



Review Article

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Issues of Race and Gender: Army Education Scheme in the Former Union Defence Force in South Africa During the Second World War, 1939-1945

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Abstract

Racial discrimination was a major legislation governed the non-white affairs since the inception of the Union of South Africa in 1910. This policy determined how blacks should be excluded in all political, social, cultural and economic spheres of life. As a result, the natives (blacks) found themselves disadvantaged to the state of exclusion and marginalization. When the Second World War broke out in September 1939, the scheme known as Army Education Scheme was established with the aim of providing educational skills to the servicemen and women as a way of preparing them to adapt into the post-war civilian life. Efforts were also taken to extend it to blacks and coloureds in the army. The work of carrying this duty was assigned to the Information Officers. The article argues that although attempts were made to extend the scheme to blacks and coloureds, racial attitudes among the white officers became a 'stumbling block' in the provision of the scheme across the racial lines. The article also argues that the coloured servicemen were generally better off as compared to their black counterpart possibly due to perception regarding their proximity to the whites in terms of colour and language. This article will focus explicitly on the role of white women, blacks and coloureds in the Union Defence Force and their unequal access to the Army Education Scheme, including other related benefits created during and after the war. Argument therefore suggests that throughout the era of white rule from Union to apartheid, was dictated by unequal access to education and other related incentives between blacks and whites in the army. This article will also touch some of the educational traits of the South African National Defence Force resembled from the Army Education Scheme.

Introduction

The concept 'Army Education Scheme' which emerged during the outbreak of the Second World War was part of the British war effort aiming at recruitment of the South Africans to join the Union Defence Force (UDF). The twin objectives of the AES were to prepare South African soldiers both for their roles in the war and for adaptation to eventual peace. As a result, the lecturing was aimed at helping the soldiers to make sense of the war and preparing them to obtain certain skills and qualifications that would afford them opportunities to fit back into the civilian life after the war. Most im

portantly was the nature of political landscape of the time as the whites were widely divided over whether it was in deed necessary for South Africa's involvement or not. The Union government under the leadership of General Jan Smuts was convinced that joining the war would be a right decision as bound by constitutional policy as well as effort to reconcile the historical rift between the Afrikaners and the English speaking populations. The major driving or organising force behind this scheme was lecturers from the University of Witwatersrand, Leo Marguard, Lieutenant Colonel R.F.A Hoernle,



and H.I Rousseau. The selection of men and women as information officers was carried out by these organisers. The Information Officers were to offer lectures to the troops at various units situated in North Africa and within the Union. The unequal enforcement of the scheme, based on gender or racial discrimination was to a certain extent created unequal access from the scheme as reflected in the manner in which both white women, blacks and coloureds were treated. When the war came to an end in 1945, the scheme was discontinued but efforts were carried out to continue unequal educational benefits for all members of the army throughout apartheid era until 1994 when democratic government was created.

White Women and the Army Education Scheme

When the war broke out in 1939, a large number of women volunteered for auxiliary services. Women's auxiliary activities were divided into two groups, those served in the Air Force as the Woman Auxiliary Air Force (WAAF) and those who served as the Women Auxiliary Army services (WAAS). While women were mainly recruited to carry out welfare duties, the Scheme saw the need to improve their education through training like their male counterparts. This occurred because the men in charge of the AES considered that women were also to understand the political circumstances involving the war as well as the reasons why the Union of South Africa declared war on the Axis forces [1].

The AES therefore undertook the training through the help of Department of Social Welfare for the section of the course dealing with welfare. The women responsible for educating other women on welfare lines were known as Welfare Information Officers. Although those women were not officially on the AES establishment, it provided them with literature on political training. Both the WAAS and the WAAF had their own seniors, major (Mrs) Dashwood and Captain (Miss) Spring respectively. The training courses of Welfare Information Officers for the WAAF had its headquarters at 100 Air School at Voortrekkerhoogte. Since the candidates had to travel from the nearby Valhalla Camp, a recommendation was made by the directorate of the WAAF that authority be granted for the supply of UDF transport. Although some preferred to walk to Valhalla in the heat of the day and back to 100 Air School in order to save transport costs, the arrangement contributed significantly to the conveyance of visiting lecturers [2]. At Milnerpark, where a number of trainees were accommodated, the continuation of general education was encouraged. By arrangement with the Witwatersrand technical Institute, correspondence courses were introduced at reduces fee. WAAF members were to perform duties such as factory workers, telegraphic operators, clerical shorthand typists and other capacities [3].

