

It is paradoxical that many women ECC supporters are moved by their maternal role - by their sense of responsibility to their children. It is often their role as mothers that generates their challenge to militarisation. For example, a letter to a local Johannesburg newspaper urged mothers to organise to demand better army treatment for their sons.

The South African way of life allows a great many myths to exist in our society. One of the greatest of these is the one that goes 'the army will make a man of your son' ... we allow the might of the army to swallow the boys we, as mothers, have spent eighteen years turning into civilised human beings, caring and considerate of others, and in two years turn them into efficient, largely unthinking, killing machines.

(Letter to The Star, 15.04.1986).

Clearly this issue generates conflict for mothers. A local study reported:

the dilemma experienced as a result of the mothers' opposition towards conscription and their simultaneous feelings that, as mothers, they should be committed to supporting their sons.

(Feinstein, et al, 1986: 77.)

It is significant that in this study

The issue of conscription was hardly discussed by the families. Discussion between mother and son on the issue of conscription was almost non-existent. All mothers felt that their sons should be informed, but distanced themselves from the process.

(Ibid. p.76).

Women's resistance to militarisation has often been rooted in their maternal roles. Sometimes the content of that resistance has echoed and reinforced such roles. For example, the wording of the appeal from the International Women's Suffrage Alliance in 1914 to avoid war:

In this terrible hour, when the fate of Europe depends on decisions which women have no power to shape, we, realising our responsibilities as mothers of the race, cannot stand passively by. Powerless though we are politically, we call upon the governments and powers of our several countries to avert the threatened unparalleled disaster.

(Cited by Orr, 1983: 11.)

Frequently also, such resistance resonates with deep maternal feelings:

... the child at once serves as an inspiration to fight on ("We are planting a tree so that our children can enjoy the shade") and a temptation to quiet down so that she may be with him to watch him grow.

(A young mother imprisoned in the Phillipines, cited by San-Juan, 1933: 256.)

While the politics of gender is often used to deny the validity of women's independent, autonomous political action, paradoxically it also gives them space for such action. There is no white male equivalent of the white women's civil rights organisation, the Black Sash, currently nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize. Their silent protest stands are reminiscent of the 'Mad Mothers' of the Plaza de Mayo in Buenos Aires since 1976.

The women of the Plaza de Mayo, having not been able to obtain any response to repeated requests for information about their disappeared relatives, found that only elderly women demonstrating in silence were not liable for immediate arrest: and thus became with their white headgear to identify their mute protest, the vanguard of public opposition to the Argentine Government's policies ... They found one loophole enabling them to act non-violently in a situation that blocked any legitimate expression of protest. (Maclean, 1982: 326.)

Similar protest from white women in the Black Sash, or involvement in the ANC or ECC are not the only forms of resistance to militarisation at the present time. There is a growing realisation in the white community of both the economic and human cost of a military solution to maintaining the apartheid regime. The human cost is indicated by Professor Green of the Institute for Development Studies in Sussex, who estimates that as a proportion of the white South African population, the number of white South Africans whose lives have been lost in fighting Swapo amounts to more than three times the number of American lives lost in Vietnam. (The Star 2.11.87.)

The scale of human cost demanded by increasing militarisation is provoking a number of very different responses in the white community. These may be categorised in terms of compliance, retreat and challenge. The response of compliance to militarisation is evident in increased support for the ruling political party and those to the right of it, such as the Conservative Party. This was clear in the 1987 general election. It is also evident in the dramatic increase in arms sales which makes white South Africa one of the most heavily armed communities in the world. In 1986 there were 220 221 applications to possess a firearm (135 382 in 1985), bringing the number of persons licenced to possess a firearm to 1 061 281. (Inside South Africa, May 1987.)

The response of retreat is evident in the increasing numbers emigrating from South Africa. Emigration on the part of white South Africans is increasing and 'the brain drain' reached headline proportions earlier this year. For example, 'Govt. figures show massive brain drain' (The Star, 20.02.1987.) According to statistics released in Parliament in February 1987, a total of 2 164 professional people emigrated in 1986. While 1 026 immigrated, the net loss for the country was 1 138 or, on average, just more than three a day. More than 47% more professional and technical people left the country than during 1985. (The Star, 04.03.1987.) This is often a response to militarisation in the form of the conscription issue.

While the motivations underlying emigration vary from the political to the most intensely personal it is significant that many of the younger white English speakers are moved to action by the prospect of extended military service. (Frankel, 1984: 139.)

At present many young white South African males obtain deferment from their military service for university study. However, there are hints in the Geldenhuys Commission appointed in 1984 that such deferment will no longer be obtained too easily.

