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Charl Blignaut

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‘Die hand aan die wieg regeer die land [The hand that rocks the cradle rules the land]’: Exploring the Agency and Identity of Women in the Ossewa-Brandwag, 1939–1954

CHARL BLIGNAUT*

Potchefstroom Campus of the North-West University

Abstract

The Ossewa-Brandwag (Oxwagon Sentinal) was an Afrikaner nationalist organisation strongly influenced by the dominant Fascist ideologies between the two world wars. Within a few years the organization became a mass movement with more than a hundred thousand members. This also included tens of thousands of women. This article sets out to show how members of the Ossewa-Brandwag Vroue-afdeling (Women’s Department) were active social agents who played an indispensable part in running the movement. It further assesses how OB women articulated and interpreted their female identity as *volksmoeders*. A special emphasis is placed on women’s role as fundraisers as well as their discursive construction of Afrikaner femininity. This evaluation is done against the backdrop of the OB’s ‘ideal image of womanhood’ which normatively dictated femininity. As such this article builds upon the research already done on the *volksmoeder* in order to shed light on the agency of a certain group of people who have received little historical attention in the past. Through assessing the nature of OB women’s fundraising it becomes evident that it would have been impossible for the movement to exist without its female members. Furthermore their own articulation of the conventional ideal of Afrikaner womanhood shows that women construed the *volksmoeder* as a potent tool of maternalist power.

Key words: women; gender; women’s history; gender history; Afrikaner women; Afrikaner nationalism; fundraising; Ossewa-Brandwag; *volksmoeder* (mother of the nation)

Introduction

The Ossewa-Brandwag (OB) was one of the main manifestations of how the ideological currents of Fascism and National Socialism influenced the South African public between

*Email: charlblignaut777@yahoo.com

the two world wars. Established in February 1939, the OB initially set out to be a cultural movement riding on the emotional wave caused by the centenary celebrations of the Great Trek in 1938. The organisation expanded rapidly and soon became a mass movement, existing for more than a decade until it was disbanded in 1954.¹ With the outbreak of the Second World War it began to show a distinctly dualistic nature. 'Afrikaner culture' was propagated on the one hand and on the other hand the unique combination between Afrikaner Calvinist nationalism and National Socialism was not only propagated, but used as motivation for activism, rebellion and attacks on party politics, democracy, the Smuts government and South Africa's participation in the Second World War.²

The opportunity to react to world events, and working together to expand the 'Afrikaner cause' in South Africa, was not confined to men in the OB. Of the tens of thousands of members belonging to the movement, women formed a formidable corpus. The role women played was undoubtedly a gendered one. Right from the establishment of the OB, contemporaries' understanding of sexual difference played a significant part in the administration and organisation of the movement. This is reflected in one of the five main goals the OB set out with from its establishment on 9 February 1939, namely 'the inclusion and coordination of all Afrikaners, men as well as women', to aspire to the goals of the organisation.³ In these words we see not only the acknowledgement of women's role in the OB, but also the significant distinction made when referring to Afrikaners as 'men as well as women'. The distinction between the two categories would eventually become one

1. For a general outline of the history of the Ossewa-Brandwag, see A.J.H. van der Walt, *h Volk op trek: h Kort geskiedenis van die ontstaan en ontwikkeling van die Ossewa-Brandwag* (Johannesburg: Kultuur en Voorligtingsdiens van die Ossewa-Brandwag, 1941); H.G. Stoker (red.), *Agter tralies en doringdraad* (Stellenbosch: Pro Ecclesia, 1953); J.F.J. van Rensburg, *Their Paths Crossed Mine* (Cape Town: CNA, 1956); G.C. Visser, *OB: Traitors or Patriots?* (Johannesburg: Johnathan Ball, 1976); H.O. Terblanche, *John Vorster, OB-generaal en Afrikanervegter* (Roodepoort: CUM-Books, 1983); P.F. van der Schyff (red.), 'Geskiedenis van die Ossewa-Brandwag', unpublished report, Department of History, PU for CHE, 1984; J.J. Badenhorst, 'Die organisasiestruktuur van die Ossewa-Brandwag', MA thesis, PU for CHE, 1985; D. Prinsloo, 'Dr. H.F. Verwoerd en die Ossewa-Brandwag, 1938–1952', *Kleio*, 17, 1 (1985), 73–85; L.M. Fourie, 'Die Ossewa-Brandwag en Afrikanereenheid', DLitt thesis, PU for CHE, 1987; J.J. Badenhorst, 'Vroeë organisasiestruktuur van die Ossewa-Brandwag', *Journal for Contemporary History*, 12, 3, December (1987), 54–82; P. de Klerk, 'Afrikanerdenkers en die beginsels van die Ossewa-Brandwag', *Journal for Contemporary History*, 14, 1, June (1989), 43–81; 'Die Ossewa-Brandwag se ideaal van h nuwe samelewingsorde in Suid-Afrika', *Journal for Contemporary History*, 14, 2, December (1989), 90–131; P.F. van der Schyff (ed.), *Die Ossewa-Brandwag: Vuurtjie in droë gras* (PU for CHE: Potchefstroom, 1991); P.J. Furlong, *Between Crown and Swastika: The Impact of the Radical Right on the Afrikaner Nationalist Movement in the Fascist Era* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1991). Also see P.J. Furlong, 'Fascism, the Third Reich and Afrikaner Nationalism: An Assessment of the Historiography', *South African Historical Journal*, 27 (1992), 113–126; C. Marx, 'The Ossewabrandwag as a Mass Movement, 1939–1941', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 20, 2, June (1994), 195–219; C. Marx, "'Dear listeners in South Africa": German Propaganda Broadcasts to South Africa, 1940–1941', *South African Historical Journal*, 27 (1992), 148–172; C. Marx, *Oxwagon Sentinel: Radical Afrikaner Nationalism and the History of the Ossewa-Brandwag* (Pretoria: UNISA, 2008).
2. See in this regard P. de Klerk, 'Die ideologie van die Ossewa-Brandwag', in P.F. van der Schyff, ed., *Die OB: Vuurtjie in Droë Gras* (Potchefstroom: PU for CHE, 1991), 292–400.
3. van der Walt, *h Volk op Trek*, 12–13. Because of the metaphoric nature of some quotations from the primary sources the original Afrikaans is given in a footnote where necessary. The rest is the author's own translations from the original Afrikaans.

of the main characteristics of the Ossewa-Brandwag and sheds light on the gendered nature of women's agency in the movement.