The importance of women as army officers was emphasised by Leo Marquard at the meeting of Welfare officers held on 2 June 1942 at the military College. Marquard stated that he was very glad to meet the WAAF Welfare officers and to be given an opportunity to talk to them. His emphasis of the neglected political education

for women became evident when he said: "This war had got to be fought by political training and women ought to have the same facilities to get it, as men. Men were showing a lively interest in the information, not really because it was a change in the routine, and up North they undergo hardships in order to come to these lectures and make sacrifices to attend them" [4].

While Marquard played a significant role in the activities of WAAF, extension of the information Services to the WAAS was first mooted by Malherbe in 1942. This enabled seven women members to attend an Information Officer's course at the Military College in March of that year. Since women were at the time considered less politically mature than men, the decision was taken by the AES to combine both Welfare and Information Services. In order to uplift the status of women, lecture topics presented by the Department of Social Welfare included the legal status of women, women in industry and the history of women's movement [5].

From the perspective of UDF, the role of women as Welfare Information Officers proved successful when women began showing a "considerable sense of political responsibility". This success was evident during the 1943 election when Captain Spring remarked that many women voted with great care after having been thoroughly prepared by information lecturers. A large number of women managed to complete their courses and in August 1944 indications of genuine interest in social and political questions were evident. [6].

The question of whether or not the Welfare and Information work should be combined was discussed at length by the AES officers at the WAAF headquarters. It was finally agreed that special needs of service women could be best met by the appointment of combined welfare and Information officers. The AES received full support, particularly from the WAAS officers. In August and September 1942, the WAAS authorised the holding of joint training of WAAF and WAAS officers at 100 Air Force Base under the direction of the AES. Although both the WAAS and the WAAF remained separate services, there was always close co-operation between the two. This Co-operation was witnessed when in June 1944 a refresher course was held at Valhalla for all WAAF and WAAS Welfare Information Officers [5].

The courses presented to women were often similar to that for men. This included the holding of lectures during working hours, organising discussion clubs, running libraries, publishing bulletins, encouraging formal education, promoting handcraft classes and arousing a sense of responsibility. The welfare work increased as the personnel gained confidence in the Welfare Officers. As a result, many issues generated by army conditions such as the placing of children in homes, dependents' allowances, grants from the Governor General's National War Fund and Air Force Fund, divorce and hospital visiting were brought up for discussion and advice [5].

The significance of this welfare information activity also took place outside the boundaries of the Union. As the war drew to an end, queries as to future employment, and possible training before demobilisation, were constantly interrogated. Before a section of

demobilisation was in operation, Welfare Officers were responsible for finding employment for ex-volunteers and acting as links either with the Labour Bureau, or private employers particularly in the cities of Johannesburg and Cape Town. This situation enabled the Information Officers to continue with attendance of courses in their task of educating women in the UDF. For example, eight Welfare Information officers were able to attend course in Cairo (Egypt) between February and June 1945 and in Helwan (Egypt) in September 1945, to run educational schemes in the camps [5].

Both the WAAF and the WAAS experienced difficulties, particularly as separate services, from the AES. One can therefore state that it would probably have made things easier if they had been part of the AES. It was despite these shortcomings that the successes had been apparent in the readjustment of individuals and that most of them would return to civilian life with some understanding of their tasks and responsibilities as South African citizens.

Blacks (natives) and the AES

Unlike the white recruits, blacks were at first recruited to perform non-combatant services, such as drivers and hygienic workers. The establishment of the Native Military Corps (NMC) made provision for the officers assigned to these formations to undergo a course in a specific Cadet Battalion at the Military College to ensure that the black troops were furnished with high standards of discipline [7]. Under the leadership of Malherbe and Marquard, South Africa's army information and education programme provided opportunity for soldiers to broaden their racial attitudes. It was, however, clear that the whites were generally not inclined to change their views. As a result, the education of the blacks was mainly based on welfare and other non-combatant services [8].

