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Tant Alie of the Transvaal (1866–1908): God's wife in the concentration camp

6.1 MALE VIEWS ON FEMALE MARTYRDOM: CONTINUED

According to Postma and Stockenström, the next important event in the martyr history of Dutch-Afrikaans women after the Great Trek was the South African War between the Boers and Britain, 1899 to 1902.

Two aspects of the way in which Postma and Stockenström record the history of the women in the British concentration camps should be seriously questioned. In the first place these historians romanticise the Boer women as passive martyrs. These women are depicted as helpless victims at the mercy of the British and they are praised for their passive acceptance of their role as martyrs of the nation, a romantic role for smiling heroines. In the second instance these historians overemphasise the international outcry against atrocities committed against Boer women in the camps.

From the Boer women's ego-texts, compiled by E Neethling in a publication *Vergeten?* (1917; and *Should we forget?* 1902), it is clear that these male presentations were far removed from the actual experiences of these women.

However, from the Boer women's ego-texts it is apparent that those who lived to tell their stories did not survive because of international attention or because they trusted in the protection of a national God. Ironically enough, they survived because of their staunch belief in a personal God. True to the piety of their foremothers, in times of pain they found comfort and acceptance in their personal God; 'Bij onze lieve Heer was het anders besloten, daarom moeten wij tevreden wezen' (Our Lord has decided differently, therefore we must be contented. Martha Kriel in Neethling 1917:15). The submissiveness which their piety required was to the male God in heaven: 'O, had ik niet een Vader in de hemel op Wie ik vertrouwde, was ik al lang van druk bezweken, maar ik wist, dat Hij mij zou leiden op Zijn eigen weg' (If it was not for my Father in Heaven in whom I trusted, I would have died long ago; but I know that He shall lead me on his way. Anna Louw in Neethling 1917:43). God, the Father, is in control; He is the Strong Man.

This submissiveness to the divine will was, of course, inherited from their foremothers, but during the last part of the nineteenth century Afrikaans women's image of their personal God was strengthened by the teaching of Andrew Murray. These women felt at ease within his teaching; on the one hand he provided for active people who wanted to please God through their actions; on the other he preached submission to the will of the strong, benevolent God when things do not turn out right. In this respect it is good to listen to the voice of one of the women from the Murray circle, that of Susanna Maria Murray (née Kriel, 1873-1962). She narrates in her diary, *Uit die dagboek van 'n predikantsvrou, 16 Mei 1900 tot 12 Januarie 1906* (From the diary of a minister's wife, 16 May 1900 to 12 January 1906) the following story her mother told her. Again the scene is that of a mother with her personal God at a death bed (s a:39):

She was telling me the other day of how, shortly after Father's death, she was standing one night beside her sleeping bairns and her heart was full of fears and anxiety. She wept and cried out: 'Oh God, how can I bring them up alone?' and suddenly it was as if she heard His voice: 'It is not My will that one of these little ones shall perish.' It brought comfort to her soul and many a day since then those words have strengthened her faith.

The war diary of Alie Badenhorst provides an excellent example of a woman who reacted actively to the challenge to survive in a war situation and who engaged her personal God in her struggle for survival.

6.2 THE LIFE AND WORK OF TANT ALIE OF THE TRANSVAAL

6.2.1 *The Tante and the war*

Alie Badenhorst (1866–1908) was in her early thirties during the South African War of 1899–1902. During this war she commenced writing her autobiography covering the period from her early childhood in the 1870s until her husband's return from exile on 3 July 1902. Although only 33 years old at the outbreak of the war, she referred to herself as 'Tante' because she was married.

6.2.2 *The women who wrote about the war*

Badenhorst's diary, written in local Dutch, was first published in English and later in Afrikaans. The English translation was by Emily Hobhouse and it was published in London in 1923 under the title *Tant Alie of Transvaal: her diary 1880–1902*. The Afrikaans edition, published in 1939, was edited by the famous MER (1875–1975) and called *Tant Alie van Transvaal: die dagboek van Alie Badenhorst*. This is only one of several ego-texts of women's war memoirs published after the war. *Should we forget* by E Neethling (1902), *Camp diary of Henrietta E A Armstrong* (Van Rensburg 1980), as well as *Het concentratie-kamp van Iréne* (1905) and *The petticoat commando* (1912) of Johanna Brandt are other well-known examples. Badenhorst's diary deserves special attention because it is the only diary in which a woman explicitly and consistently interprets her war experiences in terms of her piety.

6.2.3 *The English Tant' Alie*

In her introduction Emily Hobhouse calls Alie Badenhorst's diary a 'Peace Document'. Hobhouse claims that, influenced by a speech on pacifism by Lloyd George, she decided to take upon herself the difficult task of deciphering and translating Badenhorst's manuscript, a task which took her twenty years. Olive Schreiner allegedly offered to write a preface to the English edition of Badenhorst's diary (Badenhorst 1923:8), but she had died by the time it was ready for publication. Schreiner is reported to have said that the diary was a 'human document' and that she thought it to be 'wonderful'.

6.2.4 *The Afrikaans Tant' Alie*

In the early 1920s the English edition was presented to the outside world as the work of a pacifist Boer woman who fell prey to the horrors of British imperialism. When the Afrikaans edition was published in the late 1930s, it was directed towards the Afrikaner nation as a call to strengthen themselves through the blood of their martyrs. Initially it was President Reitz himself who endeavoured to translate Badenhorst's Dutch into Afrikaans. The work was finished by M E Rothmann and her work is gratefully acknowledged in the Introduction to the Afrikaans edition by the wife of President M T Steyn on behalf of the Afrikaans nation.

6.2.5 *The contextualised Tant' Alie*

Badenhorst's diary has therefore been presented in two contrasting contexts: Hobhouse read and presented Badenhorst's text as the work of a pacifist, who was against the imperialism of nations. MER and Steyn presented the same diary as a text to be read for building the Afrikaner nation. To understand Badenhorst's concept of God, her historical and ideological context needs to be analysed. In the first place she was a convert of Andrew Murray, bound by the restrictions of her female sub-culture. She endured severe physical suffering during the war and as a result died of heart failure, yet she managed to write down her memories in such a fashion that they could be interpreted as a 'Peace Document' as well as a document offering hope for an emerging nationalism. This leads to the supposition that she experienced God as a saving God, a comforting God who empowered her, and also a God who was not to be blamed for the war, who visited her regularly, a God whom she lost during the war but found again in time of peace.

6.3 THE STRICT BUT SAVING PERSONAL GOD OF ANDREW MURRAY

Alie Badenhorst, then still Alie de Wet, was 17 years old when she came under the influence of Andrew Murray (Badenhorst 1923:41–54) in 1883 when Murray preached in the Potchefstroom district and the young woman was visiting her sister. At that time Badenhorst was experiencing difficulties in her private life. She had broken off her engagement to Karel Moller against her own wishes because of societal pressure. Andrew Murray's simple message of absolute opposites enabled her to identify her previous life with her ex-fiancé as a life belonging to Satan, and her life to

come with Frikkie Badenhorst as a life in Christ. She met Frikkie Badenhorst, her sister's neighbour, at the time of her conversion to Murrayism. She married him three years later.

6.3.1 *The strict but saving God*

The God whom Badenhorst met through Andrew Murray was a God of integrated opposites: He saved people yet demanded their dependence upon him. He freely gave salvation and demanded legalistic holiness in return (Basson 1990:1–37).

Badenhorst was a Christian before she converted to Andrew Murray's concept of God. She had been confirmed in the church before her conversion. She was a fun-loving person, and was judged by society for drinking too much gingerbeer on the day of her confirmation and for kissing a number of men (Badenhorst 1923:22–27). This led to bad feelings between herself and Karel Moller, her fiancé. When she left to visit her sister, she met Andrew Murray, abandoned her old lifestyle (which included Karel Moller) and started a new life with a new boyfriend and a Murrayist God and lifestyle. After her conversion Badenhorst abandoned all frivolity, virginal though it was. She avoided all parties, even wedding feasts, and decided to limit herself to marriage (Badenhorst 1923:55–61).

6.3.2 *The personal God*

Murray's God was a personal God who demanded personal commitment. He focused on the individual's personal relationship with his Creator to whom he or she is committed by free will and whom he or she wishes to please. Murray's message implied the personal involvement of the individual with God, as well as God's personal involvement with the individual (Van Zyl 1989:6–12, 74).

