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A war of words : Dutch pro-Boer propaganda and the South African war (1899-1902)

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Part II: A War of Words (1899-1902)

Chapter 3: A ‘factory of lies’? The lines of communication of the Boers and their supporters

In the early evening of 4 April 1900, a train carrying the Prince of Wales arrived in Brussels. At the station, a young man jumped on the footboard of the prince’s car and using a revolver fired two shots into it before he was arrested. Nobody was hurt. The next day, *The Times* reported that the assailant had declared that ‘he wanted to kill the Prince of Wales because his Royal Highness had caused thousands of men to be slaughtered in South Africa’. The editors therefore argued that the attack was incited by the pro-Boer propaganda campaign on the continent, which was at its height at the time. Other opinion-makers too pointed out that the office of the minister plenipotentiary of Transvaal, Willem Leyds, was located in Brussels and suggested that he was directly involved in the assassination attempt. One of the most outspoken accusations came from the Secretary for India, Lord George Hamilton, who addressed his constituents in Acton when the news became known. He said that ‘if they had to seek for a reason for that foul attempt on the life of the heir-apparent they would recollect that Brussels had been the headquarters of that factory of lies of which Dr Leyds was the manager’.¹

Historians today assert that propaganda was an important aspect of the South African War, which was undoubtedly a ‘media war’.² Significantly, contemporaries were well aware of this, as is shown by the reactions to the incident cited above. Sympathisers of both sides continuously accused each other of manipulations that gave a distorted view of the events taking place in South Africa in order to corrupt public opinion. In this respect, supporters of the Boers were no less outspoken than Lord Hamilton. In a reaction to his accusations, Leyds sent a telegram in which he described this speech as ‘new proof that during the present war people in England do not shrink from any means, not even the most perfidious slander, nor the most flagrant lie’.³ On another occasion, the Dutch journalist Charles Boissevain took offence when the Duke of Devonshire stated that Leyds had bribed the European press. Although he did not deny that he had much sympathy for the Boers, Boissevain argued that this was the result of genuine indignation at an unjust war. Instead, he accused the influential London dailies, and *The Times* in particular, of working together with the British government to turn the public against the Boers in order to legitimise the conflict. ‘[T]his war is their war,’

¹ *The Times*, 5 April 1900.

² Badsey, ‘The Boer War as Media War’, 70-83; Potter, *News and the British World*, 38.

³ ‘une preuve nouvelle que dans la guerre actuelle on ne recule pas en Angleterre devant aucun moyen, pas même la calomnie la plus perfide, ni le mensonge le plus flagrant’. Leyds ed., *Tweede verzameling* I, 523.

he declared, ‘this war is a newspaper war’.⁴

The remarks of Leyds and Boissevain show that pro-Boers on the continent were deeply concerned about the official British coverage of the conflict in South Africa. As a result, they avidly tried to provide an alternative. This can be considered to be their most important and successful activity.⁵ In fact, Leyds and other agitators managed to gather a large amount of material that was omitted by the British press, much of which was published in a wide range of genres. In this way, pro-Boer coverage of the war was disseminated throughout Europe and was received with great interest and enthusiasm by the public. Although pro-Boer authors legitimated their work by saying that they wanted to reveal ‘the truth’ about the war, it should be seen a conscious attempt to spread a particular set of views on the war and its causes and, as such, it was nothing less than an orchestrated propaganda campaign. There remains, however, the question as to how effective this actually was. Leyds anticipated that the British government would yield to public pressure from inside and outside Great Britain and halt the war, but that did not happen.⁶ It is therefore doubtful that his activities were of a truly industrial scale, as the jibe by Lord Hamilton about the ‘factory of lies’ suggests. The assessment of the pro-Boer propaganda campaign must take into account the organisation of the bridgehead between South Africa and the Netherlands, which, as has been argued in chapter one, was an informal network rather than a solid system of information provision.

This chapter aims to investigate the lines of communication between the Boer republics and Europe during the South African War. The main question will be as to how information supporting the Boer cause was transferred and which groups of people were involved in this. One remarkable feature of this network was the prominence of so-called *Hollanders*. Dutch emigrants had held influential positions in the state institutions of the Boer republics, and the Transvaal in particular, before the war. This was also the case with the diplomatic service, which under Leyds – the most famous of Kruger’s *Hollanders* – assumed a central role in the co-ordination of the propaganda campaign. Aside from the diplomatic network, non-officials actively took part in the efforts to generate as much pro-Boer material as possible. During the war, thousands of Dutch-speaking people left South Africa, either as deportees or as refugees. A significant number of them ended up in the Netherlands, where many became involved in pro-Boer activities. Private letters from the war zone, containing information about the situation there, also arrived throughout the conflict. In this way, pro-Boers in Europe had a significant amount of information at their disposal, which fed into the propaganda campaign.

There were, however, serious hindrances. First and foremost, the neutral position of the Netherlands limited the freedom of officials to take sides in the conflict. Leyds respected this principle and he was in close contact with prominent politicians in the Netherlands, several of whom he knew personally. He and several prominent Dutch pro-Boers were involved in

⁴ Boissevain, *The Struggle of the Dutch Republics: Open Letter to the Duke of Devonshire*, 12.

⁵ Kröll, *Die internationale Buren-Agitation*, 323; Van Niekerk, *Kruger se regterhand*, 215.

⁶ Van Niekerk, *Kruger se regterhand*, 217-218.

clandestine ventures, such as the recruitment of military volunteers for the republics, but these activities were kept out of the public eye so that the government would not be compromised. Aside from the political limitations on the pro-Boers, there were also financial limitations. The governments of the republics, particularly the one in the Transvaal, did make money available for their representatives in Europe to sustain the propaganda campaign. But, although some British opinion-makers accused the Boers of smuggling out huge amounts of gold, the funds of the SAR legation were not infinite. Such limits become clear when compared to the huge sums that had been invested in the British lines of communication, which were under patronage of both the government and big business. The most remarkable difference in this sense was the British monopoly on the telegraph lines running between South Africa and Europe, which meant that their news reached Europe first. Even more humiliating to the Dutch was the fact that the British prohibited the transmission of coded messages from the Dutch East Indies, which also had to pass through the imperial network.⁷

Notwithstanding the problems arising from the relatively informal organisation of the European pro-Boer propaganda campaign and the Dutch lines of communication, the most severe obstacles were as a result of developments that took place in South Africa.⁸ During the first phase of the conflict, things looked rather good for the Boers when they took initiative with the invasion of Natal and the Northern Cape in October 1899. Although they did not push very far into British territory, their position initially seemed to be solid as the imperial armies under the command of Redvers Buller were reversed on several occasions between December 1899 and February 1900. On the Boer side, it was hoped that these victories would have the same effect as the battle of Majuba Hill in 1881, which had forced the government in London to back down. The British did not retreat, however, and instead reinforced their army under the command of Buller’s successors Frederick Roberts and Horatio Kitchener. The superior numbers of soldiers and arms forced a breakthrough and the so-called British ‘steamroller’ advanced rapidly. On 13 of March 1900, Bloemfontein was occupied by Roberts’s columns, with Pretoria following on 5 June. By September, the complete territory of the republics was occupied and the British commander issued proclamations that announced that the OFS and the SAR – henceforward be known as the Orange River Colony and the Transvaal respectively – had been annexed by the British Empire.

Despite these formal declarations, hostilities continued. The Boer forces were scattered and forced to flee into the fields in which they roamed around in small bands for the remainder of the war. Their leaders tried to make the best of this situation, devising a new strategy of hit and run, which led to a guerrilla-type war that would last for almost two more years. The British counterstrategy, harshly implemented by Kitchener, who took over command from Roberts, was to wear out the commandos left in the field. Huge ‘drives’ were

⁷ Bossenbroek, *Holland op zijn breedst*, 201-202; Van Dijk, *The Netherlands Indies and the Great War*, 12-14.

⁸ For good histories of the war cf. Pakenham, *The Boer War*; Nasson, *The South African War*. Chapters 5 and 6 will discuss contemporary coverage of events in more detail.

organised during which the British force, consisting tens of thousands of soldiers, pursued approximately 15,000 so-called *Bittereinders*, who refused to surrender. To restrict the movement of the commandos, a network of fences and blockhouses was set up in the countryside. Boer combatants who were captured were deported to prison camps overseas: on St. Helena, Bermuda, Ceylon and the Indian subcontinent. In addition to these drastic measures, the civilian population suffered increasingly. To cut off supplies to the Boer forces, farms were burned down, cattle slaughtered and civilians interned under dire conditions in concentration camps throughout South Africa.

These developments had serious consequences for the lines of communication between the Netherlands and South Africa, because the British gained more control over them and imposed strict censorship.⁹ One of their priorities was to cut off the Boers’ network, something which was already apparent at the start of the war, when the telegraph lines, all of which passed British stations in either Cape Town or Aden, were censored. None of the official cables from the Boer republics to the outside world were transmitted, except the lists of casualties, and even those were only allowed through after much pressure from Leyds.¹⁰ Other means of communication came under increasing pressure too. The independent mail service of the SAR, which was provided by the NZASM and a German shipping company via Delagoa Bay, was disrupted when the British began their advance in 1900. After Pretoria was captured, the new authorities censored the mail services, commandeered the railway line to Mozambique and put the press under close surveillance. Moreover, the British army command ordered the deportation of all individuals who were not born in South Africa and who might have posed a threat to the occupation. This led to the expulsion of many *Hollanders* from the Transvaal, particularly those affiliated to the NZASM.¹¹

Naturally, this was a great blow to the Boers’ lines of communication. An unintended result of these measures was, however, that many of the people who were repatriated became involved in the pro-Boer propaganda campaign in Europe. Prominent members of the Pretoria elites headed organisations that mobilised help for their compatriots. In addition, their stories and those of other refugees from South Africa were expounded at length in the press and came to typify British cruelty. Moreover, letters with useful information for the pro-Boer propagandists continued to reach the Netherlands via regular mail throughout the war. Even the Boer commandos in the field, although they were increasingly isolated, at times succeeded in exchanging letters and reports with their representatives in Europe. In this way, pro-Boers in the Netherlands gathered a significant amount of information that provided an alternative to the representation of the war that was put forward by official British sources and pro-war lobby groups. Analogous with the situation in South Africa, it can be said that, like the

⁹ This also affected British journalists. Beaumont, ‘The British Press and Censorship’.

¹⁰ Leyds ed., *Tweede Verzameling* I, viii; Van Niekerk, *Kruger se regterhand*, 214.

¹¹ *NZASM in memoriam*, 146-147; M. Kuitenbrouwer, *Nederland en de opkomst*, 184-185; Jong, *Die Levensomstandighede en Kulturele Bydrage*, 218-222.

commandos in the field, pro-Boers in Europe had fewer means at their disposal than their adversaries, but nonetheless quite successfully developed a guerrilla-style of propaganda. In this way, they were able to provide alternatives to the British coverage of the war and create dramatic images that had a strong appeal to contemporaries.

Boer diplomats

Leyds's legation in Brussels developed into the most important centre for pro-Boer agitation in continental Europe. In addition to his diplomatic duties, the minister plenipotentiary actively tried to influence the press and public opinion before the war in order to put pressure on the governments of the great powers to intervene on behalf of the republics and prevent war from breaking out. However, during the growing crisis of 1899, he made it clear to the SAR government that, despite the widespread sympathy for the Boers, no official steps to prevent war could be expected and that none of the European nations were prepared to get involved in any conflict.¹² Nevertheless, throughout the war and thereafter, Leyds kept emphasising the importance of informing the public on the war from a Boer perspective, and of refuting the British depiction of events taking place in South Africa. In other words, propaganda remained the main priority of the SAR legation.¹³ When the war started, its office became inundated with a huge amount of paperwork, because initiatives were taken all over in Europe to relieve the needs of the Boer population. In this way, the propagandistic tidal wave was both a blessing and a curse to Leyds. On the one hand, his legation performed important tasks, gathering and distributing material on the plight of the Boers, something which was in great demand. On the other hand, there were great logistical problems, which show that the campaign did not always run as smoothly as Leyds intended.

The consuls of the SAR proved to be a valuable network for obtaining information from different countries, influencing opinion-makers and co-ordinating activities. Arguably the most important post was the one in Lourenço Marques, occupied by Gerard (also known as George) Pott, who simultaneously was consul-general for the Netherlands, the SAR and the OFS. Being relatively close to the war zone, he was a vital link in the lines of communication between the Boer republics and Europe, handling everything from letters to contraband and helping both refugees on their way out and adventurers on their way into South Africa. These activities made the consul-general's position there increasingly difficult, as the Portuguese authorities were afraid to get into trouble with the British and Pott was summoned to leave Mozambique at the end of 1900.¹⁴ This was a great blow for the Boer representatives in Europe and their communication with the people in South Africa was severely hampered. In

¹² Leyds ed., *Eenige correspondentie*, 79 and 82-83; Kröll, *Die internationale Buren-Agitation*, 161. Leyds was accused in various British publications of advising the ZAR government differently, provoking the Boer ultimatum of October 1899. In later life, Leyds tried to dispel this view. Cf. chapter 7.

¹³ Van Nierkerk, *Kruger se regterhand*, 297.

