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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 4: ‘A campaign of the pen’. The Dutch pro-Boer organisations

When the South African War started in October 1899, a wave of pro-Boer enthusiasm rippled through the Netherlands, greater than ever before and, for a while, support for the embattled republics dominated public life. In November 1899, Amsterdam was all abuzz with false rumours that the Boers had defeated the British army. At times, people even went out into the streets to celebrate this ‘victory’, infecting others with their enthusiasm. On one occasion, a huge crowd gathered at the Rembrandtplein for a spontaneous celebration: flags of the Boer republics were everywhere and the Transvaal anthem was sung heartily.¹ Although the feverish enthusiasm cooled somewhat later, people continued to sing songs in the streets in which they celebrated the Boers for their heroism and denounced British cruelties throughout the war.² Advertisements from the time reveal the great popularity of the Boer leaders, several of whom literally became brand names. Paul Kruger’s name, for instance, became attached to items such as beer, lemonade, tobacco, pipes and wallets.³ These examples show that the South African War prominently featured in Dutch popular culture, but it remains to be seen what effect these phenomena had on society in general. As will be discussed in this chapter, this is not only a question for historians: also contemporaries tried grapple with it.

In historiography, much emphasis is placed on the official policy of neutrality that was adhered to by the Dutch government, which was pursued with even more rigor during the war. To ensure the integrity of the Netherlands’ colonial possessions in the Indonesian archipelago, which bordered on the British Empire in Asia, it was considered of vital importance that incidents be avoided.⁴ The general public did not always share this view and throughout the war there were loud complaints about the cautious official stance taken by the Netherlands. In this sense, the Dutch government was caught between a rock and hard place. On the one hand, it was concerned about how pro-Boer propaganda might endanger its relations with Great Britain, but on the other hand it had to take into account the sentiments of the domestic population, which were exploited in Parliament by the opposition leader, Abraham Kuyper. In order to appease the public, the Minister of Naval Affairs came up with a cunning plan in September 1900 that would save the face for the government while avoiding offense to the British. He ordered the cruiser *Gelderland* to set course to Delagoa Bay and pick up Paul Kruger, who had fled Pretoria in June. The elderly president was brought to Europe and, after a successful tour through France and parts of Germany, went to the Netherlands, where he

¹ Kröll, *Die internationale Buren-Agitation*, 52; Te Velde, *Gemeenschapszin en plichtsbefef*, 164.

² Schutte, *Nederland en de Afrikaners*, 82.

³ An extensive collection of pro-Boer paraphernalia is kept at the Kruger House in Pretoria. Cf. chapter 7.

⁴ M. Kuitenbrouwer, *Nederland en de opkomst*, 183-184.

received a hero’s welcome and was granted asylum.⁵ Despite this political master stroke, emotions ran high on several occasions during the later phases of the war. In 1901, for example, a crowd gave Edward VII a hostile welcome when he disembarked at the port of Vlissingen, singing the Transvaal anthem; one British diplomat described it as ‘the most disgraceful scene I ever witnessed in my life’.⁶

Despite such public embarrassments, the principle of neutrality was never seriously threatened and it was clear to all political parties that it was in the national interest to pursue a policy of careful diplomacy. Significantly, government policy remained unchanged on this issue when Kuyper was elected as first minister in August 1901, even though some contemporaries considered his election victory to be a direct result of his vocal support for the Boers in Parliament.⁷ Moreover, the established pro-Boer organisations respected the cautious attitude of the government in the light of the international position of the Netherlands. The NZAV, which was the largest of these, had many prominent politicians, businessmen and academics amongst its members, people who fully accepted the principle of neutrality. Therefore, the leaders of most pro-Boer organisations refrained from public protests against the government on this point.⁸ The diplomatic representatives of the Boer republics also understood the position of the Dutch government in this matter. The most prominent of them, Willem Leyds, had close connections with leading politicians in The Hague through his former professors, one of whom, N.G. Pierson, was first minister in 1899. Although they discussed the option of the Netherlands assuming a mediating role on several occasions, the Transvaal envoy was well aware that possibilities were limited due to the international balance of power, something which he clearly communicated to the government in Pretoria.⁹

Although it is obvious to historians – as it was to contemporaries – that the Dutch government’s policy of neutrality left little room to manoeuvre for Dutch pro-Boer propagandists, there was more to the matter. The campaign in support of the republics and the emotions it provoked were not simply expressions of national frustration with the weak international position of the Netherlands, nor the result of a temporary collective lapse of reason. As has been argued in previous chapters, the reporting on South African affairs was closely linked to the lines of communication that extended between the Boer republics and the Netherlands. Contemporaries themselves reflected on this network, which shows that they considered propaganda to be an important part of the struggle for colonial dominance that was taking place in the region. In the dawning age of modern media, a vital question in this respect concerned how one might mobilise and use public opinion. This chapter will explore such

⁵ Ibidem, 185-186; Bossenbroek, *Holland op zijn breedst*, 9 and 186-187.

⁶ Quoted in: M. Kuitenbrouwer, *Nederland en de opkomst*, 187.

⁷ Ibidem, 187-188; Van Koppen, *De geuzen van de negentiende eeuw*, 182-185.

⁸ ZA, *NZAV Jaarverslag 1895-1896*, 15; Otterspeer, ‘Boeren en academici’, 207 and 219.

⁹ Leyds ed., *Eerste Verzameling*, 83-87. Leyds’ contact with Kuyper, who became first minister in 1901, was not very close and when the latter undertook a mediation attempt early in 1902, the Transvaal envoy was taken by surprise. Cf. chapter 6.

notions by examining the structure of the pro-Boer movement in the Netherlands during the South African War. The pertinence of these issues is shown by the fact that the great boom in sympathy for the republics caused problems for the organisations that advocated the ideal of *stamverwantschap*, with their leaders often having trouble directing the public agitation along what they believed were the right lines.

In general, historians consider the NZAV to be the most important pro-Boer organisation during the South African War, because it was the oldest and the largest.¹⁰ The huge increase in membership after the conflict began seems to confirm this. In historiography, however, there has been little attention for how the association actually functioned or how contemporaries reflected on this question. In this sense, the primacy of the NZAV was not as straightforward as it might seem at first glance. Internally, there was significant criticism of the executive committee and their efforts to reach out to the public. In addition, several other pro-Boer organisations emerged, which could point to external competition for the NZAV. Henk te Velde argues that the process of pillarisation, during which public life in the Netherlands was divided along ideological lines, was one of the main explanations for this fragmentation.¹¹ Although the NZAV’s executive committee was aware that the organisation was considered to be a Liberal bulwark and did try to mobilise people from other political groups, this was not as important an issue as it might seem at first.

What weighted more was the connection with the lines of communication between South Africa and the Netherlands. Willem Leyds was a central figure in this network and he worked closely with several Dutch pro-Boer organisations. In addition, many *Hollanders* who returned from the Transvaal became active propagandists in Europe. There was, however, an unchecked proliferation of other activities outside this network and at times these caused significant problems. There were examples of outright fraud, by individuals who were trying to take advantage of the public’s massive enthusiasm for the Boers. The situation was not always clear-cut, however, as *bona fide* initiatives were sometimes also considered to be harmful for the general Boer cause.

Such issues will be further discussed in this chapter by examining three aspects of the propaganda campaign: dissemination of pro-Boer coverage of the war, support to emigrants and refugees and collections in order to provide humanitarian aid to the inhabitants of the republics. There was a certain degree of fragmentation in these fields, which worried many prominent pro-Boers. In response to this, there were attempts to centralise initiatives and encourage different organisations to co-operate more closely in order to maximise their effect. It is difficult to assess the results of these activities. At an institutional level, there were certain successes in streamlining the pro-Boer organisations, while on the other hand it is hard to assert the impact on the general public. What is clear, however, is that contemporaries were

¹⁰ Kröll, *Die internationale Buren-Agitation*, 139; M. Kuitenbrouwer, *Nederland en de opkomst*, 183; Schutte, *Nederland en de Afrikaners*, 73.

¹¹ Te Velde, *Gemeenschapszin en plichtsbefef*, 169.

aware of the wider context of the propaganda campaign and the pitfalls of modern media. Significantly, the main focus in this respect was not on domestic issues, although these did play a role, but on the channels by which material on the situation in South Africa was transferred and the way in which this information was disseminated. This shows that the pro-Boer movement in the Netherlands was not simply the result of a hysteric form of nationalism that projected domestic issues onto the outside world, but rather an exponent of a complex discourse on Dutch identity in the global context in the early days of mass media.

The NZAV from within

The NZAV undoubtedly remained the most important Dutch pro-Boer organisation throughout the South African War. In August 1899, a successful address to the British people was presented, written by professor of law J. de Louter, who was a member of the executive committee at the time. In 1881, around 6,000 people had signed P. Harting’s petition against the annexation of Transvaal; eighteen years later more than 140,000 signatures were collected to protest against the looming war. The address was sent to all major newspapers in Europe, many of which published it, even in Britain.¹² Although the address did not prevent the war, its outbreak was not unfavourable to the NZAV. The membership of the association grew from 1,663 at the beginning of 1899 to 6,111 in December of that year. The executive committee considered this to be a result of the recruitment campaign that the society started in November of that year in order to increase the society’s activities in support of the Boer republics. The willing co-operation of the national newspapers that published the NZAV’s circular and encouraged their readers to join, was also mentioned with much satisfaction.¹³ The activities of the NZAV expanded too. Like the official representatives of the republics, the society considered propaganda to be an important means of helping the Boers from Europe. Moreover, a new ‘*hulpfonds*’ (‘aid fund’) was started in order to provide humanitarian aid to ‘those who suffer and those who fight’ in the Boer republics.¹⁴ Before these activities are treated in more detail, this chapter will discuss the composition and character of the NZAV and other organisations that originated in the context of the burgeoning enthusiasm for the Boers during the war.

The sharp increase of membership numbers of the NZAV after October 1899 prompted questions concerning the structure of the society. The most direct outcome of this was the establishment of local branches throughout the country. At the beginning of 1899, the NZAV had just four subdivisions; a year later this number had grown to 35.¹⁵ Looking at membership distribution, it can be said that the most active centres of NZAV activity were

¹² ZA, *NZAV Jaarverslag 1899*, 16-17; M. Kuitenbrouwer, *Nederland en de opkomst*, 183; Schutte, *Nederland en de Afrikaners*, 89; Bossenbroek, *Holland op zijn breedst*, 247-248.

¹³ ZA, *NZAV Jaarverslag 1899*, 8-9.

¹⁴ ‘de lijdenden en strijdenden’. Ibidem, 18.

¹⁵ Ibidem, 10-12.

urban areas, where two-thirds of all members resided. Of these Rotterdam, (706 members in 1900), Amsterdam (651 members) and The Hague (601 members) were the largest.¹⁶ Branches in smaller communities mainly limited their activities to organising lectures during which new members were recruited for the society and donations collected in aid of Boer victims of the war.¹⁷

Compared to branches in other cities, the activities of the one in Amsterdam, which was established as late as March 1901, were rather limited. The explanation for this can be sought in the fact that the executive committee resided in the city too, which meant that there was not much left to organise. There were also many other pro-Boer gatherings held in city, so there was no need to organise more lectures or meetings. The student branch in Amsterdam struggled with the same problem, although there was a successful fundraising campaign amongst its members in 1900.¹⁸ However, this group did not submit any reports to the executive committee in the years thereafter. The same problem was experienced with other student branches in Leiden and Delft, which was explained by the fact that the committee and members of these divisions consisted of a population that ‘by its very nature changes completely every year’.¹⁹

Other branches were more active. The Rotterdam branch, which already existed before the war, introduced proposals that reflected the mercantile character of this city. The businessman A.S. van Reesema was involved in many of these schemes and unveiled several plans for improving the commercial ties between the Netherlands and South Africa, some of which were less realistic than others. During the early phase of the war, he revived the plan to establish a shipping route between Dutch harbours and Delagoa Bay. In combination with the NZASM railway, he argued, this would offer the best route for mail services. More optimistically, he thought that it might later become an important itinerary for Dutch emigrants, who he expected would flock to South Africa, even if the British were to win the war.²⁰ He issued a prospectus advertising stocks, to which 288 people subscribed a sum of fl. 88,800 and donated fl. 3,886. Later during the war, however, it became clear that this plan was unrealistic and in 1903 Van Reesema informed his prospective shareholders that the deal was off.²¹ One of the initiatives by Rotterdam that did materialise, however, was the establishment of an information bureau for trade and industry with South Africa, the *Bureau van Informatie voor den Handel en Nijverheid met Zuid-Afrika*.²² In 1901, plans were drawn up in Rotterdam for a mortgage bank to help Afrikaners with reconstruction after the war; this

¹⁶ Houwers, *Nationalistische commotie in Nederland*, 31.

¹⁷ ZA, NZAV Jaarverslag 1900, 9-18; NZAV Jaarverslag 1901, 10-18; NZAV Jaarverslag 1902, 9-21.

¹⁸ ZA, NZAV Jaarverslag 1900, 10.

¹⁹ ‘die uit den aard den zaak jaarlijks geheel veranderen’. ZA, NZAV Jaarverslag 1901, 10.

²⁰ Van Reesema, *Een stoomvaartverbinding met Zuid-Afrika*, 4-9.

²¹ ZA, NZAV archive, VI/133-VI/136. A steamship line between the Netherlands and South Africa was established in the 1919. De Graaff, *De mythe van de stamverwantschap*, 134. Cf. chapter 1.