Badenhorst's concept and experience of her personal God can be deduced from the description she gives of her struggle to deal with this new concept of God introduced by Murray (Badenhorst 1923:44–45):

That night the struggle was in my soul, and still I found no peace. Satan would not let me go. He whispered to me that if I were converted I could have no more pleasures but must put them all aside. Then, too, what would the people at home think of me? I feared they would mock at me. Here then were two spirits that fought within me, Christ and Satan; and what had Satan to offer me? Nothing but Eternal Fire while Christ offered me Eternal Life. He

gave his blood for me and yet I was in doubt. I was weary of the struggle, but next day during the service all at once it became clear to me – Christ is everything; I am nothing. It was to me as if I saw Heaven open and the Spirit of God light upon me, as in silence I yielded myself to Him. Then a great peace filled my heart.

When the church was empty Ds. Murray came to me and said: 'How is it with you my daughter? Have you found peace?'

I answered: 'God has taken me to Himself and I feel happy.'

It was this concept of God, to whom Badenhorst was personally attached and who was personally involved with her, which was the most prominent and consistent vision of the divine in the diary of Alie Badenhorst.

6.4 THE RIGHTEOUS GOD OF PEACE

Badenhorst spent the next fifteen years after her conversion peacefully, mainly as a young married mother. She writes very little about these years, although she (Badenhorst 1923:62–70) briefly sketches the main events of more than a decade.

She married Frikkie Badenhorst in February 1886, at the age of 19/20 years. Twenty months later (October 1887) a son was born who died seven days later. A few months afterwards (February 1888), after two years of marriage, she adopted an orphaned girl aged eleven. Two years later (in 1890) the first of her own five sons was born.

A few political events took place. In 1895 the Boers made war against Malapoch, the leader of a black tribe, and forced him to surrender by cutting off his drinking water. The same year the Jameson Raid occurred and a few years later the Boers made a successful onslaught on another black leader, M'Pefu.

The Badenhorst family was not directly involved in any of these events, and during this time Alie Badenhorst experienced God as a God of peace. The righteousness of God was presupposed and there was no reason to question whether God caused the wars. Badenhorst accepted that God's sympathy lay with the Boers and she was obviously convinced that cutting off the blacks' drinking water, or driving them into the mountains to die of hunger, as she earlier related, was not the same as putting (white) women and children into concentration camps to die of deprivation.

6.5 THE COMFORTING GOD OF THE WAR

In October 1899 war broke out with Britain and in the course of the next year Alie Badenhorst experienced another side of God which she had not met in her previous contexts. As a teenager she experienced God as her spiritual saviour; as a young mother God was her peace-loving guardian; now she expanded her knowledge of God and he became the Comforting Father and (later) her Helping Husband.

During the first months of the war, while still on her farm, Badenhorst looked upon God as her guardian and helper. During this time she remained loyal to her conversion to Andrew Murray's concept of God as the One who cared personally for her children's wellbeing. At this time, of course, personal salvation was contextualised by Badenhorst: her personal Saviour became her personal Helper during a time of war, fear, anxiety and loneliness. In Badenhorst's diary, God was presupposed to be the national God, and God as the warrior God and as the public God became subthemes with her main view of God still that of the personal God. Her doubts began in the concentration camp, but it was a temporary rejection of her personal God. Alie Badenhorst wrote the full story of her war tribulations within this concept of the personally present, and later absent, God.

During the first part of the war Badenhorst's personal relationship with God was strengthened by her reaching out to God in prayer, and God reaching out to her in dreams and divine visitations. The first part of her war memoirs should therefore be retold within these categories of divine support, human prayer and divine visitation. Alie Badenhorst, like her pious foremothers, received personal visits from God in visions. And, as with her foremothers, these visions occurred when the life of a member of the family was concerned.

6.5.1 God the Supporter

When Badenhorst's husband was called to the war (November 1899), she was confident that God would not forsake her in her trial (Badenhorst 1923:76). When he came back a week later for a short visit, she already knew that she would not see him for the rest of the war. During that week God had visited her with this news but He also promised her His support in the absence of her husband (Badenhorst 1923:80). On her birthday (14 December 1899), the first in fourteen years without her husband, Badenhorst (1923:93) prayed to her masculine God to become even more

male as her Protector: 'My Father, you promised to be my helper, my father, my supporter!' When news came of battles won by the Boers, it was as her protector that she honoured the national God: 'How marvellously has God stood by us! Surely He heard my prayers O God is truly good to us, He commands even the elements to work for us' (1923:97, 98; 1939:98, 100). When bad tidings were received, the personal God was called upon to help the nation: 'I will trust in my God. He alone can help us' (1923:93).

6.5.2 The God of personal prayers

Christmas 1899 came and still there was no sign of peace. New Year's Day came, bringing a new year and a new century. Badenhorst remembered how she woke her husband on previous New Year's Days with the wish that he would spend his life in God's service during the year. That year she prayed a prayer of dependence on God her Father. In the English edition Emily Hobhouse reduced Badenhorst's prayers to a few words or a few sentences and the reader is therefore referred to the Afrikaans version. Badenhorst's declaration on New Year's Day 1900 of dependence on One who was within her while the one alongside her was in the war is of significance here and is quoted in full (1939:110):

Laat my nie alleen nie, want die las is vir my te swaar. O, seën ons hierdie jaar! Ag, Vader, U sien alles; u sien ook my en my angstige hart! Ag, dit is my so bang om die hart; wees U my Rots en Toevlug in hierdie tyd van nood. Want Here, ek voel of daar vreeslike dae in hierdie jaar oor my sal gaan. Laat my tog sê: U wil geskied! Laat my met vertrouë sê: Leef ek of sterf ek, ek is die Heer syne. Leer my om U vir hierdie jaar wat voorlê, te vertrou! Neem my vermoeide hoof in U hande en ondersteun my krag met die Uwe. Amen.

That day she also confessed to a visitor that the omniscient God was not the cause of their suffering: it was known only to God what suffering awaited them (1923:105). Like her foremothers, Badenhorst was submissive and loyal in her piety: God was not the cause of the war and she chose to accept his will in not putting an end to the suffering.

6.5.3 The God who came to visit

A month later, on the first Sunday of February 1900, Badenhorst received a visit from a messenger from God (1923:130). She was not sure whether she was awake or asleep, but she knew that this divine man had also

visited her fifteen years before, demanding that she choose between two men, Karel Moller and Frikkie Badenhorst. This time the messenger laid upon her the task of choosing Frikkie Badenhorst's fate: 'What do you desire most for your husband: death, wounds or imprisonment?' Badenhorst, of course, chose exile. Badenhorst wrote her diary after the events which she recorded had occurred and therefore she presents the outcome of events as effected by God's will as well as by her personal choice after God himself had informed her of the possibilities. Once again like her foremothers, Badenhorst sees herself as the supplementary cause of her own misery.

The news arrived that General Cronjé and 1 300 men (including Badenhorst's husband) were surrounded by British Troops (Badenhorst 1923:124-133). During the months to come, while she and other women anxiously awaited news of the fate of their loved ones, the pact she made with her guardian God kept her going: her husband would not be killed or wounded. A sermon by the Reverend Winter, the local minister, blaming this setback on the personal sins of people (1923:132), provided Badenhorst with an attractive interpretation of the events: she was forced to make a choice concerning her husband's fate because she was a sinful person. Badenhorst's view of God, and its paradoxical consequences, is apparent from her interpretation of God's role in these traumatic experiences: on the one hand God was her Comforter. That she could deduce because He personally involved her in and informed her about her husband's fate. On the other hand, yet simultaneously, God had to be acquitted of any suspicion that He was responsible for this trauma: her personal sins caused the misfortune of General Cronjé and his men; her choice sent her husband into exile. God was still her God. He did not declare war against her. He answered her prayers. He protected her husband against the 160 canons fired at him (1923:136; 1939:158): 'Hoe teer het God nie vir my gesorg nie? Onder rampe en leed was Hy steeds aan my sy' (1939:159).