¹⁴ Leyds ed., *Derde Verzameling* I, xiii; idem, *De Vierde verzameling* I, xlii-xliii. Pott's papers are kept in: NASA, Leyds collection, LEY 455-481.

1901, Leyds did send one of his agents, Bas Veth, to Delagoa Bay in order to investigate the possibilities of establishing a secret route into South Africa. Veth was not able to set up anything that could replace Potts activities, however.¹⁵

In Europe, one of the most important SAR representatives was Johannes Pierson, consul-general in Paris between 1896 and 1902. He had roots in the Netherlands and was a nephew of the Dutch First Minister, N.G. Pierson, who had been one of Leyds’s professors at university.¹⁶ In addition to his consular activities, Pierson was an active propagandist. He had close contact with French journalists and, together with Leyds’s agent Edgar Roëls, released a huge number of press releases.¹⁷ Moreover, Pierson took upon himself the organisation of the SAR pavilion at the 1900 World Exhibition in Paris, which was one of the biggest showcases for pro-Boer agitation. Thousands of people from all across Europe visited the Transvaal exhibition to pay homage to the embattled republics and the heroic Boers who fought for their freedom.¹⁸

Another important SAR consulate was the one in London, ran by Montagu White, a South African of British descent.¹⁹ Like the other SAR diplomats, his activities increased significantly in the run-up to the war. In particular, White kept close contact with several journalists in Britain who were opposed to the war. His work was considered to be too dangerous after the war started, when mobs assaulted people they believed to be on the side of the Boers.²⁰ In December 1899, it was therefore decided that White should go to the USA.²¹ After the removal of the formal SAR consulate from London, Leyds remained in contact with anti-war activists, such as William Stead and several Irish nationalists.²² This correspondence was kept secret because of fears that there would be negative repercussions if the public were to find out about it. Stead even refused to accept reimbursement for stamps in order to avoid the impression that his work was financed using secret funds from the Transvaal.²³

In other countries, the situation was quite the opposite. In the Netherlands, SAR representatives did not have to change public opinion, because the population was already on the side of the Boers. Leyds’s agents there did do important work though. R.A.I. Snethlage was consul-general in Amsterdam and acted as a co-ordinator for providing shelter and

¹⁵ Letters from Bas Veth from Lourenço Marques, June-September 1901. NASA Leyds collection, LEY 314.

¹⁶ The archive of the Paris consulate of the Transvaal was not included in the Leyds collection, but can be found in the National Archives in Pretoria. NASA, Pierson collection, KGP.

¹⁷ Kröll, *Die internationale Buren-Agitation*, 198. Cf. Van Niekerk, *Kruger se regterhand*, 217.

¹⁸ For the Paris exhibition and its aftermath, cf. chapter 7.

¹⁹ The papers of Montagu White – both from his time in London and the USA – are kept in: NASA Leyds collection, LEY 483-515. After Montagu White left London, the documents were secretly transferred to Amsterdam by the vice-consul, the Dutchman A.G. Baron Quarles de Quarles. Leyds ed., *Derde Verzameling I*, 148-149.

²⁰ Meetings of British pro-Boers were disrupted by jingo rioters who attacked the participants. Koss ed., *The Pro-Boers*, xxiv and xxx; Davey, *The British Pro-Boers*, 85 and 88.

²¹ White was not particularly successful there either. Changuion, *Uncle Sam, John Bull en Oom Paul*, 204-205.

²² These letters can be found in: NASA, Leyds collection, LEY 191 and 326; NL-HaNA, Leyds, 2.21.105, inv.nr. 57. Cf. Davey, *The British Pro-Boers*, 86-87, 119 and 140-141.

²³ Leyds ed., *Tweede verzameling I*, 174.

charity to the repatriates and refugees who arrived from South Africa. As will be shown later, the fate of these men and women caused a lot of public anger and, as such, fed the propaganda campaign.²⁴ In Germany, there were several SAR consuls, but their relationship with the legation in Brussels seems to have been rather strained.²⁵ Leyds did, however, correspond extensively with local pro-Boer agitators about the propaganda campaign there.²⁶ In Russia, there was no consular representation of the Transvaal, but in fact the Dutch Calvinist minister H.A. Gillot acted as the Boer representative in St. Petersburg.²⁷

In addition to the substantial correspondence with various consuls and other semi-official representatives, the legation in Brussels was flooded with letters from individuals offering all sorts of aid, volunteering to fight for the Boers or giving unsolicited advice in the form of bold battle plans and extravagant inventions of new weaponry.²⁸ Although many of these letters did not contain much that was of interest, Leyds gave his staff strict orders to reply to every single one of them, because he did not want to run the risk of losing the goodwill of the public.²⁹ As a result of this order, the legation office was in a constant state of chaos during the first months of the South African War. To help out, more than a dozen administrative assistants were employed, often for a few weeks only. This could not have been conducive to a consistent policy and in addition there was a constant fear of spies.³⁰

Permanent members of staff did not prove themselves very competent either. Already before the war started, Leyds made it clear that he was not satisfied with the work of his *chargé d'affaires*, C. van Boeschoten. He tried to persuade his old friend F.V. Engelenburg to come to Europe to take over the job, but the editor and owner of *De Volksstem* did not want to leave his newspaper at that time.³¹ Also during the war, the minister plenipotentiary was troubled by doubts about the abilities of his staff. On a personal level, he liked the secretary of the legation (Lex Goldman) very much, but he was not very confident in his abilities to run the office properly. In one letter to his wife, Leyds complained about the sloppy handling of paperwork by his clerks. Although he had ideas about how these matters could be improved, Leyds himself was unable to implement them, because he was constantly traveling around Europe throughout the war and spent little time at the office. ‘With my constant moving around I look like the wandering Jew. The longer it goes on, the worse it gets.’³²

²⁴ The archive of Snethlage is kept in: NASA Leyds collection, LEY 516-547.

²⁵ There were ZAR consulates in Berlin, Frankfurt and Hamburg. Leyds ed., *Tweede verzameling* II, 209. There were many problems with Consul-General M. Winterfeldt in Berlin, who even gave his documents to the British. Idem, *Derde verzameling* I, xx.

²⁶ For example cf. Kröll, *Die internationale Buren-Agitation*, 111.

²⁷ Van Niekerk, *Kruger se regterhand*, 212, 217 and 227.

²⁸ Ibidem, 229-231.

²⁹ Leyds ed., *Tweede Verzameling* I, vii-viii; Van Winter, *Dr. Leyds in Zuid-Afrika*, 16.

³⁰ The secret archive of the legation contains 14 sworn oaths of ‘*tijdelijke assistenten*’ (temporary assistants) between October 1899 and April 1900. NASA, Leyds collection, LEY 317.

³¹ F.V. Engelenburg to M. Koopmans de Wet, 19 March 1899. NASA, Engelenburg collection A 140, file 42.

³² ‘Met mijn voortdurend verplaatsen lijk ik wel de wandelende jood. Het wordt hoe langer hoe erger.’ Leyds ed., *Vierde verzameling* I, 310.

Aside from these administrative troubles, Leyds complained about the finances of the legation. This seems to have mainly been in response to accusations in the British press about the ‘Kruger millions’, the huge quantities of gold alleged to have been secretly extracted from the Rand and smuggled to Europe in order to finance the Transvaal agitation against Britain. Leyds denied these stories vigorously throughout his life and there is no historical evidence that backs up the stories about the secret gold deposits.³³ Nevertheless, the legation had substantial funds at its disposal, although exact figures are unknown. In 1898, the SAR government had actually forwarded Leyds a large sum, which was kept by the Labouchère and Oyens bank in Amsterdam. After the occupation of Pretoria, the British government put pressure on the bank to freeze these funds, which led to conflict with Leyds. After mediation by several influential Dutch lawyers, a settlement was reached and most of the money was put in German and French accounts.³⁴ In June 1900, Leyds was also authorised by the SAR government to sell off assets of the republic in Europe in order to finance his activities as he saw fit.³⁵ For a large part, these were stocks in the NZASM, which became practically worthless after the British seized the company’s railway lines in August 1900. Nonetheless, the French arms factory Creusot, obviously sympathetic to the Boer cause, accepted payments in stocks of the confiscated railway company.³⁶ In addition to the official funds provided by the SAR government, individuals from all across Europe donated money to the SAR legation, which came to a sum of approximately fl. 641,000.³⁷

The increased funds of the SAR legation were quite necessary, because expenditures rose considerably during the war, gobbling up a large portion of the extra money. Substantial sums were spent on ammunition and other supplies for the Boer forces in the field. It was attempted to smuggle these items into South Africa via Delagoa Bay, but despite great investments in modes of transport, including the purchase of a steamboat to carry contraband, it is unlikely that most of these goods ever reached their destination.³⁸ In addition, hundreds of thousands of guilders were sent to South Africa to provide humanitarian aid for the Boer republics’ inhabitants.³⁹ There were also many other activities in Europe that required extra spending. A number of SAR officials who had been extradited by the British received financial assistance, as did the wives of some of the Boer leaders who had left South Africa.⁴⁰ Last, but certainly

³³ Ibidem, xxix; Van Hoek, ‘The Leyds Memoirs’, 13. In June 1900, a shipment of gold arrived from the ZAR with the German vessel *Bundesrath*, earmarked for the *Nederlandsche Bank en Crediet Vereeniging voor Zuid-Afrika*. Another notorious incident took place in November 1900 when 30 boxes of gold were confiscated at the port of Hamburg by the German authorities on request of the British government. Leyds admitted that this money came from the Boers, but that it had been a payment for supplies European firms had delivered at Delagoa Bay. Leyds ed., *Derde Verzameling* I, xv-xvi.

³⁴ Leyds ed., *Tweede Verzameling* I, xvii, 144-145, 183-184 and 192-193; Van Niekerk, *Kruger se regterhand*, 269-270.

³⁵ Leyds ed., *Derde Verzameling* I, 138-139.

³⁶ Idem, *Vierde Verzameling* I, xxvii.

³⁷ Approximately £ 53,500. Van Niekerk, *Kruger se regterhand*, 223.

³⁸ Leyds ed., *Derde verzameling* I, xiv-xv; idem, *Vierde verzameling* I, xxvi-xxvii.

³⁹ Van Niekerk, *Kruger se regterhand*, 223.

⁴⁰ Ibidem, 224-225.

not least, the propaganda campaign was an expensive business. Leyds funded several institutions that had been set up to distribute pro-Boer material. Additionally, he provided money for individual publications.⁴¹ Despite these extra costs, Leyds managed to leave a sum of about £ 170,000 (around fl. 2,000,000) at the end of the war, which he used to finance projects to promote Afrikaner nationalism in the decades that followed.⁴²

The activities of the representative of the OFS in the Netherlands, H.P.N. Muller, also increased significantly after the war broke out. Like Leyds, Muller thought it of vital importance that the public in Europe was won over for the Boer cause and also he was well connected with pro-Boer organisations and the press in Europe and the USA. In this way he became a prominent propagandist for the Boer cause and his writings were published all around the world.⁴³ Other activities included support to volunteers that wanted to fight on the Boers’ side, protests against companies that supplied the British, shipments of humanitarian aid to the inhabitants of the republics and help for refugees.⁴⁴ His work was overshadowed, however, by the magnitude of Leyds’s initiatives. Muller only received a small stipend from the OFS government, which was not enough to finance his propaganda activities. He therefore asked the SAR legation for money on several occasions, and in 1899 and 1900 received thousands of guilders from Leyds.⁴⁵

In addition to the financial problems, several diplomatic representatives of the OFS appeared to be untrustworthy, which hampered Muller’s international campaign. The consul-general of the republic in London, William Dunn, turned out to be an ardent jingo, something that was pointed out to Muller by Leyds.⁴⁶ There was also a row between Muller and the consul-general of the OFS in Paris, a certain Mr Mosenthal, which was only resolved after intervention by Johannes Pierson, who persuaded Mosenthal to resign his position.⁴⁷ Despite Leyds’s assistance in Muller’s financial and diplomatic woes, relations between the two, who had always a personal dislike of each other, became increasingly strained. These tensions came to a head in 1900, after the arrival of a deputation from the SAR and OFS in Europe, which raised questions about Muller’s diplomatic status.

In March 1900, the two Boer governments appointed a special deputation to go to Europe to ask the Western powers to intervene so that peace could be restored in South Africa without loss of independence. They travelled throughout Europe and the USA for the remainder of the conflict and their tour was extensively covered by the press.⁴⁸ The members

⁴¹ Ibidem, 212-3. Cf. chapter 4.

⁴² Ibidem, 274. Cf. chapter 7.

⁴³ Du Toit Spies, *’n Nederlander in Diens van die Oranje-Vrystaat*, 99.

⁴⁴ Copy of report J.W.J. Wessel Roux and A.E. Mackay (not dated), iii-vii. ZA, ANV collection, ANV II/29.

⁴⁵ R.W.J.C. van der Wall Bake to Willem Leyds, 10 March 1900. NASA, Leyds collection, LEY 321; Van Niekerk, *Kruger se regterhand*, 273.

⁴⁶ Leyds ed., *Tweede verzameling I*, 359-360.