²² ZA, NZAV archive, VI/137.

came into being the following year.²³

In The Hague, the focus was on charity. The NZAV branch there had close ties with other local committees that helped the Boers. Frans Beelaerts van Blokland was a central figure in this philanthropic network. As has been mentioned, this young gentleman joined a clandestine committee to smuggle volunteers into South Africa on the invitation of H.J. Kiewiet de Jonge.²⁴ At the same time, however, Beelaerts van Blokland wrote a pamphlet in which he endorsed the policy of neutrality followed by the Dutch government and called upon the Dutch people to express their support for the Boers in peaceful ways, such as by making propaganda and donating money to organisations that could relieve the needs of the Boer communities.²⁵ In his view, humanitarian aid was nothing less than a patriotic duty: ‘it is not benevolence that is expected of you [the readers]; now we have the opportunity to show the whole world, what the Dutch people understand by doing their duty and supporting their brothers in their struggle.’²⁶ Beelaerts van Blokland himself was involved in several fundraising initiatives as a member of the committee of NZAV branch in The Hague (and later of the national executive committee too) and the *Haagsche pro-Boer Vereeniging*, a local charity. These schemes included the sale of postcards with photos of picturesque South African landscapes and heroic Boer leaders²⁷, a charity shop where gifts were wrapped in special paper with a pro-Boer theme²⁸ and an international art lottery in 1902, to which many famous artists contributed.²⁹

Besides an increase in activity by individual branches, there were more fundamental questions concerning the structure of the NZAV after the great expansion of 1899. Some local committees were of the view that the power within the association should be decentralised and this was discussed often at meetings between the executive committee and representatives from the various divisions.³⁰ At a general meeting on 26 May 1900, a lengthy dispute about changes to the regulations took place. The Rotterdam delegates proposed that article three, concerning the structure of the NZAV, should state that the organisation existed as the sum of its branches, meaning that the power of the executive committee would be transferred to the larger subdivisions. After much discussion, the meeting voted against this proposal. The executive committee remained a body consisting of 15 members, who were not allowed to

²³ ZA, *NZAV Jaarverslag 1900*, 17.

²⁴ Cf. chapter 3.

²⁵ Beelaerts van Blokland, *Wat zullen wij doen*, 8-14.

²⁶ ‘[...] is het geene weldadigheid, die van u verlangd wordt; thans hebben wij de gelegenheid aan de geheele wereld te toonen, op welke wijze het Nederlandsche volk het verstaat zijn plicht te doen en zijne broeders in hunne worsteling bij te staan.’ Beelaerts van Blokland, *Wat zullen wij doen*, 14-15.

²⁷ A series of photos published by the *Haagsche pro-Boer Vereeniging* is kept in the Leyds pamphlet collection at the University of Stellenbosch.

²⁸ Circular by Utrecht branch of NZAV, March 1902. ZA, NZAV archive, V/15; Papers concerning the charity shop of the *Haagsche pro-Boer Vereeniging*, 1901-1902. NZAV archive, VI/164.

²⁹ Papers concerning the art lottery and the Scheveningen exhibition in July 1902. ZA, NZAV archive, VI/184.

³⁰ Minutes of the NZAV executive committee, 6 February 1900. ZA, NZAV archive, IV/4-5.

combine their positions with chairmanship of a local branch of the NZAV. The Rotterdam delegation did, however, successfully propose that the executive committee be required to meet with a council of the local presidents once a year.³¹

It was also attempted to create greater diversity in the executive committee. During its early years, the NZAV's executive committee of was dominated by members from Utrecht and Amsterdam and the regulations initially even stated that at least seven members were to reside in the latter city.³² That rule was abolished in the reforms that followed the meeting held in May 1900.³³ All the major branches were represented in the executive committee that was elected in 1901: Utrecht by professor J. de Louter, The Hague by Frans Beelaerts van Blokland and Evert van Gorkom (a former resident of Transvaal) and Rotterdam by A.S. van Reesema. Nevertheless, six of the 15 members still came from Amsterdam, meaning that members from that city continued to exert a great deal of influence – the more so because the head office was also situated there.³⁴ It seems that the calls for reform within the NZAV died down after 1900, or were at least no longer expressed as openly anymore. Recruitment efforts continued, although these were unsuccessful, which shows that the translation of public sympathy for the Boers into active involvement remained a difficult issue for the NZAV.

The most substantial attempt to attract new members took place in 1901 when a special propaganda committee was established within the executive committee. An open letter to the press was issued, signed by over 177 dignitaries from all over the country, including politicians, mayors, academics, medical doctors, journalists and businessmen. In the letter, unity was the keyword. It was argued that the enthusiasm for the Boers should manifest itself in the form of strong ties between the Netherlands and South Africa that would last after the war had ended. In order to achieve this, it was proposed, a strong organisation was needed.

The *Nederlandsch Zuid-Afrikaansche Vereeniging* can be this kind of organisation, when many thousands of new members join her. [...] Now she can and must become a truly national organisation, with strong management-structures, with branches throughout the country, in the colonies, in Belgium and everywhere else where Dutchmen live, and with an Executive Committee in which all confessions are represented.³⁵

³¹ Minutes of the NZAV executive committee, 26 May 1900. ZA, NZAV archive, IV/4-5.

³² Cf. chapter 1.

³³ ZA, *NZAV Jaarverslag 1899*, 58 and 64. The annual report for 1899 was published in 1900 after the meeting of 26 May.

³⁴ ZA, *NZAV Jaarverslag 1901*, 101-188. From the membership list in 1901 it appears that members of the executive were not always affiliated to the branch in the place in which they lived. Van Reesema lived in Scheveningen. Charles Boissevain and treasurer J.B. Loman were members of the Amsterdam branch, although they lived in Haarlem and Naarden respectively. President Middelberg lived in a town where no branch of the NZAV existed at all.

³⁵ ‘Zulk een Vereeniging kan de Nederlandsch Zuid-Afrikaansche Vereeniging worden, wanneer vele duizenden nieuwe leden tot haar toetreden. [...] Thans kan en moet zij worden tot een werkelijk nationale Vereeniging, met krachtige organisatie, met afdelingen in het gansche land, in de koloniën, in België en overal elders, waar

In addition to this letter, the propaganda committee started a lecture tour featuring Paul Schutte, a Transvaal Member of Parliament who had fled to Europe. One of the organisers described him as ‘one of the most steadfast and civilised Boers that I know. And not unsuitable for speaking in public.’³⁶

Despite all these efforts, the campaign was not met with much enthusiasm, with only 234 new members joining the NZAV in 1901: ‘a small increase’, according to the annual report, and not nearly the thousands of new members the executive committee had hoped for.³⁷ Most disappointing of all was the result in the southern province of Limburg. In 1900, there had been only twelve members of the NZAV in that province, which meant that it was a priority to the propaganda committee. By 1902, however, that number had dropped to a pitiful five.³⁸ Discussing the plans for Schutte’s lecture tour in the province, it was already predicted that he would experience something of a culture shock, because the speaker would be arriving in ‘such a total strange area, with a peculiar sort of people’. Moreover the Boer politician, who was naturally an orthodox Protestant, needed to be prepared for the fact that the local population was mainly Roman Catholic.³⁹ Eventually the lecture tour to Limburg was even cancelled, as several local officials made clear that there were already plenty of charities in the province at the time, and people would not be interested in becoming members of the NZAV.⁴⁰

The discussion that took place within the NZAV about its composition shows that its primacy amongst the pro-Boer organisations in the Netherlands was not as clear as is suggested in secondary literature, despite the fact that it was the largest and the oldest of them all. After the large increase in the number of local branches at the beginning of the war, several of these local divisions developed their own activities and increasingly challenged the authority of the executive committee, which was based in Amsterdam. Attempts to decentralise the NZAV had limited results, however. This discussion should be seen in the light of issues surrounding the ability of the society to mobilise the public and attract new members. The campaign in 1901 did not bring the results that were hoped for, which indicates that the great increase of membership during the first months of the war was a unique phenomenon. The problems that the NZAV encountered, trying to mobilise active support of

Nederlanders wonen, en met een Hoofdbestuur, waarin alle richtingen zijn vertegenwoordigd.’ NZAV circular, *Voor Zuid-Afrika* (not dated). ZA, NZAV archive, VI/128.

³⁶ ‘een der meest solide en beschaafde Boeren die ik ken. En niet ongeschikt om in ’t publiek te spreken.’ J.A. Wormser to P. den Tex, 14 October 1901. ZA, NZAV archive, VI/128.

³⁷ ‘een kleine vermeerdering’. ZA, *NZAV Jaarverslag 1901*, 9; Houwers, *Nationalistische commotie in Nederland*, 28.

³⁸ Houwers, *Nationalistische commotie in Nederland*, 29.

³⁹ ‘zoo’n geheel vreemde streek, bij een eigenaardig slag van menschen.’ E. van Gorkom to J.A. Wormser, 30 November 1901. NZAV archive, VI/128.

⁴⁰ E. van Gorkom to P. den Tex, 5 January 1902. NZAV archive, VI/128. Cf. ZA, *Jaarverslag NZAV 1901*, 8-9. Van Gorkom only mentioned charity in general, while the annual report explicitly mentioned ‘lectures about South African matters’ (‘lezingen over Zuid-Afrikaansche aangelegenheden’).

the public, shows that it, like other pro-Boer organisations, reflected on its position within society and the changes that were taking place in domestic politics. It remains the question, however, whether such issues were the most important considerations.

Pro-Boers and pillarisation

From October 1899, there also was an increase in pro-Boer activity outside the NZAV, which led to a variety of new organisations. One of the most noticeable of these was the *Christelijke Nationale Boeren Comité* (Christian National Boer Committee, hereafter CNBC). After a meeting of the Amsterdam branch of the Anti-Revolutionary Party (the political party of the orthodox Protestants) on 1 November 1899, a fund was started, which was later converted into a society in February 1901, to become the second largest pro-Boer organisation in the Netherlands with 4,000 members. It is tempting to see the founding of the CNBC as being the result of pillarisation and the growing ideological divides in Dutch society. The executive committee of the CNBC explicitly stated that it would focus on the religious ties that joined the Netherlands to South Africa, which in practice meant that it only drew members from the orthodox Protestant community. There were also strong connections with the Anti-Revolutionary Party.⁴¹ It would be going too far, however, to see this initiative as an extension of earlier attempts by the Protestant leader Abraham Kuyper to monopolise the pro-Boer movement, because he was not officially involved in the CNBC.⁴² Moreover, the executive committee of the CNBC openly stated that it did not seek to replace the NZAV, but to complement it. As such, it should be seen as an initiative to mobilise a sector of the population that the NZAV, which was generally seen as a Liberal bulwark, found difficult to reach.⁴³

The overlap between the two organisations can be illustrated by the fact that several individuals worked for both. Significantly, one of the most active members of the CNBC was H.J. Emous, a well-known figure in the pro-Boer movement. This headmaster had already been active in several subcommittees of the NZAV during the 1890s and continued this work throughout the war and thereafter. In addition, although he was not elected, his name was on the list of candidates that stood for election to the executive committee that was chosen during the general meeting in October 1900.⁴⁴ After the war, he continued to be active for the NZAV, becoming a member of the committee of the Amsterdam branch in 1903 and finally being elected to the executive committee in 1906.⁴⁵ In addition to this important personal link, the CNBC and the NZAV co-ordinated their efforts for humanitarian aid to the Boer war

⁴¹ Schutte, *De Vrije Universiteit* I, 90-91.

⁴² Van Koppen, *De geuzen van de negentiende eeuw*, 181; Schutte, *De Vrije Universiteit* I, 88-89. Cf. chapter 1.

⁴³ Schutte, *Nederland en de Afrikaners*, 78-79; Houwers, *Nationalistische commotie in Nederland*, 22.

⁴⁴ Minutes of the NZAV executive committee, 10 October 1900. ZA, NZAV archief, IV/4-5.

⁴⁵ ZA, NZAV archief, VIII/34/1; ZA, *NZAV Jaarverslag 1903*, 8-9; cf. De Graaff, *De mythe van de stamverwantschap*, 110. De Graaff explains Emous' move to the NZAV by the fact that the CNBC had lost almost all of its members in 1906. He does not refer to Emous' earlier activities within the NZAV.

victims, a matter which will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter. This indicates that the two organisations overlapped significantly and cannot be considered to have been competitors.

Apart from the good working relation with the CNBC, the issue of pillarisation was a difficult one for the NZAV. The first article of the society’s statutes stated that it was not allowed to influence the ‘moral or religious position of the population here [the Netherlands]’.⁴⁶ At the general meeting in May 1900, during which possible changes to the statutes were discussed, this topic was not mentioned.⁴⁷ It seems probable that Kuyper had found this sentence to be a reason to once again refuse membership of the NZAV when Middelberg had invited him to do so a few months after the war had started. The Protestant leader felt that it did not offer enough of a guarantee that his denomination would be represented in the society and he feared that the Liberals would continue to dominate.⁴⁸

Nonetheless, the NZAV’s offer to Kuyper should be seen in the context of further attempts by the executive committee to diversify its membership with members of the various different ‘pillars’ in the Netherlands (although Socialists were still excluded). In the spring of 1900, J.P. Moltzer announced that he would step down from the executive committee in order to make place for a Catholic, his colleague from the *Raad van State* (Privy Council), J.P.R.M. de Nerée van Babberich.⁴⁹ Despite this gallant gesture and the support of the executive committee, De Nerée van Babberich was not elected in the general meeting that followed, that May.⁵⁰ The following year the Catholic sector of the population was represented in the leadership of the NZAV by W.H. Nolens, a Member of Parliament. This indicates that there was an awareness amongst pro-Boers of the domestic political situation, which should be considered in the light of attempts to mobilise the broadest possible segment of the population. The sources reveal, however, that those involved had other priorities.