The OB was organised according to the commando regime of the former Boer Republics. Separate commandos for women would also be organised all over South Africa (called *vrouekommandos*).⁴ Together these commandos formed the official *Ossewa-Brandwag Vroue-afdeling* – a semi-independent women's organisation existing from 1939 to 1954. On a provincial and national level women's commandos would be represented by a special council called the *Vroue-adjunkraad* (VAR). This council formed part of the main *Vroue-afdeling*. Each of the OB's six regions had a VAR that consisted of female officers. These six women were called *Hoofvroue* (Chief women/Head women) and were also referred to as *Generale*. As a body the national VAR represented all the regional women's divisions on the *Grootraad*, the OB's highest organ of authority.⁵

The aim of this article is to show how members of the *Vroue-afdeling* were active social agents who played an indispensable part in the activities of the Ossewa-Brandwag. It also sets out to assess how women articulated and interpreted their female identity as *volksmoeders*. A special emphasis is placed on women's role as fundraisers as well as their discursive construction of Afrikaner femininity. This evaluation is done against the backdrop of the OB's 'ideal image of womanhood' which normatively dictated how women should behave as 'women'. The *volksmoeder*, however, did not reduce women to passive bystanders. This fact is repeatedly revealed in the significant body of South African scholarship focusing on the importance of the *volksmoeder* in the history of Afrikaner women.⁶ As such this article aims to build upon the research already done on the *volksmoeder* in order to shed light on the agency of a certain group of people who have received little historical attention in the past. In this regard the following statement of

4. Ossewa-Brandwag Archives, Ferdinand Postma Library, Potchefstroom Campus of the North-West University (hereafter OBA), Grootraad collection (coll.), B/L 1/2, File 11: Minutes of Meeting, 17 July 1939.
5. OBA, Grootraad coll., B/L 1/3, File 18: Die Vroue-adjunkraad en Vrouevertakking.
6. Academic works relevant for this article are as follows: D. Gaitskell and E. Unterhalter, 'Mothers of the Nation: A Comparative Analysis of Nation, Race and Motherhood in Afrikaner Nationalism and the African National Congress', in N. Yuval-Davis and F. Anthias (eds), *Women-Nation-State* (London: Macmillan, 1989), 58–78; E. Brink, 'Man-Made Women: Gender, Class and the Ideology of the Volksmoeder', in C. Walker (ed.), *Women and Gender in Southern Africa to 1945* (Cape Town: David Phillip, 1990), 273–292; E. Cloete, 'Afrikaner Identity: Culture, Tradition and Gender', *Agenda*, 13 (1992), 42–56; L. van der Watt, 'The Comradely Ideal and the Volksmoeder Ideal: Uncovering Gender Ideology in the Voortrekker Tapestry', *South African Historical Journal*, 39, November (1998), 91–110; L. Vincent, 'A Cake of Soap: The Volksmoeder-Ideology and Afrikaner Women's Campaign for the Vote', *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 32, 1 (1999), 1–17; L. Vincent, 'The Power Behind the Scenes: The Afrikaner Nationalist Women's Parties, 1915–1931', *South African Historical Journal*, 134, 40 (1999), 51–73; L. Vincent, 'Bread and Honour: White Working Class Women and Afrikaner Nationalism in the 1930s', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 26, 1 (March 2000), 61–78; M. du Toit, 'The Domesticity of Afrikaner Nationalism: Volksmoeders and the ACVV, 1904–1929', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 29, 1 (March 2003), 155–176; E. Brink, 'Die Volksmoeder: 'n Beeld van 'n vrou', in A.M. Grundlingh en S. Huigen (eds), *Van volksmoeder tot Fokopolisiekar: Kritiese opstelle oor Afrikaanse herinneringsplekke* (Stellenbosch: Sun Press, 2008), 7–16; R. van der Merwe, 'Moulding Volksmoeders Or Volks Enemies? Female Students at the University of Pretoria, 1920–1970', *Historia*, 56, 1 (2011), 77–100.

L.M. Kruger is still relevant in the historical analysis of a movement where both men and women played a significant role:

If feminist historians really are to put women back into history and understand their importance as active agents, they will have to show not only how women co-operated with men in formulating roles for women, but also adapted, shaped and articulated (and sometimes even rejected) these roles [...] Afrikaner women were neither absent from, nor silent partners of a male political movement.⁷

Assessing the nature of OB women's main activity in the movement shows that their agency made it possible for the movement to exist. Their own articulation and interpretation of the conventional ideal of Afrikaner womanhood makes it evident that women construed the *volksmoeder* as a potent tool of maternalist power.

The *Vroue-afdeling* and the *Vroue adjunkraad* enabled women to wield power in certain spheres of the OB and also served as a platform upon which women could give voice to their own views regarding the role they played in the movement. These views were strongly influenced by the OB's image of ideal Afrikaner womanhood, encapsulated in the construction of the *volksmoeder*.

Die wieg van die Afrikanervrou (The cradle of the Afrikaner woman): The normative construction of the volksmoeder in the Ossewa-Brandwag

There is a consensus in the historiography of the *volksmoeder* that the construction both liberated and constrained Afrikaner women when it came to the political sphere. As a symbolic representation of Afrikaner womanhood the *volksmoeder* could be (and was) used as a justification to exclude women from the political terrain. However, women manoeuvred themselves *within this representation* and actively fought for a more expanded version of this ideal. It offered women a platform from which they could express their own interpretation of their female identity, but as L. Vincent shows, it was still a means to control women.⁸ Despite this, women did find appeal in what Vincent calls a construction 'commonly portrayed as an oppressive set of gender stereotypes proffered by the nationalist movement'.⁹ These stereotypes are described by E. Brink as part of an image which 'involved the emulation of characteristics such as a sense of religion, bravery, a love of freedom, the spirit of sacrifice, self-reliance, housewifeliness, nurturance of talents, integrity, virtue and the setting of an example to others'.¹⁰ Vincent, however, elaborates on the appeal both working class and middle class Afrikaner women found in the *volksmoeder*. Women could, through their interaction with the *volksmoeder* ideology, reshape its content. In other words, despite its constraints, all Afrikaner women were able to *make it their own* – to imbue it with *their own* meanings.¹¹ This meant that interpretations could be made where women were able to claim a place in the sphere of politics. However, the retention of this conventional framework meant that Afrikaner

7. Kruger, 'Gender, Community and Identity', 26.

8. Vincent, 'A Cake of Soap', 1.

9. Vincent, 'Bread and Honour', 77.

10. Brink, 'Man-Made Women', 280.

11. Vincent, 'Bread and Honour', 78.

women were not able to fundamentally challenge the mentioned set of gender stereotypes and their associated inequalities.¹² Thus the *volksmoeder* had two faces – a characteristic which Vincent calls the ‘dual conception of motherhood’.¹³ On the one side there is the more traditional, reactionary understanding of motherhood in the home and family and on the other side is the more ‘radical’ and political understanding of *volks*motherhood in the public sphere. In the OB this duality of motherhood reflected itself in the official views on the role of Afrikaner women both in the broader *volkslewe* and the movement itself. These views were elaborated upon in several official books and documents.¹⁴ The dual role of women in the public and private spheres becomes evident in the following outline of women’s duty (‘die taak van die vrou’). It was worked out in 1943 by both men and women (the VAR) and sent to every women’s commando in South Africa.¹⁵