Notwithstanding Information officers from the first course in 1941 were not specifically trained to work with Africans, most of them did a small amount of lecturing and discussions with African troops, particularly in the Middle East. In this way they co-operated with the Native Welfare Officers. By the year 1942 it was felt that officers ought to be specifically trained for attachment to the NMC units. A scheme was drawn up and submitted to the Director of Non-European Army Services (DNES) in terms of which ten Information officers were to be trained. After this, the Information officers were to undergo a special course to equip them for their work on welfare activities. When this scheme was turned down by the DNES, the AES still felt that the needs of the NMC were not being catered for. As a result, the AES instructed the information Officers to cater for both blacks as well as whites. Although the work was sporadic in some areas, the Information Officers with the assistance of white and black volunteers succeeded in the establishment of classes and discussion groups [5].

According to the UDF journal, Nongqai, the basic training for the blacks in the Army consisted of training areas like motor transport and driving schools, stretcher bearers, the medical and hygienic school, basic training schools and infantry training depots. Apart from the above activities, blacks were trained as typists, telephone

operators, clerks, tailors, boot makers and cooks. In order to combat subversive activities and propaganda which might find their way into various camps inhabited by blacks, a special propaganda section was established. The course was of three weeks duration and covered a variety of subjects [9].

From the start, the attitude of white officers towards blacks was negative. This racial attitude was evident during suggestion on how Information Officers could approach the task of lecturing on black affairs. The censorship reports as well the experience of Information Offices had shown that fear of the blacks and hatred arising out of that fear was not encouraging for future relationship between white and black troops. The lecturing method was structured in such way that the specific fears were to be met. These fears included among others, fears of economic competition with the blacks, fear of social equality, as well as fear of being swamped numerically as the black population appeared in census figures to be increasing rapidly. Other methods of approach to be used by Information Officers included concentration on economics, no moral approach, the health of the blacks, indirect approach, and comparison with other countries, positive approach and alleged black inferiority [10].

The Information Officers were also to be careful not to speak of rights of the human beings, of justice or unfairness or try to arouse pity. To concentrate on economic consideration was regarded as the best approach, where a lecture was to present his course in such a way as to show that the interests of all South Africans, whites or blacks were in many respects as the same and that all will benefit by health, efficiency and prosperity for all. The emphasis on economics was therefore viewed from the point of interest of white South Africa [10].

The topic of health was approached in such a way that the black population was associated with ill-health, and by so doing contributing much to loss of efficiency, absence from work, orphans depends on the state, and under nourishment. The danger of infection of white from blacks with venereal diseases and Tuberculosis were also stressed in order to develop a negative attitude of whites against black troops. A positive approach was considered important in the same sense that the AES Officers were not to concentrate on the sufferings of the blacks. General tendencies like emphasising the rapid changing of social circumstances such as education, learning the white man's language, technics and the breakdown of tribal life, of believes, of parent control, and the drift to urban areas, were to be carried out by the Army Information Officers [10].

At Garawi, near Helwan, attempt was made to include literacy training in the ordinary training of transport drivers. Although the AES trained a number of African literates to teach their fellow men, many difficulties like lack of co-operation from the authorities led to the breakdown of this scheme. As a result, some instructors were taken on AES strength and transferred to other units where they continued to do good work [5]. It was due to the continued demands for access to the AES that local organisers were encouraged to offer general educational services both in Afrikaans and English.

To meet these demands, regular classes had to be arranged, meeting two or three times a week. In order to do the work properly, qualified school teachers were employed. The cause of instruction to be taken by the blacks was normally on weekly basis, and soldiers were to contribute a small fee towards the expenses of these courses [11].

However, various attempts to educate the blacks through the AES proved less successful because of the lack of co-operation of many of the Information Officers. On the other hand, the success achieved in the Air Force Units, both in and out of the Union, occurred as a result of co-operation of Air Force Authorities. Based on the above explanation, one can therefore support Marquard's argument when he stated that "While it is not true to say that the AES neglected the African troops, it is true that, owing perhaps to the inability of the AES and the NEAS to co-operate, one of the magnificent opportunities ever present to the country was thrown away – the opportunity to launch an anti-literacy campaign. All the conditions were right. It is recognised that the social and political structures of South African have been suspicious and, possibly hostile. But even within that circumstances much could have been done, and was not done" [6].