In the historical debate on the political and ideological background of the NZAV, the career of Gerrit Middelberg is often mentioned in order to illustrate ongoing Protestant involvement in the society. In 1912, he resigned as president of the NZAV to lead the Anti-Revolutionary Party in Parliament, of which he had been member since 1909.⁵¹ However, this account ignores Middelberg’s earlier career, when he was a member of the municipal council of Zwolle for the Liberals in the 1870s. It was only during his stay in Pretoria that he gradually started to change his religious and political ideas under the influence of the Boers and adopted more orthodox views.⁵² This did not mean that he immediately enrolled in the

⁴⁶ ‘zedelijke of godsdienstige gesteldheid des bevolkings dezerzijds’. ZA, *NZAV Jaarverslag 1900*, 77.

⁴⁷ Minutes of the NZAV executive committee, 26 May 1900. ZA, NZAV archief, IV/4-5.

⁴⁸ Van Koppen, *De geuzen van de negentiende eeuw*, 181.

⁴⁹ Minutes of the NZAV executive committee, 24 March 1900. ZA, NZAV archief, IV/4-5. Moltzer had serious health problems, which might be another reason why he stepped down.

⁵⁰ Minutes of the NZAV executive committee, 26 May 1900. ZA, NZAV archief, IV/4-5.

⁵¹ Schutte, *Nederland en de Afrikaners*, 78; Koppen, *De geuzen van de negentiende eeuw*, 181.

⁵² Van Winter, *Onder Krugers Hollanders I*, 250.

Anti-Revolutionary Party after his return in the Netherlands in 1899. In 1901, the NZAV branch in The Hague published a circular in which it gave advice on who to vote when choosing for the executive committee and Middelberg is listed there as a Liberal.⁵³ Moreover, in his later life too, he considered himself to be more of a practical administrator than a political or ideological heavyweight and his career in Parliament was short-lived.⁵⁴ This indicates that Middelberg’s political background was not an issue of vital importance to members of the NZAV. Rather it was his fame as a former director of NZASM in Pretoria and his apparent knowledge of the situation in South Africa that were explicitly mentioned when he was elected as chairman of the society in 1899.⁵⁵ A further indication that considerations related to the local political situation were not of the highest priority to the members of the NZAV is provided by the circular from 1901 mentioned above, which listed three requirements for the composition of the executive committee. These included the desirability of including persons of all political persuasions and from all the major cities. First and foremost, however, leaders of the NZAV were to be ‘persons, who are thoroughly acquainted with the situation in South Africa’.⁵⁶

It cannot be denied that domestic politics and the process of pillarisation were considered relevant issues by contemporary pro-Boers. In order to mobilise as much of the population as possible, the NZAV executive co-operated with the CNBC and tried to broaden the composition of its membership with people from various confessional groups and different cities. Despite these points for attention, it seems the results were mixed and that it remained a constant concern. The sources indicate, however, that there were other concerns for the leaders of the pro-Boer organisations in the Netherlands, namely keeping open the channels of information with South Africa. In this way, people with close connections to this international network had an important place within the pro-Boer movement. As has been mentioned in the previous chapter, *Hollander* emigrants who returned from South Africa often became active propagandists and the diplomatic representation of the republics also generated a lot of information. In the remainder of this chapter it will be assessed how Dutch pro-Boer organisations related to these groups and the wider propaganda campaign in order to support the Boers in South Africa.

‘A campaign of the pen’: the ANV press office

The refutation of British coverage of events in South Africa and the publication of accounts that put forward the Boers’ side of the story can be considered to be an important, if not the most important, activity of the pro-Boer movement in Europe. Historians agree that Leyds

⁵³ Circular, 17 May 1901. NASA, Leyds collection, LEY 808.

⁵⁴ A.J. Veenendaal, ‘Middelberg, Gerrit Adriaan Arnold (1846-1916)’.

⁵⁵ ZA, *NZAV Jaarverslag 1899*, 5. Cf. chapter 3.

⁵⁶ ‘personen, die door en door bekend zijn met Zuid-Afrikaansche toestanden’. Circular, 17 May 1901. NASA, Leyds collection, LEY 808.

propagated such views tirelessly from 1898 onwards and that his achievements on the psychological battlefield were considerable in that his efforts helped to convince the majority of people outside Great Britain that the republics’ cause was just.⁵⁷ The widespread sympathy for the Boers also had its disadvantages, however. At times, such as after the victories of SAR and OFS forces in December 1899, emotions became overheated and Leyds even tried to temper the euphoria.⁵⁸ Another problem in this regard was that the gullible public became an easy target for impostors, who tried to cash in on pro-Boer enthusiasm. Throughout the war, the SAR legation issued warnings against men who collected money by pretending to have fought for the republics or making false promises to provide aid to the embattled Boers. Some swindlers could be easily unmasked, like those who claimed to have been born in Johannesburg, while the town barely had existed for a decade when the war started.⁵⁹ It was, however, not always easy to distinguish between useful initiatives and harmful ones. Leyds therefore sought contact with pro-Boer organisations to help him to run the propaganda campaign along what he considered to be the right lines.

One of the most important institutions in this respect was a press office created by the *Algemeen Nederlandsch Verbond* (General Dutch Alliance, hereafter ANV), a patriotic society that had been founded in 1896 and which was based in Dordrecht.⁶⁰ In terms of membership numbers – 2,002 in 1901 – the organisation was significantly smaller than both the CNBC and the NZAV during the South African War.⁶¹ Nonetheless, its resourceful secretary H.J. Kiewiet de Jonge succeeded in making it an important feature in the pro-Boer propaganda network. His personal connection with Leyds, whom he met for the first time in the 1880s, was quite important in this respect.⁶² When Leyds returned to Europe as minister plenipotentiary, the two became better acquainted, which was the start of a long and intimate friendship.⁶³ In October 1899, the first fruits of their collaboration became apparent when Kiewiet de Jonge proposed to set up a press office for the Boers. Leyds thought this a splendid idea and went to Dordrecht at once to discuss the details.⁶⁴

The press office became the most important pro-Boer activity of the ANV by far. It grew

⁵⁷ Kröll, *Die internationale Buren-Agitation*, 323; Van Niekerk, *Kruger se regterhand*, 205-218.

⁵⁸ Leyds ed., *Tweede Verzameling I*, x1-xii; cf. chapter 5.

⁵⁹ Leyds ed., *Vierde verzameling I*, xxxi.

⁶⁰ Cf. chapter 1. The thesis of Ulrich Kröll provides the best overview of the activities of the ANV press office during the South African War. Kröll, *Die internationale Buren-Agitation*, 176-194; Kröll, ‘The “Perskantoor”’, 13-28. In the following paragraphs, I will refer to the latter title, which is an English adaptation of an extract from the thesis, which was originally written in German. Cf. Van Niekerk, *Kruger se regterhand*, 210; Schutte, *Nederland en de Afrikaners*, 80.

⁶¹ Houwers, *Nationalistische commotie in Nederland*, 34-35. After 1902, membership of the ANV increased, while membership of the NZAV declined and in 1908 there were even proposals to merge the two organisations, something which did not happen. De Graaff, *De mythe van de stamverwantschap*, 113-114.

⁶² H.J. Kiewiet de Jonge to Willem Leyds, 21 February 1896. NL-HaNA, Leyds, 2.21.105, inv.nr. 51. From this letter it appears that Kiewiet de Jonge was acquainted with Leyds’ uncle and had attended the party to celebrate Leyds’ doctorate in 1884.

⁶³ Much of their extensive correspondence which lasted at least until 1932 can be found in the NL-HaNA, Leyds, 2.21.105, inv.nr. 51 and 52.

⁶⁴ Leyds ed., *Tweede verzameling I*, 81-82.

to be a well-known institution that gathered and distributed information that supported the Boer cause and countered the British coverage of events in South Africa.⁶⁵ It made Kiewiet de Jonge a prominent figure amongst the pro-Boers, which in 1900 resulted in an invitation to join the executive committee of the NZAV on which he was to serve for decades. Kiewiet de Jonge’s connections illustrate that the press office of the ANV was firmly linked to both the official Boer representatives and other organisations that propagated the concept of *stamverwantschap* and thus played a central role in the network that extended between South Africa and the Netherlands.⁶⁶

The co-operation between the press office and the SAR legation in Brussels remained close throughout the war and Leyds became the main source of funding.⁶⁷ Initially, the ANV took over some tasks from the overburdened office of the legation in Brussels, acting as an information bureau for people in the Netherlands who wanted to know about the fate of their loved ones in South Africa.⁶⁸ In addition, it began distributing press releases.⁶⁹ Soon it became apparent that priority was to be given to the latter activity and the press office dedicated itself to the gathering, publication and dissemination of propagandistic material. The first, and arguably biggest, success was the production of the pamphlet *Eene eeuw van onrecht* (translated as *A Century of Wrong*). The original Dutch text, written by the SAR State Attorney Jan Smuts, arrived in Europe in November 1899 and was translated into English, German and French.⁷⁰ A less fortunate project, started at the end of 1899, was the publication of an address arguing for intervention to all the nations that had attended the Peace Conference in The Hague, the *Beroep op de natiën* (*Appeal to the nations*). This plea was meant to be signed by dignitaries all across Europe and to be published simultaneously in different countries. However, there were problems with the collection of signatures, which led to the belated and uncoordinated publication of the pamphlet. As such, it was considered to be a fiasco by those involved.⁷¹

Despite the varying results, the early activities of the press office were welcomed by other pro-Boer organisations. From the beginning, the NZAV saw the ANV as an ally rather than a competitor.⁷² This was confirmed when Kiewiet de Jonge asked for financial assistance in November 1899. His request was supported by the Utrecht branch of the NZAV. The executive committee did not agree to a monthly allowance, which the ANV asked for, because their contribution came from the funds of the NZAV itself and not from the money

⁶⁵ Kröll, ‘The “Perskantoor”’, 13.

⁶⁶ Cf. Bossenbroek, *Holland op zijn breedst*, 252-253. Bossenbroek argues that the ANV was more radical than the NZAV, but he does not mention the close co-operation between the two organisations.

⁶⁷ Cf. chapter 7 for Leyds’ involvement in the press office after 1902.

⁶⁸ Van Niekerk, *Kruger se regterhand* 211-212.

⁶⁹ Kröll, ‘The “Perskantoor”’, 15.

⁷⁰ Ibidem, 16; Van Niekerk, *Kruger se regterhand*, 235.

⁷¹ Leyds ed., *Tweede verzameling* I, xi-xii; Kröll, *Die internationale Buren-Agitation*, 178-184; Van Niekerk, *Kruger se regterhand*, 236-238. The contents of both *Eene eeuw van onrecht* and *Het beroep op de natiën* will be discussed in chapter 5.

⁷² Cf. chapter 1.

that was collected from the public, which was earmarked for humanitarian aid. Nevertheless, during the course of 1900, fl. 10,000 was allocated to propaganda and given to the ANV press office and the Utrecht branch.⁷³ In addition, a further fl. 2,000 was given in 1902, after a proposal from the Rotterdam and Hengelo branches.⁷⁴

The co-operation between the NZAV and the ANV resulted in additional financial support for individual pamphlets, which reached a considerable international audience. One was the publication of Abraham Kuyper’s article ‘La crise Sud-Africaine’ which first appeared in *Le Revue des Deux Mondes* in January 1900. The two pro-Boer societies provided funds for the translation of the text into Dutch, German, English and Swedish.⁷⁵ Also, the distribution of the three English pamphlets by Charles Boissevain, namely *Open letter to the Duke of Devonshire*, *Open Letter to an American Lady* and *A Great Crime (an Appeal to the British Nation)*, was actively supported.⁷⁶ In August 1900, a joint collection was organised to raise money for a Transvaal issue of the magazine *Hollandia*, a periodical for Dutchmen living abroad, which drew many much of its readership from the USA.⁷⁷ Another successful pamphlet was the one about education in the SAR; written by Nicolaas Mansvelt with the help of Kiewiet de Jonge, it was published in four languages.⁷⁸ By 1901, the ANV press office had expanded considerably and in practice took over most of the tasks from the Utrecht branch of the NZAV, which ceased to be involved in the production of propaganda.⁷⁹

Kiewiet de Jonge was the driving force behind the activities of the ANV press office in its early years. There was only one permanent employee who did editorial work, Bas Veth, a freelance journalist and artist from Dordrecht. Otherwise, the organisation was rather unprofessional and casual. Occasionally, there was money to pay for temporary staff, who took care of administrative jobs, but more often this was left to volunteers, whose amateurism at times led to frustrations.⁸⁰ It seems that these activities had a heavy toll on the health of Kiewiet de Jonge, who – apart from running the press office – was also headmaster of a grammar school, secretary of the regular ANV and a member of a secret committee to help volunteers who wished to go to South Africa. Just before the New Year of 1900 he suffered a nervous breakdown. The elderly professor J.P. Moltzer, with whom he was editing the text of the *Beroep op de natiën* at that time, noted with fatherly concern how ‘it is very good for him,

⁷³ Cf. correspondence between ANV press office and Utrecht branch with executive committee ZA, NZAV archive, VI/126; ZA, *NZAV Jaarverslag 1900*, 32-34.

⁷⁴ ZA, *NZAV Jaarverslag 1902*, 69.

⁷⁵ Kröll, ‘The “Perskantoor”’, 18-19; Schutte, *Nederland en de Afrikaners*, 82; Van Koppen, *De geuzen van de negentiende eeuw*, 169.