6.6 GOD THE FATHER; GOD THE HUSBAND

As her circumstances deteriorated, Badenhorst moved closer towards God and, as she believed in paradoxical rationalisation, God moved closer towards her. Her husband's imprisonment in Simon's Town was a sign of God's love, because God created circumstances in which He could reveal his care for her (1923:142; 1939:167). The more terrified she became, the more she believed that God forgave her sins (1923:163); the worse the

news from the battlefield became, the more she believed that 'God is the same yesterday and today and for ever. His power will go before us' (1923:163). When all her sons (aged between six and twelve at this stage) became seriously ill with measles – and her sister's child died – she acknowledged that her husband was not there, 'but my Heavenly Father was near me, watching unseen. I felt His Presence and His promise' (1923:166).

6.6.1 A child to God the Father

In many events at this time Badenhorst saw the wondrous, helping hand of God: a charge against her of owning a gun was dropped, and at a crucial stage of her children's illnesses the pharmacist arrived unexpectedly (1923:167). Badenhorst did not play a passive role in all these wonders: by the time that the pharmacist had appeared, she had already saved the children with the right treatment. There are descriptions of her many heroic deeds in which she saved her family from famine and death: once she rode on horseback to the English camp and demanded her cattle back, and the British returned the cattle they had stolen. Another time she went into town to buy provisions and to get care for a sick child, and she beguiled and impressed the British, and showed great courage (1923:200–205).

6.6.2 Dependency on God the Husband

In spite of her activities, Badenhorst led a religious life of utter dependence upon God. Therefore when God's messenger appeared to her again with the message that she would have to suffer even more before there could be peace, she accepted His word that God's grace is sufficient (1923:169). When she heard of the deaths of more and more family and friends, Alie Badenhorst no longer prayed to God the Father alone, but to God the Husband: 'Father, Thou has promised to be a husband to me, be near me now,' she prayed (1923:176).

Badenhorst's birthday and Christmas came around a second time with her husband in exile. The year 1901 dawned. That year Badenhorst would stop praying to her personal God, and she would no longer receive visits from God's messenger. In the new year the British troops came and they plundered and destroyed her farm. On 15 April 1901 Badenhorst and her children were taken from their farm in the Potchefstroom district to

the concentration camp in Klerksdorp where they were to stay for the next fourteen months under subhuman conditions.

6.7 THE ABSENT GOD OF HELL

Badenhorst wrote the first part of her diary *ex eventu*. This enabled her to romanticise some of the events and to evaluate God's participation in these events in the light of later, more positive occurrences. However, her concentration camp experiences she dealt with at the scene and she referred to God in the midst of her bitterness.

6.7.1 The flight of the personal God

Badenhorst experienced the journey to the concentration camp as a humiliating experience. The first information she received and recorded on circumstances in the camp came from a local friend, Maria Conradie: 'Alie, I do not want to tell you, but it seems to me as if God Himself has forsaken those who are there' (1923:213). This idea of God-forsakenness concurred with her first reaction to conditions in the camp, a reaction which introduced a new but growing theme in her religious experience, namely that of God the Punisher:

It seemed in truth as if God's hand were too heavy upon us, both man and beast. O God, dost Thou strive with us in Thine anger and chastise us in Thy wrath. Be merciful and wipe us not off from the face of the earth.

(Badenhorst 1923:214)

As early as April, the month in which Badenhorst and her family were forced into the camp, it was evident that her personal prayers had to make way for prayer meetings and for the communal singing of war songs. In the midst of the joint suffering of war victims, Badenhorst turned from a personal to a national God.

6.7.2 The end of divine visitations

In May Badenhorst's dreams commenced again, but they were no longer dreams containing messages from God. They became nightmares reflecting her daily misery. These dreams were no longer prophecies consoling her about the future. They became forebodings of imminent catastrophes:

It is the 31st of May. Last night I had a dreadful night, though why I cannot say. It was in my dream as if someone cried to me for help

and I could not help, but wept because I felt so powerless. Distress awakened me. It was long before I could sleep again, and then the same horrid dream was repeated. It roused me, and I lay thinking over all the misery of this past month; wondering if there were more to come. There was left but this one day of May, and now this dream!

(Badenhorst 1923:221)

Badenhorst was not so much inactive and passive in the camp as she was powerless. The dream just described confirms this. Badenhorst (1923:228) describes the position of the captured women as one of utter powerlessness. En route to the camp they were used as buffers against Boer attacks, shot at by their own men. When the Boers stole their cattle back from the British, or when a train was derailed and robbed by the Boers (as happened in June), the already meagre rations of the women and children were cut down even more.

6.7.3 The flight of the powerful God

When Badenhorst realised she was powerless, she began to doubt the power of God. Previously she had had confidence in God's will, now she had to be reminded of divine fate, at least once by the British themselves. In July, while already suffering from a severe cough, she contracted jaundice. She was visited by the major. He advised her to accept God's will for health reasons. According to Badenhorst (1923:230–231) the conversation went as follows:

'Mrs. Badenhorst, the doctors say that I must tell you that you are badly over-worried, and that this worry is the cause that your lungs do not come right. You must then try to make yourself content with the will of God. He has done everything for you; don't you believe so?'

I said: 'Yes, all has been taken away from me and then it is hard always to feel content.'

He went on: 'But think, God can make all things come right.'

In this state of doubt in the power of God, Badenhorst became so ill that she thought that her 'last hour had come'. She left a message for her husband with her son, that she was going to Jesus and that she would wait there for him. In her presumed last hour Badenhorst did not refer to God the Strong One, the powerful Father in heaven but, the only time in her diary, to Jesus (1923:234).

It was night and it was day. And Badenhorst survived. August came.

6.7.4 *The flight of the male God*

During this time Badenhorst lost faith in the traditionally male attributes of God, as well as in the humanity in general of the males of her day. The British generals who initiated the idea of the concentration camps were bachelors, and according to Badenhorst the camp superintendent was 'an old bachelor ... sickly and irritable' (1923:237), a sadist who provided them with sufficient medicine and insufficient food. The camp superintendent appointed a man as sexton to supervise the burying of the dead and he forbade the mothers to carry the corpses of their own children to their graves. This was an act so inhuman that Badenhorst lamented with the mothers: 'O Lord, hast Thou forsaken us?' (1923:240; 1939:288). With the corpses piled up out of reach in a big tent, it was difficult to keep the pigs from chewing the bodies of the dead children.

In August (1901) 180 people died in this camp.

6.7.5 *The flight of God the Supporter*

September 1901 came and many women and children were loaded onto open trucks in pouring rain and sent to another camp in Natal. One woman asked: 'What think you, can I hope to get my sick child alive to Natal?' and Badenhorst (1923:246) answered doubtfully: 'The Lord is mighty, but to me it seems impossible.'

A number of mothers were separated from their children on these trucks and others had to leave without being allowed to bury their dead children. In the camp it was soaking wet:

The camp was a terrible sight. In the morning, the dead bodies had to be drawn out from under the fallen tents; then mothers sought refuge for the living, leaving their little corpses behind.

(Badenhorst 1923:248)

Looking at the camp, Badenhorst did not pray to God her Helper, but remembered that the Bible says: 'There was no one to help us' (1939:297). Once again she was tormented by bad dreams.

That September 142 people died in the camp, including her brother-in-law. Early in October she had another bad dream and her mother-in-law died. The death toll that month was 164 (1923:251–264).

6.7.6 The end of prayer

She would never forget November 1901 because of the horror of uncontrolled death all around her (1923:265-275). She stood next to the bed of a child in the throes of death, whose mother had died the previous week and the sister that morning:

[T]here was not a tear in my own eyes, for weep I could no more. I stood beside her and watched till a stupefying grief overwhelmed my soul. More than once I lamented like the Prophet (Lam 3:1): 'I am the man that hath seen affliction by the rod of His wrath.'

(Badenhorst 1923:274)

Badenhorst could no longer pray. She identified with the lamenting Jeremiah and the suffering Christ (1923:277): 'I will take up my cross and try to bear it after Christ'

In December when the camp superintendent died she rejoiced with the other women. One hundred and sixty-two women and children also died that month.

6.8 THE RETURN OF THE PERSONAL GOD

1 January 1902. A new, more humane camp superintendent arrived, and Badenhorst's belief in the goodwill of her personal God returned, but the relationship was no longer naïve. She demanded answers from God (1923:285): 'Lord, canst Thou not give me light? Wherefore must we suffer so long?' Because God had also restored his personal relationship with Badenhorst, He answered her question: 'Because of your murmuring and your sins.' This convinced Badenhorst that God had remained the same during the war; she had changed. Her anger towards her personal God, whom she had believed had left her, became, once she had found Him again, anger against herself; and she begged God's forgiveness because by sinning against Him, she had caused her own suffering.

