa in the Nineteenth Century: Towards a Reassessment" in *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 3, 1, (1974); and S. MARKS and S. TRAPIDO, "Lord Milner and the South African State", *History Workshop Journal* 8, (1979). For a recent reiteration of this position see SAUL DUBOW, "Colonial Nationalism. The Milner Kindergarten and the Rise of 'South Africanism', 1902-10", *History Workshop Journal*, (Spring 1997).

inefficient agricultural population proletarianized. According to these historians, the Anglo-Boer War was caused by the failure of Boer society to fulfil its collaborationist role to the satisfaction of the mining industry and the Imperialists. The human dimensions of this tragedy are of little interest to the Marxists, emphasizing as they do the inequities and inexorability of capitalist transformation.

In a similar vein, reconstruction is interpreted as being that period when the dictates of metropolitan capital were imposed on South Africa and another enclave economy created on the global periphery. Politically, Milner's victory is viewed as the beginning of a period of four decades during which South African governments were largely sympathetic/loyal/ 'collaborationist'.⁶

Reconstruction and the 'Milner crucible' - conquest by administrative fiat or empirical and cerebral failure?

My view is that the policy to which we devoted years of labour ... must be regarded as a thing of the past. I never had any doubt about it from the first moment that the election returns of January 1906 began to come in, tho' the disaster has been more rapid and complete than I imagined....The thing became totally hopeless and a total collapse of what you may call the Milner policy and fabric was inevitable.

Milner, 14 September 1907⁷

This paper challenges those interpretations that would advance a 'Milner crucible' theory portraying the Governor as the progenitor of industrialisation and social change in South Africa.

It is possible to argue that the proletarianization of the burgher population in South Africa would have occurred in any event and Milner's role, therefore, was largely incidental. Colin Bundy has graphically illustrated the relentless process of dispossession following the mineral revolution:

The road to economic success was followed by relatively few farmers - and their progress was not through an empty social landscape. On the contrary, each instance of agricultural improvement and capitalization had a direct impact on their less enterprising, less credit-worthy, and less well-off neighbours. Greater productivity upon capitalized land increased the competition locally for labour; rising land values made it more difficult for those lower down the economic ladder to buy or rent farms...[this was a] double-edged process - whereby the accumulation by

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6. S.B. SPIES, "Reconstruction and Unification, 1902-10" in B.J. LIEBENBERG and S.B. SPIES (Eds.), *South Africa in the Twentieth Century* (Van Schaik, Pretoria, 1993), Chapter 15, p. 220.
 7. Quoted in W. NIMOCKS, *Milner's Young Men: The 'Kindergarten' in Edwardian Imperial Affairs* (Duke University Press, Durham NC, 1968), p. 72.

some contributed directly to the proletarianization of others.⁸

Eric Hobsbawm is convinced that the death of the peasantry was the most dramatic and far-reaching revolution of the twentieth century. He notes that dispossession intensified globally during the second half of the twentieth century.

On the eve of the Second World War only Britain and Belgium had an agricultural sector composed of less than 20% of their populations. At least 25% of the American and German populations were still employed in agricultural pursuits, despite the rapid industrialization of these nations. In France, Sweden and Austria fully 35% to 40% of their populations remained tied to agriculture. In the more backward and agrarian parts of Europe over 80% of populations were still agriculturally-based.

At the end of the Second World War the process of agricultural dispossession intensified:

What few would have expected in the 1940s was that by the early 1980s no country west of the 'Iron Curtain' borders had more than 10 per cent of its population engaged in farming, except the Irish Republic (which was only a little above this figure), and the Iberian states. But the very fact that in Spain and Portugal people in agriculture, who had formed just under half the population in 1950, were reduced to 14.5 per cent and 17.6 per cent respectively thirty years later speaks for itself. The Spanish peasantry was halved in the twenty years after 1950, the Portuguese in the twenty years after 1960... In Japan, for instance, farmers were reduced from 52.4 per cent of the people in 1947 to 9 per cent in 1985.⁹

Millions of people in underdeveloped nations were also abandoning their rural existence and moving to the cities. Thus in Colombia in Latin America the percentage of peasants halved in twenty years (1951-73). A similar process occurred in Mexico (1960-80) and in Brazil (1960-80) Agricultural population fell by two-

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8. C. BUNDY, "Vagabond Hollanders and Runaway Englishmen: White poverty in the Cape before Poor Whiteism" in W. BEINART, P. DELIUS and S. TRAPIDO (Eds.), *Putting a Plough in the Ground: Capital Accumulation and Dispossession in Rural South Africa, 1850-1930* (Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1986), p. 108.
 9. E. HOBBSAWM, *Age of Extremes*, pp. 289-290. Hobsbawm writes that by the early 1980s less than 3 out of every 100 Britons or Belgians was employed in agriculture "so that the average Briton was far more likely in the course of everyday life to encounter a person who had once farmed in India or Bangladesh than one who actually farmed in the United Kingdom". In the United States the farming population was now a similar percentage of population, but astonishingly this tiny fraction of the labour force was so productive as to be in a position to flood the USA and the world with untold quantities of food.

thirds in the Dominican Republic (1960-81), Venezuela (1961-81) and Jamaica (1953-81). These were all countries which at the end of the Second World War, had 50 per cent or more of their populations engaged in agriculture.

In South Africa, the process of Afrikaner urbanization was broadly similar to the global phenomenon. At the turn of the century 90% of this population lived in rural South Africa. This situation was totally reversed within some eighty years, whereafter 90% of the Afrikaner population was urbanized and had been born in towns and cities, and only 10% was still rural.¹⁰

At first glance it would appear that the Anglo-Boer War and Milner's reconstruction were responsible for much of this urbanization. There was a massive 293% increase of white population in South Africa's urban areas during the period 1891-1911. This figure is misleading, however, because it does not take a variety of other factors into account.

The period 1875-1904 saw the greatest influx of Europeans in South Africa's history. During this 30 year period some 400,000 whites entered South Africa. This immigrant population was greater than the entire European population in 1875 when minerals were discovered. Much of this population moved to the urban areas where it dominated skilled occupations in the economy. Concurrently, the migrant system brought 200,000 Black workers to the Rand annually, where they dominated the unskilled labour market. At the turn of the nineteenth century, the Afrikaner population was already locked out of both skilled and unskilled labour markets in the new industrial economy.¹¹

The process of urbanization following the mineral revolution was also the product of the two severe financial depressions of this period, 1886-1890 and 1891-1899, various epidemics, wars of subjugation, and ongoing droughts. The extent of dispossession caused by these pre-war factors can be seen in the 1897 Volksraad debates which feverishly searched for solutions during and after this "year of the 'poor whites'".