⁷⁶ ZA, *NZAV Jaarverslag 1900*, 33-34. These texts were published in *Het Algemeen Handelsblad* and afterwards as individual pamphlets, mainly for the British and American public.

⁷⁷ ZA, *NZAV Jaarverslag 1900*, 34; The circular can be found in: NASA, Leyds collection, LEY 808.

⁷⁸ Leyds ed., *Tweede Verzameling* II, 113-116; Leyds ed., *Derde Verzameling* I, 262, footnote; Kröll, ‘The “Perskantoor”’, 16-17.

⁷⁹ ZA, *NZAV Jaarverslag 1901*, 17.

⁸⁰ H.J. Kiewiet de Jonge to W.J. Leyds, 15 May 1900. NL-HaNA, Leyds, 2.21.105, inv.nr. 51; cf. Kröll, ‘The “Perskantoor”’, 15.

such a mandatory rest, after the very busy period he has been through.’⁸¹

But instead of slowing down, the activities of the ANV press office only became more frenetic during the first part of 1900. In April, problems with personnel grew when Veth left the press office to work for the SAR legation.⁸² At the same time, activities expanded rapidly, illustrated by the fact that by March 1900 the costs of distributing propagandistic material had risen to a substantial sum of fl. 600 a month.⁸³ The contributions of the NZAV and the SAR legation were no longer sufficient, so funds were secured from private donors, who Leyds suggested give their money directly to the press office. This shows how by that time the organisation was considered to be an important institution in the pro-Boer movement, which provided opportunities for a more professional approach. Kiewiet de Jonge wrote to Leyds that it had become desirable to find a permanent full-time editor for the press office, a patriot who was fully committed to the Boer cause and, most importantly, who was fully informed on South African affairs.⁸⁴

A few months later this wish was granted when Frederik Rompel took charge of the ANV press office. As has been mentioned, this former journalist of *De Volksstem* left the Transvaal and returned to the Netherlands after the occupation of Pretoria.⁸⁵ His knowledge about the situation in the two republics was considered a great asset by Kiewiet de Jonge, who was very satisfied with his work.⁸⁶ Rompel became a prolific author about the situation in South Africa and contributed to many magazines and newspapers. He also published several pamphlets and books, including a volume of biographies of Boer leaders that was published in Dutch, German and English and that was to become quite famous.⁸⁷ In addition, he produced the bulk of other material as the editor of the press office. During the war, two press releases went out to periodicals throughout Europe every day. These newsletters mainly contained summaries of and excerpts from the most important articles that appeared in the papers. From time to time, the press office also published original material, such as interviews with refugees about their experiences, letters from South Africa provided by private persons or reports from the Boer generals in the field that had been received by Leyds’s office.⁸⁸ The ANV also supplied information to journalists and authors of pamphlets on request.⁸⁹

⁸¹ ‘Het is wel heel goed voor hem, zoo’n gedwongen rust, na den zeer ingespannen tijd, dien hij achter den rug heeft.’ Leyds ed., *Tweede verzameling* I, 252.

⁸² H.J. Kiewiet de Jonge to W.J. Leyds, 7 April 1900. NL-HaNA, Leyds, 2.21.105, inv.nr. 51. Cf. chapter 3, for Veth’s activities.

⁸³ H.J. Kiewiet de Jonge to NZAV executive committee, 10 March 1900. ZA, NZAV archive, VI/126.

⁸⁴ H.J. Kiewiet de Jonge to W.J. Leyds, 7 April 1900. NL-HaNA, Leyds, 2.21.105, inv.nr. 51.

⁸⁵ Cf. chapter 3.

⁸⁶ H.J. Kiewiet de Jonge to W.J. Leyds, 14 January 1901. NL-HaNA, Leyds, 2.21.105, inv.nr. 51.

⁸⁷ Rompel, *Uit den tweeden (Transvaalschen) vrijheidsoorlog*; idem, *Siegen oder Sterben*; idem, *The Heroes of the Boer War*. The latter translation was overseen by William Stead. After the war, Rompel was also involved in the publication of Kruger’s memoirs and wrote a biography of ex-President Steyn.

⁸⁸ A very large number of these press releases can be found in: NASA, Leyds collection, LEY 861-869; a selected collection of about hundred press releases can be found in: ZA, ANV collection, ANV/B; cf. Kröll, ‘The “Perskantoor”’, 21, footnote 50.

⁸⁹ ANV press office address list. NASA Leyds collection, LEY 889; Kröll, ‘The “Perskantoor”’, 20-22.

In this way, the press office gathered an extensive collection of pro-Boer propaganda, which Kiewiet de Jonge and Rompel tried to distribute as widely as possible. The question remains, however, as to what extent they succeeded in doing this. Ulrich Kröll has noted that there are a number of problems in assessing the impact of their campaign. First of all, the ANV often asked the newspapers not to mention its name when they took over news from the circulars, which makes the identification of press office material difficult. It should also be borne in mind that much of the news in the circulars was ‘second-hand’, meaning that it was taken from other newspapers. Many of the major press offices were perfectly able to do that themselves and often had more direct sources; as will be discussed later, it seems that this was particularly the case in the Netherlands.⁹⁰ Looking back on the early years of the ANV, Kiewiet de Jonge himself raised another point about the efficiency of the press office. He argued that during the South African War the organisation was too young to cope with ‘an overwhelming amount of work’, and that it was ‘impossible to organise and manage both internally and externally at the same time’.⁹¹ In the following paragraphs, this complex question will be assessed in more detail by examining the ANV press office’s relations with Dutch and international media.

Remarkably, the direct influence of the ANV press office seems to have been most limited in the Netherlands. This can be explained by the fact that public opinion there was already firmly in the Boers’ favour.⁹² Another reason was that Dutch newspapers received quite a lot of information from South Africa independently.⁹³ This seems to have made journalists in the Netherlands quite reluctant to tap into the stream of information provided by the ANV press office, much to the disappointment of Kiewiet de Jonge. In 1900, he tried to get more material published in large national newspapers. He wrote letters in which he asked the *NRC* if they could publish more of his articles on economics and politics, while he offered *Het Algemeen Handelsblad* personal accounts of war victims.⁹⁴ Representatives of both papers thanked Kiewiet de Jonge cordially for his offers, but wrote that they could not guarantee publication of texts provided by the ANV press office. The editor from *Het Algemeen Handelsblad* was the most frank, stating in his reply that they were often too long to publish.⁹⁵

Kiewiet de Jonge’s failure to get material from the ANV press office published in Dutch newspapers should not obscure the fact that the relationship between the press and the pro-Boer organisations were very good in the Netherlands. Many journalists were members of the

⁹⁰ Kröll, ‘The “Perskantoor”’, 23-24.

⁹¹ ‘een overmacht van arbeid [...]; naar buiten en naar binnen tegelijk regelen en besturen was onmogelijk’. Kiewiet de Jonge, ‘Een woord ter Inleiding’, 9.

⁹² Kröll, *Die internationale Buren-Agitation*, 162; Van Niekerk, *Kruger se regterhand*, 216.

⁹³ ANV press office to P.J. Ketner, 25 November 1901. NASA, Leyds collection, LEY 809; A.G. Boissevain to F. Beelaerts van Blokland, 26 July 1900. ZA, F. Beelaerts van Blokland collection, FBB 1.

⁹⁴ [H.J. Kiewiet de Jonge?] to *NRC* editors, 9 November 1900. NASA, Leyds collection, LEY 809.

⁹⁵ Representative *NRC* to [H.J. Kiewiet de Jonge?], 10 November 1900; A.G. Boissevain to H.J. Kiewiet de Jonge, 19 November 1900. NASA, Leyds collection, LEY 809.

NZAV and newspapers already published favourable accounts of the republics in the 1880s and 1890s.⁹⁶ Also in quantitative terms, there was an upward trend throughout this period, meaning that an increasing number of articles about South Africa was published.⁹⁷ The start of the South African War led to an unprecedented wave of news that swept the front pages of newspapers. During the years that followed, the quantity of the material that was published dropped, which can be explained by the fact that censorship was increased by the British and that it became harder for correspondents to report on the guerrilla war, which was scattered and unpredictable. Nevertheless there seems to have been a sustained interest in South African affairs in the Dutch press up to the end of the conflict, more so than in Great Britain.⁹⁸

The sustained attention for the plight of the Boers was not simply the result of newspaper editors’ efforts to capture the issues of the day. From the start of the war, they reflected on the broader meaning of their work, which was interwoven with the structure of information channels between South Africa and the Netherlands. It was embarrassing to journalists in the Netherlands that, because of the British monopoly on telegraph lines, they were dependent on sources from London for the latest news about the war. Readers were therefore explicitly warned that these reports should not be taken at face value. There was also an awareness that these telegrams were subject to censorship by the British army. From the beginning of the war, news about British successes was presented as exaggerated, while it was argued that Boer victories were structurally downplayed by official correspondents.⁹⁹ But Dutch journalists did more than that: they also published alternative accounts. Although these often came from letters that reached the Netherlands weeks or even months after events had actually taken place, they were considered to be important, as they enabled the public to make up their own minds about what had actually happened in South Africa using information that was not provided in the British sources. In the view of several newspapermen, this was not only of significance for contemporaries, but would also mean that in the future historians would not have to depend on British sources only.¹⁰⁰

In this sense, the activities of Dutch journalists were compatible with the work done by the ANV press office. There were therefore many positive responses to the organisation. Already in the 1890s, some reformers within the journalists’ union proposed the establishment

⁹⁶ Cf. chapter 1.

⁹⁷ Geerts, *Verzilde Boerenliefde*, 112-113. In his MA dissertation Jan Geerts analyses the coverage of five important events in the history of South Africa: the annexation of the ZAR (1877), the battle at Majuba Hill (1881), the visit of the ZAR deputation to the Netherlands (1884), the Jameson Raid (1895-1896) and the outbreak of the South African War (1899). The papers he examined are: *De Tijd*, *Het Algemeen Handelsblad* and *De Standaard*.

⁹⁸ Kröll, *Die internationale Buren-Agitation*, 52; Kester, ‘Uit de slaap gewekt’, 225; cf. Badsey, ‘The Boer War as Media War’, 81-82.

⁹⁹ Cf. *NRC*, 26 November 1899; *Het Algemeen Handelsblad*, 2 December 1899; Kester, ‘Uit de slaap gewekt’, 223-224.

¹⁰⁰ Editorial by Charles Boissevain. *Het Algemeen Handelsblad*, 8 December 1899; Van Harpen, *Nederland Zuid-Afrika*, introduction. Van Harpen was the editor of the *Amsterdamsche Courant*.

of an institute that could refute foreign newspapers who wrote about matters that harmed the interests of the Dutch people, but this initiative did not yield any results.¹⁰¹ The ANV press office was therefore seen as a valuable contribution to public life in the Netherlands.¹⁰² In 1900, one editorial entitled ‘A Campaign of the Pen’ praised the organisation for its work to ‘explain to the people the true state of affairs’.¹⁰³ There was more than just praise, however, and on several occasions the press actually did co-operate with the ANV to mobilise the public for its initiatives. In November 1899, for instance, an advertisement of Kiewiet de Jonge, calling people to forward private correspondence they received from South Africa was published and explicitly endorsed by the editors of the *NRC*.¹⁰⁴ At the same time there was a willingness for a certain degree of self-censorship and the journalists’ union instructed its members to be careful with information that could expose Boer tactics on the request of the ANV press office.¹⁰⁵ This shows that the fact that only a relatively small amount of press office material was published in the Dutch media was not the result of unwillingness. It rather was that newspapers in the Netherlands on their own could acquire plenty of material that supported the Boers’ cause, so that they needed little help.

At first sight, the situation was quite different in other countries, so that the ANV seems to have had greater influence there. The massive number of press releases with the transcripts of pro-Boer clippings was not only published in Dutch, but also in English, German and French. On one occasion, Kiewiet de Jonge was quite positive about the effect of these newsletters, which were sent to major newspapers throughout continental Europe. ‘A lot of what you read in foreign periodicals, comes from us [the ANV press office]’, he reported to Leyds.¹⁰⁶ But here too, assessing the true impact of the work of the press office is problematic. Besides the anonymity of the circulars and the fact that much of the material was not from original sources, it seems that Leyds himself used other means to counter the British coverage of the war in the continental press. He was able to reach newspapers in France and Germany through his correspondents Edgar Roëls and F.F. Eiffe respectively.¹⁰⁷ Moreover, in August 1901 another press office was established, with special focus on the German-speaking world, which can be seen as a competitor to the ANV.

The plan for this organisation came from P.A. Nierstrasz, who in 1896 had started a publishing house called „*Nederland*”, which focussed on Dutch-speaking readers outside the

¹⁰¹ Cf. chapter 1.

¹⁰² Several state officials had the same opinion and during the 1900s they took up contact with Kiewiet de Jonge on several occasions to help and refute ‘lies about the Netherlands’ in the foreign press. Cf. chapter 7.

¹⁰³ ‘Een Veldtocht met den Pen’, ‘de menschen de ware toedracht der zaak uit te leggen’. *NRC*, 16 March 1900.

¹⁰⁴ *NRC*, 1 November 1899 and 19 December 1900.

¹⁰⁵ Circular ANV, 16 November 1899. NASA, Leyds collection, LEY 888. The NZAV asked the ANV to send such a circular. P. den Tex to ANV press office, 15 November 1899. NASA, Leyds collection, LEY 808. Cf. *Mededeelingen van den Nederlandschen Journalistenkring*, nr. 27 (December 1900), 4.