WOMEN’S DUTY

1. Since men and women naturally differ they should of course each have a distinct duty in the *volkslewe* and consequently also in the movement of the *volk*, just as is the case in the family. Because of their separate duties men and women mutually complement each other in the family, the *volkslewe* and the movement of the *volk*.
 2. The duty of the men pre-eminently consists in practising their profession, in the politics of the *volk* and warfare, while the duty of the women pre-eminently consists in the work of bringing up and taking care of, first in their own families, and subsequently extended to the *volkslewe*.
 3. The specific duty of women in the *volkslewe* is at least as important and in its final effect even more important than that of men. In the same way that the woman by way of upbringing and taking care is the soul of the family, she also is the soul of the *volk*. In carrying out their own duty women should at least enjoy just as much recognition as men in the execution of their duty.¹⁶
12. Vincent, ‘Power Behind the Scenes’, 73.
 13. Vincent, ‘A Cake of Soap’, 14.
 14. Quite a large number of texts sheds light on the OB’s image of conventional womanhood. The following is a small selection: OBA, Transvaal governing body coll., B/L 8(1)/1, file 1: Organisasietegewys van die Ossewa-Brandwag, 1940; *Grootraad* of the Ossewa-Brandwag, *Gesonde huisgesinne bou ’n lewenskragtige volk* (Stellenbosch: Pro–Ecclesia, 1942); OBA, Cronjé, C. coll., B/L 2/11, file 3: Die Vroue–adjunkraad en Vrouevertakking: Verklaring en besluite; OBA, P.J. Meyer coll., B/L 1/4, file 7: Die Ossewa–Brandwag Vroue–Volksorg: Memorandum; University of the Orange Free State, Archives for contemporary affairs (hereafter: ARCA): PV 158, File no. 30, Jerling coll.: Voorstelle rakende die Vroue Afdeling van die Ossewabrandwag; OBA, *Grootraad* coll., B/L 1/4, file 36: Afrikaanse Gesinsbeleid. OBA, P.J. Meyer coll., B/L 1/4, file 7: OB Vroue Volksorg: Doelstellings en pligte; OBA, Cronjé G. coll., B/L 2/11, file 4: Afdeling Sosiale Volksorg: Skema van vrouetake; OBA, *Grootraad* coll., B/L 1/3, file 18: Die Vroue Afdeling van die Ossewa-Brandwag; OBA, *Grootraad* coll. B/L 1/3, file 18, Die Vroue Adjunkraad en Vrouevertakking; OBA, J.S. de Vos coll., B/L 1/5, file 3: J.A. Smith, Vroue Afdeling van die Ossewabrandwag, 1943; OBA, P. J. Meyer coll., B/L 1/4, file 7: Doelstellings en taak; OBA, Cape governing body coll., B/L 5(i)/1, file 5: Mobilisering van vrouekragte; OBA, J.S. de Vos coll., B/L 1/8, file 8: Die taak van die vrou in die nasionale beweging; OBA, *Grootraad* coll., B/L 1/4, file 36: Die sedelike fondasie van die OB familie; OBA, *Die OB*, 9 February 1949, 16 February 1949, 16 March 1949, 23 March 1949; 30 March 1949; 13 April 1949.
 15. OBA, Cronjé, C coll., B/L 2/11, file 3: Die Vroue–adjunkraad en Vrouevertakking: Verklaring en besluite. OBA: *Grootraad* coll., B/L1/2/12: Minutes of meeting 28–29 September 1944, Verslag van die Afdeling Sosiale Volksorg aan die Kommandant–Generaal.
 16. OBA, Area C coll., B/L 6/5, file 3, Circular no. C 4/43, 22 July 1943. Original Afrikaans: Taak van die vrou: 1) Omdat man en vrou van nature van mekaar verskil, moet hulle uit die aard van die saak in die volkslewe en gevolglik ook in die volksbeweging elk ’n onderskeie taak hê, net soos dit in die huisgesin die geval is. Op grond van die onderskeie taak word man en vrou dan wedersyds aanvullend in die huisgesin, die volkslewe

Women's role in the private sphere of the family is prioritized as their most important duty; however, at the same time this role is extended to the public sphere. The construed image of women in the OB is not only as symbol of care for the family but also of society in the wider sense as well as the social care of the OB itself (the movement of the *volk*). This held significant consequences for the eventual social role of women who had to fit in ideologically with the dominant image of the *volksmoeder* which stayed the same from 1943 to 1954. This social role was vested in women's upbringing of their children. Because women form the characters of their children they likewise form the character of the *volk* since it was accepted that

in our own homes the mother more than the father, is responsible for fostering certain virtues like honesty, sincerity, cleanliness, solidarity and industry. And the values respected in the home are reflected in turn in the *volkslewe* in a wider sense.¹⁷

The calling of women is summarised where they are seen as the 'builders of families and therefore also the most eminent builders of the *volkslewe* of which the family is the core'.¹⁸ In several documents the *volksmoeder* is called by the name when women are described as the symbolic heart of the *volkslewe*: 'And if our mothers are poor in spirit and neglect their duties, the *volk* of whom they are at the same time also the *volksmoeders*, will waste away spiritually, even if it had all the gold in the world.'¹⁹ The social, symbolic and biological essentialist nature of the *volksmoeder* was sometimes cast in lyrical/hysterical terms:

May our faith be that of the Afrikaans wife and mother! And our hope? Our hope is fixed on the cradle of the Afrikaner woman. The cradle of the Afrikaner woman (let us never forget this!), the cradle of the Afrikaner woman (let us remember this in the unequal struggle we have to wage!), the cradle of the Afrikaner woman is mightier than the sword of the conqueror.²⁰

The historiography shows that Afrikaner women in general chose to stay within the *volksmoeder* framework during the first half of the twentieth century and therefore could never transgress the traditional concept of the 'proper sphere' of women's activities. As will become evident, women in the OB also claimed this image. This, however, does not mean that the role women played was of lesser value than that of men. OB women did not just

en die volksbeweging. 2) Die taak van die man is by uitstek geleë in die beoefening van die beroepsarbeid, die volkspolitië en die krygskuns, terwyl die taak van die vrou by uitstek geleë is in die opvoedings- en versorgingsarbeid, allereers in die eie huisgesin en vervolgens in die breëre volkslewe. 3) Die eie taak van die vrou in die volkslewe is minstens net so belangrik en in sy uiteindelijke uitwerking selfs meer belangrik as die van die man. Net soos die vrou langs die weg van die opvoeding en die versorging die siel van die gesin is, net so is sy langs dieselfde weg ook die siel van die volk. In die uitvoering van haar eie taak moet die vrou minstens net soveel erkenning geniet as die man in die uitoefening van sy taak.