⁴⁷ Ibidem, 360-361; Du Toit Spies, *’n Nederlander in Dies van die Oranje-Vrijstaat*, 111.

⁴⁸ For an overview of the activities of the deputation cf. Scholtz, *Europa en die tweede vryheidsoorlog*, 97-111; Van Niekerk, *Kruger se regterhand*, 289-296.

of the deputation were well-known figures in Boer politics: Danie Wolmarans (SAR), Abraham Fischer (OFS) and C.H. Wessels (OFS) were prominent members of the representative bodies in their respective homelands. When they arrived in Napels (April 1900), Muller and Leyds met them to discuss their diplomatic tour. The Transvaal minister plenipotentiary was in favour of going to Germany immediately to try and win over emperor Wilhelm II to the Boer cause, but Muller advised that a visit to the Netherlands would be better. After some deliberations, the deputation decided to go to The Hague first, also because the Boer governments preferred this.⁴⁹

The good relationship between the deputation and Muller ended after an incident during the arrival of Paul Kruger in Europe in November 1900. Journalists from all over the world had gathered in Marseilles along with thousands of spectators to meet the exiled president of the Transvaal, who was to arrive on board of the Dutch cruiser *Gelderland*. Although there were some indications as to the date of arrival, there had been poor communication between the ship and the official representatives of the Boers, meaning that the large crowd had to wait for two days. Amidst that chaos, Muller presented himself as part of the official representation of the Boer republics, claiming that he stood in direct contact with the *Gelderland* and made haphazard statements about the delay to the press. A public relations disaster could be avoided after resolute intervention of C.G.S. Sandberg, a *Hollander* who had worked for the SAR government and who had returned to Europe in July 1900. He had been dispatched by Leyds to meet Kruger at Suez and after his return to Marseilles explained to the waiting journalists there that the *Gelderland* had been caught in a storm.⁵⁰ Despite the positive outcome, Leyds was furious about this incident and accused Muller of endangering the good relations between the Boer diplomats and the press with his vanity. Fischer and the rest of the deputation clearly sided with the SAR legate in this matter.⁵¹

The problems with Muller continued to worsen when he declared himself to be a ‘special envoy’ (*speciale gezant*) of the OFS. He quoted official letters, written in 1898, in which the government of that republic referred to him as such.⁵² However, Fischer argued that these letters only referred to specific activities by Muller in that year, for which the government had authorised him in that capacity. The Boer politician therefore officially declared that Muller had not been given diplomatic prerogative beyond his consular activities and that he and Wessels were the highest representatives of the OFS in Europe.⁵³ Later during the war there

⁴⁹ Leyds ed., *Derde Verzameling* I, 8-20. Leyds considered this decision to be a mistake, because the Dutch government was bound to its neutrality, while there were indications at the time that Wilhelm II was willing to meet them. This opportunity was lost later on.

⁵⁰ Sandberg, *Twintig jaren onder Krugers Boeren*, 329-338.

⁵¹ Leyds ed., *Derde Verzameling* II, 150-151; Du Toit Spies, *'n Nederlander in Diens van die Oranje-Vrijstaat*, 193-195. In the 1930s, a polemic started between Leyds and Muller about this incident. Cf. chapter 7.

⁵² H.P.N. Muller to W.J. Leyds, 26 November 1900. NASA, Leyds collection, LEY 257.

⁵³ W.J. Leyds to H.J. Kiewiet de Jonge, 20 January 1917. NASA, Leyds collection, LEY 257; Leyds ed., *Vierde verzameling* II, 37. I have not recovered the original letter by Fischer, but Leyds' account is supported by the fact that the relationship between the deputation and Muller deteriorated.

were more incidents, which seem to have had repercussions for the propaganda campaign. In February 1902, the deputation went to the USA, followed by Muller who travelled through the country at the same time. He did so without consulting either Leyds or the deputation, as it was against their wishes.⁵⁴ Several pro-Boers in America wrote to the SAR legation in Brussels to complain about Muller’s embarrassing performance. Montagu White, for example, described how his behaviour was becoming a problem. ‘Dr Muller, with the intention of making himself a very important person, intrigues for his own benefit, not necessarily to the detriment of others, though that, of course, results with considerable mischief at times’.⁵⁵ Another critic was L.K. Pook van Baggen, an emigrant from the Netherlands who was secretary of the Transvaal Committee in California. He was irritated by Muller’s continuing pretence, but decided not to intervene, because a scandal might have spoiled the work of other pro-Boers in America.⁵⁶

What was considered to be even more damaging than Muller’s ego was his opinion on relations between the OFS and the SAR. Muller had been complaining about overexposure of the heroic role of the Transvaal from the beginning of the war. To compensate for this, he actively tried to promote the OFS. This was not in line with the policy followed by Leyds and the deputation, who tried to emphasise the common cause of the two Boer republics in their struggle against the British Empire.⁵⁷ Pook van Baggen reported that Muller continued to make these allegations in the USA on an unprecedented scale and advised to make him return to Europe.

His statements are absurd in the three speeches I have heard, he talks about himself and his President and his government and in every lecture made insinuations against the Transvaal government in comparison to his government, that could not have been more strongly stated by an English jingo.⁵⁸

Such remarks show that there were clear tensions between the diplomatic representatives of the Boer republics. Given the scale of its activities, it can safely be said that Leyds’s legation was by far the most important institution to produce propaganda for the cause of the republics in Europe. Via the network of SAR representatives he had access to much information and was able to co-ordinate activities that were intended to support the Boer

⁵⁴ Leyds ed., *Vierde verzameling* I, xv and 642.

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*, 667.

⁵⁶ *Ibidem*, 729; Du Toit Spies, *’n Nederlander in Diens van die Oranje-Vrijstaat*, 217.

⁵⁷ Du Toit Spies, *’n Nederlander in Dienst van die Oranje-Vrijstaat*, 189-190. Cf. chapters 4 and 5.

⁵⁸ ‘Zijn verhalen zijn absurd in de drie speeches die ik gehoord heb, hij praat over zichzelf en zijn President en zijne Regeering en maakte in elke rede insinuaties tegen het Transvaalsche Gouvernement in vergelijking met zijn Gouvernement, die niet sterker van een Engelsche jingo konden komen’. Leyds ed., *Vierde Verzameling* I, 746.

combatants in South Africa. However, there were also many difficulties, which indicate that the effect of these efforts was limited. The increased activities meant that the office of the legation was overloaded with work, which even Leyds himself conceded led to poor results. Moreover, his problematic relationship with Muller suggests that it was often difficult to follow a single diplomatic policy. The enormous egos of the two gentlemen undoubtedly lay behind many of these tensions, but the complaints by the OFS representative that the Transvaal received far more attention point to more fundamental issues. As will be discussed in later chapters, the primacy of the Transvaal in pro-Boer literature was considered to be a problem at times by other contemporaries as well. In addition to these difficulties, the official policy of neutrality followed by the government in the Netherlands sometimes led to embarrassments.

Fraying at the edges: the Dutch policy of neutrality

The Dutch diplomatic service had ties with the pro-Boer network that extended between the Netherlands and South Africa. This inevitably led to problems, because the government in the Netherlands strictly adhered to its neutral position towards the South African War in order not to antagonise the British, which, it was feared, might have threatened the territorial integrity of the Dutch colonial possessions in South-East Asia.⁵⁹ There was, however, great personal sympathy for the Boers amongst leading figures in government, including Queen Wilhelmina herself. Leyds, whose former professor was first minister when the war erupted, had warm contact with the government in The Hague. He was discrete about these connections, however, because he did not want to compromise the policy of neutrality.⁶⁰ It was often more difficult to maintain such discretion when it came to the activities of Dutch diplomats who had sympathies for the republics, some of whom even helped pro-Boer organisations. The position of George Pott was the most problematic in this sense, because he was not only the representative of both Boer republics in Lourenço Marques, but also of the Netherlands. As has been mentioned, his involvement in the smuggling of illicit material to the war zone eventually caused the Portuguese authorities to extradite him.

There were also other Dutch diplomats in South Africa who caused controversy. As of 1888, the Netherlands had officially been represented in the Boer republics in the form of a consul-general in Pretoria. From 1896, this post was held by F.J. Domela Nieuwenhuis. Despite his precarious position, as envoy of a neutral power, he warmly sympathised with the Boer cause, something he did not make a secret of. Although he was not listed as an official correspondent, he was in direct contact with the executive committee of the NZAV and

⁵⁹ M. Kuitenbrouwer, *Nederland en de opkomst*, 183-184.

⁶⁰ This might be the reason why he did not publicly reflect on the Dutch position during the South African War or thereafter. The only reference I have found to the neutral position of the Netherlands, which Leyds thought to be the result of the precarious position of the colonial possessions, is: Van Hoek, *Gesprekke met Dr. W.J. Leyds*, 31.

provided the society with ‘important information’, even before the South African War.⁶¹ During the conflict, Domela Nieuwenhuis became more active. He sent information about the fate of *Hollanders* who had been caught up in the war to the information bureau of the NZAV, which reported to friends and family about the fate of their loved ones.⁶² He was also involved in the distribution of Dutch aid to the civilian population of the Transvaal.⁶³ In this capacity, he and other consuls in Pretoria visited the concentration camp at Irene and wrote a highly critical account of the situation there, which was published in the European press.⁶⁴ These activities made his presence increasingly problematic to the British authorities and in September 1901 his position became untenable after he was openly accused of pro-Boer activities. As a result, the Dutch government ordered him to leave his post.⁶⁵ Back in the Netherlands, the NZAV rewarded him with a honorary membership.⁶⁶

B.H. de Waal, the consul-general to the Cape Colony, initially had a more problematic relationship with the NZAV. When he visited the Netherlands in October 1898, he gave an interview in which he criticised the society and accused it of arrogance.⁶⁷ The executive committee wrote a reply in which they tried to persuade him of the use of the NZAV by listing their activities to strengthen the bonds between the Dutch-speaking people in Europe and South Africa on the basis of equality.⁶⁸ This appears to have eased the tensions between the society and the consul-general and, like Domela Nieuwenhuis, De Waal acted on behalf of pro-Boer organisations in the Netherlands during the war. His main task was to co-ordinate support for PoWs and other people leaving South Africa via Cape Town.⁶⁹ In a letter, he promised to use the funds sent by Dutch pro-Boer organisations not only for *Hollanders*, but ‘for all Boers’, to which he added ‘it speaks for itself that I will do nothing for the natives and as good as nothing for the coloureds’.⁷⁰ In addition, De Waal distributed aid to PoWs who had been transported to St. Helena and Bermuda.⁷¹ This diplomat too was made an honorary member of the NZAV after his return to the Netherlands.⁷²

Another person from the diplomatic service who contributed to the pro-Boer network was the consul-general in London, H.S.J. Maas. He sent a complete collection of British official documents about the conflict to the NZAV, which was used as a source for propagandistic

⁶¹ ‘belangrijke informatie’. ZA, *NZAV Jaarverslag 1896/1897*, 7.

⁶² ZA, *NZAV Jaarverslag 1899*, 7 and 24.

⁶³ Letters F.J. Domela Nieuwenhuis to H.J. Emous. ZA, Emous collection, EM 11, G3.

⁶⁴ *NRC*, 24 August 1901. The report was published two months after the account of Emily Hobhouse appeared and although the findings were similar, it did not attract as much attention. Cf. chapter 6.

⁶⁵ *NRC*, 29 October, 9 and 14 November 1901.

⁶⁶ ZA, *NZAV Jaarverslag 1902*, 7.

⁶⁷ *Het Algemeen Handelsblad*, 8 October 1898.

⁶⁸ ZA, *NZAV Jaarverslag 1898*, 7 and 45-51.

⁶⁹ ZA, *NZAV Jaarverslag 1900*, 8.

⁷⁰ ‘voor alle Boeren’; ‘het spreekt vanzelf dat ik voor de imboorlingen niets en voor de kleurlingen zoo goed als niets doe’. B.H. de Waal to the executive committee of the NZAV, 11 December 1899. ZA, NZAV collection, VI/130.

⁷¹ Those on Ceylon were assisted by Consul P.A. Wennink. ZA, *NZAV Jaarverslag 1900*, 43-45.

⁷² ZA, *NZAV Jaarverslag 1902*, 7.

publications.⁷³ In addition, Maas was authorised by the Dutch government to look after the interests of SAR citizens in London after Montagu White had left for the USA. Apparently this did not make him very popular in Britain, with his house besieged by a jingo mob in May 1900.⁷⁴ These examples show that many Dutch diplomatic officials had strong sympathies for the Boer and at times acted accordingly, which led to their position being compromised. There were, however, also representatives who had a different outlook on the South African question, which brought them into conflict with the authorities of the republics.

On the battlefield, the Dutch army was represented by two military attachés on the Boer side, Captain J.H. Ram, Lieutenant L.W.J.K. Thomson.⁷⁵ These two men had an ambivalent attitude towards the republican forces, to say the least. Although they did express their sympathy for the Boers, Ram and Thomson also criticised the way in which they fought the war and in particular thought the lack of discipline of the commandos to be a problem.⁷⁶ This kind of criticism was not exceptional in the Netherlands, but it seems that Thomson’s personal dislike of the Afrikaners went further, which led to an incident in July 1900. By then, the SAR leadership had left Pretoria and was temporarily seated in Machadodorp, in north-eastern Transvaal, where they were joined by the foreign attachés. There, several personal letters from Thomson, in which he made rather undiplomatic remarks about his hosts, were intercepted by a censor.