In May only 14 people died in the camp. In June 1902 peace was declared.

Badenhorst's post-war personal relationship with God is best described by her reaction to her destroyed house and the loss of all their stock. 'O God, O God, wherefore hast Thou tried us so sorely; was there then no might left in Thine arm to strike for us?' she asked God the Punisher (1923:315-316). However, she repented immediately and she turned her clenched fist away from God towards herself, placing the

omniscient and benevolent God once again in control: 'O God, make me content, teach me to bow to Thy will. Thou knowest my unruly heart.'

When her husband disembarked from the train, after two and a half years in exile, Badenhorst's relationship with the personal God was fully restored: 'How good was God who so graciously heard our prayers' (1923:318; 1939:376).

CONCLUSION

Alie Badenhorst took control of her everyday life. Even when confronted by a situation of utter powerlessness in the concentration camp, she actively practised her piety. However, her own powerlessness influenced her relationship with her personal God. Because of the intensity of this personal relationship, her concept of God changed according to her personal circumstances.

As a teenager she deliberately chose, as preached by the Reverend Andrew Murray, God as her personal Saviour. This choice of a new concept of God coincided with her personal need to break with old friends and contexts. During the first 15 years of her marriage and early motherhood, Badenhorst experienced God as the God of peace. During this time it was possible for her to presuppose that God was on her side against the blacks and the British. This view changed somewhat when the war with Britain broke out in 1899 and Badenhorst's circumstances forced her to place new demands on her relationship with God. While her husband was imprisoned, Badenhorst depended upon God as her protector, as her substitute husband. When her circumstances on the farm became worse and far more dangerous, Badenhorst grew closer to her personal God, but when she and her children were imprisoned, she crossed that barrier where she was able to rely on God's protection and goodwill. For a while the concept of a national God siding with the nation but punishing her for her personal sins dominated Badenhorst's religious experience. The end of the war allowed her to enter once again into a personal relationship with God, and to place the blame for the war on her personal sins.

Women like Alie Badenhorst were tricked into bowing before a national God when the men used their women's piety as a political weapon in the years after the war.

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7

Johanna Brandt (1876–1964): Visions of the cosmic God

7.1 WHERE HAD ALL THE WOMEN GONE?

The war was over. From the year 1906 the Afrikaans men planned the erection of a monument for their women with, as was earlier suggested, an eye upon an international audience. In this process the primarily personal God to whom these women were indebted for their survival was replaced by a national God. Nationalist men turned the women's piety into a national strategy.

The Afrikaans women, apparently content with the events surrounding the erection of a monument in their honour and the dishonouring of their God, came in their thousands and in subcultural bliss to the inauguration of their monument. It was a national event and not a subcultural event for women only, therefore men and women were present. MER, a well-known Afrikaans woman author of the first half of the twentieth century, narrates in her autobiography, *My beskeie deel* (My humble contribution, Rothmann 1972:171), that it seemed like a sea of people spilling over the mountains around the monument.

Were there no alternative voices amongst Afrikaner women during a time when their foremothers in Europe were obtaining the vote against the male nationalisation of womanhood? Were there no voices challenging the values of the Afrikaans female subculture and the prescriptions of its male dominant culture?

Indeed, there was the voice of Marie du Toit (1880–1931), the sister of the Afrikaans poet Totius. In a book published in 1921, *Vrou en feminist*, Du Toit challenged the position of the Reformed Church against women's suffrage. Her contribution will be discussed in the next chapter. But there was also Johanna Brandt.

7.2 THE ALTERNATIVE VOICE OF JOHANNA BRANDT

7.2.1 Johanna Brandt: prophet turned feminist

Brandt was the wife of a high-ranking minister in the Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk, another Afrikaans Reformed church. Her life and writings can be roughly divided into three periods in which she developed from conservatism and nationalism to a cosmic and feminist view of society.

(1) Conservative beginnings

Born in 1876, Johanna Brandt-Van Warmelo was 16 years old when her father, the Reverend N J van Warmelo, died. The next ten years she lived with her mother in Harmony, a small estate in Sunnyside, Pretoria. Her relationship with her mother was very close, and during the South African War (1899–1902) they both engaged in spying for and in hiding Boers at Harmony. At the end of the war, Johanna left for Holland where she married the Reverend L E Brandt, her brother's former roommate (Van der Merwe 1989). On their return to South Africa in 1904, she wrote two books, her war memoirs, *Het concentratie-kamp van Irène* (1905) and *The petticoat commando* (1912). These books were very conservative and exclusive in view of what she produced later. In these books she did not refer to God and concentrated on the nationalist acts and ideals of the Afrikaner nation. The contents of her writings were soon to change, however.

(2) Metamorphosis at forty

In 1916, when Brandt turned forty, her mother died, and because of their close relationship, Brandt believed that she received divine visions at her mother's death bed. She experienced these visions as hope for the future and they also provided meaning for her mother's death. Consequently, Brandt wrote a book, *The Millennium* (1918), based on these visions. In this book equality between the sexes and harmony between warring partners are presented as positive alternatives for humanity to prepare itself for the second coming of the Lord.

At this time Brandt's husband was ministering to a congregation of the Reformed Church (Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk) in Johannesburg. She was popular in the congregation because of her active engagement in the upliftment of poor people. Because she was a woman, however, her church did not pay much attention to her 'heretical' writings. They did ask her husband to dissociate himself from her views, which he did. At this time the Reverend Brandt was the chairman of the General Assembly of his church. This position, the highest in the church, he held for 21 years (1916–1937).

(3) *Radical at sixty*

In the years to come, Johanna Brandt, like many other talented women captured in a female subculture, turned radical in her views. Receiving no recognition for her work, at the age of fifty she left her husband and seven children in South Africa, and departed for Europe and America in 1927. She developed a grape cure in 1925 with which she treated her own cancer. In America recognition came in the form of an honorary doctorate from the American School of Neuropathy (Botes 1989:469). She returned in 1929 to South Africa on the eve of the Great Depression.

During the early 1930s Johanna Brandt, now nearing sixty, wrote her theology of hope amidst this Great Depression. In her book, *The paraclete, or coming world mother* (1936), she reinterpreted her 1916 visions in the light of her concern for an impoverished local society and a war-torn international society. With the help of the works of Anna Kingsford (d 1888), English feminist and co-founder of the Hermetic Society in Britain, Brandt announced in her book that the second coming of God to this world would be in the form of a woman, a Mother who would heal the world and save it from the violence which ensued from its male leaders' insatiable lust for power. Published in 1936, this book contains many of the elements of modern feminist theology in its concern for the political, social and physical exploitation of the world.

Brandt's life can therefore be summarised as follows. As a young woman her ego-texts testified to narrow nationalist views. As a woman of forty, her personal God visited her and told her to go to the people, to tell South Africa that he was everybody's God and that he desired harmony. When Brandt was sixty, she addressed the whole world, challenging the male-dominant culture which brought the world to its knees. She told a humanity in need of care that their mother was coming to comfort them.

The major events of her life and her spiritual development will now be dealt with in greater detail.

7.2.2 God visits a potential Afrikaans feminist

It was December 1916 and three years after the power of the national God was acknowledged by the inauguration of the National Women's Monument. Johanna Brandt sat next to her dying mother's bed in Harmony in Pretoria and, she later claimed, received a personal visit from a Messenger of God. This Messenger empowered her to spread the message that the God of all Christians was returning to earth, and that He had chosen to come to South Africa. Brandt claims in her book *The Millennium* that God revealed the events surrounding the divine coming to her in four visions. These visions occurred to her a week after the Messenger's first visit.

Divine appearances are not, of course, a new phenomenon within the tradition of Afrikaans female piety. Brandt linked these visions with the death of her mother, a very traumatic event in her life. Once again this fits historical female piety: the personal commitment to God at the time of the death of a relative. Hester Venter received personal comfort from God whose presence she experienced when her children died; it was her concern for the souls of her deceased children and husbands which eventually strengthened the personal relationship between Matilda Smith and God; Susanna Smit came to know God's will personally through visions of hell and heaven after the death of her son.