The AES and the South African Coloured Corps

Like blacks, the coloureds were primarily tasked to perform non-combatant duties. The Education of the coloured troops, who were mostly employed in the navy along the coast under the South African Coloured Corps (SACC), became evident when Information Officers were transferred to the coloureds units in September 1942. In 1943 the work within the SACC was reorganised under the AES which lasted until August 1945. This Scheme entailed the training of Senior Information Officers, all of whom were from the SACC. These Information Officers were trained as Non-Commissioned Officers (NCO's), and their courses.

The AES personnel assigned to the SACC was to perform duties like formal education and citizenship training. The Information Officers were drawn from the best educated men in the SACC. Some of these officers were highly educated men, including trained teachers and principals of schools with many years of teaching experience. Like other officers in the white units, those in the Coloured units were also stationed with the purpose of promotion and maintenance of good morale among the members of the units [12].

The numerous requests from various units to conduct first aid classes in black camps were also considered significant for the Coloured units. In order to achieve this objective, arrangements were made through the Director General of Medical Service (DGMS) with the South African Red Cross Society (SARCS) to conduct such classes. This enabled the blacks to gain knowledge in order to qualify for the first aid certificate of the Red Cross Society. According to the plan, each course consisted of about ten to twelve lectures and demonstrations which were given once per week. Such lectures and demonstration took place with a fixed routine, preferably in the af-

ternoons and evenings [13].

Unlike recruits from white units, the coloured candidates were expected to pay for the whole course that included certificates that were handed to the successful candidates. In order to make the lecture interesting or successful, the SARCS undertook steps to place equipment such as skeleton, bandages, splints and literature at the disposal of each class without any cost. At the same time uniformed members of the Ambulance Corps of the South African Red Cross offered their voluntary assistance [13].

The Cape Corps Literacy Scheme also played a pivotal role in the education of the Coloured people in and around the Cape. The scheme proposed that the army units had to ascertain the number of illiterates or semi-illiterates, advise senior Information Officers of the SACC personnel with teaching qualification to allow them to teach reading and writing, attend a meeting at Headquarters to discuss the scheme, scheme had to be run centrally from the office of the Senior Information Officer who was to prepare fortnightly a scheme of lessons for unit teachers and who, through an Information NCO, was to keep contact and assist unit teacher, and attendance was to be voluntary and in working time where necessary [14].

Books and material were supplied frequently due to the high demand. In order to maintain supervision for the smooth running of this scheme, the secretary of the Cape School Board gave permission for visits to schools by the AES staff to look for old primary readers in English and Afrikaans. As a result, three schools in Cape Town turned out 40 readers, half of them in Afrikaans. Of 25 units and detachment that were contacted, 19 units and detachment were discovered to have 332 illiterates in their ranks. As a result, instruction was to commence as soon as possible [14].

Although the officers commanding SACC details had generally been the most sympathetic and helpful, some difficulties or problems were prevalent. In the case of the Coastal Batteries and Engineer Detachment, the officers were changing so frequently that some difficulties were encouraged in obtaining continuous interest and control. At times the DNES had no stock of exercise books or slates. Since the AES staff could not visit all detachment, several of them were not organised into literacy classes. Examples are Robben Island, Langenbaan, Saldahna, Hangklip and Westlake [14].

The success of the AES for the SACC units was generally based on the consensus of opinion that the scheme was practicable and that it would work, provided officers in the units interest themselves in it and gave the necessary support to unit teachers. Unlike the role of the AES among blacks, the AES personnel within the SACC was successful. The success was due to the fact that it responded very well to the opportunities offered to it as well as the positive willingness by the AES to assist. The work of the NCO's in running libraries, encouraging reading, discussion and education was very good. In the North, the officers and NGO's attached to the SACC and to the 6th SA Division organised regular programmes of educational classes and informal lectures, and significant improvement was noticeable [15].