What is obvious from the population demographics is that it was during post-war periods in South Africa - following the Anglo-Boer War, and the First and Second World Wars, that most Afrikaner dispossession occurred. The fullest extent of this dispossession, however, occurred not during reconstruction, but after 1926 when 60% of Afrikaners still lived in rural areas.

On the basis of these figures it is possible to argue that the uniqueness of industrialization in South Africa cannot be laid at the door of the Anglo-Boer War or

10. See figures in E. L. P. STALS (Ed.), *Afrikaners in die Goudstad*, vol. 2, (HAUM, Johannesburg, 1986) p. 10. WILLIAM BEINART, *Twentieth-Century South Africa* (Oxford University Press, Cape Town, 1994), p. 213.

11. A. H. JEEVES, *Migrant Labour in South Africa's Mining Economy: The Struggle for the Gold Mines' Labour Supply 1890-1920* (McGill Press, Queens University, Kingston, Montreal and Johannesburg, 1985), p. 3.

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Milner's reconstruction because the process of dispossession was global and was in any case most intense from the late 1920s onwards. Instead, the uniqueness of South Africa's industrialization derives from the specific policies and the *weltanschauung* that emerged in this country following the Anglo-Boer War, in an effort to deal with and come to terms with the consequences of this phenomenon. These approaches to industrialization owe a great deal to the emotional and psychological plight of the Afrikaner people following the war and reconstruction. The Second Anglo-Boer War did not end with either the Treaty of Vereeniging or reconstruction - some would say the war was still being fought more than 90 years later.

The revisionists insist that even if South Africa's urbanization was not the result of Milner's social engineering, the Governor and his state departments initiated capitalist agriculture in South Africa. This assertion is also contested.

Opponents point to the work of F. R. Tomlinson, who as late as 1939 expressed doubt about any substantial progress in South African agriculture from the discovery of minerals onwards.¹² Tomlinson was convinced that produce prices had declined precipitously in a 70 year period from the 1870s to the end of the 1930s.

Tomlinson was concerned that the continued under-capitalization of South African agriculture held severe social implications. He believed that it was the failure of agriculture to become self-sufficient that exacerbated the 'poor white question' and forced South Africa to evolve into a command economy.

Ralph Horwitz was another researcher whose work denied the hypothesis that Milner's reconstruction was successful in transforming South African agriculture. At the end of the 1960s he wrote:

It would seem fair to contend that many years of subsidised transportation costs for agriculture had not enabled it to reach the point of take-off into sustained growth. Certainly heavy continued dependence on the Government land bank and the commercial banks for both mortgage financing and short-term financing suggests little net capital formation in South Africa's agricultural industry.¹³

Agricultural statistics and long-term price trends tend to support the argument that South African agriculture was neither reconstructed nor reorientated by Milner. On the contrary, as this study contends, it was the devastation of lives, livestock, property, equipment and savings during the Second Anglo-Boer War that committed the interior republics to economic backwardness, identity politics in the form of national and ethnic antagonisms and constant struggles surrounding the politics of

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12. F.R. TOMLINSON, "Die invloed van Prys-kommeling op die Boerebevolking", *Volkswelstand*, 1, 1, (1939).
 13. R. HORWITZ, *The Political Economy of South Africa* (Praeger, New York, London, 1967), pp. 123-126.

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Another fundamental flaw in Milner's plans for reconstruction was his failure to adequately respond to the 'poor white question' that was so exacerbated by the war and reconstruction. The 'poor white question' must be viewed in the context of Black/White relations and Milner's Imperial/late Victorian conception of South Africa as a 'white man's country'.

The situation facing Milner at the end of the war was very far from a *tabula rasa*. The options available to the new Governor were limited in a number of ways. In the first place the defeat of the Boer nation threatened the complex fabric of this multiracial society. Secondly, Milner was committed to the late Victorian belief that the only role for Whites in Africa was that of a labour aristocracy. Thirdly, it was axiomatic that if Whites were to form part of a labour aristocracy there was no room for a threatening 'poor white' population

The governor was intensely conscious of the threat of 'poor whiteism' to his plans for a labour aristocracy in South Africa and wrote:

Our welfare depends upon increasing the quantity of our white population, but not at the expense of its quality. We do not want a white proletariat in this country. The position of the whites among the vastly more numerous black population requires that even their lowest ranks should be able to maintain a standard of living far above that of the poorest section of the population of a purely white country.... However you look at the matter, you always come back to the same root principle - the urgency of that development which alone can make this a white man's country in the only sense in which South Africa can become one, and that is, not a country full of poor whites, but one in which a largely increased white population can live in decency and comfort. That development requires capital, but it also requires a large amount of rough labour. And that labour cannot to any extent, be white, if only because, pending development and the subsequent reduction in the cost of living, white labour is much too dear.¹⁴

Whilst Milner was aware that his plans for agricultural transformation would dispossess unproductive agriculturalists, he also believed the resultant expansion of industry would absorb those forced out of the rural areas. But South Africa's industrialisation was a slow and painful process, even with massive state subsidisation, as future governments were to discover. In the meantime, the domination of the urban economy by skilled immigrants and unskilled Black workers meant that there were few opportunities for Afrikaners who left the land. As reconstruction continued, Milner channelled the last of his funds away from burgher restoration, and in so doing, ensured the rapid growth of the influential 'poor white' class.

14. S. MARKS and S. TRAPIDO, "Lord Milner".

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Milner's failure to deal with the 'poor white question' was a terminal blow to his political aspirations. Before Milner left South Africa, these people already comprised the backbone of that political grouping that would emerge as the National Party with its platform of anti-Imperialism, ethnicity, economic intervention and racial division. Margaret Ballinger referred to the predominating influence of 'poor whiteism' on subsequent South African development when she wrote:

It is difficult now to remember or to appreciate the dark shadow which poor whiteism cast over this country in the 20s and 30s of this century. Yet it was the formative force in standardising the relationship of Black and White in the country.¹⁵

Milner's referential framework also accounts for the fact that the Governor failed to consider Black agriculture a viable option on which to base the new South Africa. Milner was aware that in making a choice between a Black or White South Africa, 'you have only to sacrifice "the nigger" absolutely, and the game is easy'.¹⁶

Thus, instead of supporting black tribes that had occupied much Boer farmland during the war, the reconstruction government armed special commandos whose task it was to return land to its former owners.¹⁷ Dan O'Meara notes that in taking this step, the colonial state

intervened decisively to enforce the property rights of Boer landlords over African peasants.¹⁸

After the war the government showed that it had no intention of subverting pre-war relationships with respect to the provision of Black labour. In fact, Milner's government committed itself to the increased provision of agricultural and industrial labour. Consequently, it enforced the master-and-servants law of the old Transvaal and in 1906 introduced a new pass law, designed to limit the movement of Black workers.