¹⁰⁶ ‘Zeer veel wat gij in buitenl. bladen leest, stamt van ons’. H.J. Kiewiet de Jonge to W.J. Leyds, 17 February 1902. NL-HaNA, Leyds, 2.21.105, inv.nr. 51.

¹⁰⁷ Kröll, ‘The “Perskantoor”’, 20.

Netherlands and particularly in South Africa, where he opened an office in Pretoria.¹⁰⁸ When the war started, Nierstrasz was forced to cease his activities in South Africa, but became involved in the pro-Boer propaganda campaign in Europe. One of his most noticeable contributions was the Transvaal issue of *Hollandia*, a magazine for Dutchmen abroad that was owned by the publisher. Another remarkable project was a series of postcards featuring famous photographs of the war, which were sold to raise money for pro-Boer charities.¹⁰⁹ At first sight, it seems as if the relations between Nierstrasz and the ANV were quite good. „*Nederland*” published the periodical of the organisation, *Neerlandia*, and also the German translation of Rompel’s book with biographies of Boer heroes. On closer inspection, however, there seems to have been great personal animosity between Nierstrasz and the editor of the ANV press office, information which reached Leyds as gossip.¹¹⁰ These tensions manifested themselves more clearly when Nierstrasz started his own press office, funded by the SAR legation.

In August 1901, Leyds gave Nierstrasz the green light to start with a new press agency that would focus on the German-speaking world, *Die Correspondenz „Nederland”*, a name that shows the strong link with Nierstrasz’s publishing house.¹¹¹ In a report on its first year, the publisher rubbished the activities of the ANV press office in Germany, Austria, Switzerland and Russia. According to the report, the circulars from Dordrecht were amateurish and because of their poor style and sensationalism ended up in the wastepaper baskets of serious newspapers without being read. ‘Evidently, being a pro-Boer does not involve being a journalist, politician or diplomat!’, Nierstrasz fumed.¹¹²

It is hard to discern Leyds’s personal opinion on the matter as he barely reflected on the activities of the ANV press office and *Die Correspondenz „Nederland”*. What is clear is that he lavishly supported Nierstrasz’s initiative from his secret funds. In April 1902, his secretary Dirk Balfourt, who co-ordinated these payments, complained about the great expenses of this press office, which by then had received – and spent – fl. 26,222.¹¹³ Subsequently, a new agreement was signed in which Nierstrasz promised that he would cut costs by no longer sending expensive telegrams and sticking to printed material only.¹¹⁴ The war ended soon after this arrangement was made, but Nierstrasz continued to work for Leyds, who forwarded him substantial sums of money in the years that followed to cover his high expenses. Only in 1905, when the „*Nederland*” publishing house went bankrupt, were these ties cut.¹¹⁵ Looking

¹⁰⁸ Cf. chapter 1.

¹⁰⁹ Advertisement „*Nederland*”, in: *Neerlandia*, vol. 4 (1900), 56.

¹¹⁰ E.G.A. ten Siethoff to W.J. Leyds, 12 October 1902. NL-HaNA, Leyds, 2.21.105, inv.nr. 78. Ten Siethoff was a medical doctor from Scheveningen who collected a great amount of material on the South African War with the purpose of writing a history about it.

¹¹¹ P.A. Nierstrasz to W.J. Leyds, 10 August 1901. NASA, Leyds collection, LEY 321.

¹¹² ‘Pro-Boer sein heiszt [*sic*] eben noch lange nicht Journalist, Politik [*sic*] und Diplomat sein!’ Report activities *Die Correspondenz „Nederland”*, 6-7. NASA, Leyds collection, LEY 197.

¹¹³ D. Balfourt to W.J. Leyds, 23 April 1902. NASA, Leyds collection, LEY 322.

¹¹⁴ Financial report *Die Correspondenz „Nederland”*, 10 May 1902. Leyds collection, LEY 322.

¹¹⁵ Cf. chapter 7.

back decades later, one former associate of Nierstrasz suggested that the publisher had done little good for the Boer cause in the Netherlands and that his activities for Leyds were a way for him to secure employment.¹¹⁶

It remains difficult to get a sense of the real effects of the activities of the pro-Boer press offices on the European continent. In the end it seems that Nierstrasz mainly denounced the ANV press office in order to obtain funding from the SAR legation. On the other hand, his report might point to more fundamental problems that pro-Boer organisations grappled with in their attempts to get material published in newspapers. These were the result of a lack of professionalism and the fact that their contacts were often informal. The ANV press office encountered these kinds of problems – and worse – with its activities in Great Britain. Still, the London bureau was the only office outside Dordrecht that remained open after 1902. This would suggest that its activities were considered to be the most important by contemporaries.

Besides trying to influence the continental press, the ANV press office aimed its arrows directly at British public opinion. To that end, contact was made with correspondents for Dutch newspapers in London. They informed the ANV about public opinion on the war and helped them to distribute material amongst opinion-makers in Great Britain, such as members of the press, political elites and the clergy.¹¹⁷ More structural contacts were established in May 1901, when Kiewiet de Jonge was approached by M. van Beek, a Dutch translator and private tutor in London, who was working for the most prominent British organisation that protested against the war in South Africa, the Stop the War Committee. In his function for the so-called ‘literature department’, he had a close relationship with Harold Rylett, the editor of the radical magazine *New Age*.¹¹⁸ It was arranged that the ANV start correspondence with Van Beek in which they were to exchange material that could be used in their respective campaigns. Moreover, the ANV channelled a monthly subsidy of £ 10, which was raised amongst a small group of people in the Netherlands.¹¹⁹ Absolute secrecy was needed, because Van Beek feared that if it became known that he as a Dutchman was working for the Stop the War Committee ‘surely they [the jingo’s] would have lynched me as one of “Leyds’s or Kruger’s spies” and tried to storm our offices’.¹²⁰ Despite all this secrecy, the ANV press office and Van Beek were in regular contact with one another and much information about pro-Boer agitation in Britain reached the Netherlands from this source.¹²¹

As is the case with other activities of the ANV, it is difficult to assess the effects of this

¹¹⁶ L. Simons to W.J. Leyds, 6 November 1931. NASA, Leyds collection, LEY 95. Simons edited *Hollandia*.

¹¹⁷ H.J. Kiewiet de Jonge to W.J. Leyds, 15 November 1900 and 14 January 1901. NL-HaNA, Leyds, 2.21.105, inv.nr. 51.

¹¹⁸ M. van Beek to [H.J. Kiewiet de Jonge?], 3 May 1901. NASA, Leyds collection, LEY 821.

¹¹⁹ H.J. Kiewiet de Jonge to M. van Beek, 13 May 1901. NASA, Leyds collection, LEY 821. It is likely that Leyds was one of the contributors, if not the only one.

¹²⁰ ‘zouden zij mij stellig als een van “Leyds of Kruger’s spionnen” gelynd hebben en een aanval op onze kantoren beproefd hebben.’ M. van Beek to [H.J. Kiewiet de Jonge?], 3 May 1901. NASA, Leyds collection, LEY 821.

¹²¹ For the extensive correspondence see: NASA, Leyds collection, LEY 821.

contact. On several occasions the press office released public statements that there were signs that public opinion in Britain was shifting.¹²² In letters to Leyds, however, Kiewiet de Jonge was critical about the results, which were hampered because of the discretion that had to be observed in the contact with anti-war propagandists in Great Britain.¹²³ Moreover, he did not expect that the British public would be open to their views because it was so ‘biased and partial’.¹²⁴ Nevertheless, the ANV press office remained active in Britain after the war and, with Leyds’s backing, employed freelance correspondents in London at least until the start of the First World War. Their main task was to act as liaisons of the Dutch-speaking press in South Africa by writing reports about how the British newspapers covered South African affairs and by circulating material that supported the Afrikaner cause.¹²⁵ It therefore seems that the activities of the ANV in Great Britain, although they were performed under a cloak of secrecy, lasted the longest.

The ANV press office played a central role in the propaganda campaign during the South African War. It had close connections with both the SAR legation and the NZAV and as such handled a lot of information that reached Europe via the pro-Boers’ lines of communication and turned it into publications. It remains hard to assess the actual effects of this work. On the one hand it led to the distribution of some of the most famous pamphlets, which were read in substantial numbers, while on the other hand it seems that the informal nature of the office and its haphazard way of working limited its efficiency considerably. Moreover, it is unlikely that newspapers depended on Rompel’s press releases and the question remains as to how much was actually published from them. Nevertheless, contemporaries did express appreciation for the activities of the ANV press office. At that time, there was no other similar organisation in the Netherlands that was trying to feed the international media with material that supported the interests of the Dutch as a race. The case of the ANV press office shows that the pro-Boer movement in the Netherlands actively reflected on the growing importance of mass media and tried to develop institutions that could manage the flow of propagandistic material. Such awareness was also apparent in other aspects of the pro-Boer campaign, which will be discussed below.

‘Practical support’ or ‘impractical plans’: emigration schemes

A remarkable development during the early stages of the war was the increase in initiatives to promote emigration to South Africa. Before the fighting started, the emigration committee of the NZAV reported a sharp drop in the number of people that wanted to go to South Africa: just 14 people showed interest that year.¹²⁶ The successes of the Boer commandos against the

¹²² NRC, 6 September 1901; ANV press circular, 15 May 1901. NASA, Leyds collection, LEY 866.

¹²³ H.J. Kiewiet de Jonge to W.J. Leyds, 3 August 1901. NL-HaNA, Leyds, 2.21.105, inv.nr. 51.

¹²⁴ ‘bevoordeeld en partijdig’. H.J. Kiewiet de Jonge to W.J. Leyds, 6 May 1902. NL-HaNA, Leyds, 2.21.105, inv.nr. 51.

¹²⁵ Cf. chapter 7.

¹²⁶ ZA, NZAV Jaarverslag 1899, 43.

British army in the Northern Cape and Natal in December 1899 led to a wave of euphoria amongst the Dutch public, which temporarily changed this situation. In January 1900, the emigration committee received letters from 134 people that wished to settle in the republics, because they anticipated that overall victory for the Boers would soon follow. Considering the dangerous situation there, they were advised not to go, but seven adventurers did go to South Africa on their own accord. After the British victories of February 1900, the enthusiasm waned again and the emigration committee changed its priorities to helping people that returned from South Africa.¹²⁷ The prudent attitude of the NZAV emigration commission towards potential settlers during the early stages of the war was in line with the policy of the Boers’ official representatives. Willem Leyds often complained about what he considered to be an exaggeratedly optimistic mood in the Netherlands after the first battles.¹²⁸ He advised against emigration to the republics because the majority of settlers would be hindrances to the commandos rather than useful helpers. Only people who could contribute to the war effort, particularly artillery officers and couriers, were assisted by the SAR legation.

There were, however, people who thought differently about these matters. In December 1899, W.P. Noëls van Wageningen, the director of the *Bataafsche bank* in Amsterdam, founded a pro-Boer organisation that promised ‘practical support’ to the Boer republics – the *fonds tot daadwerkelijken steun*. Its main aim was to recruit ‘strong young men’ who could take over the work of ‘the housefathers, who went to war and died defending the independence of their nation’.¹²⁹ Because of the neutrality of the Netherlands, they could not replace them on the battlefields, but could take over other tasks on the farms and in the towns. Noëls van Wageningen saw advantages for those who went immediately, as they would have a head start on settlers from other countries, who it was expected would flock to the Boer republics when the fighting was over. The *fonds tot daadwerkelijken steun* asked the public for money to pay for the journey, equipment and a guide, so that they could reach the Boers safely.¹³⁰ In a prospectus, it was announced that 500 men had registered for assistance, of which around twenty people had been selected for a first expedition, led by J.H. Junius – a former inhabitant of landlocked Transvaal who claimed to be a naval officer.¹³¹ In addition to the emigration scheme, Noëls van Wageningen published a periodical, *Op! Voor Transvaal*. This magazine is known amongst literary historians for its doggerel, mainly written by the ultra-Calvinist author Willem Zuidema.¹³² Apart from providing its readers with mediocre rhymes, *Op! Voor Transvaal* also tried to mobilise support for Noëls van Wageningen’s

¹²⁷ ZA, NZAV Jaarverslag 1900, 21.

¹²⁸ Leyds ed., *Tweede Verzameling* I, xi-xii.

¹²⁹ ‘flinke jongelui’, ‘de huisvaders, die voor de verdediging der onafhankelijkheid van hun land te velde trokken en sneuvelden’.

¹³⁰ Draft prospectus *Fonds tot daadwerkelijken steun*, 22 December 1899. ZA, NZAV archive, VII/142.

¹³¹ Prospectus *Fonds tot daadwerkelijken steun*, not dated. ZA, F. Beelaerts van Blokland collection, FBB 2.

¹³² For Zuidema cf. Jonckheere, *Van Mafeking tot Robbeneiland*, 38-39; Huussen, ‘De Anglo-Boerenoorlog’, 113-115.

emigration scheme with fiery editorials.¹³³

From the start, the initiative of the *fonds tot daadwerkelyken steun* was received cautiously by influential figures within the pro-Boer movement. After a meeting with Noëls van Wageningen and Junius, Leyds wrote a letter to the government in Pretoria in which he mentioned the scheme. He announced that he had carefully expressed doubts about the Junius expedition, but that he was not able to stop it, because he did not want to endanger the goodwill towards the Boer cause. This, he continued, was an example of a wider problem, namely how to deal with the massive support for the Transvaal.