He basically asserted that the British pro-war propaganda was right about the Boers. ‘Corruption, cowardice, treason, theft – that is what one runs into here every day. A biased press has pulled the wool over the eyes of the Europeans in general and us Dutchmen in particular!’⁷⁷ He also wrote that the hate of the Afrikaners against people from the Netherlands was still in effect and was even greater than their aversion to the British. Although he still felt that the war was not justified, he did not lament the fate of the Boers.

It will be a pity if England wins, a pity for us, from a selfish point of view; because we lose a *debouche* for many, and the territory in which our language is spoken – jabbered rather – will shrink. But the large majority does not deserve to remain independent!⁷⁸

⁷³ ZA, *NAZV Jaarverslag 1900*, 8.

⁷⁴ Leyds ed., *Derde Verzameling I*, 148-149.

⁷⁵ There were also two attachés from the colonial army in the Dutch East Indies, Lieutenants C.J. Asselbergs and M.J. Nix. Nix died of wounds he sustained during the battle of Sannah’s Post (March 1900) Asselberg left South Africa thereafter. For his diary cf. Schultz ed., *Dagboek van C.J. Asselbergs*.

⁷⁶ J.H. Ram, ‘Report meeting *Vereeniging ter beoefening van de krijgswetenschap* (1901-1902)’, 154. Leyds collection University of Stellenbosch, PAM 2; Pretorius, *Kommandolewe tydens*, 206. For doubts about the discipline of the Boer army cf. chapter 5.

⁷⁷ ‘Corruptie, lafheid, verraad, diefstal, dat is wat men hier dagelijks ontmoet. Wel heeft een partijdige pers de Europeanen in algemeen, ons Hollanders in de eerste plaats een rad voor de ogen gedraaid!’

⁷⁸ ‘Het zou jammer zijn, als Engeland overwint, jammer voor ons, uit egoïsme [*sic*]; want we verliezen een *debouche* voor velen, en het gebied waar onze taal gesproken – liever gebrabbeld – wordt, zal inkrimpen. Maar de overgroote meerderheid verdient niet, zelfstandig te blijven!’ Typed extract of letter L.W.J.K. Thomson to [unknown addressee], 26 June 1900. NASA Leyds collection, LEY 328.

The State Secretary, F.W. Reitz, took offence at these remarks and threatened to extradite Thomson. Despite protests by the attaché that his mail, which had diplomatic status, had been tampered with, he decided to leave on his own initiative and to inform the Dutch government on a strictly confidential basis so that a public scandal could be avoided.⁷⁹ As a result, these statements never reached the ears of the general public in the Netherlands.⁸⁰

It can be said that during the South African War there were significant ties between the diplomatic services of the Netherlands and the Boer republics. Leyds was well acquainted with leading politicians in The Hague at that time and Dutch representatives in Southern Africa corresponded with pro-Boer organisations in Europe. There were, however, limits to these activities. The Dutch government could not afford to break with its policy of neutrality and it was a result of this that Pott and Domela Nieuwenhuis were forced to return to the Netherlands after the British accused them, not without reason, of helping the Boers. Moreover, there were several individuals who caused controversy and internal strife, which is evident from the departure of the Dutch attachés after Thomson’s condescending remarks about the Boers. Although this dispute was kept out of the press during the war, it shows that the contact between the Netherlands and South Africa was not without complications. The informal nature of the Dutch pro-Boer movement, a result of the relatively weak international position of the Netherlands, limited the possibilities for effective control over the channels of information that provided them with material for the propaganda campaign in Europe. Still, a substantial amount of information did reach the Netherlands via contacts that existed between individuals that bypassed the formal institutions. How that happened will be discussed in the following sections.

Repatriates and refugees

During the course of the South African War, thousands of Dutch-speaking people – *Hollanders*, Boers and Afrikaners – left South Africa and found refuge in the Netherlands, but it is impossible to extract the exact number from the sources. The majority arrived after the British army had started its advance into the Boer republics. A substantial group of people who arrived in the Netherlands were *Hollanders*, mainly officials from the SAR and their families, who were considered to be ‘undesirables’ by the new authorities and were forcibly repatriated. Not all of the people leaving the war zone were deportees, however. Many others became refugees out of fear for British brutalities or because they did not think they could be of any use if they stayed put. The fact that these people left South Africa did not mean that they could not help the war effort anymore. A large number of individuals who had left the fighting zone became active in the pro-Boer propaganda campaign in Europe, making a

⁷⁹ L.W.J.K. Thomson to F.W. Reitz, 4 July 1900; F.W. Reitz to Willem Leyds, 14 July 1900. NASA Leyds collection, LEY 328.

⁸⁰ Despite the fact that this incident was kept quiet, there was a significant aftermath. Cf. chapter 7.

significant contribution to it. They managed to stay in touch with people in South Africa and so keep some lines of communication open, along which information about the conflict was transferred to Europe. In addition, the experiences of refugees and deportees were an important subject of propagandistic material. Pro-Boer organisations and the press published articles on the fate of these men, women and children that led to much public outcry.⁸¹ In this respect, the exiles symbolised the horrors of the war in South Africa and the injustice inflicted upon the Boers by the British Empire.⁸²

Gerrit Middelberg, the former director of the NZASM in Pretoria, set an example for repatriates to become involved in the pro-Boer movement. In the early months of 1899 he resigned his position and, voluntarily, returned to the Netherlands. Middelberg had a good reputation amongst the Boers and this also had an effect back home. At the general meeting of the NZAV on 10 May 1899, he was elected as chairman of the executive committee, ‘because of his [Middelberg’s] many years’ stay in the South African Republic, [he] appeared to be the most suitable person to lead the society’.⁸³ Under Middelberg’s leadership, which lasted for more than a decade, the NZAV remained in touch with the developments in South Africa, from the South African War to the formation of the Union in 1910. His diary reveals that he kept up with these events, but had a rather pragmatic attitude towards them. In October 1899, for example, he welcomed the ultimatum issued by the Transvaal that led to the invasion of the British colonies as ‘a practical lesson in statesmanship’.⁸⁴ At a time when public emotions ran high, Middelberg’s realism and knowledge of South African affairs was considered to be important and it probably contributed to the prominence of the NZAV amongst other pro-Boer organisations. At the same time, there was also criticism on the society’s executive committee and its lack of reform, which in the view of some meant that the organisation failed to capitalise on the widespread enthusiasm for the republics.⁸⁵

Another NZASM official who came to play a prominent role in the pro-Boer propaganda campaign was J.A. van Kretschmar van Veen (1857-1931), Middelberg’s successor in Pretoria. He had been working for the NZASM office in Amsterdam in the 1890s and was elected as secretary of the NZAV in June 1897.⁸⁶ He did not remain in this position for long, going to the Transvaal the next year to take over the management of the railway company there. His directorship was largely coloured by the South African War. In the run-up to the conflict, he strove to prepare the NZASM for performing auxiliary tasks for the Boer forces.

⁸¹ M. Kuitenbrouwer, *Nederland en de opkomst*, 185.

⁸² Cf. chapter 6.

⁸³ ‘door zijn jaren-lange verblijf in de Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek, de aangewezen persoon scheen te zijn de leiding der Vereeniging op zich te nemen’. ZA, *NZAV Jaarverslag 1899*, 5.

⁸⁴ ‘een practische les in staatkunde’. Diary, 11 October 1899, page 113. NL-HaNA, Middelberg, 2.21.232, inv.nr.15. The view that the Boers had been right to invade Natal and the Cape was common in Europe. It was argued that this would not leave time for Britain to send reinforcements. Leyds ed., *Tweede Verzameling I*, 23-24.

⁸⁵ For further discussion about the effectivity of the NZAV, cf. chapters 4 and 7.

⁸⁶ ZA, *NZAV Jaarverslag 1897-1898*, 5.

His open loyalty to the SAR government worried directors of the company in Amsterdam, because they feared this might endanger the Netherland’s position of neutrality. Van Kretschmar van Veen reacted strongly against this cautious attitude. In April 1900, at the height of the British advance, he wrote that the NZASM would probably be punished for supporting the Boer war effort. Nevertheless, in this letter he refused to pretend that the company had been pressurised by the Boer authorities to help them, in order to use it as an excuse later on. He did point out the fact that the concession allowed the SAR government to commandeer the NZASM, but also raised an objection on moral grounds. ‘We are a Dutch company in order to make money, but we have a Transvaal railway. The first is in the position to be neutral, but the second is not.’⁸⁷ Apart from co-ordinating the wartime activities of the NZASM, he also played a large role in the establishment of local charities that were to become a pivot in the distribution of humanitarian aid that was sent from Europe.

Directly after the occupation of Pretoria on 5 June 1900, Van Kretschmar van Veen was confined to his home and threatened with deportation. After he had personally protested to General Roberts, he was allowed to stay in order to handle the paperwork of the NZASM on condition that he would not intervene in the actual running of the railway company anymore. Despite this arrangement, the documents of the company and all assets of the NZASM in South Africa were confiscated by the British in August of that year. This left the director with no other choice than to return to the Netherlands, where he arrived in November 1900.⁸⁸ Back home, Van Kretschmar van Veen became heavily involved in the pro-Boer propaganda campaign. He wrote an extensive report on what in his view was the illegal liquidation of the NZASM, which was published before the end of the war.⁸⁹ In addition, he continued his activities co-ordinating humanitarian aid to the Boers. He was re-elected to the executive committee of the NZAV in May 1901 and helped to centrally organise the activities by the pro-Boer charities in the Netherlands. In this capacity, he was also involved in the publication of reports on the concentration camps that were sent to the Netherlands by people who were distributing humanitarian aid in South Africa.⁹⁰

The fact that the NZASM sided with of the Boer republics during the war also had significant consequences for the employees of the company. The tasks they performed for the Boers included managing the growing number of services within the SAR, running the captured railway lines in northern Natal, performing special duties at the siege camp of Ladysmith and taking over the lines in OFS, which were owned by an English company.

⁸⁷ ‘Wij zijn een Nederlandsche Maatschappij om geld te verdienen, maar wij hebben een Transvaalschen spoorweg. De eerste kan neutraal zijn, maar de tweede niet.’ Quoted in: Van Winter, *Onder Krugers Hollanders II*, 343-347.

⁸⁸ *In Memoriam: NZASM*, 140-142.

⁸⁹ Kretschmar van Veen, *Rapporten van den directeur J.A. van Kretschmar van Veen*. After the war, shareholders of the NZASM started a legal procedure and in 1908 were awarded with approximately fl. 2,670,000 by the British government. De Graaff, *De mythe van de stamverwantschap*, 75-87.

⁹⁰ ZA, *NZAV Jaarverslag 1901*, 6. For Van Kretschmar van Veen’s activities as co-ordinator of aid, cf. chapter 4.

Moreover, they acted as sentries along the railways, organised ambulance trains and repaired canons in their workshops. After the British advance started in February 1900, NZASM engineers were also involved in the destruction of railway tracks and bridges, so that the enemy would be unable to use them.⁹¹

These activities were conducted under growing hardships. The financial situation of the NZASM became more difficult, which resulted in cuts in salaries and eventually in suspension of pay when the British captured Pretoria and took over control of the railway lines. During the British advance, NZASM employees tried to flee from South Africa via Delagoa Bay, but many were captured. Of these men, 61 were deported to PoW camps overseas, while the rest was moved to Pretoria.⁹² From there, all who had not been born in South Africa were declared to be ‘undesirables’ and deported from June 1900 onwards. 1,400 NZASM employees and their families, a total of 3,010 persons, were put on trains to the port of East-London and from there were shipped to the Netherlands.⁹³ These impoverished families stood together to put in a claim for compensation. This campaign attracted much attention in the Dutch press and the government was forced by public opinion to take action on their behalf.⁹⁴ It appealed to a special arbitrary committee that had been set up by the British government, which in 1902 paid a sum of £ 37,500 that was divided amongst the destitute families.⁹⁵

There were also other *Hollanders* who were expelled from the SAR. One of the most prominent was Nicolaas Mansvelt, the superintendent of education who had been in South Africa for twenty-five years when the war started. After the occupation of Pretoria, he and his family were summoned by the British authorities to leave. Back in the Netherlands, he was warmly welcomed by the leaders of the pro-Boer movement. The secretary of the ANV, Kiewiet de Jonge, himself a teacher, was very much impressed by this icon of *Hollander* education and found it ‘wonderful to have met him’.⁹⁶ Despite this warm welcome and an offer to stay with Kiewiet de Jonge in Dordrecht, Mansvelt decided to take up residence in Utrecht.⁹⁷ In addition, Mansvelt had financial concerns. He was deprived of an income after his departure from South Africa and his property in Pretoria had been confiscated by the British. He complained bitterly about ‘the great expenses of my destitute family’ and asked Leyds for financial support.⁹⁸ Kiewiet de Jonge once again came to his aid, asking him to

⁹¹ For an overview cf. *In memoriam NZASM*, 105-130; Van Winter, *Onder Krugers Hollanders II*, 340-343; De Jong, *Die Lewensomstandighede en Kulturele Bydrage*, 202-208.