Etats De Mauvaise Foi - Bellicose conquest states and the curse of the vanquished

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15. M. BALLINGER, "Migrant Labour - historical background", Ballinger papers, University of Cape Town collection, D70/80/9(d).
 16. T. PAKENHAM, *The Boer War*, (Jonathan Ball Publishers, Johannesburg, 1979), pp. 408-409.
 17. J. KRIKLER, "A Class Destroyed, A Class Restored", paper presented at the Centre for African Studies, Africa Seminar, University of Cape Town, 1986. Also his *Revolution from Above, Rebellion from Below* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1993).
 18. D. O' MEARA, *Volkskapitalisme: Class, Capital and Ideology in the Development of Afrikaner Nationalism, 1934-1948*, (Ravan Press, Braamfontein, 1983). Also KRIKLER, "A Class Destroyed".

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How can an elite of usurpers...establish their privileges? By one means only: debasing the colonized to exalt themselves, denying the title of humanity to the natives, and defining them as simply absences of qualities - animals, not humans. This does not prove hard to do, for the system deprives them of everything.¹⁹

Another manner of appraising the success or failure of reconstruction is to examine the motives behind the Anglo-Boer War and consider the extent to which reconstruction achieved those motives. In contrast to an unremitting emphasis on market relations, recent material suggests that the causes of the Second Anglo-Boer War should rather be sought in the efforts of the 'warrior/noble class' in Britain to protect itself from oblivion.

Imperialism is viewed as the creation of this embattled social order and a crucial element in its survival strategy. Imperialism may thus be understood as a defensive strategy, a form of political empowerment, and an identity-generating strategy by Britain's nobility in the face of the erosion of modern capitalism. Arno J. Mayer in *The Persistence of the old Regime* (1981) concluded, in opposition to the thrust of much work in South African history:

The Great War was an expression of the decline and fall of the old order fighting to prolong its life rather than of the explosive rise of industrial capitalism bent on imposing its primacy.²⁰

The Second Anglo-Boer War may thus be interpreted as an exercise in damage control - once the Boers had won the First Anglo-Boer War and discovered the

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19. J-P. SARTRE quoted in, R.N. LEBOW, *White Britain and Black Ireland. The Influence of Stereotypes on Colonial Policy* (Institute for the Study of Human Issues, Phil,1976), p. 13.
 20. A. J. MAYER, *The Persistence of the Old Regime* (Croom and Helm, London,1981), p. 4. See also R.N. LEBOW, *White Britain and Black Ireland. The Influence of Stereotypes on Colonial Policy*; R. ROBINSON, J. GALLAGHER and A. DENNY, *Africa and the Victorians. The official mind of Imperialism* (Macmillan, London, 1961); J. BOTTOMLEY, "'Garrisoning the Moon against an attack from Mars'; The Siege of Mafeking and the Imperial Mindset" *New Contree*, 41, (1997) pp. 7-24. The mainsprings of this metropolitan-based approach should perhaps be sought in W. LANGER, *The Diplomacy of Imperialism* (Knopf, New York, 1935). The basic text opposing the success of reconstruction is D. DENOON, *A Grand Illusion. The Failure of Imperial Policy in the Transvaal Colony during the Period of Reconstruction 1900-1905*, (Longman, London, 1973). For more recent criticism of the structuralist paradigm and the Second Anglo-Boer War see A. N. PORTER, "The South African War (1899-1902); context and motives reconsidered", *Journal of African History*, 31 (1990); I. R. SMITH, "The Origins of the South African War (1899-1902): A Reappraisal", *South African Historical Journal*, 22 (1980). On the gold standard as a motive for the war see R. ALLY, *Gold and Empire: The Bank of England and South Africa's Gold Producers 1886-1926*, (Witwatersrand University Press, Johannesburg, 1994).

mineral wealth that would make them independent.

The negotiated settlement that followed the British defeat at Majuba, created much bitterness and a great deal of insecurity amongst Imperial strategists. The pride of the Empire was unable to countenance the reality that some of its best regiments had been

out-manoevred and out-fought by irregular troops of the two tiny pastoral republics.²¹

At the same time the victorious resistance of the Boers undermined the threat of coercion regularly employed against recalcitrant parts of the Empire.

Churchill was appalled that a parcel of ragged Boers should defeat the famous soldiers of Kabul and Kandahar and urged a return to the 'healthier atmosphere of war'.²² Churchill reflected the opinion of his aristo-military caste, and the baser more predatory nature of Imperialism when, following the outbreak of the Second Anglo-Boer War he wrote,

...eighteen years of heart-burnings, the abandoned colonist, the shamed soldier, the cowardly Englishmen, the white flag, the how about Majuba? All gone forever.²³

The specifics of reconstruction had much to do with the course of the war, the nature of Imperial victory, and the dilemma of the vanquished. We can clearly see the effect of these restraints in Milner's failure to apply his pre-war blueprints to post-war colonies.

Seeking to use criticism of the government as an external constraint on the Z.A.R (*Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek*) Milner helped initiate the 1897 Industrial Commission. Milner enthusiastically endorsed the conclusion of this commission that rural dispossession was necessary to promote capitalist agriculture by undermining the forces of inertia and resistance in the republics.

The post-war Magisterial reports, however, express growing concern with what the Magistrates perceived as a *volte face* in the continued reluctance of the Milner state to promote a 'New Order of Things'. In Wolmaransstad, for instance, the Magistrate highlighted what he believed was the great error in placing *bywoners*, who were largely "poor whites" back on the farms, arguing that this class was "economically all wrong":

True [the *bywoner*] was nomadic, thriftless, dirty; he was also thrifty,

21. G. R. SEARLE, *The Quest for National Efficiency: A Study in British Political Thought, 1899-1919* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1971), p. 36.

22. W. S. CHURCHILL, *The Boer War* (1989), p. 234

23. *Ibid.*, p. 275.

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domesticated, clean. In fact in him were compounded the ploughman, the labourer, the tramp and the vagabond of a more complex social system.²⁴

This Magistrate justified the growing failure of *bywoners* in his district by criticising the rudimentary structure of Boer society:

In view of the dryness of the District, preventing general cultivation, the want of stock preventing grazing, and the want of industries rendering work unavailable, it has become clear that before the new order of things has got shaken down into working trim there must be some displacement of the previous order. The district in its present state of development is over-populated, and an outlet other than farm labour must be found for its superfluous workers.²⁵

In the Magistrate's opinion there was no longer any room for unproductive members of society, making their dispossession inevitable. Despite such sentiments, Milner, initially at least, implemented a policy of restoration that was contrary to his pre-war vision. The mainsprings of this new approach to the Boer population must be sought in the impact of the unexpectedly brutal and extended Anglo-Boer War.