It is often difficult to lead the enthusiasm of the public in Europe, that eagerly wants to do something for the Republic [SAR], along the right lines, and in many cases it brings forth the most impractical plans. And because the plans are often executed before the people who know something about the Republic are consulted, it is often difficult to answer them, as one does not want to insult the people or pour cold water on their enthusiasm.¹³⁴

The OFS consul-general H.P.N. Muller also expressed his doubts when he met the delegation of the *fonds tot daadwerkelyken steun*. This did not stop Noëls van Wageningen from claiming in *Op! Voor Transvaal* that both of them had been informed about the scheme from the start and pledged their full support. Muller replied with a letter in which he complained about that statement.¹³⁵ The next month, the two representatives of the Boer republics discussed whether they should tolerate the emigration scheme any longer.¹³⁶ Leyds ended the silence. In an interview that appeared in the newspaper *Het Vaderland* of 16 March 1900 he openly declared that neither he nor Muller had supported the foundation of the *fonds tot daadwerkelyken steun*. Although he was not against the idea of emigration to South Africa in principle, he doubted whether the Boers actually needed new settlers who had limited knowledge of South Africa at that time. He added that he had advised the Junius expedition, which by then had already left, to wait until more information was available about the situation in the region and the prospects for settlement.¹³⁷ Noëls van Wageningen responded

¹³³ The most complete set of issues of the magazine I have found is in the Leyds collection at the University of Stellenbosch.

¹³⁴ 'Het is dikwijls moeilijk om in Europa den ijver van het publiek, dat graag iets voor de Republiek wil doen, in goede richting te leiden, en in zeer veel gevallen komt het met de meest onpractische plannen aan. En aangezien dikwijls die plannen al uitgevoerd zijn, vóórdat menschen die van de Republiek iets weten worden geraadpleegd, is het dikwijls moeilijk een antwoord te geven, waar men de menschen niet gaarne beleedigen wil of hun ijver bekoelen.' Leyds ed., *Tweede Verzameling I*, 312-313.

¹³⁵ Transcript of a letter by H.P.N. Muller to [W.F. Noëls van Wageningen?], 20 February 1900. ZA, F. Beelaerts van Blokland collection, FBB 2.

¹³⁶ H.P.N. Muller to F. Beelaerts van Blokland, 11 and 21 March 1900. ZA, F. Beelaerts van Blokland collection, FBB 2.

¹³⁷ Cutting from *Het Vaderland*, 16 March 1900. ZA, F. Beelaerts van Blokland collection, FBB 2. It seems that Leyds did not consult with Muller about this interview. H.P.N. Muller to F. Beelaerts van Blokland, 11 and 21 March 1900. ZA, F. Beelaerts van Blokland collection, FBB 2.

with a memorandum to the editors of all Dutch newspapers, in which he insisted that there had been sustained contact between him and both Leyds and Muller, and that there had been several meetings to discuss the details of the scheme.¹³⁸

This led to growing suspicion amongst other pro-Boers, not only about the plans, but also about the credibility of Noëls van Wageningen himself. The young civil servant Frans Beelaerts van Blokland started a campaign against the *fonds tot daadwerkelijken steun*. He himself was involved in many different pro-Boer initiatives, including a committee that secretly supported volunteers who wanted to go to South Africa to join the republican forces. After these activities were exposed in the press, Beelaerts van Blokland took upon himself the task of informing the public about emigration to South Africa in general. Via an old friend from university he found out that Noëls van Wageningen had circulated lists with names of people who he claimed were active supporters of his scheme, but in fact had only received a prospectus.¹³⁹ Subsequently, Beelaerts van Blokland started to compile a dossier on the career of Noëls van Wageningen, asking various people from the financial world for information.

It appeared that Noëls van Wageningen’s claims that he was a banker were true, but several of his colleagues reported that his business was moribund and that there were persistent rumours that he had been accused of fraud on several occasions, which had led to his dismissal from other positions. Some informants even claimed that ‘Noëls’ had been added to Van Wageningen’s surname recently.¹⁴⁰ Beelaerts van Blokland did not keep this information to himself. He wrote to several individuals who were associated with the *fonds tot daadwerkelijken steun* and told them, which led to their withdrawal from the organisation.¹⁴¹ He also warned them against other people involved in the *fonds tot daadwerkelijken steun*, such as Zuidema, whom he described as ‘a man who had gone stark raving mad because of his hate of papists’.¹⁴²

In addition, Beelaerts van Blokland undertook action to warn the general public against Noëls van Wageningen and his plans. He did so in co-operation with Bas Veth, who at that time still worked for the ANV press office. They decided that the most authoritative statements against the *fonds tot daadwerkelijken steun* were provided by Leyds’s interview in *Het Vaderland*. This article was therefore published as a leaflet by the ANV and sent it to 568 periodicals, together with a reference to Beelaert van Blokland’s emigration committee in The Hague.¹⁴³ In response, Noëls van Wageningen published a circular in which he accused the

¹³⁸ Circular by W.F. Noëls van Wageningen, 21 March 1900. ZA, F. Beelaerts van Blokland collection, FBB 2.

¹³⁹ J.L. Plemp van Duiveland to F. Beelaerts van Blokland 9 February 1900. ZA, F. Beelaerts van Blokland collection, FBB 2. Beelaerts van Blokland induced Plemp van Duiveland to send a letter to the press about the matter. Cutting from *NRC*, 10 February 1900. ZA, F. Beelaerts van Blokland collection, FBB 2. Noëls van Wageningen’s response was published on 11 and 14 February 1900.

¹⁴⁰ G. Vissering to F. Beelaerts van Blokland, 12 April 1900; Memorandum probably by K. Zwaardemaker, not dated. ZA, F. Beelaerts van Blokland collection, FBB 2.

¹⁴¹ Several letters to F. Beelaerts van Blokland. ZA, F. Beelaerts van Blokland collection, FBB 2.

¹⁴² ‘een man die door zijn papenhaat stapelgek is geworden’. F. Beelaerts van Blokland to [H.J. Kiewiet de Jonge], 15 February 1900. NASA Leyds collection, LEY 808/43.

¹⁴³ B. Veth to F. Beelaerts van Blokland, 16 March 1900. NL-HaNA, Veth, 2.21.167, inv.nr. 19.

ANV of waging a campaign against him.¹⁴⁴ Kiewiet de Jonge was at first alarmed by this pamphlet and asked Veth to publish and distribute Noëls van Wageningen’s side of the story in order to refute his allegations about the partiality of the ANV. Veth managed to change his mind, explaining that Leyds and Muller both agreed that the press office fulfilled a useful task by ‘informing the public when it is at risks, while at the same time referring to an institution where it can obtain truthful information’.¹⁴⁵

In April 1900, evidence from South Africa arrived that proved that the scheme of Noëls van Wageningen was unrealistic if not downright fraudulent. Newspapers published a letter by one of the men who had joined the Junius expedition. He described how, on arrival in South Africa, he and his fellow-emigrants were forced to join the Boer forces, despite the promises that they were going to do peaceful work. Moreover, the unfortunate adventurers had to pay the largest share of the costs of the voyage themselves.¹⁴⁶ Another letter from Pretoria mentioned the arrival of the ragged members of the Junius expedition, who were supported by a local charity and so wasted money that should have been spent on the Boers themselves.¹⁴⁷ This information effectively meant the end of the *fonds tot daadwerkelijken steun*, which disappeared from the annals of the pro-Boer movement.¹⁴⁸ Likewise, the magazine *Op! Voor Transvaal* did not survive 1900, and the last issue appeared in December of that year. It appears that Noëls van Wageningen himself was ruined too and in March 1902 he received a three-year jail sentence for fraud while working as the director of a chemical factory.¹⁴⁹ In this sense, the campaign by Beelaerts van Blokland to warn the public against the dubious emigration scheme of the *fonds tot daadwerkelijke steun* was successful. At the same time, he was also involved in attempts to create another organisation, which became an instrument for the Boer representatives and the NZAV to inform the public about their views on the matter.

In December 1899, another new organisation to promote emigration was founded, the *Nederlandsche Emigratie-Maatschappij voor Transvaal en Oranje Vrijstaat* (Dutch Emigration Company for the Transvaal and the Orange Free State, hereafter NEM). It had similar goals as the *fonds tot daadwerkelijken steun*, namely to support emigrants in going to South Africa and so help to continue the presence of Dutchmen in that part of the world. Another similarity between the two organisations was that no military goals were pursued: it was asserted that the Boer republics needed farmers, artisans and entrepreneurs to keep daily

¹⁴⁴ Circular by Noëls van Wageningen, 21 March 1900; reprint from *Op! Voor Transvaal*, 25 March 1900. ZA, F. Beelaerts van Blokland collection, FBB 2.

¹⁴⁵ ‘het publiek op de hoogte te stellen waar het gevaar loopt, tevens een inrichting te wijzen waar het eerlijke inlichtingen kan krijgen’. B. Veth to F. Beelaerts van Blokland, 16 March 1900. NL-HaNA, Veth, 2.21.167, inv.nr. 19. The ANV also sent other circulars for Beelaerts van Blokland’s emigration committee. Kröll, ‘The “Perskantoor”’, 19.

¹⁴⁶ Newspaper cutting [NRC?], 24 April 1900. ZA, F. Beelaerts van Blokland collection, FBB 2.

¹⁴⁷ Letter J.A. van Kretschmar van Veen to NZAV. NRC, 15 May 1900.

¹⁴⁸ The last document I found in the Leyds archives was: W.F. Noëls van Wageningen to ANV press office, 29 November 1900. NASA, Leyds collection, LEY 808/43.

¹⁴⁹ *Het Algemeen Handelsblad*, 13 February and 11 March 1902; Kröll, *Die Internationale Buren-Agitation*, 159.

life going.¹⁵⁰ The main difference was that the NEM was set up as an investment company that offered loans and was not involved in the actual itineraries. The main initiator of this project, the financial journalist Otto Kamerlingh Onnes, emphasised the businesslike approach of the organisation, which tried to secure funds by selling stocks instead of asking the public for donations.¹⁵¹ Another difference with the scheme of Noëls van Wageningen was that the relationship between the NEM and other pro-Boer organisations were much better. At a meeting of shareholders on 19 March 1900, Gerrit Vissering, a prominent banker from Amsterdam, proposed that more co-operation was needed with the NZAV – of which he was a member himself. The underlying idea was that in this way the emigration company would be able to work together with people who ‘possessed sufficient knowledge of Africa and enough trust in the Netherlands.’¹⁵²

In April, negotiations between the NZAV and the executive of the NEM started. Kamerlingh Onnes wanted to make arrangements for the society to appoint two members to the board of the emigration company. Middelberg, however, refused to approve the resolutions, which led to a delay.¹⁵³ In May, another proposal was made about which Beelaerts van Blokland was also consulted, and he was ‘not entirely positive’ either.¹⁵⁴ This cool attitude indicates that both Middelberg and Beelaerts van Blokland wanted to have a strong influence in the organisation in order to ensure that no further rash adventures were undertaken. Eventually this led to the establishment of a new conglomerate organisation, *De Nederlandsche Maatschappij tot Handhaving van Stamverwante Belangen in Zuid-Afrika*, which incorporated the NEM. Kamerlingh Onnes was appointed as president and Beelaerts van Blokland sat on the board of directors as a representative of the NZAV.

The prospectus of the new company indicated a radical change in its objectives. It was argued that the initial foundation of the NEM was to be considered the result of the ‘electric shock’ that had gone through the Netherlands after the outbreak of war, which led to ‘[s]pontaneous manifestations of completely diverse nature’.¹⁵⁵ However, further analysis led to the view that the initial plan to help Dutch people to emigrate to South Africa would probably be an extra burden on the Boers. Considering the advance of the British army, priority was given to aid for refugees, which, it was argued, would be far more effective for the time being. Looking at the technical aspects of the statutes, the company retained its businesslike approach, as a loans bank, but it co-operated with the NZAV in selecting the most feasible initiatives and suitable individuals to strengthen the ‘rational development of

¹⁵⁰ O. Kamerlingh Onnes *Wat Verwachten wij van de Nederlandsche Emigratie-Maatschappij voor Transvaal en Oranje-Vrijstaat?* (Amsterdam, 1900), 1-4. ZA, NEM collection, 1.

¹⁵¹ *Ibidem*, 9-10.

¹⁵² ‘voldoende kennis van Afrika en genoegzaam vertrouwen in Nederland bezaten.’ Cutting *Het Algemeen Handelsblad*, 2 April 1900. ZA, NEM collection, 1.

¹⁵³ O. Kamerlingh Onnes to G.A.A. Middelberg, 25 April 1900. ZA, NEM collection, 1.

¹⁵⁴ J. Drost to G. Vissering, 12 Mei 1900. ZA, NEM collection, 1.

¹⁵⁵ ‘electrische schok’; ‘[s]pontane uitingen van geheel uiteenlopenden aard’.

Dutch interests’.¹⁵⁶ In addition, the money was distributed by the established subcommittees of the society.¹⁵⁷ In this way, the new company was in keeping with the policy that was laid out by the emigration committee of the NZAV and the official representatives of the Boer republics.