17. OBA, *Die OB*, 17 June 1950. Original Afrikaans: In ons eie huise is die moeder meer as die vader, verantwoordelik vir die aankweek van sekere deugde soos eerlikheid, opregtheid, sindelikheid, saamhorigheid, en arbeidsaamheid. En die waardes wat in die huisgesin geld, word weer in die breëre volkslewe weerspieël.
18. OBA, *Die OB*, 25 August 1943.
19. OBA, *Die OB*, 17 June 1950. Original Afrikaans: En as ons moeders arm van gees is en hulle plig versaak, sal die volk, waarvan sy terselfdertyd ook die volksmoeder is, geestelik wegkwyn, al besit dit ook die goud van die wêreld.
20. OBA, *Die OB*, 1 October 1943. Original Afrikaans: Mag ons geloof dié wees van die Afrikaanse vrou en moeder! En ons hoop? Ons hoop is gevestig op die wieg van die Afrikanervrou. Die wieg van die Afrikanervrou (laat ons dit tog nooit vergeet nie!), die wieg van die Afrikanervrou (laat ons dit onthou in die ongelyke stryd wat ons moet voer!), die wieg van die Afrikanervrou is magtiger as die swaard van die veroweraar!

serve as a symbol. In the official outline of women's duty two characteristics of the *volksmoeder* are especially emphasised, namely taking care of the family/*volk* and being the soul of the family/*volk*. 'Caring' for the *volk* was not taken to be only symbolic, but manifested itself materially with women's activities as fundraisers – it had much more than just a symbolic impact. Thus, the goal is to show how women became an indispensable part of the Ossewa-Brandwag through their circumscribed agency as *volksmoeders* within the framework of activities that were linked to 'caring' for the *volk*. Furthermore their role as 'the soul of the *volk*' is explored through women's own articulation of their role in the Ossewa-Brandwag.

Casting bullets for the *volk*: The politics of fundraising

One of the women's most important tasks in the OB was raising funds – sometimes referred to as *the* most important task.²¹ In 1941 a circular was sent to all the regional women's divisions in South Africa emphasising fundraising: 'They [women] will assist the men as far as possible, by [...] raising funds through organising events at gatherings of the Ossewa-Brandwag, asking favourable individuals for donations and gifts, and saving money for the maintenance of the organisation.'²² *Generale C.W. Rautenbach, Hoofvrou* of the Northern Transvaal, made a distinction between men and women when she referred to fundraising: 'The men were always holding meetings. We simply brought together the women and we just organised.'²³

The idea of Afrikaner women as 'flukse vroue met organisasietalent' (hard-working women with a talent for organisation)²⁴ is not unique to the *OB Vroue-afdeling*. As early as the late 1880s the *Vrouwen Zending Bond* (Women's Missionary Bond) of the Dutch-Reformed Church asserted that women should play an uplifting role outside of the home. In 1905 the *Transvaalse Vrouefederasie* (Transvaal Women's Federation) was founded with the aim to aid working class women and young girls after the devastation caused by the South African War. After the 1914 Rebellion the *Nasionale Vroue Helpmekearbeweging* (National Women's Aid Movement) organised fundraisers to help pay for the heavy fines laid on the leaders of the rebellion.²⁵ After 1914 both the *Nasionale Vroueparty* (National Women's Party) in the Transvaal and the *Vroue Nasionale Party* (Women's National Party) in the Cape also set out to strengthen fund-raising for the National Party. Despite this goal Vincent shows that these women did not see themselves as 'mere fundraisers'.²⁶ This is also important to take into account with the *Vroue-afdeling*.²⁷ However, as pointed out by gen. K. Malan, *Hoofvrou* of the Western Transvaal: 'her [women's] duty in the OB

21. OBA, *Die OB*, 13 February 1946.

22. OBA, J.S. de Vos coll., B/L 1/5, File 3: Omsendbrief: Werksaamhede, 1941.

23. OBA, Tape recordings, interview (tr.) tape no. 23, 1973: H.M. Robinson/C.W. Rautenbach, p. 4.

24. OBA, Cape governing body collection, B/L 5(i)/1, file 5: Mobilisering van Vrouemag.

25. Brink, 'Die Volksmoeder: 'n beeld van 'n vrou', 10.

26. Vincent, 'The Power Behind the Scenes', 56.

27. Women's official duty included propaganda, organising cultural events, education in the official OB ideology arranging women's camps (*laertrekkings*) and educational workshops, taking responsibility for the *Boeredogters* (Boer girls) in the youth wing, military drills, wreath-laying on special occasions, providing moral and material support for political detainees and welfare work via the *Sosiale Volksorg* (social care of the nation) division. See in this regard: OBA, G.Cronje collection, B/L 1/12, file 1: Reëls vir die OB

has mainly been to raise funds.’²⁸ OB women primarily raised funds for two purposes: to support the Ossewa-Brandwag Emergency Fund and to provide a continuous source of income for the OB at large.

The Ossewa-Brandwag Emergency Fund was set up in 1941 as a result of the mass arrests and internment of OB members under the emergency measures of the Smuts government. Hundreds of people were detained in gaol or in camps because they resisted the war effort or because they were regarded as a threat by government agents. Others were on the run and had to be provided for as they fled from one home to the next.²⁹ The Emergency Fund had to ensure that there was enough money to provide for the needs of dependents of the detained, fugitives and interned people. This is where women fulfilled one of their most significant functions in the OB, namely as the financial heart of the Emergency Fund.

Every week, month, year numerous functions of various kinds were organised to raise funds. Huge and small functions were organised – most of the time under the unfavourable circumstances of the war years.³⁰ It varied from taking up a collection at the doors at a meeting to a variety of gatherings which bore witness to the women’s ingenuity.³¹ Women regularly organised bazaars too. Mrs. WJ Seymore tells about a bazaar held in a public park in Wonderboom South. In 1941 there was a gathering where thousands of people were present. The OB women of Pretoria sold pancakes at a tickey each. At the end of the day they had made £100 in this way.³² This means that they had baked approximately 8,000 pancakes!