A week after the death of her mother, Brandt received the following four visions (Brandt 1918:103–111). In the first vision she saw her whole life in one flash, but it was not clear in which direction it was moving. In the second vision she saw her children, sitting around her in full harmonious bliss. They were all together in her late mother's house, Harmony. From this centre of human happiness the whole world was to move towards the ideal of harmony in human relations. In the third vision she saw the battlefields of Europe, and how Light slowly conquered Darkness. The fourth vision revealed to her the future of South Africa. A tornado of violence swept over the country. However, the Messenger posed to her an alternative to the coming disaster: the nation should unite politically; people should forget political and personal differences and work towards righteousness. The coming destruction of the land would then be averted.

7.2.3 Criticism and hope from suburbia

In these visions a suburban harmonious lifestyle is juxtaposed with contemporary miseries in Europe and South Africa, together with a prophecy that harmony will be victorious once the nation has rid itself of political and social iniquities. Three years after the covert call upon the international community at the National Women's Monument to acknowledge the righteousness of the Afrikaans nation, an Afrikaans woman criticised national and international discord and disharmony, and personal lust for money and gold, as male yearnings causing wars.

Brandt, a daughter of the war period, inherited both the personal God of her foremothers and Andrew Murray, and the national God of post-war revenge. Her own contribution was to return the international God, that God who stands for socio-political righteousness, to South Africa.

How should this alternative voice of Johanna Brandt be understood? She had been exposed through her journeys, contacts and books to a variety of cultures as well as to experiences which transcended the restrictions of her subculture, and, therefore, at first she expressed her cosmic visions within the values of her own Afrikaans female subculture. But what did Brandt still have in common with her subculture at this stage, and to what extent did she deviate from it?

These questions can best be answered by narrating her biography in terms of Willem Postma's view of Afrikaner womanhood published in the same year as Brandt's *The Millennium*.

7.3 BRANDT'S HISTORY IN TERMS OF CONTEMPORARY MALE CONCEPTS OF WOMANHOOD

Brandt published her interpretation of her visions in *The Millennium* in 1918, the same year in which Willem Postma, under the pseudonym of Dr O'Kulis, published his prescriptive history of Afrikaans women, *Die boer-vrou, moeder van haar volk* (Boer woman, mother of her nation). This book represents his attempt to construct a uniform 'Afrikaans woman' attributed with the conflicting characteristics of active patriotism, unquestioning religiosity, passive martyrdom and social submissiveness.

7.3.1 *Afrikaans women are active patriots and passive martyrs*

According to Postma and Stockenström Afrikaans women were active patriots who supported their husbands in their battles against the blacks. At the outbreak of the South African War, when the women were left without their husbands, Postma and Stockenström turned these same women whom they had previously presented as active patriots into passive martyrs.

(1) *The traditional Brandt-Van Warmelo and the war*

After the Reverend Van Warmelo died in 1892, Johanna's mother, Mrs Van Warmelo, bought Harmony, a neglected property in Sunnyside in Pretoria where, throughout the war, she stayed alone with her daughter Johanna (Hansie). Brandt (1912:4, 5) describes her mother as a pioneer, a voortrekker, actively involved in conquering the country for local whites. Johanna and her mother did not become passive at the outbreak of the war in 1899. On the contrary, they were patriots who helped the Boer spies to infiltrate Pretoria, which was in British hands during the war (see Roberts 1991). For a short period of two months Johanna was a nurse in the Irene concentration camp. During the final months of the war, Johanna left the country because of mental and physical ill health. In Holland she met her husband-to-be, the Reverend L E Brandt, whom she married in 1902 at the age of 26. She had met him in 1897 when she and her mother visited her brother who was studying theology in the Netherlands. Soon she heard voices calling her back to South Africa and she convinced her husband to go back home: 'In all the world there is no pain to be compared with the pain of being born a patriot; but a patriot in exile – may Heaven protect me from the tragedy of such a fate' (Brandt 1912:374).

(2) *Brandt not passive but still traditional*

Johanna Brandt was 36 years old when in 1912 she wrote *The petticoat commando* on her war memories. At that time she was apparently still that type of Afrikaans woman who fitted well into those categories prescribed by Postma and subscribed to by her female subculture. She did not play the role of a passive martyr during the war, but she conformed to the image of the historical Afrikaner woman who was both defiant of the enemy and accommodating to the men of her own nation. Johanna Brandt remained extremely fond of and to a great extent dependent on her husband all her life. Yet her views of women and their role in the dominant culture were soon to change.

7.3.2 Afrikaans women accept the religion of their fathers

Postma and Stockenström also claimed that Afrikaans women accepted the Calvinist religion of their forefathers without questioning it at all.

(1) *Visions and social consciousness at forty*

As has been emphasised earlier, Brandt was forty years old when, in 1916, she received a visionary warning from God that the future of the world was dependent upon her. These visionary experiences of God, and the age at which Brandt received these visions, are not foreign to Afrikaans female piety. Hester Venter experienced the proximity of God in her early forties; Matilda Smith was almost forty when God called her to the mission field; Marie du Toit was forty when she wrote *Vrou en feminist*. Even English-speaking South African women like Frances Colenso and Elizabeth Lees Price reached the age of forty before they became aware of God's presence and acquired a growing insight into the social iniquities to which their fellow people were exposed.

(2) *Visions of the national God for white people*

It is clear from the visions Brandt received in 1916 that she was still heiress to the religion of her fathers and their concept of a national God. The God who sent a Messenger to her had a fixation with South Africa. According to her visions God's second coming was not only at hand, but He would be coming to South Africa.

This God's attention was directed not only towards South Africa, but in particular towards the whites of South Africa. As an accompaniment to her book *The Millennium* (1918a) Brandt wrote and feverishly distributed pamphlets amongst South African blacks in Zulu, Sotho and Xhosa. In one pamphlet, 'The Millennium. A prophetic message to the native tribes of South Africa', Brandt informed black people that she had been visited by God's Messenger who had revealed the future to her: after the last tribulations, God will come to South Africa and the Millennium will dawn upon this country (and through it, on the world).

The aim of this pamphlet was twofold. On the one hand she wished to warn black people not to take advantage of the disasters which were going to befall the whites:

It was revealed to me by the Messenger of the Lord that the perils in store for South Africa, would be a thousand times more severe if the Native tribes mixed themselves up in them They must not fight among themselves, they must not go forth to steal and murder.

When human beings are scattered homeless over the land, and when the elements rage, when the mighty roar of destruction shakes the very earth, they must remain as quiet as possible and only protect themselves.

(Brandt 1918a:20)

On the other hand, albeit in the patriarchal fashion of the 1920s, Brandt assured the blacks that the coming of God would also be to their benefit:

The Christ is coming to give the undeveloped races a very special push upward, and that is one of the reasons why South Africa has been chosen as an instrument in preparing the world.

(Brandt 1918a:20)

(3) *Being ecumenical and criticising the nation*

On the one hand, it would appear as if in 1918 Brandt was still clinging to the national God of her forefathers. On the other hand, however, Brandt showed remarkable frankness and insight into the iniquities of her nation even at this time, that is three years after she was co-honoured as a martyr of a righteous nation at the inauguration of the Women's Monument. In an 'Appeal to South Africa' made in *The Millennium*, she addresses not only discord in the male dominant culture, but also disharmony on a racial, gender and ecclesiastical level:

This, then, is the cry, oh, South Africa, which I would sound from border to border of our vast-continent – *sink your racial animosities, bury your political differences*, put aside your personal grievances, and join hands, every one of you, **men, women and children of every race and class and creed**, join hands and present an undivided front to the approaching enemy.

(Brandt 1918:111)

The enemy was not the enemy against whom the national God of her fathers had directed himself. The enemy was a society warring against itself.

Furthermore, when Brandt formed The World Harmony Movement in Pretoria in 1916, she defined it as 'A Universal Peace Movement, non-political, non-racial, non-sectarian, having for its basic principle the establishment of Universal Brotherhood through International Friendship' (*The Order of Harmony, aims, objects and principles*).

With this embryonic ecumenical view of non-racism Brandt was indeed already moving away from the religion of her fathers and her husband.