There is no doubt that Milner envisioned a typical colonial 'small war' in South Africa, especially since Milner, like most of the Imperial hierarchy, regarded the Boers 'in utmost contempt as ignorant, uneducated and backward people'.²⁶ The result of Milner's prejudices was that he could not envision any substantive Boer resistance or imagine an extended war. Milner revealed these internalized prejudices and rationalizations in a conversation with Ian Hamilton before the war:

He [Milner] said in a questioning sort of way, surely these mere farmers cannot stand for a moment against regular troops?

I replied that this depended upon locality and other conditions. In the open they were no use against cavalry and artillery, on their own Boer ground they were the most formidable foe in the world. He did not like this.²⁷

Chamberlain was likewise sanguine when faced with the outbreak of Milner's Armageddon,

my own opinion is, as it has always been, that both Milner and the

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24. Transvaal Archives Depot (Hereafter TAD), TKP 139, Law Department, Transvaal Administration Reports for 1904, Resident Magistrate, Wolmaransstad-Christiana.
 25. TAD, TKP 139, Law Department, Transvaal Administration Reports for 1904, Resident Magistrate, Wolmaransstad-Christiana.
 26. I. HEXHAM, *The Irony of Apartheid: The struggle for National Independence of Afrikaner Calvinism against British Imperialism*, (Edwin Mellen, New York, 1981), p. 15.
 27. L. JAMES, *The Savage Wars, British Campaigns in Africa, 1870-1920*, (R. Hale, London, 1985), p. 192.

military authorities greatly exaggerate the risks of this campaign.²⁸

The Anglo-Boer War evolved into a war of attrition and a huge Imperial 'sledgehammer' was brought to bear on a recalcitrant and tiny republican population. Smuts afterwards wrote that the Second Anglo-Boer War was amongst the first of the 'total wars' in the twentieth century mould, and for this reason its ramifications on South African development were profound.²⁹

The guerrilla phase of the war saw Imperial forces concentrate on destroying the material well-being of the Boer people. On the one hand, the Imperial army used the horror of concentration camps to take war to women and children, whilst on the other, the army concentrated upon destroying property and all other forms of livelihood and means of capital accumulation of this population.³⁰ Conditions of almost total devastation faced Milner at the end of the war.

The war had gone on too long and was so catastrophic in its consequences that whatever his earlier plans, Milner had no choice but to concentrate on rehabilitation rather than transformation after the war. A strong *bittereinder* faction also emerged during the war and the Imperial government feared these burghers might be provoked into renewed resistance. Chamberlain reflected this fear when he wrote to Milner,

You will know better than I how far the danger I anticipate is real of finding after peace is made a large portion of the Boer population are impecunious and therefore desperate men, and you will also know how such a social and political danger can be met.³¹

The curse of the vanquished - that along with victory and the spoils came the dilemma of the defeated - was a major strand in reconstruction thinking.

28. T. PAKENHAM, *The Boer War*, p. 454.

29. S. B. SPIES and G. NATTRASS (Eds.), *Jan Smuts, Memoirs of the Boer War*, (Jonathan Ball, Johannesburg, 1994).

30. Free State Archives Depot, (hereafter FAD), MG 24, Confidential Instruction, Major General Kelly re denudation of food and livestock, 7 December 1900:

"The Commander-in-Chief has noticed that, after the passage through a district of a column of troops, the food supplies therein do not appear to have sensibly diminished. The Commander-in-Chief knows how difficult it is to collect supplies over a scattered area, and at the same time defend a long column and complete a long march before nightfall, but he urges on officers commanding the columns that they should fully recognize the necessity of denuding the country of supplies and livestock, in order to secure the two-fold advantages of denying subsistence, and of being able to feed their own columns to the fullest extent from the country."

31. C. HEADLAM (Ed.), *The Milner Papers, South Africa, Vol. 2, 1899-1905* (Cassell, London, 1933), Chamberlain to Milner, p. 205, 21 January 1901.

Historia, 44(1), May 1999, pp. 183 - 209.

Chamberlain wrote,

we cannot get rid of the Boers and it is hard to see what they can do except on the land. With their cattle gone and farms destroyed in many cases they will not have the capital to start again and yet they have got to live under our rule.³²

Milner, less magnanimously but more pragmatically, agreed that a policy of rehabilitation was crucial at that stage. He was all for

the most forbearing and generous treatment of the Boers when they are beaten - if only because it is the sole means of absorbing and ultimately getting rid of them as a separate, exclusive caste.³³

Any comprehension of the emotional environment of reconstruction proves elusive. It is difficult to empathize with this period except through hyperbole. The problem lies in the fact that in assessing reconstruction, researchers have been content to focus either on Imperial designs following the war, or to examine Afrikaner political resurgence after Milner left the country. There has been almost no research into the effects of reconstruction at the local or district level - the level at which Imperial plans were implemented and influenced the lives of the burghers. This failure is understandable because Boer society was hardly in a position to reflect on the effects and extent of its suffering. The Resident Magistrates, however, were people with the best vantage point to observe and assess what was happening on the ground.

The rest of this paper is an attempt to gather material at a local level, detailing the common experiences of Milner's reconstruction in Free State districts, although it will focus particularly on the Frankfort district.

The 'Poisoned Air of then'³⁴

When journalists or historians come to ask about something in the past the hardest moment is when I see on their faces the look that means, but how could you have believed this, or done that? Facts are easy. It is the atmospheres that made them possible that are elusive. 'You see, we believed...' (You must have been pretty stupid then!) 'No, you don't understand, it was such a fevered time...' (Fever you call it, do you!) 'I know it's hard to understand, without being immersed in the poisonous air of then.

In 1904 the government insisted that all Orange River Colony (hereafter O.R.C.) Magistrates go on familiarisation tours of their districts. This step was taken because of increased discontent with the delay in compensation payments, and the government was anxious that magistrates should take control of the situation. The government also sought statistics on the extent and nature of recovery from the war.

Ibid., p. 215.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 205. Milner to Haldane, 21 January 1901.