Asserting that women were the financial heart of the Emergency Fund is not an exaggeration. It was reported in *Die Burger* and *Die Transvaler* that women ‘usually’ made more than £600 during an OB function.³³ The women’s commandos all over the country sent the money they made to the central office of the Emergency Fund in Johannesburg. At one stage the expense for support was almost £3,000 per month, but still the payments could be made. G. Cronjé writes: ‘By the end of the month when the hundreds of cheques had been sent out, the funds were nearly depleted, but the next month when the cheques had to be signed again, there once more was money.’³⁴ When the fund was finally closed more than £120,000 had been raised over a period of eight years.³⁵

Although the fundraising and its distribution among the families was in itself a ‘caring’ activity, women’s role was also sketched as people not working with the needy, but with compatriots on an equal footing. Therefore the guideline was given

Noodhulpfonds; J.S. Vos collection, B/L 1/8, file 8: Die taak van die vrou in die beweging van die volk; *Die Volksblad*, 6 February 1939, 15 April 1939 and *Die Volkstem*, 13 February 1939.

28. ARCA, PV 158, File no. 30, Jerling coll.: Recommendations of Transvaal WAC flowing from a meeting held on 26 November 1942.

29. E. Theron. *Sonder hoed of handskoene* (Kaapstad: Tafelberg, 1983), 42.

30. OBA, Free State governing body coll., B/L 6/2/7, file 5: Minutes of WAC meeting 9 May 1942.

31. OBA, Free State governing body coll., B/L 6/2, file 6: Voorstelle aan Vrouekommandos, 1942.

32. OBA, Tape recordings, interview (tr.) tape no. 82, 1975: H.M. Robinson/W.J. Seymore, 2.

33. *Die Burger*, 5 September 1941; *Die Transvaler*, 4 February 1941, 28 February 1941, 6 March 1941, 21 March 1941.

34. OBA, G.Cronje coll., B/L 1/12, file 1: OB Noodhulp.

35. Theron, *Sonder hoed of handskoene*, 42.

that it should always be kept in mind that the monetary help is only part of the caring given by the Emergency Fund. As much attention as possible should also be given to the social and spiritual care.³⁶

The monetary aspect of caring also served an ideological goal and shows how women played an interesting gendered role via the Emergency Fund.

Motherhood was seen as a woman's 'highest calling' in the OB.³⁷ In this sense women were not encouraged to enter the labour force. It was said of a girl's education that mothers should 'inculcate in their daughters the realisation that she should prepare herself one day to be a housewife and mother. So a girl's concept of labour should be very closely linked to her concept of a family.'³⁸ To truly be a *volksmoeder*, in the orthodox interpretation of the OB, a woman had to be a wife and a mother. Furthermore this meant that she had to be financially free to devote her time to motherhood. For this to be the case her husband would be the breadwinner and as a family they would be firmly rooted in the middle class. The Ossewa-Brandwag saw the urbanisation of the Afrikaner and the internment of breadwinners as a threat to women's 'highest calling'.³⁹ The Emergency Fund had to counter this threat.⁴⁰ It had to enable women to stay at home and fulfil their duty as mothers even while their husbands were not able to work. In raising funds for the Emergency Fund OB women became the providers for the households of men who were interned. *Women* became the breadwinners of the men's families. However, it was never seen in this way. Official propaganda for the Emergency Fund cast women in the image of the 'suffering mother', as *dependants*, who cannot take care of herself and her children without her husband. The official poster of the Emergency Fund reflects this excellently (see Figure 1).

The gender order's refusal to explicitly acknowledge that OB women became their sisters' breadwinners is further evident in the official praise for the Emergency Fund where it is not stated that 'the women' cared for the families, but the more abstract term 'volk' is used:

The Emergency Fund was founded to help in cases of emergency. When the breadwinner could not fulfil his obligations, the *volk* intervened as father of his family and by means of the Emergency Fund provided for their needs. Words cannot describe what it meant in those times to mother and children! That aid made her fate bearable. Her *volk* helped her to bear her cross. Her pain was eased. She did not have financial worries. Therefore she could look after and educate her children who had to do without the leadership of a father, and she could bear her fate in a manner worthy of Afrikaner women.⁴¹

36. OBA, Area A coll., B/L 5(i)(a)/3, file 15, Noodhulp: Algemeen.

37. OBA, Grootraad coll., B/L 1/4, file 36: Social issues: Family policy.

38. OBA, *Die OB*, 11 August 1943.

39. OBA, *Die OB*, 11 August 1943. OBA: *Die OB*, 25 August 1943.

40. As part of the Emergency Fund funds was also collected and distributed under the 'poor whites' of the Witwatersrand, see C. Marx, *Oxwagon Sentinel*, 337.

41. OBA, *Die OB*, 13 December 1944. Original Afrikaans: Die Noodhulpfonds is gestig om te help in die nood. Toe die broodwinner nie sy verpligtinge kon nakom nie, het die volk ingetree as vader van sy gesin en deur die Noodhulpfonds in hulle behoeftes voorsien. Woorde kan nie beskryf wat dit in daardie tye vir 'n moeder en kindertjies beteken het nie! Daardie hulp het haar lot draaglik gemaak. Haar volk het haar gehelp om haar kruis te dra. Haar leed is versag. Sy het nie finansiële kommer gehad nie. Daarom kon sy haar kindertjies, wat die leiding van die vader moes ontbeer, versorg en opvoed; en kon sy haar lot dra soos dit 'n Afrikanervrou waardig is.



Figure 1. Official poster of the Ossewa-Brandwag Emergency Fund. Source: OBA, Pamflette: OB Noodhulpfonds.

There is some irony in this. Women maintained the patriarchal gender order through their fundraising by being the breadwinners until the imprisoned men would be released. Women took on the role of provider in order to keep her fellow women from entering the labour market and thus neglecting her 'highest calling'. In this sense women became culprits in upholding their own subordinated position and bought into the orthodox concept of the *volksmoeder*. However, this example shows that without the women the Emergency Fund would not have been able to support several families for almost a decade. Had this been the case the gender order would have been threatened if the wives of the interned had to take her labour beyond the confines of her home.

Women's fundraising activities did not end here. Several functions were held with fundraising as its aim. The greatest of these functions was called Union Funds Day, Organisation Day or OB Day and took place annually on 8 August.⁴² Here it becomes evident that women were more than just the financial heart of the Emergency Fund.

Next to the celebration of the Boer victory over the British on 27 February 1881, called Freedom Day or Majuba Day, OB Day was the second great official festive day on the calendar. OB Day was closely linked with the Voortrekker Centenary of 1938. On 8 August 1938 the ox wagons of the symbolic ox wagon trek left Cape Town on their trip northwards. It was regarded as the birthday of the Ossewa-Brandwag because on that day the *volk* started 'moving' in the form of the OB.⁴³

OB Day was celebrated for the first time in 1942 and was honoured up to 1952. It was regarded as the 'greatest countrywide endeavour by women' and OB women referred to Fundraising Day as their 'main celebration', meaning fundraising event.⁴⁴ Women saw it as a day of sacrifice where 'the *volk* has to be taught to make sacrifices'.⁴⁵ It would seem as if on this day the gender tables were turned. It was laid down that the initiative for Fundraising Day would be left exclusively to the women, but that 'the whole-hearted support and cooperation of the men were essential'. During this day the men would have to make a special effort to support and help the women in all respects wherever possible.⁴⁶ The calls made for Fundraising Day were sometimes definitely propagandist, clearly using singular interpretations of the *volksmoeder:kmoeder*.