⁹² Jong, *Die Lewensomstandighede en Kulturele Bydrage*, 208-209.

⁹³ Smit, *Hoogtij der neutraliteitspolitiek*, 26; De Jong, *Die Lewensomstandighede en Kulturele Bydrage*, 210.

⁹⁴ *NZASM in memoriam*, 146-147; M. Kuitenbrouwer, *Nederland en de opkomst*, 184-185; De Jong, *Die Lewensomstandighede en Kulturele Bydrage*, 218-222.

⁹⁵ Smit, *Hoogtij der neutraliteitspolitiek*, 26. This suit was separate from the compensation that was paid to the shareholders of the NZASM in 1908 that was mentioned in footnote 89 of this chapter.

⁹⁶ ‘heerlijk hem te hebben leeren kennen’. H.J. Kiewiet de Jonge to W.J. Leyds, 17 September 1900. NL-HaNA, Leyds, 2.21.105, inv.nr. 51.

⁹⁷ N. Mansvelt to H.J. Kiewiet de Jonge, 14 September 1900. NASA, Leyds collection, LEY 826.

⁹⁸ ‘de groote uitgaven van mijn berooide gezin’. N. Mansvelt to W.J. Leyds, 1 November 1900. NL-HaNA,

write a pamphlet about education in the Transvaal for the ANV, which became a well-known publication. Mansvelt was also offered a position as a school inspector in the Netherlands, but he declined the offer and so a more permanent financial solution had to be devised.⁹⁹

This happened early in 1901, when a substantial project for ‘this highly meritorious fighter’ for the Dutch language was proposed by Gerrit Kalff, professor of Dutch literature at the University of Utrecht.¹⁰⁰ The initiative was supported by an influential committee, which raised fl. 5,000 for Mansvelt to write a book about the history of the relations between the Netherlands and South Africa since the establishment of British rule in the Cape Colony.¹⁰¹ After this project was completed in November 1902, it had become clear that it would be impossible for Mansvelt to return to South Africa, because the British authorities would not have allowed him in. It was only then that he formally became involved in various pro-Boer organisations in the Netherlands, sitting on several committees, something which made him an influential figure in the 1900s. In his obituary he was called ‘the heart, the soul and the spirit of everything that has been done from this side [the Netherlands] to promote relations between the Netherlands and South Africa. The heart first.’¹⁰²

Hollanders who were active in the Transvaal press also experienced turbulent times during the South African War. When the hostilities started, Frans Engelenburg was flooded with work. In addition to his busy schedule working for his own newspaper, *De Volksstem*, he was also asked to act as a correspondent for the international press. He did work for the French news agency Havas, *The New York Journal* of William Randolph Hearst and several newspapers in the Netherlands and the Dutch East Indies.¹⁰³ Engelenburg, however, did not remain chained to his desk at his Pretoria office and, as he had done in the 1890s during punitive expeditions against black Africans, joined the Boer commandos. In Natal, he was present at the battles of Elandsplaagte and Colenso, of which he wrote reports, but did not partake in any military action. In addition to his work as a reporter, he set up and ran the mobile state press in a railway carriage in northern Natal. This installation was used to print official statements and memoranda, but also a special field-edition of *De Volksstem*, containing the latest news from the front lines.¹⁰⁴ After a few months, Engelenburg went back to Pretoria and witnessed the occupation of the city. The journalist was arrested in June when British authorities found an empty bandolier in his house. He was released on parole, but *De*

Leyds, 2.21.105, inv.nr. 55.

⁹⁹ H.J. Kiewiet de Jonge to W.J. Leyds, 17 September, 10 December 1900 and not dated [probably January-February 1901]. NL-HaNA, Leyds, 2.21.105, inv.nr. 51.

¹⁰⁰ ‘dezen zoo hoogstverdienslijken strijder’. G. Kalff to H.J. Kiewiet de Jonge, 27 January 1901. NASA, Leyds collection, LEY 812.

¹⁰¹ Circular, March 1901. NASA, Leyds collection, LEY 808. The circular was signed by the foreign minister, the president of the Upper Chamber of Parliament, leading businessmen and prominent members of the NZAV. It enabled the publication of: Mansvelt, *De betrekkingen tusschen Nederland en Zuid-Afrika*.

¹⁰² ‘het hart, de ziel en de geest van alles, wat aan deze zijde is gedaan om de betrekkingen tusschen Nederland en Zuid-Afrika te bevorderen. Het hart eerst.’ ‘Dr. N. Mansvelt’, *Zuid-Afrika*, vol. 10 (1933), 35-36, 36.

¹⁰³ Cf. documents in: NASA Gustav Preller collection, A 787, files 206-209.

¹⁰⁴ Wallach, *Die Volmaakte “Gentleman”*, 22.

Volksstem was closed down.¹⁰⁵ Many years later, a business partner recounted how Engelenburg boldly recovered sensitive documents that were kept in his office: he dressed himself in his finest clothes, pinned on all the medals he could find and demanded access to the office. Legend has it that the guard was so impressed by Engelenburg’s appearance that he was not only allowed in, but was also politely saluted as he left.¹⁰⁶

After his newspaper was banned, Engelenburg went to Europe, arriving in August 1900. Contrary to what one might expect, he did not become one of the leading figures of the pro-Boer movement in Europe. In 1898 Engelenburg had already refused an offer by Leyds to join the SAR legation’s staff and, although he did do some work for his old friend, did not become an official representative of the Boers when he came to Europe.¹⁰⁷ To some extent, he continued with his journalistic activities and was appointed as Lisbon correspondent to *De Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant (NRC)*, a prominent Dutch newspaper.¹⁰⁸ Portugal was not exactly a hotbed for pro-Boer agitation, but he there wrote reports about the Boer refugees who arrived from Delagoa Bay. He also kept Leyds informed about the latest political developments concerning the border between Mozambique and the Transvaal. Despite these activities, it seems that his time in Europe was a welcome break from his busy life in South Africa. Engelenburg took the time to make several trips through the continent, during which he could really live up to his reputation of being a man of refined taste. In letters to Leyds and his wife, he wrote extensively about his visits to restaurants and art galleries, which led to the following verdict: ‘I prefer Munich to Berlin, but Paris to all the rest.’¹⁰⁹

By contrast, one of Engelenburg’s employees at *De Volksstem*, Frederik Rompel (1871-1947), became a central figure in the Boer propaganda network after his return to Europe. Rompel, who was born in Amsterdam, went to Pretoria to work for the newspaper in 1896. It is likely that he got this job through his wife, who was related to an aunt of Engelenburg, Marie Koopmans-De Wet, a well-connected lady from Cape Town who was also known as the ‘Madame de Staël of South Africa’.¹¹⁰ Rompel clearly liked the journalistic profession and he boasted that he had been the only reporter present at the negotiations during the Bloemfontein conference, the failed attempt by President Steyn of the OFS to reconcile Milner and Kruger.¹¹¹ After that, he became a war correspondent for *De Volksstem* and joined the Boer

¹⁰⁵ Ibidem, 4.

¹⁰⁶ Ibidem, 23.

¹⁰⁷ Ibidem, 24. Also in later life, Engelenburg was reluctant to do diplomatic work. In 1919 he was asked by another good friend of his, Prime Minister Louis Botha, to take a diplomatic position in Europe, but also then he refused. He did attend the Versailles conference though.

¹⁰⁸ F.V. Engelenburg to Mrs Leyds, 9 January 1901. NL-HaNA, Leyds, 2.21.105, inv.nr. 48.

¹⁰⁹ ‘Ik stel München boven Berlijn, maar Paris over the rest.’ F.V. Engelenburg to W.J. Leyds, 20 October 1900. NL-HaNA, Leyds, 2.21.105, inv.nr. 48. After his return to South Africa in 1903 Engelenburg’s love for the more sophisticated aspects of life became well-known and he became one of the leading figures in the cultural elites of the Union. Wallach, *Die volmaakte „Gentleman”*, 30-34.

¹¹⁰ ‘Madame de Staël van Suid-Afrika’. Quoted in: Malan, *Marie Koopmans- De Wet*, 240. She was a well-known figure in the social life of the colony, and had excellent contacts in the Boer republics as well, which she used to help Engelenburg when he first came to South Africa. Wallach, *Die volmaakte „Gentleman”*, 20.

¹¹¹ Rompel, *Uit den tweeden (Transvaalschen) vrijheidsoorlog*, 15.

armies in the Northern Cape, where he witnessed the battle of Magersfontein alongside General Koos de la Rey.¹¹² Rompel and his wife, who was a nurse for the Red Cross, left South Africa after the occupation of Pretoria, although it is not entirely certain whether they were forced to do so or not. When he arrived in the Netherlands, Rompel became the manager of the press office of the ANV, a position he occupied until 1912. This organisation became an important link in the pro-Boer propaganda network that extended between Africa and Europe. During the war, the press office was one of the main distributors of pro-Boer propaganda on the continent.¹¹³ After the conflict, Rompel would become one of the most prominent liaisons of the South African Dutch-speaking press in Europe.¹¹⁴

The Netherlands also became a safe haven for Boer and Afrikaner refugees from South Africa. Even more than with *Hollander* repatriates, it is hard to estimate the numbers, but it seems that there were at least several hundred of them. Unlike many *Hollanders*, these people generally did not have family in the Netherlands and therefore depended even more on the pro-Boer organizations that set up special committees to help them. As such, there was a marked interest in their fate from journalists and the experiences of the exiles were incorporated into the great corpus of pro-Boer propaganda.

Without a shadow of doubt, the most famous Boer exile was Paul Kruger, the president of the SAR. The statesman, better known as *Oom Paul* (uncle Paul) was already a popular figure in the Netherlands before 1899 as a result of his heroic conduct during the Transvaal War. During a visit in 1884, for example, he was received with much enthusiasm.¹¹⁵ The old man’s popularity was at its peak at the outbreak of the South African War and after that he was to remain one of the most popular Boers, if not the most popular, even after he handed over his authority to Schalk Burger and left for Delagoa Bay in September 1900. In the Netherlands, public pressure to intervene on behalf of the republics mounted at the time and the cabinet devised a cunning plan to calm emotions at home and at the same time not to offend the British too much. Kruger was offered passage to Europe on the cruiser *Gelderland* by the Dutch government. The elderly statesman arrived in the port of Marseilles in November and, after a triumphant tour through France and a part of Germany, the party travelled to the Netherlands. There was no official reception by members of the Dutch cabinet – although there were private meetings with several ministers – but he was granted an audience with Queen Wilhelmina, who expressed her personal admiration for him.¹¹⁶ In addition, he was

¹¹² Ibidem, 38.

¹¹³ Cf. chapter 4.

¹¹⁴ Cf. chapter 7.

¹¹⁵ M. Kuitenbrouwer, *Nederland en de opkomst*, 123-124.

¹¹⁶ There was some uncertainty about the exact status of the audience, however. Kruger was received by Queen Wilhelmina incognito, but he was taken to the palace in a royal carriage and wore his presidential sash. In addition, Leyds, who accompanied him, was dressed in his diplomatic costume. The newspaper *Het Vaderland* reported that the discussion had been about private matters only, such as the well-being of Kruger’s family and Wilhelmina’s impending marriage. Waszklewicz-Van Schilfgaarde ed., *Paul Kruger’s tocht*, 56-57.

continuously cheered in the streets near the royal residence. His visit to other cities in the Netherlands also drew massive crowds and everywhere he was hailed as a hero by local dignitaries and pro-Boer organisations. The newspapers reported extensively about these events.¹¹⁷ After a short stay in Utrecht, the former president retired to a villa near the town of Hilversum, *Casa Cara*. Due to his poor health, it was impossible to stage other mass meetings and he largely retired from public life.

Despite the limited diplomatic impact of Kruger’s arrival in Europe and his secluded life after December 1900, he was still adored by the public. His household was flooded with objects that were sent to honour the former SAR president.¹¹⁸ Moreover, a continuous stream of prominent visitors from all over Europe stopped at *Casa Cara* to pay him homage. As was the case at the SAR legation in Brussels, the personal staff of the president had trouble coping with the overwhelming public interest. Frederik van Eeden, a famous writer at the time, complained to Leyds about the lax attitude of the staff after he had had to visit the villa four times before he could arrange an appointment with Kruger for a British pro-Boer journalist.¹¹⁹ This kind of complaint was not made public, however, and the former president was depicted in the press as the embodiment of the suffering of his people, who had fallen victim to the British hunger for gold and power. Kruger, who was forced to leave the country he himself had helped to build during the Great Trek, pined away in exile. As such, his presence in the Netherlands became a strong symbol in the pro-Boer campaign.