34. D. LESSING, *Under My Skin, Volume One of My Autobiography*, p. 16.

'Almost bled to death'

The effects of the war were still glaringly apparent two years after the Treaty of Vereeniging. Only in 1904 did the last batch of Boer prisoners-of-war arrive back in South Africa. On average, over 90% of all farmhouses had been damaged during the war and most remained unrepaired; either because the landowners had died during the war, or more often because there was no money for repairs. In all districts there were large numbers of widows struggling to run farms. The magistrate of Bloemfontein investigated conditions in his district and discussed the plight of the most privileged settler/colonial carpetbagger class.³⁵ In his usual laconic tone he wrote:

All settlers one might imagine had consistently broken looking glasses or in some other way tempted fortune before they settled. Drought and frost are always with them; if rain comes it falls with a splash in the dam and bursts it; locusts smell them from afar. The Egyptians after the experience of the plagues would have made good hardy settlers.³⁶

According to the Magistrate, the majority of the burghers were living in much worse conditions than settlers. He was "perfectly astonished" at how few complaints there were amongst these people:

they are all having a pretty hard time mealies and pumpkins practically their whole diet except where there are buck and yet they carry on cheerfully in circumstances which would probably make most settlers go

35. I would like to thank Tim Clynick for his use of the phrase 'carpetbagger'. R. VAN REENEN (Ed.), *Emily Hobhouse: Boer War Letters* (Human & Rousseau, Cape Town, 1984). Letter to Lady Hobhouse, (about 25 July 1903), p. 248 gives us some idea of the limitations of both administrative fiat and Milner's settlers when she wrote:

"Mr Potgieter drove me round to see the Settlers, Milner's special pets. There were about fifty at Warm Baths, but only six have survived the first twelve months work in spite of the coddling they received.... The Government has supplied them with every requisite, including 100 pounds put to their credit in the bank. Most of them have abused their opportunity.... Six are now doing three years for stealing cattle, twenty are sent away to distant turf lands to be out of reach of the hotel, for, as a Settler informed us with a wink, "We Settlers don't bear a good name."

36. FAD, ORC CO 471, file 4521/04, Report by Resident Magistrate Bloemfontein, 21 June 1904.

under.³⁷

During his tour the Magistrate found only one farmhouse which was not seriously damaged, musing:

Curiously enough it is almost the only farm I have found in the Colony in which neither the house nor the furniture nor the outhouses nor the trees were injured during the war. Such houses...are exceptions...It was difficult to find out the secret of the immunity of this house and all its belongings - it remains rather a puzzle.³⁸

In the Smithfield district in the eastern O.R.C.

all said they were living hard, some *bijwoners* said they were without meat for a fortnight or three weeks.

A sizeable class of white tenants/ 'poor whites' had moved into the eastern districts since the war. *Bywoners* were to be found on 37% of all the farms visited. Whereas before the war *bywoners* had been expelled from this wealthier region, they now found temporary refuge as overseers on the many farms belonging to widows. The dearth of Black labour also led farmers to employ *bywoners* to help them rebuild, re-fence and to help them get crops into the ground.³⁹

The situation facing the *bywoner* class in the pastoral western districts was much more acute because there were "acres of splendid veldt and the absence of stock to consume it". *Bywoners*, their existence clearly threatened, were to be found on only 10% of these farms. The magistrate of Jacobsdal was clearly unsympathetic to the plight of his former enemies and wrote:

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37. The Magistrates, of course, possessed neither the skills nor familial attachments to enable them to assess the effects of this limited diet upon the health of the burgher population. Any judgements they made were also clouded by their feelings towards their former enemies. The close contact of Emily Hobhouse and her affinity with the Boer population placed her in a far better position to assess the effects of a diet of mealies on the wellbeing of the burghers. She wrote of her visit to a young woman "belonging to a good family":

She drew me out of earshot of the men on the stoep. Then her courage failed her and she could not speak. Her face was very white with blue shadows round the lips and eyes. I said: "Are you hungry?" I am getting experienced now and begin to understand. She said for months she had eaten *nothing* but mealies, not meal, nor meat, nor coffee, nor *anything* else...her baby was coming, the first baby. See R. VAN REENEN, *Emily Hobhouse*, letter to Lady Hobhouse, 2 August 1903, p. 256.

38. FAD, ORC CO 471, file 4521/04, Report by Resident Magistrate, Bloemfontein, 21 June 1904.
39. FAD, ORC CO 396, file 800/04, Report by Resident Magistrate Smithfield, 2 February 1904. Curiously, there is little evidence in these reports of that 'Sotho colonizing movement' that Timothy Keegan believes took place over the Caledon into the arable eastern areas of the Orange River Colony after the war.

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I was informed by more than one farmer especially among the poorer classes (Bijwoners) that during the drought last year they subsisted chiefly on vermin, such as springhares, antbears and porcupines. Although they did not appear to me any the worse for this change of diet.⁴⁰

Perhaps the greatest problem facing the *bywoner* class in this pastoral area was the continued capitalisation of agriculture. Farms were bigger in the south and south-western O.R.C because of the pastoral nature of agriculture, and there were fewer opportunities for white tenants to find work. In addition, the growing profits to be made from pastoralism in the post-war environment attracted settlers/ colonial carpet-baggers who had purchased over a third of all farms in this region since the war. These new farmers had the capital to buy expensive stock and could afford to

invest in implements and infrastructure and establish control over black labour.

The arrival of capitalised farmers, often with their own black labour, left no room for white tenants.⁴¹

The impact of agricultural capitalisation on this post-war environment can also be seen in the benefits enjoyed by loyalist *hensoppers* and the *joiners*. The government was intent on supporting this class and creating a pro-British bloc amongst the burghers, which it hoped would vote with the settlers in any future election.⁴²

Hensoppers and *joiners* were thus well treated by compensation boards and many of these people were given the capital to buy land and stock. In the Smithfield area the magistrate found that 12% of farms were occupied by loyalist burghers. Their farms were now

... flourishing their having been paid out large receipts by the government.⁴³

Continued drought accelerated the process of rural impoverishment during 1904. At the same time, because of overtrading, overspeculation and the over-extension of mercantile credit, the post-war commercial boom of 1902/1903 was succeeded by

40. FAD, ORC CO 396, file 1683/04, Report by Resident Magistrate Jacobsdal, 9 March 1904, summary.

41. FAD, ORC CO 396, file 1683/04, Report by Resident Magistrate Jacobsdal, 9 March 1904, summary.

42. In the O.R.C. Milner's political expectations failed miserably. There was a strong pro-Imperial voting bloc, but the failure of the Milner government to provide adequate compensation destroyed any potential and passed the initiative to the burgher elite. See J. BOTTOMLEY, "Political Resurgence in the Orange River Colony and the Brandfort Congress of 1904." *Wits History Workshop*, 1987.

43. FAD, ORC CO 396, file 800/04. See farms Kalkoenkrantz, Spitzkop, Inzicht, Wilgenhoutfontein, Cijpherfontein and Uitkyk.

deep depression. In 1904 the money market finally collapsed,

... partly due to the amount of land thrown on the market by indebted owners, and partly due to the unavailability of loan capital for prospective buyers.⁴⁴

It was now that many burghers found themselves unable to pay the bonds which, in order to gain some liquidity, they had taken out since the war. The

weight of indebtedness which hung over their heads was in many cases grossly disproportionate to the productivity of their enterprise and their financial returns from it.⁴⁵

The Magistrate of Bloemfontein noted that land prices in the O.R.C had plunged and 'progressive' settlers were now flocking to the interior to take advantage of the low prices. He pointed out that

a great number of farms have been sold to Dutch Colonial farmers and the old residents are leaving the district.