If the mothers of the *volk* in the past were willing to sacrifice their sons, yes even their infants, on the altar of our freedom, are you not prepared to sacrifice just a small part of your income on the altar for the same freedom which has not yet been realised? You will be given this opportunity on 8 August.⁴⁷

It is important to keep in mind that Fundraising Day was *not* held for raising money for the Emergency Fund. *Generale* Meyer, *Hoofvrou* of the Orange Free State, spelt it out clearly in 1942: 'The funds raised on this day will be going solely and exclusively to the Ossewa-Brandwag as a movement [...]'⁴⁸ The Free State OB women in 1942 raised more than £3,000 on Fundraising Day 'for the provincial coffer'.⁴⁹ and tried to *double* it every year.⁵⁰ Although this ideal was not completely reached, the Free State OB women bettered the amount every year and kept on aiming at higher amounts. In 1944 female general Meyer made the following appeal to her commandos:

42. OBA, *Die OB*, 08 April 1942; 9 December 1946.
43. OBA, Area A coll., B/L 5(i)(a)/3, file 16: Feesviering: 8 Augustus.
44. OBA, Free State governing body coll., B/L 6/2/7, file 6: Minutes of WAC meeting 12 March 1942.
45. OBA, Free State governing body coll., B/L 6/2/7, file 5: Minutes of WAC meeting 9 May 1942.
46. OBA, Transvaal governing body coll., B/L 8(i)/1, file 1 Fund-raising Day: 8 August.
47. OBA, *Die OB*, 22 July 1942. Original Afrikaans: Indien die moeders van ons volk in die verlede gewillig was om hul seuns, ja selfs hul suigeling op die altaar van ons vryheid te lê, is u nie bereid om vandag maar net 'n deeltjie van u geldelike inkomste op die altaar te lê vir dieselfde vryheid wat nog nie verwesenlik is nie? Die geleentheid daarvoor word op 8 Augustus gebied.
48. OBA, Free State governing body coll., B/L 6/2/7, file 5: Minutes of WAC meeting 9 May 1942.
49. OBA, Free State governing body coll., B/L 6/2/7, file 5: Minutes of WAC meeting, 17 October 1942.
50. OBA, Free State governing body coll., B/L 6/2/7, file 5: Minutes of WAC meeting 12 March 1943.

I am proud of what the women in this area have already accomplished. In 1942 we raised £3 200, in 1943 we increased this amount to £4 500. Won't we summon all our strength and attempt to reach £5 000 this year?⁵¹

If we take into account that a similar income was received every year in each of the areas of the OB⁵² one can go as far as calling the women the financial lifeblood of the Ossewa-Brandwag. They were also deeply conscious of the role they played in the movement. As such they articulated their role as fundraisers in political terms.

In three calls for OB Day fundraising was cast within the discourse of *volkspolitiek*. In the official mouthpiece of the movement, *Die OB*, of 9 May 1945 women are reminded that 'the ideal which binds women in the OB [is] that they work towards uniting again their *volk* which has been torn apart by deep inner conflict'.⁵³ Here reference is made to the rift in Afrikanerdom created by the outbreak of the Second World War. This 'work' is seen as contributing to the unity of the *volk* by means of fundraising: 'it is the women's contribution to the struggle for realising this ideal that they give their spare time and full strength for raising funds for Ossewa-Brandwag Day.'⁵⁴ In similar vein gen. K. Malan wrote that the OB contributed to ensuring that the cause of the Afrikaner was maintained and the only way to maintain it was to see to it that the movement made enough money on Fundraising Day.⁵⁵

In 1948, after the victory of the National Party, gen. Mostert, later *Hoofvrou* of the Northern Transvaal, declared that 'the enemy has been conquered but not destroyed'. In her summons for Fundraising Day she reminded the members that 'without funds we will have to abandon the struggle'. Her justification was that the task of the OB had not been accomplished at all and that therefore 'everyone has to do her duty so that we can reach the final victory, namely our Christian National Republic for which we are fighting and willing to suffer for'.⁵⁶ Gen. E. Theron, *Hoofvrou* of the Cape, encouraged her commandos to use all their strength to make a success of the upcoming OB Day because

the victory of the Afrikaners on 26 May is only the beginning and not the end of the *volk's* long road to *volks*unity and the Republic. Therefore, move forward with diligence, courage and with confidence in the future of our country and *volk!*⁵⁷

Women attached great meaning to their role as fund raisers. *Generale* Meyer describes this role in the following terms:

51. OBA, J.A.S. de Wet coll., B/L 1/7, file 3: Correspondence: J.A.S. de Wet/C. Meyer, 5 June 1944.
52. See OBA, Area F collection, B/L 8(i)(b)/4/26, file 2: Six monthly report, 1944.
53. Original Afrikaans: 'Die ideaal wat die vroue in die OB aanmekeer [is] dat sy werk om haar volk dieperskeurd, uitmekeergejaag weer bymekaar... bring.'
54. OBA, *Die OB*, 9 May 1945. Original Afrikaans: dit is die vrou se bydrae tot die stryd vir verwesening van hierdie ideaal dat sy haar spaartyd en volle kragte sal gee vir die insameling van fondse vir Ossewabrandwagdag.
55. OBA, *Die OB*, 9 July 1947.
56. OBA, *Die OB*, 16 June 1948. Original Afrikaans: In haar oproep om Fondsdag herinner sy die lede dat 'sonder fondse moet ons die stryd gewonne gee.' Haar regverdiging is dat die OB se taak nog eensins afgehandel is nie en daarom moet 'elkeen [sy] plig doen, om so ons eindoorwinning te bereik, naamlik ons Christelike nasionale Republiek waarvoor ons stry en gewillig is om te ly.'
57. OBA, *Die OB*, 27 August 1947. OBA: *Die OB*, 8 October 1947.