(4) *Brandt and the religion of her father/husband*

Brandt was loyal to her husband and in her writings she always referred lovingly to him. He consoled her when she was exhausted after her vision, she reveals in *The Millennium*. In *The paraclete* she expresses her appreciation for his respectful albeit disapproving attitude towards her prophecies of the coming World Mother. But Brandt was moving beyond the mainline theology for which her husband was honoured and for which he had been known since his student days (see Botes 1989:passim). After the publication of *The Millennium* (1918) the Church Council of the Johannesburg congregation, where her husband was ministering, appointed a commission to talk to Ms Brandt about her views. She stood by her point and the commission accepted that this was her own point of view (Botes 1989:390). Her husband was not suspected of heterodoxy. In 1933, however, the Turffontein Church Council called upon the Reverend Brandt to retire as their minister. This was not because of his wife's writings, but because it had come to light that she had undergone adult baptism 16 years earlier (Botes 1989:496).

In summary: Since 1916, Johanna Brandt, then in her early forties, while still honouring God's special interest in the Afrikaans nation, had incorporated ecumenical and non-racial elements into her religious message to humankind. During this time she also underwent adult baptism. Officially her church took little notice of her message which displayed a developed social consciousness. In 1933, aged almost sixty, she was officially condemned not for her writings but for being rebaptised.

After this official rejection, Johanna Brandt turned radical.

7.3.3 *Afrikaner women submissive to their dominant culture*

Johanna Brandt was a woman of sixty when her book *The paraclete or coming world mother* was published in 1936. This book marks a distinctive radicalisation in her socio-political thinking.

In this book Brandt specifies that when God comes to earth a second time, it will be in the form of a woman. She claims that the message of this book was revealed to her directly and in a divine manner. Although she

does not acknowledge external influences on her thinking, she does refer to the work of Anna Kingsford and her attraction to Kingsford's ideas.

Dr Anna Kingsford (1846–1888), a nineteenth-century British scholar and supporter of 'vegetarianism and antivivisectionism' (*Encyclopaedia Britannica* 1963:695), founded the Hermetic Society in 1884. Two of her books, *Perfect way: the finding of Christ* and *Perfect way in diet*, are even today being reprinted (Kingsford 1986; 1989; 1991). Brandt quotes Kingsford's feminist insight, namely that the suppression of the femininity of God is because of 'a priesthood desirous of preserving a purely Masculine Conception of the Godhead' (Kingsford in Brandt 1936:32).

No attempt will be made in this study to analyse the hermetic, theosophical and other non- and quasi-Christian influences on Brandt's thinking. Although here Brandt has been placed within the tradition of Afrikaans female piety which highly honoured divine visitations, she should also be seen as a precursor of a religious tradition yet to come. Therefore an attempt will be made to highlight her embryonic feminist theology with special reference to the social implications of her piety. In *The paraclete* Brandt entertained at least three views which would eventually become central social issues in the feminist theology of the last part of the twentieth century, namely the femininity of God, eco-feminism and the hermeneutics of female religious interpretation.

(1) *The motherhood of God*

By the time the ageing Brandt published the *The paraclete or coming world mother* (1936) she was convinced that the time had come for God to reveal God's feminine side to humanity. Internationally the emancipation of women (though not of Afrikaans women) was in the air; across the globe male leadership had led humanity into desolation and destruction. Human society was ready to accept the motherhood of God.

This is Brandt's message cast in the language of modern feminist theology. Brandt, however, presented her message in another form.

In the first place, as said before, Brandt claimed divine revelation as the source of her foreknowledge which was, as we have seen, a yearning often detected in Afrikaans female piety. She could even provide a specific date for the vision. The coming of the World Mother was initially revealed to Brandt in 1916, but for nine years she did not understand it (Brandt 1936:29), 'until in December, 1925, again in Pretoria, the City of Harmony, the Mother came in great power and glory and explained much to me'. From that day Brandt no longer called on the name of Christ because, in

The Age of Woman will be a corrective to the age of male misgovernment (1936:20):

Since the Fall man has governed the world. It has been a one-sided government, indeed, a mis-government from first to last. By brute force or violence he has crushed his weaker fellows in his insatiable lust for power, holding the woman meanwhile under the subjection of his will and desire. Now comes the Aquarian Age with its new gospel of motherly love and the essentially womanly qualities of intuition and imagination.

Brandt predicts that men would not accept this challenge to their exclusive power without fighting back, and (1936:20):

the baser elements in man will be lashed into fierce opposition against this unexpected influence which, he feels instinctively, will undermine and overthrow his supremacy.

Women's credibility will lie in the fact that they are empowered by the divine. This will threaten men (1936:20):

As long as it apparently was the world of a band of hysterical women he could afford to smile with superior good-nature, but when he realises that there is a mighty, spiritual force behind it, and that 'the band of hysterical women' is inspired, he will be roused into dangerous action.

Divine intervention is needed to help during the transitional period when humanity will grow into the balance between the sexes. This would indicate that the time is ripe for the appearance of the Mother (1936:21):

It will not be Jesus. It will not be the Messiah of the Jews. It will not be one of the prophets of the past.

It will be the first appearance of the Paraclete, the Comforter. The Outpouring of the Holy Ghost at Pentecost was the beginning, not the end of the manifestation of the Motherhood of God.

(2) *Eco-feminism*

Modern eco-feminism reacts against man seeing himself as 'lord of creation'. Feminism, and eco-feminism in particular, criticises male supremacy which claims absolute possession not only of women, but also of nature.

Brandt criticises the social and political supremacy of men as unnatural. The perfect balance between the sexes is the natural position

towards which we should move (1936:6, 9), just as the Aquarian Age follows naturally upon the Piscean Age (1936:12).

Brandt, as we have seen, was concerned about the wars and destruction which ensued from male leadership and she preached the coming of the Mother God as a time in which we have to prepare the world for her coming. It is not the task of the Divine to save the world; 'the obligation has been laid on us to make this world a fit habitation for God' (Brandt 1936:25).

Brandt saw signs of the coming Mother God not only in the women's emancipation movement of her time, but 'still more so in the Return to Nature Movement' (1936:36). She was not so informed as modern feminists concerning the violence against natural ecosystems. Brandt concentrated on what today is only one aspect of eco-feminism: the self-development of the human (mind and) body. 'We must learn the secrets of self-healing, self-analysis, self-reform, self-discipline and self-expression' (1936:38). The motivation is religious: The Spirit dwells within us (1936:38). We are potential gods (1936:39). We have to find Divinity within ourselves (1936:40).

The teaching of self-healing which the Mother God will bring to us is, according to Brandt, woman's work. She describes this in a rather mundane way: 'Is it not the woman, the mother, whose hand prepares the innumerable dishes and delicacies that tempt the palate and lead to overindulgence? Truly, nations are made and unmade in the kitchen' (1936:60).

The salvation of the world and of our bodies is in our own hands, especially in the hands of women. The coming Mother God will be only a transitory figure to help us into the New Age. Brandt does not differ much from the piety of her foremothers when she attributes contemporary world disasters to our own sins (1936:70, 71): the World Mother tells us that we are to blame poverty, vice and disease on our own sins. The Mother of the World tells us that war will be averted only when we stop the sin of manufacturing arms. We are causing our own destruction through our own wrongdoing.

However, Brandt differs from her foremothers' concept of sin in two ways. Unlike her foremothers, Brandt does not refer to sins in a vague spiritual way; she calls them by name: we cause war through the sin of making arms; we sin when we cause the deterioration of our bodies by eating the wrong food. Brandt, furthermore, differs from her foremothers

in the formulation of a solution for our sins. Their solution would have been a return to the male God in guilt and self-hate. According to Brandt we should return to what is natural, to what the Divine teaches us about self-healing. We must first of all heal ourselves before we can heal the world.

(3) Feminine religious understanding

When we stand on holy ground, we are justified in launching our own investigations into matters and we have the right to make known our deductions, Brandt (1936:3) told her readers and especially the 'Mothers of the New Age, in whose hands the splendid future lies' and to whom, incidentally, she dedicates her book. For Brandt feminine religious understanding is based, on the one hand, on intuition and inspiration, and on the other, on observation and purely logical reasoning (1936:3).

In other words, Brandt preceded a modern feminist position which views (female) experience as an important preliminary phase to scientific thinking. According to this insight, it was natural for Brandt to ask questions about divine healing after she had experienced the death of her mother. We have seen that questions surrounding the deaths of their beloved ones caused Dutch-Afrikaans women in the past to ask religious questions about life and death.