Post-War Army Educational Incentives in the South African Defence Force

While the AES was halted after the Second World War in 1945, the idea of providing servicemen with education incentives was not ignored. For instance, in the early 1950s more financial services were granted to the servicemen including allowances to soldiers who attended continuation classes at the Universities and colleges [16]. The establishment of Military Academy at Saldanha Bay in the 1950s made provision for officers to further their studies through formal training as well as registering for degree courses called Bachelor of Military Science offered by the faculty of Military Science at the University of Stellenbosch [16].

During the 1970s efforts have already been made to gradually uplift the standard of blacks in the army through the establishment of Adult Education Centres run by the National Service Units at Messina, Phalaborwa, Durban and other places around the country. The trainees had to register with the Department of Education and Training [17]. As war against the liberation movements intensified, white women were also trained to perform combatant roles, and this created educational opportunities where most of them were afforded training in musketry, field craft, regimental duties and map reading. Basic training was followed by second phase where women volunteers could attend courses such as advanced first aid, elementary pharmacology and military hygiene [18]. The notion of attracting white recruits in the army was considered crucial, with conscription as part of national duty. The inception of a democratic South Africa in 1994 paved way for the provision of human right principles where South Africans enjoyed various forms of freedom as part of the SADF restructuring process. At the same time the apartheid law of conscription was becoming unpopular and ultimately phased away.

The newly-formed South African National Defence Force (SANDF) which replaced the South African Defence Force (SADF), opened a wide range of educational opportunities for all South African races for the first time, with more emphasis on skills development. Men and women of all races were allowed to perform both combatants and non-combatant duties, based on their career choices. As part of transformation, former liberation movements such as the African National Congress's Umkhonto we sizwe (MK), Pan African Congress's Azanian People's Liberation Army (APLA), including the Self-Protection Units of the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) were freely allowed to form part of one integrated SANDF. A scheme called Army Service Corps was established as a distinct organisation within the SANDF in September 1995. The demobilisation arrangements initially made provision for the scheme to focus on integrating the demobilised non-statutory force members into civilian society by upgrading their educational, vocational and life skills, as well as assisting them in finding employment or setting up their own enterprises in the private sector [19].

The recruitment for enlistment was guided by democratic principles of equality and human rights to all south African citizens. Equal access to education, healthcare, and other related ed-

ucational and career incentives were considered a priority in the eradication of the imbalances of the past apartheid era. These new developments were in line with SANDF gender transformation mandate which aimed at reducing symptoms of patriarchy in the army. The inception of various military colleges throughout South Africa was aimed at educating the men and women of the SANDF as a way of instilling professionalism to adapt to the changing patterns and strategies of warfare worldwide, where sophisticated weapons such as electronic tanks, drones, air defence systems, war planes, submarines, unmanned aerial vehicles, rocket launching systems, hypersonic systems, Artificial Intelligence (AI) and other related weapons based on advanced technology are popularly utilised. These new approaches have been witnessed in recent wars in the Middle-East, Ukraine, and other African countries.

Conclusion

It is clear from this study that that the success of the AES was hampered by the government's racial policy, and the unwillingness of the Information Officers to execute equal education for all races within the army. Although the scheme was generally aimed at all population groups within the UDF, racial attitudes adversely affected its initial intention of equalising access to the scheme. As a result, the army educational process proved more effective on the white women than on the black and Coloured army recruits of the UDF. However, the education of blacks in the Air Force and coastal units was exceptionally effective and successful. When the war came to an end in 1945, most of the demobilised coloured servicemen were better able to fit well into civilian life than their black counterparts. When apartheid came to an end in 1994 amid the democratic election in the country, the processes which led to the creation of the new South African National Defence Force made provision for free participation of South Africans in all activities of the army irrespective of their different gender or race. Today recruits receive training in the navy, air force, information technology, health education, law, military police, adult education and other related army services. The notion of 'professionalism' was eventually realised with the understanding that modern army requires professional people with skills in a variety of services to fulfil the notion of 'war and peace' as expressed by one of the main objectives of the AES practiced during the Second World War.

Acknowledgement

None.

Conflict of Interest

None.

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