Just as women in the olden days poured bullets for the man to fire so that their safety and survival could be guaranteed, so the women in the Ossewa-Brandwag will take care of the necessary funds so that the struggle can be taken further and victory can be gained.⁵⁸

Women abstracted their role as fundraisers to one which encapsulated the notion of ‘caring for the *volk*’, given that the OB was seen by members as the representative of the *volk* and its ideals.⁵⁹ In serving the OB, women served the *volk* and the ‘cause’ of the *volk*. In their interpretations of fundraising they expanded their role as fundraisers to include political meanings. But their raising of funds was of immense importance where every aspect of the OB is concerned. Although men (who were not interned) provided the main income of the household, women’s fundraising was one of the main sources of continuous income for the Ossewa-Brandwag. Years later this was acknowledged by the leadership of the movement in an anthology commemorating the OB:

It was the women who made the greatest contributions to the financial needs of the Ossewa-Brandwag both in its ordinary administrative organisation and its emergency action. Without the work and contributions of Afrikaner women the whole movement would simply have petered out in impotence.⁶⁰

Women were crucial in their capacity as fundraisers. They provided the material conditions for the OB to exist. Taking only fundraising as an example women were active agents in the OB who made a discernible difference. In a movement that initially set out to be exclusively male, women, through their own doing, became indispensable.

Women knew they were important to the OB. Just as Afrikaner women used the language of home-making and motherhood to legitimize their suffrage campaign, women of the OB used it to justify their position as maternal mobilisers of the *volk*. OB women articulated their own views on the *volksmoeder*. In terms of the dual notion of motherhood women saw themselves as the bearers of nationalism reflecting a broader understanding of the *volksmoeder*. Vincent concurs with Brink that the *volksmoeder* subordinated women socially, morally, economically and politically through the ideological incorporation of women into male dominated nationalism.⁶¹ However, through their articulation of the *volksmoeder* women painted a radically different image of themselves in the OB.

‘Kan die vrou haar volk dien deur haar huis? (Can a woman be of service to her *volk* through her home?): Voices of OB women

The official newspaper of the OB gave women a platform from where they could voice their views on their own identity and role. In an article addressing the dual nature of

58. OBA, Free State governing body coll., B/L 6/2, file 6: Work Schedule: Women’s Auxiliary Council, Orange Free State. Original Afrikaans: Soos die vrou in die ou dae koeëls gegiet het vir die man om weg te skiet, sodat hul veiligheid en voortbestaan verseker kan word, so sal die vrou in die Ossewa-Brandwag sorg vir die nodige fondse sodat die stryd voortgesit en die oorwinning behaal kan word.

59. OBA, Ketting-Flugskrifte, no. 1, 1941. DJM Cronje coll., B/L 15, file 4, *Ossewa-Brandwag: Vanwaar en waarheen?*, 10

60. F. ‘Die vrou in die oorlogsjare’ in H.G. Stoker (ed.), *Agter Tralies en Doringdraad* (Stellenbosch: Pro Ecclesia, 1953), 397.

61. Brink, ‘Man-Made Women’, 291; Vincent, ‘A Cake of Soap’, 15.

motherhood, under the title ‘Can a woman be of service to her *volk* through her home?’, it is argued that women in the OB can be likened to factory workers in war time who works endlessly to provide arms for the fighting soldiers: ‘Just as the worker does his bit for the war on the home front, so women do their part for the advancement of the *volk* when they fulfil their duties towards their families in their homes.’⁶² Women were conscious of their ‘highest calling’ and described their duties in terms of matters revolving around the family. *Generale* Meyer openly declared that the Smuts government did not provide the context in which women can fulfil her highest calling:

Ennobling women is forfeited under poverty and misery. Women realise that nothing can be expected from the current system, therefore they have thrown their strength behind the struggle fought by the Ossewa-Brandwag.⁶³

Generale Gericke from the Mossebaai *vrouekommando* broadens the meaning of an Afrikaner woman’s highest calling by interpreting motherhood as nationalist action:

The work of women in the OB is and will always be the work of the wife and mother. Not only do our little ones have to learn their first prayer at their mother’s knee, they also have to learn from her to know and honour the heroes of their own *volk*. The mothers have to inculcate in them love for the fatherland and fidelity. They have to teach them their history, for a *volk* who does not know its own history, does not know any patriotism or loyalty either.⁶⁴

In this sense OB women saw themselves as active participants in nation building. According to D. Gaitskell and E. Unterhalter this view was typical of the period between 1914 and 1948 where a more active and mobilising idea of motherhood were constructed. The home became an arena where Afrikaner national identity was fostered through mothers’ child-rearing and domestic responsibilities – it became ‘a maternalist powerhouse of domestic ethnic mobilisation’.⁶⁵

It is interesting to note that women did not see their role in the OB as that of ‘mere fundraisers’. They viewed their role as extremely important. *Generale* Mostert was of the opinion that women were the heart of the OB and if they were to be removed just a ‘dead body’ would remain, ‘an empty shell without a core’.⁶⁶ The moral role is furthermore emphasised by *generale* Meyer when she mentions that the main reason for women’s importance was that they ‘had to uphold the morals of the *volk*’ and they were the ones who had to hand down the *volk*’s assets to the next generation.⁶⁷ *Generale* Mostert wrote in an article ‘Women in the Ossewa-Brandwag’ that the title read ‘in’ not ‘and’. This, according to Mostert, immediately implies that women form part of the body of the

62. OBA, *Die OB*, 07 October 1942.

63. OBA, *Die OB*, 19 September 1945.

64. OBA, *Die OB*, 9 May 1943. Original Afrikaans: Die werk van die vrou in die O.B. is en moet altyd bly dié van vrou en moeder. Ons kindertjies moet nie net hul eerste gebedjie aan moedersknie leer nie, maar hulle moet daar ook leer om hulle eie volkshelde te ken en te eer, daar moet onsmoeders vir hulle vaderlandsliefde en trou inboesem; daar moet hulle hul geskiedenis leer, want h volk wat sy geskiedenis nie ken nie, ken ook geen vaderlandsliefde en trou nie.