The Magistrate was saddened by this process which saw the dispossession of many of the older inhabitants, but continued to look at the situation philosophically:

These new settlers are the brightest spot for the politician who can rivet his attention on the future but for the immediate present such men with their well developed ability of looking after themselves seem hardly to offer so interesting an object as their less self helpful neighbours who have fallen on more evil times.⁴⁶

This Magistrate claimed that neither his own report nor the census of 1904 demonstrated the deteriorating conditions in his district, since no assessment had been made of the number of farms bonded since the war. He suggested that a return of all mortgages "would probably alter the appearance of affairs very considerably" and show the increasingly desperate plight of most burghers in the O.R.C.

Reconstruction in the Frankfort district, hensoppers and joiners, settlers and colonial carpetbaggers and the price paid by burghers for agricultural advance

In many ways the Frankfort district is the ideal microcosm to assess reconstruction. Researchers are able to evaluate the extent of agricultural transformation because the Magistrate provided an extensive survey of conditions during 1904. At first glance Frankfort appears to have been transformed during the Milner era.

Before the war Frankfort was not a proclaimed district but was known as the Wilge

44. T. J. KEEGAN, *Rural Transformations in Industrializing South Africa. The Southern Highveld to 1914*, (Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1986) pp. 45-46.

45. *Ibid.*, p. 47.

46. FAD, ORC CO 471, file 4521/04, Report by Resident Magistrate Bloemfontein, 21 June 1904.

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River subdivision. As late as 1897 the government referred to farms in this area as *grensplaatsen* or frontier farms. This subdivision included parts of the Bethlehem, Vrede and Harrismith districts and it was only during the war when British Field Intelligence mapped the area, that the boundaries of the Frankfort district were finally established.⁴⁷

Being in the northern O.R.C., Frankfort was part of that region least affected by societal transformation when war broke out. The northern districts failed to respond to the huge new market on the Witwatersrand because of intense competition and the lower prices generated by produce grown in the grain lands of Basutoland and the eastern "Conquered Territory". Other reasons for the lack of commercial response to the Rand market include the poor transportation infrastructure in this region:

The Zandveld was to become a major maize-producing region. However, very little cultivation took place there before the war. The sandy nature of the soil made road transport very difficult for much of the year, and made the marketing of grain on a large scale almost impossible. Indeed, before the war, a Bothaville correspondent tells us,

grain was often brought in from Klerksdorp and other districts, as enough could not be grown for local requirements, the country being practically a waste.⁴⁸

As a result of these factors, societal dislocation was largely deferred in the north until reconstruction.

In October 1922 the editor of the *Bloemfontein Friend* reflected on the enormous potential of the Frankfort region, which prior to the Anglo-Boer War had been viewed "as a worthless country, useless alike for men and beast".⁴⁹ Despite this apparent success, a closer examination of the Frankfort district reveals the high price paid for agricultural advance, benefiting as it did mainly "progressive" settlers and colonial carpetbaggers who had bought farms since the Second Anglo-Boer War.

During April and May of 1904 the Frankfort Magistrate undertook a tour of twenty-

47. FAD GS 1727, file R1964/97. Also FAD, 159/16/1, Van Riebeeckfees Collection, Frankfort, "Die Ontwikkeling van Handel en Nywerheid"; and FAD, Map 5/2/15B. Map compiled by A. H. F. Duncan of the Field Intelligence Department, September 1901.

48. T. KEEGAN, *Rural Transformations...*, p. 103. Prior to the war the northern districts of the Free State were commonly regarded as economic backwaters. Those who lived in the Wilge River subdivision, for instance, were referred to as *Riemlanders*, a derisive term which implied that these people were *takhare* or poor backwoods people. See 159/16/1, Frankfort.

49. *The Friend*, 11 October 1922.

Historia, 44(1), May 1999, pp. 183 - 209.

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seven days throughout the district. During this period he visited 171 farms on which lived 111 landowners, 102 *bywoners* and seventeen newly arrived settlers/colonials. Thus 48% of the farmers in the survey were landowners, 44% were tenants and occupiers, and 8% were Milner-supported settlers/colonials. There were 935 people living on the farms. The Magistrate discussed this population in terms of living conditions, size of families, bonding of properties, expected crops, and whether occupiers were *bittereinders* - who fought to the end of the war - or *hensoppers* and *joiners* who either remained neutral or fought for the Imperial forces.

In G. B. Beak's account of post-war conditions, he noted that Frankfort had suffered the full brunt of the war:

The town of Frankfort was completely smashed up, and there were only eight houses in the whole district with walls still standing...In the few cases where the homesteads had not been levelled...roofless and shapeless gaps showed where the windows and doors had once been, for the woodwork had been used for fuel.⁵⁰

The Magistrate supported Beak's conclusion. Discussing the schoolhouse at Zandfontein he wrote,

the house in which this school is situated is one of the few that escaped being burnt during the war, there were only about 7 others.⁵¹

Two years after the Treaty of Vereeniging the Magistrate observed that "most of the houses were still unrepaired". By mid-1904, only five houses or some 3% of the property in the district had been restored, and these were properties owned either by "protected burghers" or newly-arrived settlers/colonials, the only classes with capital. In the case of other inhabitants

the people are living in the back portion of the house and the front portion, that is the part between the gables, is practically not used.⁵²

The widespread inability to restore property was related to market forces. The glut of arable produce adversely affected farmers in this region. Even farmers in districts closer to Johannesburg were finding

the low price ruling for maize and kaffir corn makes it hardly worthwhile for farmers to send their grain to the Johannesburg market.⁵³

Frankfort was not connected to the Witwatersrand by rail and transportation costs alone, placed Frankfort farmers at a disadvantage. Another reason farmers could not afford to repair their houses was that they were pouring all available capital into

50. BEAK, *Aftermath*, p. 77.

51. FAD, ORC CO 487, file A5116/04, Report by Resident Magistrate, Frankfort, 6 June 1904, p. 54.

52. FAD, ORC CO 487, file A5116/04, Report by Resident Magistrate, Frankfort, 6 June 1904, p. 3.

53. TAD, TKP 142, Reports 1904, Resident Magistrate, Lichtenburg.

buying animals. The Magistrate wrote:

It will be seen from the detailed report that a considerable amount of Cattle, Horses and Mules are now in the District. It must be borne in mind that those belonging to bywoners...are still unpaid for, and that even in the case of landowners, the farms had to be Bonded to enable them to buy stock.⁵⁴

It was not merely hopes of profit that pushed farmers into pastoralism at this time. Stock conveyed many other advantages in this pre-automobile age. Cattle were

everything to the farmer and supply him with the means of transport, tillage, manure for land, food for his family and profit in the increase; his great stand-by when crops fail.⁵⁵

Without animals, burghers were forced to transport their produce by hand. This was the case on the farm Bordeaux where the farmer told the Magistrate that earlier that day he had been compelled to carry twenty bags of mealies on his shoulders from his lands to the farmhouse.