Another place where exiles from South Africa were housed, was the so-called *Afrikaner Tehuis*, a building at the Nieuwe Herengracht in Amsterdam. It started as an *ad hoc* solution in August 1900, when no accommodation could be found for the new arrivals. Under the supervision of the *Christelijk Nationaal Boeren Comité* (Christian National Boer Committee, hereafter CNBC), a Calvinist pro-Boer organisation, it came to be a permanent shelter for more than 70 people.¹²⁰ Many of the inhabitants of the *Tehuis* were Afrikaners from the Cape Colony who had joined the Boer forces and did not dare return to their homes because they were considered to be rebels by the British authorities and risked the death-penalty if caught. Residents of the *Tehuis* were subjected to a strict regime, with compulsory Bible-reading twice a day and a curfew.¹²¹ Despite this strict discipline, there were some disturbances and three people were told to leave in 1902.¹²² Nevertheless, there was a lot of sympathy for the Afrikaner refugees amongst the general public, which was illustrated by the important visitors who came to visit. Both Kruger and Wilhelmina went to the *Tehuis* to meet the people living

¹¹⁷ For a compilation of contemporary press reports of Kruger’s tour cf. Waszkiewicz-Van Schilfgaarde ed., *Paul Kruger’s tocht*.

¹¹⁸ For what later became of this collection cf. chapter 7.

¹¹⁹ Leyds ed., *Vierde Verzameling* I, 351. Leyds and Van Eeden knew each other from their student days.

¹²⁰ Schutte, *De Vrije Universiteit* I, 93. For more on the CNBC, cf. chapter 4.

¹²¹ *Statuten Afrikaner tehuis*. ZA, Emous collection, EM 1.

¹²² *Verslag van de werkzaamheden der vereeniging Het Christelijk Nationaal Boeren-Comité*, 13.

there personally.¹²³ In this way the shelter generated publicity about the fate of the Boer refugees.

A different group of refugees that caught the attention of the pro-Boer organisations and the press in the Netherlands were people that had fled the republics and had gone to Lourenço Marques in the Portuguese colony of Mozambique. During the course of 1900 and 1901, around 1,500 refugees were allocated to a camp there. Their circumstances were dire, which contemporaries thought was mainly due to the unhealthy climate. In 1901 the authorities decided to transport the Boer refugees to Portugal where they were accommodated in several camps in order to improve their situation. The CBNC was active in these camps too and a representative from the charity co-ordinated the distribution of aid sent from the Netherlands. His letters gave detailed reports of his activities, with particular emphasis on the success of the schools that were set up, allowing the young refugees to receive a proper education. Spiritual guidance to the inmates was also considered to be an important issue.¹²⁴ Engelenburg, who acted as a correspondent from Portugal, covered the arrival of the Boers in the camps and reported on their fortunes in the Dutch press on several other occasions.¹²⁵

Most exiles in the *Tehuis* and the refugee camp in Portugal were illiterate and therefore only few of them were able to make propaganda.¹²⁶ Members of the Boer elites who went to Europe made their voice heard more often. One way to do so was to give interviews and in this way their views were disseminated via the newspapers. A more lively way to inform the public was by giving lectures and several Boers, with the help of Dutch organisations, toured the Netherlands, Germany and France. This proved to be quite a lucrative enterprise and aside from raising money for the funds that provided humanitarian aid to the inhabitants of the republics, the speakers often earned a handsome sum themselves. This had some undesired effects, because it allowed them to dress in the latest European fashion and thus lose some of their rough appeal. Kiewiet de Jonge, who was an important co-ordinator of the lecture tours, was particularly worried about the fact that they started shaving: ‘a Boer without beard is like a lion without a mane’, he complained.¹²⁷ Still, such lectures continued to attract large crowds throughout the war.¹²⁸

The return of the majority of *Hollander* emigrants from South Africa and the arrival of other refugees did not mean these people were no longer useful for the pro-Boer propaganda campaign. Members of the *Hollander* elites from Pretoria, such as Middelberg, Van Kretschmar van Veen and Mansvelt did important work for the organisations that supported

¹²³ R.C. de Jong, ‘Het “Afrikaans Tehuis” in Amsterdam 1900-1902’, in: *Zuid-Afrika*, vol. 58 (1981), 170-171.

¹²⁴ Cf. ZA, Emous collection, EM 1, 3 and 4; Spanjaard, “*Voor de Boeren*”, 45.

¹²⁵ For an example of the coverage of the arrival Boers in Portugal cf. *NRC*, 31 March, 2, 10 and 12 April 1901.

¹²⁶ For examples cf. Schutte, *Van Amsterdam naar Krugersdorp*, 51-51.

¹²⁷ ‘een Boer zonder baard is als een leeuw zonder manen’. H.J. Kiewiet de Jonge to W.J. Leyds, 9 April 1901. NL-HaNA, Leyds, 2.21.105, inv.nr. 51.

¹²⁸ For papers concerning these tours cf. NASA, Leyds collection, LEY 812; ZA, Emous collection, EM 1 and 13.

the embattled republics. In this way, they became important middlemen in the network that transferred information from South Africa to Europe. Arguably the most important figure in this respect was Rompel, who became the manager of the ANV press office, a job he continued to do after the conflict ended. Other deportees and Afrikaner refugees were not left in obscurity either. The press in the Netherlands wrote about their fate, which became emblematic of the unjust war. The most famous symbol of the wrongs that the British Empire inflicted on the Boers became Paul Kruger, a frail man who had been forced to leave the country he had built up himself. Such drama appealed widely to contemporaries and large crowds gathered to see the heroic president for themselves when he arrived in the Netherlands. The Boers who went on lecture tours also made the tragedies of the war in South Africa tangible to people in Europe. There were, however, also other means to inform the public about the drama that was unfolding in the Boer republics. Throughout the war, stories from South Africa reached the public in the form of letters that were written by people who were witnessing the events as they took place or had heard about them first hand.

Evading censorship

Although in all probability most *Hollanders* left South Africa, a number of them remained behind. From the beginning of the war, pro-Boers in Europe recognised the opportunities in using them as correspondents who could provide valuable information. Unlike British newspapers and news agencies, who probably had at least two hundred reporters in the field, the Dutch press had few official representatives, and largely depended on the correspondence of private individuals as a source of information.¹²⁹ During the first months of the conflict, newspaper editors and the ANV press office called upon the public in the Netherlands to forward all letters they received from friends and relatives who were present at the war zone.¹³⁰ This appeal was successful and a large collection of writings was gathered, not only about the battles, but also about daily life in the towns of the republics. During the early phase of the war, there were other sources of information too. All major Boer newspapers were available in the Netherlands, containing official statements by the governments of the republics and reports that often contradicted the British coverage of events. The biggest Dutch periodical from the Cape, *Ons Land*, was also considered to be an important source of information in this connection. During the first phase of the conflict, there was a large supply of such material, because the republics’ mail services were able to operate freely via the NZASM railway line and the port of Delagoa Bay. Although the British press was a lot faster in providing news thanks to the telegraph lines, opinion-makers in the Netherlands considered such documents to be important sources that allowed them to not have to depend on the

¹²⁹ For the British press cf. Badsey, ‘War Correspondents in the Boer War’, 191; Beaumont, ‘The Making of a War Correspondent’, 125.

¹³⁰ For the ANV advertisement cf. *NRC*, 1 November 1899; *De Telegraaf*, 4 November 1899.

London dailies only.¹³¹

Things changed after the occupation of the Boer republics, however. To start with, the British authorities confiscated the NAZSM railway line to Delagoa Bay, which meant an effective end to the regular mail services of the Boers. Moreover, they started to impose censorship in the republics, which affected both the press and private correspondence. It was for the first time that such extensive measures were taken during a conflict and Jaqueline Beaumont has argued that the South African War therefore represented an important phase in the development of modern censorship. Nevertheless it is hard to assess the effectiveness, or even the guidelines used, due to the fact that the censors left few sources.¹³² Although there was a general dislike of British censorship amongst Dutch contemporaries, they also seemed to be largely left in the dark about the motives behind it and the true extent of its power. Newspapers explicitly stated it when they received letters that had passed the censors, so that the people knew they had probably been tempered with. Despite these complaints, it should be remembered that the haphazard organisation of the censorship clearly imposed limits to its efficiency. Throughout the war, documents from South Africa containing statements that were considered to be important propaganda material, still reached the Netherlands. In fact, some correspondents tried to dodge censorship and at times actually succeeded in doing so. In this way, private letters remained a valuable source of information to the pro-Boer propaganda campaign.

The most obvious form of censorship was the attempt to gain control of the press in South Africa. Beaumont has shown that the army increasingly interfered in the work of correspondents, much to the chagrin of the British media, including those who supported the war.¹³³ However the authorities were far more aggressive towards the Boer periodicals. After the occupation of Bloemfontein and Pretoria, newspapers that had supported the republican governments were shut down. As mentioned above Dutch journalists who worked at these periodicals, such as Engelenburg and Rompel from *De Volksstem*, were put under pressure to return to Europe, if they were not actually extradited. Other Boer newspapers were taken over by British journalists, who actively produced propaganda for the new regime. The most famous example was *The Friend* in Bloemfontein, to which the famous writer Rudyard Kipling contributed for a period of several months.¹³⁴

These measures were not only confined to the republics, but also affected *Ons Land* in the Cape. This periodical regularly published accounts of the war from the Boers' perspective, contradicting British coverage. As such, it was an important source for newspapers in the Netherlands, probably also because the mail services from Cape Town were quite reliable.¹³⁵

¹³¹ Cf. chapter 4.

¹³² Beaumont, ‘The British Press and Censorship’.

¹³³ Ibidem,

¹³⁴ Krebs, *Gender, Race and the Writing of Empire*, 146.

¹³⁵ Kester, ‘Uit de slaap gewekt’, 226-227.

This source of information petered out after the start of Boer guerrilla operations in the Cape Colony just before New Year of 1901, when martial law was proclaimed. One of the measures taken by the Milner administration was the further tightening of censorship and the most obvious target was *Ons Land*. In January 1901, the journalist F.S. Malan was arrested and the authorities prohibited the periodical from publishing editorials. After this clamp-down, newspapers in the Netherlands largely ceased to use it as a source, because they thought it had lost its critical stance towards the authorities.¹³⁶ It seems that, in this respect, the British were quite successful in curbing the supply of pro-Boer information coming from South Africa via the press. There were, however, also more informal sources, which were harder to control.

Much information reached the Netherlands from the Dutch emigrants who had settled in South Africa during the final decades of the nineteenth century. A few weeks before the war broke out, enthusiasts amongst this group decided to form their own commando in the Transvaal, the so-called *Hollandercorps*. The Dutch regiment consisted of 450 men, of whom around 150 joined the Boer forces that invaded Natal. At first, newspapers in the Netherlands welcomed this news enthusiastically and praised their bravery in fighting for their ‘kinsmen’. But disillusion soon set in when the commando was defeated during the infamous battle of Elandslaagte, which took place ten days after the war had started. The dramatic events became widely known in the Netherlands thanks to many of the veterans sending in accounts of the battle in letters and it probably became the single most covered event by the Dutch press during the whole conflict. One of the major national newspapers in the Netherlands published no less than 27 accounts, a number of which were written by people who actually fought with the Boers.¹³⁷ After Elandslaagte, these men continued to send letters in which they gave accounts of their adventures. In total, almost half of the *Hollandercorps* was taken prisoner and many of these accounts were about their experiences in British captivity.

The most prolific correspondent amongst the *Hollander* PoWs became B.G. Versélewel de Witt Hamer, an officer who was captured at Elandslaagte and was initially held near Cape Town. In June 1900, he was one of the first to be sent to the prisoner camp on St. Helena, where he became one of the main spokesmen for the inmates. In this capacity he acted as a liaison for pro-Boer organisations that sent aid to the PoWs and he wrote extensive reports about daily life in the camp that were published in the Dutch press. Despite the fact that they were read by the censors, these letters contained clear assertions that many of the PoWs remained defiant and patriotic, which was discussed extensively in the newspapers.¹³⁸ But there were also complaints about censorship. One of the most notorious incidents happened when two censors were found guilty of randomly burning letters after they had stolen the stamps from the envelopes.¹³⁹

¹³⁶ *NRC*, 5 and 12 February 1901.

¹³⁷ Cf. Welcker collection of *NRC*-cuttings in the NZAV library. For the coverage of Elandslaagte cf. chapter 5.

¹³⁸ Cf. chapter 6.

¹³⁹ Letter from St. Helena. *NRC*, 9 January 1902.