The advantages and disadvantages of national service, prior to tertiary training, were studied, and the Committee came to the conclusion that it would be preferable if military service were made compulsory before tertiary training. (White paper on Defence and Armaments Supply, 1986, p.07.)

However, the war on the east coast will not prevent increasing militarisation of South African society as the result of the Total Conscription Campaign and the increasing numbers of white South Africans resisting military service. This resistance involves elements of retreat (seeking political asylum abroad), passive or personal resistance (in the form of not reporting to the SADF) as well as applications for alternative service and (in a very few cases) serving a prison sentence in preference to military service.

It has been reported that 1 000 objectors to military service were granted political asylum in Britain between 1977 and 1981 (Total War in SA, 1984). Increasing numbers of young white South Africans do not report for military service. It was reported in Parliament that 7 500 conscripts failed to report for duty in the SADF in January 1985, as opposed to 1 536 conscripts in the whole of 1981. (At Ease, ECC Newsletter, May 1986.) The SADF challenged the former figure as incorrect on the grounds that it included some students and scholars. In January 1986 General Magnus Malan refused to reveal in Parliament the number of people who had failed to report to the SADF. (Star, 3.3.86)

Retreat shades into challenge in the case of the increasing numbers of people applying to the Board for Religious Objection for alternative service as 'religious objectors'. By December 1985 the number of conscripts applying for religious objector status had increased by 35% according to statistics supplied by the Board. (Eastern Province Herald, 19.12.1985.) Between July 1981 and May 1987, 755 applications were considered by the Board. (Weekly Mail, 19.06.1987.) This is a small minority of those who are conscripted. On the whole there is little support for such objectors.

With the noteworthy exception of a few organisations and individuals, South Africa's public displays little sympathy for conscientious objection.

(Star, 19.06.1987)

Frankel maintains this is a direct result of the militarisation of South African society:

work in the direction of producing individuals who have culturally absorbed militarist values prior to their embarkation on formal military service. The result is a series of conscriptions in strong patriotic terms and the generally self-military service as a desirable part of their individual growth.

(Star, 19.06.1987)

However, Frankel was writing with reference to the SADF in South Africa's black townships a process which started in December 1981. This has changed many people's attitudes towards conscription and underlined manpower problems within the SADF. The war on the east coast and internal unrest situation has increased manpower requirements. The SADF is in a balance and armaments struggle.

One important response to manpower problems is that the ideological construction of defence force manpower as 'white' is being restructured. There are reports that new colours in Indian uniforms are available for voluntary service from the SADF command. (SIT, 1986, 117 (The Star, 28.01.1986).) However, the 1986 Defence White Paper clearly envisages extending conscription to coloured and Indian people in the long term. It succeeds taking coloured and Indian people through the same stages of military service as whites, i.e. a voluntary system (1977-1981) followed by a ballot system (1982-1983) followed by compulsory military service for extended periods. At present the

However, the sharpest and most direct challenge to the increasing militarisation of South African society is the growth of the End Conscription Campaign and the increasing numbers of white South Africans resisting military service. This resistance involves elements of retreat (seeking political asylum abroad), passive or personal resistance (in the form of not reporting to the SADF) as well as applications for alternative service and (in a very few cases) serving a prison sentence in preference to military service.

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With the noteworthy exception of a few organisations and individuals, South Africa's public displays little sympathy for conscientious objection.
(Frankel, 1984: 134.)

Frankel attributes this to the fact that the militarisation of South African society:

works in the direction of producing individuals who have partially absorbed militarist values prior to their embarking on formal military service, who regard their period of conscription in strong patriotic terms and who generally see military service as a desirable part of their individual growth.
(Frankel, 1984: 134-135.)

However, Frankel was writing prior to the use of the SADF in South Africa's black townships, a process which dates back to October 1984. This has changed many people's attitudes towards conscription and exacerbated manpower problems within the SADF. At the same time, "the internal unrest situation has increased manpower requirements". (White Paper on Defence and Armaments Supply, 1986, p.04.)

One important response to manpower problems is that the ideological construction of defence force manpower as 'white' is being restructured. There are reports that more coloured and Indian men are applying for voluntary service than the SADF can handle. (SAIRR, 1985: 417; The Star, 28.04.1986.) However, the 1986 Defence White paper clearly envisages extending conscription to coloured and Indian people in the long term. It suggests taking coloured and Indian people through the same stages of military service as whites, i.e. a voluntary system (1946-1951); followed by the ballot system (1952-1969); followed by compulsory military service for extended periods. At present the

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END CONSCRIPTION CAMPAIGN (ECC)

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