Another reason for the failure to repair houses was that some landowners were so short of capital that they were bonding their properties simply to buy food. On the farm Goedehoop lived a Mr. Pretorius, his wife and five children, a father-in-law who was seventy-two years old and an adopted child. Pretorius told the Magistrate that he was in the process of bonding his farm because then "the family will get some meat". One must understand this statement in terms of farmers being without the bare necessities including tea, coffee, sugar, tobacco, medicine, etc.

The number of bonds on property taken out since the war suggests that landownership was becoming increasingly precarious in this district. Almost one-third of farms had been bonded in the two years since Vereeniging, and this situation arose despite the fact that burghers would bond their property only as a last resort. As the Magistrate wrote,

the landowner, big and small, is so loathe to bond his farm that he has at present no cash to re-build. Where the farm has been bonded his first care is to re-stock it.⁵⁶

In addition to the destruction and extensive bonding of property, most burghers had lost their possessions during the war. The Magistrate expressed incredulity at finding a grand piano in the home of a newly-arrived settler, commenting, "anyone

54. FAD, ORC CO 487, file A5116/04, Report by Resident Magistrate, Frankfort, 6 June 1904, p. 6.

55. TAD, TKP 142, Reports 1904, Resident Magistrate, Lichtenburg.

56. FAD, ORC CO 487, file A5116/04, Report by Resident Magistrate, Frankfort, 6 June 1904, p. 3.

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transversing the Frankfort district at this time will understand that the finding of an article of this nature...caused me no little surprise".⁵⁷

The *bywoners*, obviously with fewer possessions when war broke out, were now managing without the most basic utensils. In a 'poor white' household the Magistrate was equally surprised to find the family eating at a table complete with tablecloth, plates, knives and forks.

An estimate of crops provided by the Magistrate is an important indication of conditions in the Frankfort district. In order to clarify these figures it is necessary to determine from the report what was considered to be a subsistence level maize crop, i.e. the number of bags of maize that would be sufficient to support a household until the next harvest, and also the amount of maize that was considered to be a commercially viable crop. If the expected harvest for each of the 171 farms is examined, the position was as follows:

Expected harvest during 1904:

Under 30 bags of maize: 30% of the population expecting a crop which was below the subsistence level on which they could feed themselves.

30-49 bags: 50% of farmers. Subsistence level to very slight profit.

50-2,000 bags: commercial level productivity. 20% of farmers. Including 4% "protected burghers" (subsidised *hensoppers* and *joiners*), 8% settlers, 8% burghers.⁵⁸

One can define the subsistence level of this population by investigating the living conditions of families at the various levels of agricultural productivity. Thus, Pretorius on the farm Goedehoop was expecting to reap only one-and-a-half bags of maize during the 1904 growing season. A family of nine could obviously not hope to survive until the next harvest on this amount of maize. Without capital, this farmer was forced to bond his property to survive.

Next door to the Pretorius homestead was the farm Bultfontein. In one year this farmer expected to reap fifteen bags of maize, which had to be shared amongst six people. The Magistrate described the living conditions of these people in some detail:

David Krause (one of the five heirs). This man is bootless and looks very dirty, as do all the inmates in this establishment.... All the inmates here, especially this man, show strong signs of degeneration. Du Plessis of Hartebeestfontein states these people are gradually becoming wild, they

FAD, ORC CO 487, file A5116/04, Report by Resident Magistrate, Frankfort, 6 June 1904, p. 8.

58. FAD, ORC CO 487, file A5116/04, Report by Resident Magistrate, Frankfort, 6 June 1904, pp. 7-82.

flee on the approach of anybody coming to the homestead as a rule.⁵⁹

Apart from Nationalist rhetoric, the social/psychological consequences of the war have rarely been commented upon. This lacunae is one result of the success of the 'degeneracy paradigm' adopted by the Imperial government to defend its violation of the behavioural norms of metropolitan society in South Africa. The 'degeneracy paradigm' was the stereotyped categorization of all Boers as being too lazy to work, too complacent in their poverty to care, and so intellectually inferior as to make them insensitive to the possibilities offered by Imperial and capitalist transformation. The same rationalization emerges after the war as important dimensions of both the Marxist and liberal paradigms.

In a very real sense the Second Anglo-Boer War was the nadir of Boer existence. From this point on terror and violence lost any efficacy as a coercive tactic - the struggle between Imperialism and the politically relevant elements of the Boer population would no longer be influenced by the destructive capability of the Imperialists. The parameters of Imperial policy were now limited to either coercion or integration. The 'magnanimous gesture' of Campbell-Bannerman and the liberals should be viewed in this light - the recognition that, following the war, all forms of external pressure had become worthless. The extreme devastation of the war was to encourage many Afrikaners to seek revenge and to engage in various forms of resistance. Milner's 'anglicization policy' whereby he attempted to impose the English language on the schools was an important facet in goading further reaction:

When struggles take on ideological significance the level of endurance of all the participants is raised. Action is inspired that is frequently suicidal in cost. When people rebel in the name of religious freedom, human liberty or national independence, the extent of their opponent's destructive capacity is no longer the most relevant consideration because the insurgents no longer perceive death as the worst of all possible outcomes.⁶⁰

The legacies of war in the closing of minds and tyrannies of memory

War does not become less important to me as time passes, on the contrary...unlived lives, unborn children. How thoroughly we have forgotten the damage that war did...but we are still living with it...I wonder how many of the children brought up in families crippled by war had the same poison running in their veins from before they could even speak.⁶¹

59. FAD, ORC CO 487, file A5116/04, Report by Resident Magistrate, Frankfort, 6 June 1904, p. 62.

60. R.N. LEBOW, *White Britain and Black Ireland. The Influence of Stereotypes on Colonial Policy*, p. 92

61. D. LESSING, *Under My Skin, Volume One of My Autobiography*, pp. 8-10 *Historia*, 44(1), May 1999, pp. 183 - 209.

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The Bultfontein homestead in the Frankfort district was one of thirty-eight farms, or 22% of properties that was recommended for immediate government relief because the inhabitants were no longer able to feed themselves and conditions were intolerable. Another such farm was Tweefontein, occupied by a seventy-four year old *bywoner* who was supporting two daughters, one of whom was mentally ill. He was expecting thirty bags of maize.