The cases of the *fonds tot daarwerkelijke steun* and the NEM show that prominent pro-Boers intervened at times in order to protect the public from what they saw as misinformation about the situation in South Africa. It was not always easy to assess the value of initiatives, especially during the hectic first few months of the war, when public opinion was all ablaze. In this electric atmosphere, emigration plans were temporarily met with a strong response, which led to some unrealistic initiatives, such as the one by Noëls van Wageningen. At first, the Boer representatives were very cautious not to insult him, but he lost their goodwill by making false claims about their unconditional support. Beelaerts van Blokland took it upon himself to start a publicity campaign, which eventually ruined the *fonds tot daadwerkelijke steun*. The case of the NEM was different, because it had far better contacts with the established pro-Boer organisations. Still, Middelberg and Beelaerts van Blokland took no risks and replaced it with a new company with strong institutional links to the NZAV in order to secure control. This led to a revision of the company’s goals and instead of helping people to emigrate, it focused on refugees coming from South Africa. This change is illustrative of the response of the pro-Boers in the Netherlands to the developments in the war zone. Over the course of 1900, it became clear that the commandos were not going to be able to keep the British army at bay, which was confirmed by the occupation of Bloemfontein and Pretoria. Hopes of a swift victory melted away and instead priority was given to initiatives that would relieve the immediate suffering of the Boer population. The following section will explore how these humanitarian efforts were organised.

Fundraising

One of the most tangible results of the public enthusiasm for the Boers in the Netherlands was the money that was raised for humanitarian aid to the war victims in the two Boer republics. Looking at the figures of the most important Dutch pro-Boer organisations, it can be concluded that they received around fl. 1,8 million for that purpose. The NZAV’s *hulpfonds* collected most of that sum, with no less than fl. 1,4 million, which confirms the prominence of the society in the Netherlands.¹⁵⁸ On the whole, contemporaries saw the results of the collections in the Netherlands as a great success and it was emphasised that many segments of

¹⁵⁶ ‘rationeele ontwikkeling van Hollandsche belangen’.

¹⁵⁷ *Prospectus Nederl. Maatschappij tot de Handhaving van Stamverwante Belangen in Zuid-Afrika*. By the end of 1900, fl. 170,000 had been raised by the company. ZA, NZAV Jaarverslag 1900, 57.

¹⁵⁸ *Overzicht van de verrichtingen*; Schutte, *Nederland en de Afrikaners*, 79-80 and 91. In addition to the money collected by the Dutch pro-Boer organisations, the ZAR legation received a total of fl. 641,981 in private donations for humanitarian aid. A large part of this sum seems to have come from the Netherlands as well. Van Niekerk, *Kruger se regterhand*, 223.

the population contributed to the efforts to relieve the suffering of the Boers. Throughout the war, individuals from all walks of life organised fundraising events, such as bazaars, charity shops and lecture tours.¹⁵⁹ Even children did their bit, like the boy who collected fl. 12,50 for the war victims during his sixth birthday party.¹⁶⁰ Similarly, Leyds instructed his wife not to buy their children presents for the celebrations of St. Nicolas in December 1901 and instead to donate the money to the funds for the women and children in the concentration camps.¹⁶¹

Despite the apparent satisfaction amongst those involved, the Dutch donations are dwarfed by the sum that was raised in Great Britain for war charity. There, approximately £ 6 million (at that time about fl. 72 million) was collected by non-governmental organisations for humanitarian aid to the dependents of the 22,000 fallen soldiers and 75,000 injured veterans for whom little state care was arranged.¹⁶² Andrew Thompson has demonstrated that the success of this collection was far greater than those held during other colonial wars, which he explained with the great media exposure of the South African War and the fact that an effective network of philanthropic organisations had come into being nationwide.¹⁶³ This indicates that the organisation of fundraising was an important aspect of its overall success, something that was keenly felt by contemporaries, also in the Netherlands. The widespread enthusiasm of the Dutch public raised concerns amongst pro-Boers about the proper management and efficiency of collections. One particular difficulty was considered to be the fragmentation of the initiatives to raise and distribute money to help the Boers. Although pro-Boer organisations tried to hide this problem behind a façade of unity, it was exposed on occasion. Prominent members of the NZAV therefore undertook attempts to centralise these efforts and so to maximise the effects of the pro-Boer propaganda campaign.

The NZAV clearly put itself forward as the dominant organisation in the co-ordination of collecting money for the Boers in the Netherlands from the beginning of the war. On 10 October 1899, it published a confidential circular about the plans for a new *hulpfonds* which, amongst other things, mentioned the need to send ambulances with the mediation of the Dutch Red Cross.¹⁶⁴ This remark was not appreciated by the executive committee of that organisation, which was about to start its own campaign to raise money for its activities in South Africa. The efforts of the NZAV were considered harmful in particular, because the readers of the circular could conclude that the pro-Boer society was connected to the work of the Red Cross, which would give the impression that its independence and neutrality, the

¹⁵⁹ The archive of H.J. Emous contains much material about these activities. ZA, Emous collection, EM.

¹⁶⁰ Jantje Palmboom to H.J. Emous, 12 November 1901. ZA, Emous collection, EM 3, D1.

¹⁶¹ Leyds ed., *Vierde verzameling* I, 469. St. Nicolas is the Dutch equivalent of Father Christmas. His birthday is celebrated on 5 December.

¹⁶² Measured per capita, people in the Netherlands (5 million at the time) paid fl. 0.36. In Britain (population 40 million) this was fl. 1.80.

¹⁶³ Thompson, ‘Publicity, Philanthropy and Commemoration’, 29.

¹⁶⁴ The text of the circular was published by the president of the Red Cross in *NRC*, 15 November 1901. ZA, NZAV archive, VI/132.

founding principles of the Geneva Convention, were imperilled.¹⁶⁵ The NZAV replied with a cheque of £ 4,000 (about fl. 48,000) and a pledge of a substantial amount of medical supplies, which, according to another circular, were meant to remove all doubts concerning the good relationship between the two organisations.¹⁶⁶

Nonetheless, tensions continued to rise during the next few months, because the successful collections of the NZAV obscured the campaign by the Red Cross. Some of these grudges spilled onto the pages of newspapers, when local committees of the Red Cross complained about the dominant presence of the pro-Boer society in the public sphere, overshadowing other initiatives that aimed to raise money for the republics.¹⁶⁷ In December 1899, the conflict flared up once again when the president of the Dutch Red Cross re-asserted its independence of the NZAV in a letter to the executive committee. Furthermore, he remarked bitterly how in several places NZAV members had ‘publicly thwarted donations to the Dutch Red Cross’.¹⁶⁸ Although he expressed great personal sympathy for the NZAV and what it stood for, he wrote that these incidents had made it necessary for the Red Cross to distance itself from the NZAV.¹⁶⁹ In an agitated reply, Middelberg denied the ‘improper’ use of the name of the Red Cross and even threatened to withdraw the donation of £ 4,000.¹⁷⁰ This threat was not carried out and in total the NZAV donated approximately fl. 80,000 to the Red Cross for its work in South Africa during the war.

There remained a measure of mutual resentment, however, and relations between the two organisations continued to be strained. In January 1900, there was controversy over a donation by Dutch emigrants in the USA, part of which ended up with the NZAV. The treasurer of the Red Cross published a letter in the newspapers in which he demanded that the whole sum be handed over to the Red Cross. Although the NZAV was of the opinion that this was not in line with the instructions from the USA, the money was remitted in order to avoid more ‘envy’.¹⁷¹ In a private letter, the treasurer of the Red Cross wrote he had not meant to cause any hard feelings, but at the same time repeated the accusation that the NZAV had started the trouble with the circular of October 1899.¹⁷² The harmful effects of the NZAV circular were also reiterated in the official report on the activities of the Dutch Red Cross, published in October 1901.¹⁷³ This issue even led to an exchange of angry letters between the

¹⁶⁵ Secretary of the Netherlands Red Cross to P. den Tex, 20 October 1899. ZA, NZAV archive, VI/131.

¹⁶⁶ Circular NZAV, 15 November 1899. ZA, NZAV archive, VI/132.

¹⁶⁷ Cutting *Zutphensche Courant*, 8 November 1899. ZA, NZAV archive, VI/131; Cutting from local paper from Leiden, not dated [probably November 1899]. ZA, NZAV archive, VI/132.

¹⁶⁸ ‘het geven van bijdragen aan het Ned. Roode Kruis in het openbaar tegengewerkt’.

¹⁶⁹ B. van den Wardenbroek van Bergambacht to G.A.A. Middelberg, 5 December 1899. ZA, NZAV archive, VI/131.

¹⁷⁰ ‘ongepast’. Draft letter, not dated [December 1899]. ZA, NZAV archive, VI/131.

¹⁷¹ ‘naijver’. [?] van Heel to the NZAV, 20 January 1900. ZA, NZAV archive, VI/131. Van Heel was a banker from Goes who handled the donation.

¹⁷² B. van den Wardenbroek van Bergambacht to P. den Tex, 25 January 1900. ZA, NZAV archive, VI/131.

¹⁷³ *De Vereeniging Het Nederlandsche Roode Kruis*, 2-3.

presidents of the two organisations in the national press.¹⁷⁴

Despite the fact that it was fought out in public at times, the polemic with the Red Cross did not challenge the prominence of the NZAV fundraising campaign for South Africa. The society also took a leading position in the network that provided aid to the Boer war victims, which raised another difficult question: how was the money to be properly spent? To increase efficiency, a dependable corresponding institution in South Africa was considered to be necessary. Middelberg therefore responded enthusiastically, when in January 1900 J.A. van Kretschmar van Veen wrote to him from Pretoria with the proposal of starting a local organisation that could distribute money collected in the Netherlands – *Het Nederlandsch Bijstandsfonds voor Zuid-Afrika* (The Dutch Assistance Fund for South Africa).¹⁷⁵ Initially, the central committee was based in Pretoria and consisted of ten members; seven *Hollanders* chosen by the NZAV and three Boers appointed by the government of the SAR. Van Kretschmar van Veen acted as chairman. In addition, a subcommittee was established in Bloemfontein, which consisted of six members, including several emigrants with roots in the Netherlands.¹⁷⁶

The occupation of Pretoria, in June 1900, affected the *Bijstandsfonds* significantly. Several *Hollander* members of the central committee returned to the Netherlands, including Van Kretschmar van Veen. These new circumstances meant that the ties between the *Bijstandsfonds* and the NZAV became much closer, and delegates of the two organisations met weekly. Even more illustrative of this close relationship is the fact that Van Kretschmar van Veen joined the executive of the NZAV. Members of the *Bijstandsfonds* in Pretoria (eight in January 1902) implemented the policy set out by the delegates in Amsterdam.¹⁷⁷ The occupation of the Boer republics also caused problems for the *Bijstandsfonds*, because it was initially founded as a semi-official institution that had to account to the Boer governments, which by then had moved into the field. To avoid British interference, the *Bijstandsfonds* changed its constitution, making it a private charity. The subcommittee in Bloemfontein, however, reported that the military authorities there demanded more influence and they proposed that British representatives be invited to join the organisation, in order to avoid trouble in future. This plan was resolutely opposed by the Pretoria committee, who even declared that they considered the Bloemfontein subcommittee to be dissolved.¹⁷⁸ In the end it continued to exist, but only with two members.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁴ NRC, 12 and 15 November 1901; several documents concerning this polemic from November 1901 can be found in: ZA, NZAV archive, VI/132.

¹⁷⁵ J.A. van Kretschmar van Veen to the NZAV, 17 January 1900. ZA, NBZA collection, 1.

¹⁷⁶ *Statuten Nederlandsch Bijstandsfonds voor Zuid-Afrika*, 14 March 1900. ZA, NBZA collection, 1.

¹⁷⁷ ZA, NZAV *Jaarverslag 1901*, 35.

¹⁷⁸ Transcripts of J. Brill to H.C. Jorissen, 8 September 1900; H.C. Jorissen to J. Brill, 24 September 1900. ZA, NBZA collection, 1.

¹⁷⁹ Transcript of Bloemfontein Sub-Committee to P. den Tex, 21 June 1901. ZA, NBZA collection, 3. Two members, A. Fischer and D.E. Wenting, had left South Africa and two members, J.J. Brill and D. Beest van Andel, had resigned, although the former remained active in the distribution of aid. P.J. Blygnaut and J.J. Bisseux remained.

Not only the legal status of the *Bijstandsfonds* changed over the course of the war, also its objectives had to be adapted. The main purpose of the organisation was to provide help to the Boer war victims, which Van Kretschmar van Veen initially expected would not be necessary until after the hostilities had ceased.¹⁸⁰ As the war lingered on, however, conditions amongst the civilian population deteriorated and a large part of the collected money was spent forthwith. With instructions from Amsterdam, the *Bijstandsfonds* committee in Pretoria co-ordinated the distribution of Dutch humanitarian aid in the whole of South Africa and set up local committees in concentration camps.¹⁸¹ This policy was not uncontested. In 1901, B.A.P. van Dam, a former inhabitant of the OFS who had returned to the Netherlands, wrote several letters in which he complained about the lack of knowledge about his former country of residence amongst the delegates of the *Bijstandsfonds* and the executive committee of the NZAV. He argued that money should be saved to help the veterans and widows after the war instead of spending it on the people in the camps, who were receiving enough help from the British. ‘At the moment people are generously throwing the money into a bottomless pit.’¹⁸² Van Kretschmar van Veen refuted these allegations, claiming that influential people in South Africa applauded the immediate action of the *Bijstandsfonds*. Moreover, he continued, the situation in the camps had made it necessary for money to be spent there from a humanitarian point of view.¹⁸³

Another complaint that came from Bloemfontein was that most of the money went to the Transvaal, while the situation in the Orange River Colony was at least as dramatic.¹⁸⁴ This was no new reproach to the NZAV: at the beginning of the war consul-general of the OFS, H.P.N. Muller, already complained about the society’s perceived favouritism.¹⁸⁵ In 1901, he again asked the executive committee to look at this problem with reference to the letter from the Bloemfontein subcommittee, expressing the hope that an ‘arrangement’ could be reached so that more money went to Bloemfontein.¹⁸⁶ Van Dam was less diplomatic and wrote bluntly, ‘Mr. v. Kr. [Van Kretschmar van Veen] takes care of Transvaal. What does the executive committee [of the NZAV] do for the Free State?’¹⁸⁷ Such remarks point to ongoing concerns by representatives of the OFS that the Transvaal was eclipsing its sister republic in the propaganda campaign for the Boers in Europe.¹⁸⁸ Although the NZAV, together with the Transvaal representatives, argued that no distinctions were made between the two republics, this issue seems to have caused significant tensions throughout the war and even thereafter. In

¹⁸⁰ J.A. van Kretschmar van Veen to NZAV, 17 January 1900. ZA, NBZA collection, 1.