65. Gaitskell and Unterhalter, ‘Mothers of the Nation’, 62–63.

66. OBA, A.C.M. Mostert, ‘Die Vrou in die Ossewa-Brandwag’, in *OB Jaarboek 1948*, 13.

67. OBA, *Die OB*, 2 June 1943.

Ossewa-Brandwag. Woman is associated with it. She is a member of this body and ‘she is of cardinal importance’. She goes further and writes:

as in days gone by the mothers preferred to cross the Drakensberg barefoot, so their daughters did their share in times of crisis to keep the OB standing, and as long as women continue on this way there is nothing to be feared from the future – we shall overcome!⁶⁸

Women who chose to be part of the OB saw it as a movement which enabled them to become proper *volksmoeders*.⁶⁹

In the case of the Ossewa-Brandwag it is also important to remember that it was *both* a cultural organisation and a resistance movement. The OB saw itself as the spiritual successor of the 1914 Rebellion. It was seen as the Afrikaner’s ‘Second Rebellion’ *sonder gewere* (without guns).⁷⁰ This resistance *sonder gewere* was exemplified by women’s activities in the OB. Through raising funds for an openly anti-British and pro-German movement women indirectly resisted the war effort. In a speech given by *generale* E. Theron, *Hoofvrou* of the Cape, in 1947 the ‘republican ideal’ of the OB is praised. She mentions that she is proud of the OB’s ‘resistance against the Empire’ and referred to the historical continuity in which members viewed the OB: ‘we are just as proud of our resistance against the Empire and it’s war now as we are of the rebellion of 1914.’ She called the OB the ‘only republican *volksbeweging*’.⁷¹ S.S. Swart mentions that women who identified with the rebel’s side in 1914 adopted the attitude of ‘republican cheerleaders’.⁷² In similar vein OB women were called upon by their female leaders to encourage their husbands:

We will have to be prepared to go full-out, otherwise everything will be lost. Do not deter your husbands from doing their duty in this hour of the *volk’s* crisis. On the contrary, encourage them, even if there is the threat of personal persecution. More serious matters are at stake. Allow the interests of the *volk* to weigh more than personal interest!⁷³

Women accepted the orthodox interpretation of conventional Afrikaner womanhood, but even this image did not exclude political connotations. The OB was seen by women as the organisation which provided the most fertile ground for this image of motherhood to take root. It is evident that women themselves also understood sexual difference as based on biological determinism and consequently accepted and moulded the social meanings ascribed to ‘femininity’ in the OB. Together with fundraising, providing the moral backbone of the OB (‘soul of the *volk*’) and encouraging resistance against Britain, women took motherhood as their highest calling and imbued it with political meaning. It was seen

68. OBA, A.C.M. Mostert, ‘Die Vrou in die Ossewa-Brandwag’, 13.

69. OBA, *Die OB*, 2 June 1943.

70. Theron, *Sonder hoed of handskoen*, 41. OBA: Tape recordings, interview (tr.), tape no. 75, 1979: H.M. Robinson/A. Neethling-Pohl, 1. Also see F.W. Quass, *Die Tweede Rebelle: ’n roman uit die dae toe die Vierkleur opnuut die simbool was van alles wat die Afrikaner verteenwoordig het* (Johannesburg: Afcet-uitgewers, 1975). This ideal was not completely reached. The *Stormjaers* (Storm Troopers) was a movement indirectly affiliated with the OB who resisted the war-effort in a more violent way.

71. OBA, *Die OB*, 27 August 1947.

72. S.S. Swart, ‘Motherhood and Otherhood: Gendered Citizenship and Afrikaner Women in the South African 1914 Rebellion’, *African Historical Review*, 39, 2 (2007), 46.

73. OBA, *Die OB*, 2 June 1943.

as a calling that not only ensured the survival of the *volk*, but which also entailed that political ideas would be taught by mothers to their children. Hence the statement by *generale* Meyer: *Die hand aan die wieg regeer die land* ('The hand that rocks the cradle rules the land').⁷⁴

Most of these voices are those of women who were mainly part of the leadership corps. It might not necessarily reflect *every* woman's sentiments, but if we take into account that the VAR was responsible for ensuring the objectives of the movement was met in every regional *Vrouekommando*,⁷⁵ it can be argued that this certainly influenced the grassroots members who, by joining the OB in the first place and signing the avowal,⁷⁶ accepted the above mentioned version of the *volksmoeder*.

Conclusion

Central to the *volksmoeder* ideal is the argument that 'women possessed certain natural predispositions which could legitimately circumscribe their social capacity in a variety of ways'.⁷⁷ Despite this being the case, exercising agency by means of fundraising for the Emergency Fund and the OB itself did not mean that this activity was a 'mere' duty of women. Women were the financial lifeblood of the movement, an indispensable part of the OB. They 'cared' for the *volk*. In this sense they had significant power, although they did not use it to question the dominant gender order. Instead they reproduced the dominant ideologies of the OB and even upheld the heteropatriarchal gender order. This was a *choice* women made. However, they broadened their own interpretation of this traditional activity by seeing it as a political act. They expanded the *volksmoeder* by embracing its metaphoric possibilities.

J.W. Scott argues that the normative concepts in a gender order can limit the metaphoric possibilities of symbols like the *volksmoeder*.⁷⁸ This is exactly what happens when an oppressive set of gender stereotypes emphasises the traditional role of women in the home based on biological determinism. However, as the academic wing of Second Wave Feminism has shown, this does not mean woman had no agency in the public sphere. Here Vincent's words are important where she argues that the *volksmoeder* 'operated as a mechanism by means of which the traditional role of women in the family could be extended to include a public role'.⁷⁹ OB women's public role manifested in their claim to be the moral backbone of the movement as well as the mobilisers of ethnic nationalism through their childrearing – being the 'soul' of the *volk*. In this sense a parallel can be drawn between the ACVV and the OB where M. du Toit mentions that Afrikaner women *consciously* participated in the nationalist cause.⁸⁰ Her concept of the 'domesticity' of nationalism emphasises that women did indeed participate in politics *through her home*. This is exactly the avenue OB women took when they embraced the *volksmoeder*. This does

74. OBA, Transvaal governing body coll., B/L 6/2/7, file 5: Minutes of WAC Meeting, 17 October 1942.

75. OBA, Cape governing body coll., B/L 5(i)/1, file 5: Die Vroue-afdeling van die Ossewa-Brandwag.

76. Badenhorst, 'Organisasiestruktuur van die Ossewa-Brandwag', 78.

77. Vincent, 'The Power Behind the Scenes', 73.

78. J.W. Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*, revised ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 43.

79. Vincent, 'A Cake of Soap', 14.

80. Du Toit, 'The Domesticity of Afrikaner Nationalism', 176.

not mean that their role was insignificant just because it was not overtly political. In the words of L. Davidoff and C. Hall: 'If the moral world was theirs, who needed the public world of business and politics?'⁸¹

In the available historiography on Afrikaner women, used in the paper, a slight difference can be observed between women of the ACVV, SAVF, Women's National Parties and the OB. OB women cast their roles in a more radical Afrikaner nationalist light – in the process they embraced the more orthodox view of the *volksmoeder*. Even the vote did not translate as political power to them during peak years of the OB, as they were part of a movement that was extremely anti-parliamentarian. Their work in the OB was preparation for the coming national-socialist government and even after the Second World War and the decline of the OB, women still upheld the republican ideal of the Afrikaner, only this time through the National Party.⁸²

81. L. Davidoff and C. Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class* (London: Hutchinson, 1987), 183.

82. OBA, Tape recordings, interview (tr.) tape no. 165–166, 1985: L.M. Fourie/K.J.H. Steenkamp, 8.