In every case recommended for relief the occupants were expecting a harvest of 30 bags of maize or less, and it seems reasonable to conclude that this amount of maize was the absolute minimum for survival. More than one-third of all Frankfort homesteads were expecting crops below this subsistence level. Discussing the plight of these people the Magistrate wrote:

I found nobody actually starving, some of the cases I visited on the Administrator's list I class as bad cases. The worst kind of these cases to my mind are those where the persons concerned are very old, and have only mealies and a few vegetables to live on. These persons I consider should be assisted with meat to start with. Other bad cases are those where the crops gained will not be sufficient until the next harvest, and to those cases may be added the fact that in many of them there are no draught cattle, not even on P/N [promissory note] from the Repatriation Board.⁶²

During his tour the Magistrate found only one *bywoner* family in the whole district still receiving rations from the government. His appeal for relief came at a time when the government had begun channelling funds away from restoration and into transformation and the landed elements in arable districts. There was thus no possibility of further support.

The 'poor white'/*bywoner*/tenant class suffered most during reconstruction. None of the 102 families of this class were living in restored houses; many of them lived in extreme poverty in sod huts, or in one case in a wood and iron shelter constructed of material salvaged from a British army blockhouse. These families all existed on the common diet of pumpkins and green mealies. Amongst them it was the widows, of whom there were twenty-three in the district, who suffered especially. A number of these widows were supporting six or more children, although contrary to canon, larger families were the exception rather than the rule amongst Boers in this district.

The deteriorating conditions facing those below the subsistence level contrasted starkly with the living conditions of *hensoppers/joiners*, settlers, and colonial carpetbaggers who were subsidised by the government. There were eleven "protected burghers" in this district, and except for two of these families, this class had done well out of the war. Government assistance was requested in the case of one "protected burgher" who had been badly wounded during the war and was left

62. FAD, ORC CO 487, file A5116/04, Report by Resident Magistrate, Frankfort, 6 June 1904, p. 1.

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blind and partially paralysed. He was given a gratuity of £45 for his wartime services, but had spent this amount since the war. This man and his family were now living in a sod hut surviving on the standard diet of mealies and pumpkins.

A total of 8% of farmers were post-war settlers and colonials who formed the other diminutive and privileged group in the district. Amongst the seventeen settlers were four Australians. There were also three settlers from Britain, whilst the rest were wealthy colonials from Natal. Despite the relative lack of farming experience amongst the new arrivals, all were doing well at the time of the Magistrate's visit. One of the reasons for this success was the quality of farmland given to them by the government.

H. Witherington, a newly-arrived settler from Britain on the farm Dalkeith, told the Magistrate that his neighbours regarded his farm as the best in the entire district. Likewise, two British settlers on the farm Middenin were expecting 900 bags of mealies, which was exceptional seeing that their neighbours were satisfied with a harvest of fewer than 250 bags. What the settler farms lost in terms of size (for none was bigger than 1,000 morgen) they made up for in fertility. A further contrast with the great majority of burghers was provided by their living conditions. The settlers were all living in "comfortable" restored houses. It was one of these settlers who owned the grand piano that so caught the eye of the Magistrate.

Settler farms all grew commercially viable crops, most producing over 200 bags of maize, whilst a number of settlers had diversified into pastoralism, revealing the extent of their capitalisation. An example of one such property was the farm Mandyville on which lived two Van der Westhuizen brothers from Natal. These men were now making a living speculating with cattle which, as a result of the high stock prices, was the preserve of the wealthy. This farm was "one of the nicest in the district" and on it had been built two houses, including one which "must have cost £1,000", and a large dam. These men were also using irrigation to grow a commercially viable crop.

Conclusion

If the people could have but the half or the quarter of their claims paid they might at least live, and if...the Government wants to make the people satisfied, that is the only way. A starving population cannot feel pleased.⁶³

We feel that the misery in our country has reached a climax. Many farmers are suffering the extremes of poverty, and even formerly wealthy persons are everywhere to be met who stand on the brink of bankruptcy.

63. R. VAN REENEN, *Emily Hobhouse*, Letter to Lady Hobhouse, 10 June 1903, p. 193. *Historia*, 44(1), May 1999, pp. 183 - 209.

..The number of grievances is legion. Destitution increases day by day.⁶⁴

The traveller is haunted by the face of popular starvation. It is not the exception, it is the condition of the people. In this fairest and richest of countries, men are suffering and starving by the millions...The epicurean, and traveller for pleasure, had better travel anywhere than here, where there are miseries that one does not dare think of, where one is always feeling how helpless pity is, and how helpless relief, and is perpetually ashamed of being happy.⁶⁵

In a work written over 250 years ago, the 'Enlightenment experiment' was roundly condemned by E. Young who asked,

are passions then, the pagans of the soul? Reason alone baptized.⁶⁶

Similarly and more recently J. M. Coetzee argued that dogma in South Africa has precluded empathy or any intuitive understanding of the 'mind of apartheid' or 'lair of the heart' that were crucial in the growth of Nationalist ideology and the social engineering of apartheid.⁶⁷

During the past 30 years the revisionists imposed a monocausal interpretation on the Anglo-Boer War and Milner's reconstruction. This paper has shown that researchers must revisit this central moment and look beyond the imposition of capitalist markets or urbanization or the creation of collaborationist enclaves.

The roots of apartheid are more clearly seen in the grievous damage inflicted by Imperialism upon the psyche of the burgher population. The hatred engendered by the utter devastation of Anglo-Boer War explains why until the 1930s and after, many Afrikaners viewed English-speakers as their sworn enemies; the Anglo-Boer War also explains why South Africa was remarkably slow to address the preminent relationship of Black and White in this country.⁶⁸

Opsomming

'Almost bled to death': Die effek van die Anglo-Boereoorlog op samelewingstransformasie in die Oranjerivierkolonie

Vir die afgelope 30 jaar was die Suid-Afrikaanse geskiedskrywing vasgevang binne 'n Marxistiese paradigma. Een van die slagoffers van

64. The Vlotman Manifesto, *The Friend*, 28 September 1904.

65. R.N. LEBOW, *White Britain and Black Ireland. The Influence of Stereotypes on Colonial Policy*, p. 35.

66. E. YOUNG, *Night Thoughts* (1744), Night vi, p. 298

67. J.M. COETZEE, "The mind of apartheid: Geoffrey Cronjé (1907-)", *Social Dynamics*, 17, 1 (1991).

68. S. DUBOW, "Afrikaner nationalism, apartheid and the conceptualization of race", *Journal of African History*, 1992.

'Almost bled to death'

hierdie tydperk was studies oor die Anglo-Boereoorlog. Die Marxiste het geredeneer dat kapitalisme en Milner se rekonstruksie die verloop van Suid-Afrikaanse geskiedenis bepaal het. Die verskeie Suid-Afrikaanse oorloë was slegs buite-faktore. In hierdie studie word aan die hand gedoen dat die Anglo-Boereoorlog weer in oënskou geneem moet word – want in hierdie oorlog lê die hoofbron van die Suid-Afrikaanse geskiedenis van die twintigste eeu.