¹⁸¹ ZA, *NZAV Jaarverslag 1901*, 40-41.

¹⁸² ‘Op ‘t oogenblik werpt men met milde hand het geld in een bodemlooze put.’ B.A.P. van Dam to the NZAV, 12 June 1901. ZA, NZAV archive, VI/151.

¹⁸³ Report J.A. Kretschmar van Veen, 15 July 1901. ZA, NZAV archive, VI/151.

¹⁸⁴ Transcript P.J. Blignaut to [J.A. van Kretschmar van Veen?], 25 August 1901. ZA, NBZA collection, 3.

¹⁸⁵ H.P.N. Muller to A.S. van Reesema, 22 October 1899. ZA, NZAV archive, VI/129.

¹⁸⁶ ‘regeling’. H.P.N. Muller to P. den Tex, 6 January 1901. ZA, NZAV archive, VI/170.

¹⁸⁷ ‘De Heer v. Kr. zorgt voor Transvaal. Wat doet het hoofdbestuur voor de Vrijstaat?’. B.A.P. van Dam to the NZAV, 5 August 1901. ZA, NZAV archive, V/11.

¹⁸⁸ Cf. chapter 5.

addition to these continual internal problems, there were also external factors that caused concerns amongst the leaders of the NZAV about the efficiency of their efforts to provide humanitarian aid to the Boers.

During the South African War, there was a proliferation of activities in the Netherlands to collect money for victims of the war. Several of these initiatives grew into charities that set up their own network for distributing aid to destitute Boers all over the world. On the territory of the former republics, the *Bijstandsfonds* was dominant, but there was also attention for people outside the war zone. In Cape Town, the Dutch consul-general B.H. de Waal co-ordinated aid to PoW camps on St. Helena and the Bermudas. Another important agent who distributed humanitarian aid to several places inside and outside South Africa was Marie Koopmans-De Wet, a famous figure in the Cape elite, who also had warm ties with several prominent pro-Boers in the Netherlands, which had been the country of birth of her late husband.¹⁸⁹ Inhabitants of the former republics who ended up in Europe also received help. The CNBC took care of Boer refugees that had been transported from Delagoa Bay to Portugal and also ran a shelter for Afrikaners in Amsterdam. There was also much attention for the fate of the *Hollanders* who had been extradited from the Transvaal by the British authorities. This group organised itself into a committee that demanded compensation of the British, which was awarded after intervention by the Dutch government.¹⁹⁰ Other former administrators received money from the SAR legation. The elitist *Transvaal Comité* in Amsterdam took care of the families of whom the father had remained in South Africa or had been imprisoned.¹⁹¹

These various initiatives and organisations made it hard to keep an overview of all the activities that were undertaken, so further co-ordination of the humanitarian aid to the Boers became desirable. Once again it was Van Kretschmar van Veen who took the lead in the efforts to centralise these initiatives on his return to the Netherlands. In May 1901, a circular was sent out to all known pro-Boer organisations in the Netherlands, signed by the executive committee of the NZAV and the delegates of the *Bijstandsfonds*. It was asserted that because of the great need for aid, ‘the energy and dedication of more than a few’ were needed.¹⁹² The decentralisation that had accompanied the abundance of initiatives had clear disadvantages, however, because some individuals received money from different sources at the same time and ‘people who are less needy did not hesitate to make all too eagerly use of this’.¹⁹³ It was therefore proposed that a joint meeting with the representatives of pro-Boer organisations be organised to discuss who would take care of what tasks. In order not to inhibit the

¹⁸⁹ Malan, *Marie Koopmas-De Wet*, 208-215; Notulen NZAV Bijstandsfonds, 21 August 1901. ZA, NBZA collection, 1.

¹⁹⁰ Cf. chapter 3.

¹⁹¹ *NZASM in memoriam*, 146-147; Kröll, *Die Internationale Buren-Agitation*, 146-147; M. Kuitenbrouwer, *Nederland en de opkomst*, 184-185; Schutte, *Nederland en de Afrikaners*, 80; De Jong, *Die Levensomstandighede en Kulturele Bydrage*, 218-222.

¹⁹² ‘de lust and toewijding van meer dan enkelen’.

¹⁹³ ‘minder hulpbehoevenden aarzelden niet een al te gretig gebruik daarvan te maken’.

spontaneity, the independence of the various organisations was guaranteed.¹⁹⁴ This meeting came to be the so-called *Vereenigde Comités voor de noodlijdenen ten gevolge van den Zuid-Afrikaanschen oorlog* (United Committees for the needy due to the South African war), a platform in which eleven of the most important pro-Boer organisations participated.¹⁹⁵ Representatives from all these organisations met once a month, with Middelberg acting as chairman and Van Kretschmar van Veen as secretary. These two men also had weekly meetings with the leaders of the most important pro-Boer charities.¹⁹⁶

It appears that the *Vereenigde Comités* contributed to a more effective management of the humanitarian aid to the Boers in South Africa and elsewhere. In the annual report of the NZAV, it was noted that the administration of the network was run at much lower costs.¹⁹⁷ Another effect of the centralisation of the pro-Boer organisations in the Netherlands was that local charities in South Africa were asked to submit reports on how they spent their money. In this way, a substantial number of letters about the situation in the concentration camps was gathered. It seems that the co-ordination of this activity was left to H.J. Emous, who, as a founding member of the CNBC, attended the weekly meetings of the *Vereenigde Comités*.¹⁹⁸ Emous sent extracts of the reports to the Dutch press and thus tried to expose the, in his words, ‘hypocritical violence on the part of England’.¹⁹⁹ Throughout the second half of 1901, newspapers published summaries of reports in which the hardships of the people in the camps were mentioned; the more positive ones were left out. When it appeared, early in 1902, that the situation in the camps had improved structurally, these reports disappeared from the pages of the press.²⁰⁰

Encouraged by the apparent success of the *Vereenigde Comités* in the Netherlands, Van Kretschmar van Veen tried to extend its activities to other European countries. A circular was sent to the large foreign pro-Boer organisations in which they were asked to join the platform and make money available for the *Bijstandsfonds*. Despite the fact that Leyds endorsed this initiative, it did not have significant results. Some organisations donated a bit of money and others asked for information about the situation in South Africa, but none of them joined the *Vereenigde Comités*.²⁰¹ Another initiative to integrate the pro-Boer organisations on the European continent was taken by Kiewiet de Jonge and the French senator Louis Pauliat. In March 1901, they organised an international conference in Paris after which the *Union*

¹⁹⁴ Circular signed by J.A. Van Kreschmar van Veen, May 1901. ZA, NBZA collection, 1.

¹⁹⁵ Kröll, *Die internationale Buren-Agitation*, 151-152; Schutte, *Nederland en de Afrikaners*, 80.

¹⁹⁶ For the minutes of these meetings see: ZA, NBZA collection, 1.

¹⁹⁷ ZA, *NZAV Jaarverslag 1901*, 34.

¹⁹⁸ For a substantial number of these reports cf. ZA, Emous collection, EM 2-3 (concentration camps); ZA, Emous collection, EM 1 (PoW camps); ZA, Emous collection, EM 1 (for refugee camp in Portugal). Emous also received many letters from teachers he had helped to move to the Transvaal in the 1890s, which he published in the *Christelijk Schoolblad*, a pedagogic journal. These letters can be found in: ZA, Emous collection, EM 7-11.

¹⁹⁹ ‘de huichelachtige geweldpleeging van de zijde van Engeland’. H.J. Emous to ANV press office, 19 August 1901. NASA, Leyds collection. LEY 809.

²⁰⁰ Cf. chapter 6.

²⁰¹ Kröll, *Die internationale Buren-Agitation*, 152-153.

federative internationale pour l'indépendance des Boers (International Union for the independence of the Boers) was founded.²⁰² But this committee lacked clout too and besides a few individual successes – such as the lecture tour by the former SAR administrator C.G.S. Sandberg in France – it was not able to co-ordinate many activities in other European countries.²⁰³ These examples suggest that the influence of Dutch pro-Boer organisations was not great enough beyond the borders of the Netherlands to mobilise foreign funds for their own efforts to provide humanitarian aid to the victims of the war in South Africa.

It has been argued in this section that the collections for the Boers should be seen in the light of more general issues that arose from the pro-Boer propaganda campaign. Contemporaries grappled with questions as to how to mobilise the public and how to maximise the effects of the money they spent on humanitarian aid. From the start of the conflict, the NZAV tried to assert its position as the most prominent organisation providing aid to the Boers by starting the *hulpfondsen* and the *Bijstandsfondsen*. Although there can be no doubt that these were important institutions, there was also controversy surrounding the way in which they operated. The Red Cross, for example, considered the NZAV collections to be harmful to its own activities to raise funds. Moreover, there was internal criticism on how the aid was distributed. Representatives of the *Bijstandsfondsen* in the OFS objected to the fact that so much money was spent on direct aid to the concentration camps, while they felt that it should be saved for after the war to help with reconstruction. In addition, they accused Van Kretschmar van Veen of favouring Transvaal charities. Such tensions, in combination with the chaotic state of affairs resulting from the proliferation of organisations that collected money for the Boers, made it desirable to centralise these efforts. This was achieved in the Netherlands by the *Vereenigde Comités*, a platform for all major pro-Boer charities. This institution succeeded in lowering administration costs during the second half of 1901 and also provided the press with material about the concentration camps. But the domestic success of this plan could not be repeated on an international level, which indicates that the influence of the Dutch pro-Boer agitation was limited.

Conclusion

The enormous enthusiasm for the *stamverwanten* that resounded through the Netherlands in the years around 1900 was apparent to contemporaries, just as it is to historians today. But contrary to what one might think, such public emotions were not always considered unproblematic by the leaders of the pro-Boer movement. Established bodies, such as the legation of the SAR and the NZAV, tried to direct public enthusiasm, claiming that they were best equipped to take care of the needs of the Boers. They were aware of the limited options of the Netherlands as a neutral nation, a principle that they generally accepted. Moreover,

²⁰² Ibidem, 242-253.

²⁰³ Ibidem, 258-259.

domestic issues, such as regional rivalry and pillarisation, were seen as factors that influenced the effective mobilisation of the public for the Boer cause. It has been argued in this chapter, however, that these considerations did not play as dominant a role in the propaganda campaign as has been suggested by some historians. First and foremost, the pro-Boers’ priority was the management of the lines of communication that extended between South Africa and the Netherlands in order to provide an alternative to the British coverage of the South African War and to generate material support for the embattled republics. At times the massive public enthusiasm was considered to be problematic in this respect, because the established pro-Boer institutions lacked a clear overview of all the spontaneous outbursts of sympathy, which made it hard to distinguish between useful initiatives and harmful ones. This is why several organisations were founded during the course of the war in order to streamline efforts to help the Boers.

One of the most noticeable of these institutions was the ANV press office, which was closely linked to the NZAV and the diplomatic representatives of the Boer republics. As such, it handled much of the information that reached Europe from the Boers in South Africa and turned it into propagandistic material such as press circulars and pamphlets. Although it remains the question to what extent these texts were actually taken up and used by the media, there was widespread appreciation in the Netherlands for this ‘campaign of the pen’. Another example of how pro-Boers intervened in order to influence the public, took place after the euphoria of December 1899, when several emigration schemes emerged that were unrealistic, if not outright fraudulent. Frans Beelaerts van Blokland – in co-operation with the ANV, NZAV and Boer diplomats – led a campaign against the untrustworthy *fonds tot daardwerkelijke steun* and took over another emigration company in order to establish a reliable source of information for the public. A final headache for the NZAV was the organisation of humanitarian aid to the Boers. Although it ran the most important pro-Boer charity, there was criticism on its conduct, both externally and internally. It was J.A. van Kretschmar van Veen, a *Hollander* who had returned from Pretoria, who led the centralisation of the collections and the distribution of aid that resulted in the foundation of the *Vereenigde Comités*.

The cases mentioned in this chapter reveal that the pro-Boer movement in the Netherlands often relied on improvisation due to the haphazard organisation of its institutions, which was particularly apparent when compared to the British lines of communication with South Africa. Significantly, contemporaries in the Netherlands were aware of such problems and tried to find solutions. They clearly considered propaganda to be an important feature of the South African War and although it is difficult to draw conclusions about the actual impact of the campaign, this demonstrates its historical significance. As such, pro-Boer enthusiasm in the Netherlands was not simply a temporary fit of hysteria, but should be considered in the context of the rise of mass media and the globalisation of information in the age of modern

imperialism. This chapter and the previous one have described how a large amount of information was transferred from South Africa to the Netherlands. Dutch organisations attempted to distribute this material in order to influence public opinion in Europe on the events taking place in the war zone and to mobilise support for the Boers. Such views were published in a great variety of genres and distributed amongst people from all walks of life. The following two chapters provide an analysis of the contents of these sources and how the South African War was depicted.