Like modern feminists, Brandt placed a high value on the ability of women to grasp religious truths. Men, she related (1936:51), were unwilling to accept her message of the new age of equality with women. On the other hand, '[t]he women of the world are going to grasp at this great new truth eagerly'.

But Brandt was mistaken. Afrikaans women were not then, and still are not, willing to accept the ideas of the femininity of God, of self-healing and of the value of their own religious understanding.

CONCLUSION

Johanna Brandt's contribution to the liberation of Afrikaans women – although they did not accept that liberation – was to replace the personal God to whom these women felt attracted, as well as the national God they were inclined to share with men after the war, with the cosmic God. Brandt presented to her audience a God who would bring balance between sexes, restore nature, wipe out violence and war, a cosmic God for all races, sexes and age-groups.

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Marie du Toit (1880–1931): The first muted Afrikaans feminist

8.1 THE PLOT AGAINST WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE

It was said in the Introduction that the Afrikaans women of the early twentieth century (that is the first generation post-war women whose mothers were honoured by the erection of the National Women's Monument) stood ignorantly under the deliberate influence not of the Dutch feminists, but of the conservative women-unfriendliness of the Dutch statesman and theologian Abraham Kuyper. His ideas were brought to South Africa by those Afrikaans men who studied theology in the Netherlands after the war.

Was there a reason why, during the 1910s, the Afrikaans men were at great pains to emphatically romanticise submissiveness and inassertiveness as the main characteristics of Afrikaner womanhood? Several men wrote the history of Afrikaans women as an embodiment of these values in the late 1910s (Postma 1918 and Stockenström 1921). In these histories the piety of Afrikaans women was used to alienate them from possible political ideals. The women were told that, according to biblical examples, they should accept the natural place God gave them in family life.

The reason for typifying Afrikaans women as naturally apolitical is that at that time women in Europe were obtaining the vote. The Afrikaans men who erected a Women's Monument as a political platform for them-

selves were adamant that they must keep these women from obtaining public power. For instance, in the case of Postma, the same man who feverishly planned the erection of the National Women's Monument wrote the history of Afrikaans women as a testimony against women's suffrage.

8.2 CONSERVATIVE HOLLAND TO THE RESCUE

In 1894 the 'Vereeniging voor Vrouwenkiesrecht' (The Association for Women's Suffrage) was founded. After a fierce struggle Dutch women obtained the vote in 1918 (as told by Naber 1937/1985). Leading the forces against women's suffrage in the Netherlands was Abraham Kuyper (1837–1920) who published a book *De eerepositie der vrouw* (Woman's position of honour) in 1914. This book is a compilation of articles originally published in the *Standaard* on women's socio-political position. The *Standaard* was the official paper of the ultra-conservative Anti-revolutionary Party in the Netherlands headed by Kuyper. Kuyper was of the opinion that it was unnatural for women to bring out an individual vote; as it was ordained in the Bible, the head of the family ('gesinshoof') should vote on behalf of the whole family.

The prominent Dutch theologians W Geesink (see Manenschijn 1987:20–22) and H Bavink supported Kuyper in his ideas on the natural position of women aside from politics (see Gerritsma 1987:79–83). Kuyper himself was building on the ideas of his predecessor, Groen van Prinsterer (1801–1876), and their ideas were eventually to determine the political future of Afrikaans women.

A leading role in the apolitisation of Afrikaans women in the ecclesiastical sphere was played by J D du Toit, known as Totius, who studied in the Netherlands and on his return fathered local Kuyperianism. In the late 1910s the Synod of the Reformed Church in South Africa (Gereformeerde Kerk in Suid-Afrika) appointed a commission of three men to investigate women's suffrage in the church. This commission, headed by J D du Toit, advised the 1920 synod of this church against allowing women to vote in the church. The Synod decided in 1920 'om altyd te protesteer teen Vroue Stemreg op grond van Gods Woord' (always to protest against women's suffrage on the grounds of God's Word; *Handelinge van die Sinode* 1920:37). The Synod at once sent a copy of its decisions to Parliament to advise the government against women's suffrage in general.

J D du Toit's commission presented its recommendation in seven points, all directly dependent on Kuyper's book *Woman's honorary position*. Only one voice was raised in favour of women suffrage. One year after the synodical decision, in 1921, Marie du Toit, the sister of J D du Toit, wrote a book of protest against the position of the church on women's right to vote. In this book she presented arguments against each of the seven points put forward by the Synod in suppression of women's suffrage.

8.3 THE ONLY FEMINIST BOOK IN AFRIKAANS

Maria Magdalena du Toit was born in 1880 as the youngest child of S J du Toit's first marriage. She died in 1931 in Potchefstroom at the house of her brother, J D du Toit, with whom she had a good relationship in spite of their difference on political views concerning women. She left all her money to him (Testament, Transvaal Archives). She suffered from tuberculosis and died at the age of fifty years (Sterfkennisgewing, Transvaal Archives). She was unmarried and, before she fell ill, she was a teacher in Bloemfontein.

When Marie du Toit's book *Vrou en feminist* (Woman and feminist) (1921) used the word 'feminis(t)' in its title, it was the first, and also the very last, time this word occurred in the title of an Afrikaans book. Amongst the Afrikaans women of her time she was alone in pleading for women's suffrage. She was soon forgotten and the book she wrote is known to very few Afrikaans women.

Central to her thinking stood the question: What is a natural lifestyle for a woman? Du Toit regarded the socio-political restrictions laid on womanhood as far as clothing, the vote and other forms of self-expression, as unnatural – and unbiblical, since Jesus Christ wished women to be free human beings.

The question, what is natural to women, is significant within South African Calvinism because, on the one hand, it encourages people to rid themselves of their natural sinfulness; on the other hand, local Calvinism, quoting Kuyper, encourages women to stay within the natural boundaries of womanhood, which is restricted to the personal sphere of their homes.

Du Toit attempts to answer this question with common-sense feminism. She claims that common sense should lead to acknowledging women's natural role in society and politics.

8.4 HOW TO BE A NATURAL WOMAN

8.4.1 *Is it natural for women to be political beings?*

The first point accepted in 1920 by the Synod of the Reformed Church in South Africa (*Handelinge van die Sinode van die Gereformeerde Kerke in Suid-Afrika* 1920:81–82) states that women may not vote because that would open up the possibility of women participating in government. I Timothy 2:12, it is argued, prohibits women from governing; Genesis 2:18 places woman in an inferior position to man as his helper.

In this argument the Synod depends upon the distinction made by Kuyper between the inferior position of women in public life and the honorary position attributed to them in the private life of the family (Kuyper 1914:48).

Du Toit (1921:139) rejects this distinction between the private and public spheres of life. She claims that this distinction is not biblical but paternalistic. Men cannot decide for women on their right to vote. Women should make their own decisions about their participation in public life (Du Toit 1921:12). Du Toit finds an analogy in slavery. Nobody can decide for a slave whether or not he/she wants to be free. Ultimately the question should be: What does the slave think about freedom? Du Toit then invites men to put themselves in the place of women and look, from their point of view, at the suffering caused by their lack of freedom.

8.4.2 *Are women by nature politically different?*

The Synod of the Reformed Church in South Africa was quite explicit in its view that women are inferior to men in public life. They stated that women are politically inferior because God made them different and the Bible is forced to speak in support of this ideology: by nature, woman has received a 'gentle and quiet spirit' from God (I Pt 3:4) to prepare her for private life within the family (as the woman in Proverbs 31:10–31).

This point of view came from Kuyper's ideology that female political participation is, in the first place, against the will of God and, in the second place, against the nature of woman. The natural woman, according to Kuyper, is shy and passive (1914:34, 35); her bones are weaker than those of a man; although she can shout louder than a man, her physical abilities are limited (:37). The strength of a man settles in his head and chest, while a woman is strong only in her lower body; few women possess a natural or developed sharpness of brain (:38). Kuyper acknow-

ledged that behind his attack on women lay the fear that women would have the majority vote in politics: during his time there were 28 000 more women than men in the Netherlands (:27).

Du Toit was appalled by low-level presentations of the natural woman such as the one just described and the influence they exercised on Afrikaans men's views on women. She claims (1921:55-62) that the differences between 'natural woman' and 'natural man' are minor; the differences between men and women are not innate but social. Du Toit, obviously very well read, quotes numerous instances of intellectually brilliant women throughout history (:66).