In the camp of Diyatalawa in Ceylon, there also was censorship. One of the *Hollander* inmates there, a teacher, devised a rather creative way of dodging it. After arriving there, he sent a wooden box as a present to H.J. Emous, the man who had recruited him to go to the Transvaal in the 1890s.¹⁴⁰ In it, he hid a piece of paper with squares cut out and the accompanying instruction explained that this paper had to be put over the future letters, so that only the words in the squares were visible. The general contents of these letters were harmless and thus passed the censors without any trouble. The coded words, however, contained information about the situation in the camp and the morale of the inmates, which, he asserted, was still high. One such hidden message read: ‘Here [...] there is complete [...] unity [...] fierce hatred [...] the greatest [...] resolve [...] hope for [...] revenge and [...] mistrust [...] with regard to all that [...] is English’.¹⁴¹

Another way in which authors in the PoW camps tried to avoid censorship was by smuggling out their manuscripts. One of the most noteworthy examples is the war diary of Dietlof van Warmelo. This young man was the son of a Calvinist minister from the Netherlands who had settled in the Transvaal and married a local girl. Van Warmelo had studied in the Netherlands, where he became well-acquainted with his uncle, the famous writer Frederik van Eeden. By the time the war started, Van Warmelo had finished his education, returned to South Africa, joined a Boer commando and fought for almost a year and a half. In April 1901, he was captured and sent to the Ahmednagar camp in northern India. There he wrote an account of his personal experiences during the war; which he had to do from memory because he had lost the diary he had kept in the field. This manuscript was smuggled out of the camp and reached Van Eeden, who immediately found a publisher for this ‘remarkable’ book, which went on to become quite famous.¹⁴²

Besides the accounts of those who had been captured, there were also letters from civilians who had not joined the commandos and remained in the towns of the Boer republics. During the early phases of the war, such epistles were regularly printed in newspapers, but after censorship had been imposed they often ceased to contain much interesting information. At times, however, controversial news did come out, describing the situation in the concentration camps and giving news from the battlefield. Although a substantial number of the secret correspondents were female, contemporaries paid relatively little attention to these women. This could explain why there are few sources available that give insight into their activities. The only woman who explicitly wrote about her experiences as an intelligence agent was one of Dietlof van Warmelo’s sisters, Johanna. In 1913, she published a personal account of her adventures as a Boer informant, in the so-called ‘*kappie kommando*’. After she

¹⁴⁰ For Emous cf. chapters 1 and 4.

¹⁴¹ ‘Hier [...] heerschen volkomen [...] eensgezindheid [...] innige haat [...] de grootse [...] beslist [...] heid, hoop op [...] wraak en [...] wantrouwen [...] van al wat [...] Engelsch is’. Quoted in: H. Wagenaar, ‘De code van Diyat’, in: *Zuid-Afrika*, vol. 86 (2007), 176-177.

¹⁴² ‘bizonndere’. Van Warmelo, *Mijn kommando en guerrilla-kommando leven*, 7.

had served as a nurse in the concentration camp of Irene between May and July 1901, she was recruited by a former Boer officer, J.J. Naudé, to help smuggle information and people in and out of Pretoria.¹⁴³

In this capacity, she also sent letters and reports to the Boer representatives in Europe, mainly about the situation in the camps. Such material was usually addressed to members of her family and to her fiancé, who lived in the Netherlands at the time. But this sort of information was not always received well. One report about the concentration camps that was carefully hidden in a bottle of ‘Dr Williams’ Pink Pills’, was put away by the recipient because he, with ‘unequalled stubbornness’, did not think it was of any value.¹⁴⁴ Johanna van Warmelo also experimented with short reports which she sent directly to the SAR legation. These were written in lemon-juice on the inside of envelopes and became visible after heating. Despite this spectacular method, it does not seem likely that this information significantly contributed to the pro-Boer propaganda campaign. The notes only contained rudimentary information and there is no evidence that they were ever published. Moreover, Leyds himself advised her to stop this dangerous activity after one envelope arrived with the text already visible.¹⁴⁵

But not all of Johanna van Warmelo’s projects petered out like this, as is shown by the Spoelstra case, which also reveals that there were significant risks for the correspondents. At the end of 1900, the *Hollander* J. Spoelstra wrote a long letter to the Dutch newspapers in which he criticised the situation in the concentration camps and the general circumstances under the occupation. The courier who tried to carry this report to Europe was caught and Spoelstra was arrested. Despite protests from several prominent Pretoria residents, he was convicted to one year in prison and a fine of £ 100. Although the controversial letter was confiscated, the contents still became known. During the hearings in his case, Spoelstra summoned around thirty witnesses who corroborated the indictments he had written. Secret agents operating in the circle of Johanna van Warmelo obtained a full report of these proceedings, hid it in a cocoa tin and gave it to a lady on her way to London. Once there, it reached the anti-war journalist William Stead, who published the full text in one of his pamphlets.¹⁴⁶

Another *Hollander* correspondent who was arrested because of his secret activities was Cornelis Broeksma, public prosecutor in Johannesburg and a prominent member of the charity committee in that town. He wrote highly critical reports about the local concentration camp that had been set up at the local racetrack, which he visited regularly. It seems likely that he was the author, under the pseudonym ‘Pax’, of one of the first letters that complained about

¹⁴³ Brandt-Van Warmelo, *Die kappie kommando*. *Kappie* refers to the headdress of Boer women. Cf. chapter 6.

¹⁴⁴ ‘weergalooze eigenzinnigheid’. Ibidem, 166.

¹⁴⁵ A few of these notes can be found in: NASA, Leyds collection, LEY 94. Cf. Van der Merwe, *Johanna Brandt*, 106-108.

¹⁴⁶ Stead, *Methods of Barbarism*, 68-91; Brandt-Van Warmelo, *Die kappie kommando*, 167-170; Krebs, *Gender, Race and the writing of Empire*, 99-100.



Leaflet with picture of Broeksma's family.

conditions in the camps, which was published in a Dutch newspaper in February 1901.¹⁴⁷ He continued to write about the deteriorating conditions and also gave estimates of the death tolls, which were not mentioned in official British sources at the time. Many of these letters, written under the pseudonym 'Charles Brooks' were addressed to 'Dr Williamson', one of the

¹⁴⁷ *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 21 February 1901. The editors of this newspapers refused to identify the letters' author, even to the ANV. Correspondence between ANV press office and editors of *Het Algemeen Handelsblad*, 22 and 27 February 1901. NASA, Leyds collection, LEY 809. Cf. chapter 6.

aliases of Willem Leyds.¹⁴⁸

Broeksma was arrested by the British and charged with high treason, because he had allegedly written a pamphlet in which he had called for the murder of a prominent member of the British community in the Transvaal. As a result, he was condemned to death under the occupational law and executed on 30 September 1901.¹⁴⁹ In the Netherlands, the Broeksma case became emblematic of the way in which the British authorities tried to quell the coverage of the tragedy that was unfolding in the concentration camps. Leaflets were printed with a photo of him and his family, the subscript of which read: ‘Cornelis Broeksma, [...] executed by the English on 30 Sept. 1901. Hero and martyr for mercy, public prosecutor in the most noble way: he indicted England before the court of humanity.’¹⁵⁰

The fate of Broeksma shows that there were grave risks for people in South Africa who sent documents to the pro-Boer organisations in Europe. However, there was a substantial group of people, many of them *Hollanders*, who tried to do so nonetheless. Compared with British war-journalism, it was quite a haphazard network, which was not always able to provide a steady supply of news, particularly after censorship was imposed. The main consequences of the British occupation were that formal mail services were stopped and Dutch language periodicals in South Africa muzzled. All this did not prevent news from slipping through, however. Although private letters were screened, at times they contained some relevant information for the propagandists about the situation in the PoW or civilian camps. In addition, several individuals attempted to smuggle out letters with the explicit intention of influencing public opinion in Europe. Such material did contain statements about the situation on the battlefields, but because people in towns and camps hardly had any contact with the commandos who continued to fight, these descriptions were too vague to be of use in propagandistic material. However, there were more direct sources that provided information about the events at the front line.

Letters from the front line

The majority of people who travelled between South Africa and the Netherlands during the war left to find refuge in Europe. There were, however, several groups that went to South Africa to help the Boer war effort. These men (and a few women) often saw action at the front line and reported on their experiences in letters that were published in the press. The lingering war complicated the position of such correspondents, mainly because the Boer commandos

¹⁴⁸ A collection of the original letters is kept in: NASA, Leyds collection, LEY 314.

¹⁴⁹ Memorandum by F.E.T. Krause, June 1932, 17-18. NASA, Leyds collection, LEY 256. Krause was a state prosecutor from Johannesburg who went to London during the war, where he was arrested in a related case a few days after Broeksma’s execution. He was accused of inciting Broeksma to kill the British journalist John Douglas Forster and convicted to two years imprisonment.

¹⁵⁰ ‘Cornelis Broeksma, [...] 30 Sept. 1901 door de Engelschen gefusileerd. Held en martelaar voor barmhartigheid, publiek aanklager in den edelsten zin des woords: Hij klaagde Engeland aan voor de rechtbank der menscheijkheid.’ These leaflets were meant to raise money for the orphaned family. The papers of the Broeksma fund are kept in: ZA, Emous collection, EM 3, file D5.

became increasingly isolated when the guerrilla phase of the conflict started. Still, information from the battle zone did reach Europe on several occasions and these heroic reports were eagerly published by pro-Boer propagandists.

During the first stages of the conflict, volunteers from all around the world went to South Africa to join the commandos. In the Netherlands, this was a sensitive issue because it endangered the policy of neutrality. Nevertheless, it became common knowledge that a number of volunteers were assisted by a clandestine organisation, which was founded in November 1899 by H.J. Kiewiet de Jonge with the approval of the SAR legation. Another prominent figure in this committee was Frans Beelaerts van Blokland, son of the late consul-general of the SAR, who in later life was to become a prominent statesman.¹⁵¹ The members of the clandestine committee were well aware of the sensitivity of this work and were very discrete about it while openly paying lip service to the official policy of neutrality. Moreover, like Leyds, they were of the opinion that only trained soldiers, preferably artillerymen, were of use to the Boers and thus carefully selected the people whom they assisted.¹⁵² A list in the personal papers of Beelaerts van Blokland reveals that the committee helped around twenty people to leave for South Africa between January and May 1900.¹⁵³

Lieutenant Gerrit Boldingh probably became the most well-known of these men. This 28 year-old artillery officer resigned from the Dutch army after the war started and arrived at the front line in March 1900. After seeing action at different battles, he joined the commando led by the famous Boer General Christiaan de Wet, whom he deeply admired.¹⁵⁴ In September 1901 he died in the saddle after he was shot while being pursued by the British army. Before Boldingh left for South Africa, he was contracted by Charles Boissevain of *Het Algemeen Handelsblad* to act as a war correspondent.¹⁵⁵ His letters reached the Netherlands throughout his stay in South Africa and were published in this newspaper. In 1903, his missives were collected in a book to which Boissevain himself contributed an introduction in honour of his memory. The editor of the volume explained that it also served a higher purpose: he held such a high view of Boldingh’s writings that he was of the opinion that historians would in the future find it ‘a source [...] of the most pure nature’.¹⁵⁶

Another group of volunteers that left the Netherlands to serve in South Africa in the early stages of the war was the staff of the Red Cross ambulances. Already during the Jameson Raid, G.W.S. Lingbeek, a *Hollander* who worked as a medical doctor in Pretoria during the

¹⁵¹ In later life Beelaerts van Blokland became a diplomat, foreign minister and vice-president of the *Raad van State* (Privy Council). Woltring, ‘Beelaerts van Blokland, Jhr. Frans (1872-1956)’.

¹⁵² C. Beelaerts van Blokland to F. Beelaerts van Blokland, 7 January 1900. ZA, F. Beelaerts van Blokland collection, FBB 1. Cf. chapter 4.

¹⁵³ List of names. NL-HaNA, Beelaerts, 2.21.253, inv.nr. 72, bundel A.

¹⁵⁴ Boissevain, ‘Een jonge Nederlandsche held’, in: Boldingh, *Een Hollandsch officier in Zuid-Afrika*, iv-xi, ix-x.

¹⁵⁵ C. Boissevain to F. Beelaerts van Blokland, 14 January 1900. ZA, F. Beelaerts van Blokland collection, FBB 1.

¹⁵⁶ ‘een bron [...] van den allerzuiverste aard’. Introduction by G.H. Priem to: Boldingh, *Een Hollandsch officier in Zuid-Afrika*, iii. Another memorial in remembrance of Boldingh is a granite bench bearing his name in front his former barracks in Gorichem (the Netherlands), which was unveiled in 1903.

1890s, set up an ambulance corps with the help of the NZAV and the Dutch Red Cross.¹⁵⁷ The outbreak of the South African War led to the expansion of these activities. In November and December 1899, three Dutch ambulances left the Netherlands, under the leadership of Lingbeek, J.D. Koster and D. van Rijckevorsel, respectively. Also, a joint Dutch-Russian ambulance and one that was mustered in the Dutch East Indies went to the frontlines in the months thereafter. In May 1900, two additional physicians, J.H. Pameyer and D.J.E. MacLeod, arrived in Pretoria.¹⁵⁸ The total staff of these ambulances consisted of 64 people.¹⁵⁹

Several of these men and women wrote long letters about their experiences that were forwarded to newspapers by the executive committee of the Dutch Red Cross. In 1901, a voluminous book was published, containing the official reports of the doctors in charge.¹⁶⁰ In addition, the personal memoirs of several nurses also appeared.¹⁶¹ In these publications, the activities of the Red Cross were extensively described, as were the increasing problems with the British army, who considered them to be on the Boers’ side. After the occupation of Pretoria, the staff members of one ambulance were even arrested, after which the men were sent to a PoW camp on Ceylon and the women deported to Europe. Such stories caused an outcry in the Netherlands.¹⁶² In addition to these problems, the changing tactics of the Boers, who started a guerrilla war with mobile hit-and-run attacks, complicated the work of the Red Cross. The majority of the medical staff therefore decided to leave South Africa, but a small number of them, amongst whom doctor J.C.J. Bierens de Haan and male nurse H.J. Poutsma, joined the commando’s in the field on their exhausting journeys. During the first half of 1901, they returned to the Netherlands, where they tried to organise new ambulances for the Boers, an initiative which failed because the British authorities refused them access to the war zone.¹⁶³ Nevertheless, the stories of both Poutsma and Bierens de Haan did attract considerable attention from the media in the Netherlands. The former wrote a feuilleton in *Het Algemeen Handelsblad* and the latter granted a famous interview to *De Nieuwe Courant*, in which he asserted that the Boers would never give up.¹⁶⁴ After these men had returned, however, no Dutch Red Cross employees were left in South Africa to provide useful material for the newspapers to report on.