Du Toit (1921:20) also expresses her shame that there is no substance to the male fear that a majority of women will dominate the political scene. She regrets that women are not loyal to one another. The reason for this she ascribes to the fact that women have a poor self-image and do not believe that something great can come from themselves and that they do not allow other women any greatness. According to Du Toit (:118) society can benefit from women combining their private and public lives. She quotes Jan Smuts who said that social legislation was in need of women's insight into social matters. Women's experience of social problems was to become publicly aired.

8.4.3 Can the natural woman be an individual?

According to the Synod God did not create women as individuals but as part of a family. The women's suffrage movement, presupposing the individual right of women to vote, is therefore sinful and against God's will. It is not Christian teaching, but the ideology of the French Revolution which emphasises the individuality of people.

The words of Kuyper echo throughout this statement of the Synod. It was Kuyper who attributed (1914:23) women's yearning for the vote to the false individualism of the French Revolution which, of course, occurred more than a century before the women's suffrage movement.

Du Toit's answer to that (1921:75) is that women's suffering, and not the French Revolution, is the source of their struggle: she does not need the French Revolution to point out to her how women suffer because of their alleged inferiority. She does not echo the ideas of the French Revolution; she says only what is in her heart.

Du Toit exposes a fundamental difference between the male and female religious thinking of her time. Male theology centred on principles

while women's argumentation was based on experience. People, and not abstractions and dogmas, formed the centre of women's interpretation of the will of God. Du Toit's point of view was that women's worldwide struggle for the vote was not because they had been seduced into individualism or because they were driven by an unchristian thirst for power; women simply wished to address the needs of women, black and white.

8.4.4 Is a woman by nature able to make her own decisions?

The Synod of the Reformed Church in South Africa also claimed that the vote for women was foreign to the Christian character of the Afrikaans nation. We shall remember that during this time Postma and Stockenström described the history of Afrikaans women as the history of women who kept the nature of the nation intact and protected it against foreign influences.

The Synod, following Kuyper, treated women as types. The standard type (the natural) of woman lives, and wants to live, according to the role defined for her by God and men, they claimed. The only other type of woman left is the woman who is influenced by revolutionaries.

Du Toit rebels against the presupposition that women ignorantly fall prey to the 'unnatural' ideas of the French Revolution and the English suffragettes. Throughout her book she takes pains to describe women not only as intelligent but also as living beings, who do not unthinkingly belong to a prescribed type, but who have a contribution to make to the contexts to which they belong.

8.4.5 Can it be natural for a woman to be a feminist?

The Synod finally determined that married women may take on private positions only; widows, however, may vote and therefore perform public duties; unmarried women may not vote but may perform specific social duties in society to earn a living. Belonging to this trend of thinking is a concession made by Kuyper that feminism is allowed in the private sphere in which women must liberate themselves from laws and practices which oppress them in their private lives.

Du Toit regards these distinctions as completely illogical (1921:140-141). How can political life be too rough for a married woman while it is accessible for a widow? Why may widows participate in political life but not unmarried women? Du Toit (1921:41) refers to the political force of the

provement of the plight of those who are oppressed, poor and muted.

History was to make Marie du Toit the first muted feminist amongst Afrikaans women. Neither her church nor her society was to take any notice of her insight into women's social inequality and personal suffering.

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The piety of Afrikaans women: A summary

At the beginning of the nineteenth century diaries of a number of Dutch-Afrikaans women were published by certain men for a European audience. While the men benefited from these publications, they relegated female piety to a secondary place in their own writings. According to John Philip, for instance, the piety of women is strong and peaceful but without depth.

This was the beginning of a history in which the male dominant culture used the piety of the female subculture against itself. On the one hand, the piety prescribed to Afrikaans women was employed to keep them from occupying executive offices in church and state on religious grounds. On the other hand, the piety of these women, without exception portrayed as the piety of selfless people inclined towards martyrdom, was misused by their men to attain international attention. The culmination of this history was the erection of the National Women's Monument when the God honoured by these women became nationalised.

From the beginning Dutch-Afrikaans women did not believe in a national God, but in a very personal God. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries their circumstances caused the loss of many of their children through natural and unnatural deaths. Therefore, the theological question uppermost in their minds concerned the fate of the souls of their deceased beloveds. Because they were theologically untrained, and because there were no books that stood between them and God, they believed that God visited them personally with the required relevant answers and comfort. All the women discussed in this book, from Hester Venter on her border farm in the late 1700s to Johanna Brandt in the suburbs of the Transvaal in the twentieth century, describe the visions in which God gave them answers concerning the death of a beloved one and comforted them.

These women developed their belief in a personal God according to the demands of the restricted circumstances of their female subculture. Powerless as females, all the women, with the exception of Johanna Brandt in her later years, believed in a very male God, a powerful masculine figure in whom they could find refuge in times of death and danger. Theirs was a God who was not easy to please, but a God who noticed sinners. These women, therefore, excelled in self-humiliation and in self-hate to please their demanding male God. This poor self-image came not only from their God but also from the men of their dominant culture. It developed amongst these women into a negative view of all people. Later, when their God became nationalised, it progressed and developed into a mistrust towards people of other cultures.

In the late 1700s, when the Dutch-Afrikaans women had already adapted God to serve as their Saviour in their subcultural circumstances, a number of books did appear on the scene and were read by these women. The works of the Dutch pietists of the Second Reformation, no longer read in the Netherlands, reached the South African market. These books formed the reading matter of the women right through the 1800s and even accompanied them on the Great Trek. Pietist theology, with its strong emphasis on personal sins, supported the women's belief that God was blameless and that everything, including all misfortune, should be blamed on their personal sins. The death of their children, their loneliness and depressions on the Great Trek, even their suffering in the British concentration camps, the women blamed upon themselves. Their belief in a punishing God caused these women to fall prey to guilt fantasies accompanied by excessive confessions of their sins to God in order to be saved by him from the arms of the enemy (Satan). In these fantasies God was often visualised on a horse rescuing in true heroic fashion the woman in jeopardy. Also playing an important role in these guilt fantasies was Jesus, seen as the lover of the Song of Songs. The Dutch-Afrikaans women of the eighteenth and nineteenth century who have been discussed were all kissed and loved by Jesus. In more decent dreams they eventually married him.

Therefore, in a subculture in which women had little value and even hated themselves, Dutch-Afrikaans women believed that they caused all the disasters which befell them. Privately they survived by means of their fantasy concerning a strong God who took a personal interest in them and a Jesus who loved them as tenderly as their husbands should have done.

Apart from the erection of the National Women's Monument as a male effort to win international sympathy for the nation, the late 1910s also saw the publication of Willem Postma and Eric Stockenström's histories of Afrikaans women. These histories clearly defined in paradoxical terms the parameters of the Afrikaans female subculture. In times of conflict the Afrikaans woman should stand aggressively behind her husband against the enemy, as she did during the wars against the blacks. Without a husband, as in the British concentration camps, she should be heroic in her passive martyrdom. However, whatever the case may be, an Afrikaans woman should accept the religion of her fathers without question: submission to the men of her own nation without any aspiration toward public office and power.

In 1921 Marie du Toit reacted against a synodical decision of her church to disallow women to vote in church affairs. She dismantled the social stereotyping of women as male insensitivity towards women's suffering and restrictiveness. She emphasised women's natural abilities, as well as divine consent for women to participate in politics.

In 1936 Johanna Brandt expressed her hopes that God will come back to earth as a Mother to save the world from war and the lust for money. Brandt prophesied that God the Mother will help women to develop themselves, thereby empowering them to restore harmony on earth.

This prophecy has not yet come true for Afrikaans women who still choose to restrict themselves to a subculture in which they are disloyal to themselves, to their sex and to the motherhood of God which dwells in them.

Local Calvinism was as sexist as it was racist. The piety of Afrikaans women analyses the diaries of several Dutch-Afrikaans women from the eighteenth to the early twentieth century. It concludes that these women believed in a very personal God who cared for them when they and their children were afflicted; this personal God, however, was nationalised for them by their men during the early twentieth century, especially after the inauguration of the National Women's Monument. It also points out that the Dutch-Afrikaans women who were literate were lonely and could not adapt to a subcultural role in a peasant society. Consequently they fantasised about Jesus as their lover and about pleasing a male God by pleading guilty before him of sins they had never committed.



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