The increasing problems of the activities of the Red Cross in South Africa were in keeping with a general trend. As the war went on and the Boers’ chances of a military victory waned, the stream of volunteers to help the commandos in the field dried up. Soldiers from

¹⁵⁷ ZA, *NZAV Jaarverslag 1896-1897*, 27-28. Cf. chapter 4 for an account of the ties between the NZAV and the Dutch Red Cross.

¹⁵⁸ De Jong, *Buitenlandse Ambulances in de tweede Anglo-Boerenoorlog*, 5.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibidem*, 11.

¹⁶⁰ *De Vereeniging Het Nederlandsche Roode Kruis*.

¹⁶¹ Wormser, *Wat ik zag en hoorde op een ambulancetrein*; Hellemans, *Met het Roode Kruis mee*; Jeltens, *Uit het dagboek van H. Jeltens*; Romeyn, *Met de 1e Nederlandsche Roode-Kruis ambulance*.

¹⁶² For the reception of these incidents in the Dutch press cf. chapter 5.

¹⁶³ Jong, *Buitenlandse Ambulances in de tweede Anglo-Boerenoorlog*, 72-75.

¹⁶⁴ *Het Algemeen Handelsblad*, June-August 1901; *De Nieuwe Courant*, 9 June 1901. Cf. chapter 6.

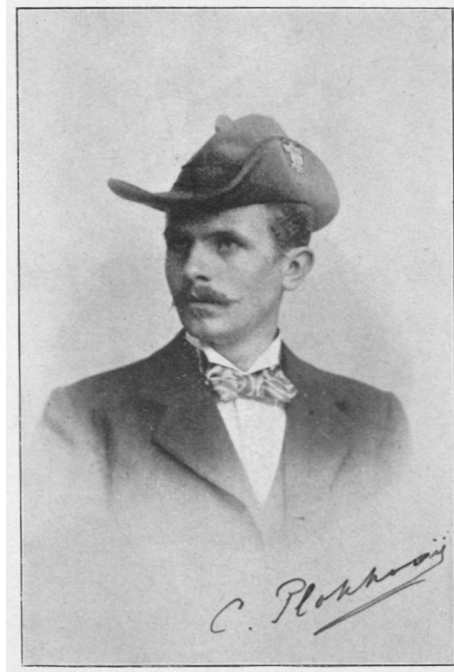


Photo of Cornelis Plokhooy (1901).

Europe became less useful in the new circumstances, because they did not know the terrain and had no experience with guerrilla warfare.¹⁶⁵ There was, however, a growing need for couriers. Because the British controlled all routes to the region, communication between the Boer representatives in Europe and the commandos in the field became problematic. After Pott's expulsion from Lourenço Marques at the end of 1900, correspondence could only be taken back and forth via couriers who travelled all the way from the war zone to Europe and *vice versa*.¹⁶⁶ At least twenty missions consisting of either one or two people left with letters from the Boer representatives in Europe to the leaders in the field between the beginning of 1901 and the middle of 1902. Most recruits were people who had previously fought with the Boer commandos.¹⁶⁷ It seems that the majority of the couriers did not arrive, either because they ran off or succumbed to the dangers along the routes via Delagoa Bay and South-West Africa, which became more and more difficult to pass.¹⁶⁸

One of the men who attempted the hazardous journey (and that twice) was the former Dutch resident of the SAR Cornelis Plokhooy (1877-1964), who fought with the Boers in the early stages of the war. In June 1900, he was captured by the British and deported back to the Netherlands, where he became involved in the propaganda campaign by writing a book about his war experiences, which was followed by a successful lecture tour. In addition, he volunteered as a courier.¹⁶⁹ In a handwritten report, he recounted how he had gone to Paris in

¹⁶⁵ Pretorius, *Kommandolewe tydens die Anglo-Boereoorlog, 1899-1902*, 166.

¹⁶⁶ Leyds ed., *Derde Verzameling* I, xiii; idem, *Vierde Verzameling* I, xliii.

¹⁶⁷ Idem, *Derde Verzameling* II, 1.

¹⁶⁸ W.J. Leyds to Judge Hertzog, 18 November 1902. NL-HaNA, Leyds, 2.21.105, inv.nr. 40.

¹⁶⁹ Plokhooy, *Met den Mauser*, 133; Ploeger, *Cornelis Plokhooy*, 1-2.

December 1900 and there received a bundle of letters for the Boer leaders in the field reporting on the situation in Europe and £ 10 to pay for the journey from Johannes Pierson. By the time he arrived at the port of Lourenço Marques, Plokhooy was penniless and fell ill with malaria. To make matters worse, he had a quarrel with the local Boer representatives, thereby depriving him of all support. When he heard that the journey to the Transvaal had become very dangerous because the British were extensively patrolling the borders with Mozambique, Plokhooy decided to call off the expedition in order to prevent the letters from falling into the wrong hands. He was interned as a Boer refugee and deported to Portugal. There he managed to escape from the camp, hand over his sensitive load to Engelenburg in Lisbon and reached the Netherlands in July 1901.¹⁷⁰ Despite this ill-fated adventure, Plokhooy volunteered for another mission early in 1902. This time he did reach the commandos via South-West Africa after an arduous journey during which he was allegedly chased by enemy spies. However, by the time he arrived, peace had been signed and he was once again deported by the British authorities.¹⁷¹

There were also couriers who attempted to carry documents from South Africa to Europe. Already during the early phases of the guerrilla campaign, the Transvaal leaders considered it important that their correspondence and reports should be sent to their representatives in Europe so that papers containing intelligence would not fall into the hands of the British. Just before the occupation of Pretoria, C.K. Trotsenburg, a *Hollander* who was in charge of the telegraph department, gathered all the cables of the Boer generals from his office and took them to the temporary republican headquarters at Machadodorp (north-eastern Transvaal). When this camp had to be abandoned, Botha ordered him to go to Europe and leave the collection with Leyds for safekeeping. The cables contained much sensitive information about mistakes made by the Boer commanders during the first phase of the war, so the minister plenipotentiary kept a close eye on them. Although the Dutch government showed great interest in the collection, and even allowed them to be temporarily stored in the queen's offices, Leyds was not willing to grant permission for their publication in the Netherlands because he feared that some negative sides to the Boer strategy would be exposed.¹⁷²

Besides concerns about the safety of some of their confidential correspondence, the Boer generals also thought it important to keep the Boer representatives in Europe – mainly Leyds, the deputation and President Kruger – informed about military developments in South Africa. Not all attempts to send reports were successful, but several of their accounts reached Europe and were reproduced in their entirety in newspapers and pamphlets. One of the most famous examples is a report about the failed attempt to negotiate peace between Botha and Kitchener

¹⁷⁰ Handwritten report by Plokhooy, 18 July 1901. NASA, Leyds collection, LEY 324; Plokhooy, *Met den Mauser*, 138-151.

¹⁷¹ Ploeger, *Cornelis Plokhooy*, 4; file Plokhooy. NASA, Leyds collection, LEY 324. Initially, Plokhooy was refused a permit to go to South Africa again, but eventually he settled in Pretoria in 1921, where he died in 1964.

¹⁷² Cf. correspondence in: NASA, Leyds collection, LEY 317 and 322. Also the strained relation with the Dutch attachés played a large role in this matter. Cf. chapter 7.

in February 1901, which appeared in a Dutch newspaper the following May under the pseudonym of ‘B.ot H. Anicus’. This alias would suggest that it was written by the general himself, but the author was in fact Bierens de Haan, who acted as Botha’s personal physician during the talks and returned to the Netherlands carrying the minutes of the proceedings.¹⁷³ Nevertheless, it is clear that the Boer commander considered it to be important that this account be published in Europe.

General Jan Smuts too considered the propaganda campaign in Europe to be of great value. Smuts, who was the state attorney of the Transvaal, was already known in the Netherlands for writing a famous pamphlet, entitled *A Century of Wrong*, which appeared a few months after the war had started.¹⁷⁴ When the guerrilla phase started, he led a commando that infiltrated the Cape and eventually went to the barren north western part of the colony. There he wrote several reports about his activities during the final months of 1901. In confidential letters to the Boer representatives, he expressed his doubts about the war effort, but in reports that were explicitly marked for publication, he boasted about the high morale of his men and of their achievements.¹⁷⁵ One of the couriers who arrived at the SAR legation told how Smuts had ordered him to set up more regular lines of communication running through the desert into German South-West Africa. Not only would it be easier to obtain supplies this way, but it was hoped that the positive reports coming from the Boers would influence the public in Europe, so that the British government would come under increasing pressure to end the war. Smuts had asked all the Boer generals to send him their reports in code, so that he could forward them.¹⁷⁶

Conclusion

By the time Smuts’s initiative to strengthen the lines of communication between the commandos in the field and the Boer representatives in Europe began to take shape, talks had already begun which would eventually end the war and result in the Peace of Vereeniging, which marked the end of the Boer republics’ independence. In this sense, these efforts to supply material for the propaganda campaign in Europe were too late. It does show, however, that it was considered important to keep channels of information between the commandos and the pro-Boer agitators in the Europe open throughout the whole course of the war. The main goal was to counter the British coverage of events and so to put forward the other side of the story in order to influence public opinion and thus increase the pressure on the British government. This effort was successful in that a substantial amount of material from the

¹⁷³ This report was first published in: *NRC*, 29 May 1901. It was also published as a pamphlet. ‘B. ot H. Anicus’, *De onderhandelingen van Lord Kitchener*; Leyds ed., *Vierde verzameling* I, xxli. Cf. chapter 6.

¹⁷⁴ Cf. chapter 4 and 5.

¹⁷⁵ The original reports can be found in: NASA, Leyds collection, LEY 94; Hancock, *Smuts: The Sanguine Years*, 140. Cf. chapter 6.

¹⁷⁶ Memorandum of a conversation held between J.C. Smuts and J.H. Alleman, 20 December 1901; handwritten note by J.C. Smuts, not dated. NASA, Leyds collection, LEY 94.

battlefield reached Europe (and particularly the Netherlands) where it was used in propagandistic publications. Nevertheless, members of this network also encountered some serious problems that can be accounted for by the informal nature of the pro-Boer movement.

Probably the most important institution of pro-Boer agitation in Europe was the SAR legation run by Willem Leyds. He had an extensive network of informants and agents who helped him to gather and distribute material that was in support of the Boers' cause. Still, Leyds's activities were severely inhibited by the Dutch government's policy of neutrality. In addition, he had limited means available to him and his staff was not competent enough to properly handle the huge amount of paperwork involved. Moreover, the fact that there were conflicts, such as those with H.P.N. Muller and the Dutch attaché L.W.J.K. Thomson, shows that there was controversy surrounding the way in which the Boers were to be depicted. However, the greatest problems experienced by the pro-Boer propagandists resulted from the changing situation in South Africa. Already at the beginning of the war, the monopoly on the telegraph lines was greatly to the advantage of the British in the coverage of events there. During the course of the conflict, they expanded their control over infrastructure in South Africa, which led to the deportation of unwanted groups, attempts to cut off Boer lines of communication and the imposition of stricter censorship. Despite these measures, a large amount of information was still transferred to Europe by exiles and refugees, in private letters from the PoW and concentration camps and in reports from people who witnessed action at the front line. In this way, a significant body of pro-Boer literature came into being, heavily influencing the way in which the conflict was depicted in continental Europe.

Compared to British coverage of the war, the network that provided information to the pro-Boer propagandists was far less extensive and far less consistent. In this respect, Lord George Hamilton's jibe referring to the SAR legation as a 'factory of lies' was an exaggeration, because the legation was actually rather inefficient. As a result, its propagandistic activities did not achieve Leyds' main objective, namely to induce the great powers to intervene on behalf of the republics. Moreover, the massive public enthusiasm at times proved to be a burden rather than a blessing. Still, the importance of propaganda during the South African War should not be underestimated. The words of Lord Hamilton and the agitated response to them by pro-Boers reveal that contemporaries were reflecting on the coverage of the conflict in the context of the age of an emerging mass media. In this respect, the pro-Boer propaganda campaign was successful, because it managed to create gripping images based on the sources that made their way from South Africa to Europe. In order to publish and distribute this material, Leyds sought contact with organisations in the Netherlands, which affirms that these institutions were closely connected to the lines of communication that have been described in this chapter. The next chapter will further explore this link and describe how the Netherlands became an important base in the war of words that accompanied the actual fighting in South Africa.