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*Wupperthal: listening to the past*

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**This work is dedicated to the community of Wupperthal.**

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## **Abstract**

The community of the Wupperthal Mission Station and its satellite stations, forms the focus of this text. The mission is situated in the Tra-Tra River Valley in the Cederberg Mountains of the Western Cape.

In this text I have sketched a series of vignettes to portray the lives of certain individuals, characters in the community's past and certain events throughout the history of the mission. The work is largely an oral history project, combined with a certain degree of philosophy of history as well as incorporating secondary sources where applicable.

Though post-modern in certain aspects, this work incorporates sound modernist thought and academic practice. It is intended to be accessible to a wide readership, and prove to be entertaining as well as insightful. The scholarly endeavor driving this text is as sincere, as the history is real. It is a journey I encourage the reader to take with an open mind, taking time to savor the richness of the peoples' experiences. It is their quest for legitimacy, a combined search for truth, and my personal adventure.

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## ***Introduction***

*Wild and untaught are terms  
which we alone  
Invent for fashions differing  
from our own.  
For all their customs are by  
Nature wrought,  
But we by art unteach  
what Nature taught.*

John Dryden

## **Introduction**

This text is a journey; a journey into a world that few of us can comprehend. It is a world where poverty and hardship give way to a wealth of understanding. The understanding I speak of is not an intellectual, Westernized perception of the world, but rather a wisdom honed from years spent working the land, watching the seasons change and following the cycle of life and death with a quiet reserve. The people of Wupperthal and the satellite stations that make up the greater community are not politicized in the way we understand the term. Many of them do not put much score in the economic and social processes which govern our daily existence. They are a community who have witnessed many events in South Africa's history, and have themselves undergone political and social changes which South African history has never accommodated. They have existed as a mission community for over one hundred and sixty years, and the events that have shaped their consciousness have been rich in their own right, important in their own way. This text is a record of some of those events, and offers the reader an opportunity to journey to their world, and glimpse the challenges which confront a 'Coloured' rural, mission community in South Africa of today. They have carried with

them a history, passed down from one generation to the next, and it is this history that we go in search of.

This is an oral history project, which does not attempt to offer solutions to unanswered questions about the community's past. Instead, what it offers is a series of vignettes, admittedly compiled by the author, though sketched by the people themselves. The aim of the text is to make a history of Wupperthal as accessible as possible, to as broad a readership as possible. Gone are the days when academics churn out works which target a pre-selected readership, about communities which they have chosen to form the focus of their work. The community is not a pawn; it is not to be sacrificed in the interests of the academic's 'game'. Instead, the community is to be incorporated and involved to the extent that they too can take something away from the experience, and learn from the collective contribution they have made.

The vignettes in this text were selected from a rich source of oral testimonies. Unfortunately only a few have been afforded literary breathing space here. It is my intention that this work will be read and cherished by past, present and future historians alike, and regarded as a springboard for future work along the same lines, or even within the same community.

The chapters follow a rough chronology, but are more an ensemble of thoughts and ideas which, although varied in opinion and rhythm and tone, merge as a body of work which conveys a single, collective voice, the voice of the people about whom it is written. The people of Wupperthal are a community, and their shared experiences and personal endeavors are indelibly linked, as will become apparent as the reader progresses through the text.

It is my wish that the image this work portrays will add colour and insight where there was none before. That the work might be continued even after the completion of this minor contribution to recovering aspects of a community's past, would prove even more valuable to the canon of history in this country, for it would mean that there is sufficient interest in the lives and experiences of rural communities in the Western Cape, or even other regions of South Africa, which have previously been neglected or marginalised at the expense of what was deemed more 'important' histories. The perception of what constitutes history is changing in this country, and it is refreshing to observe the circle of legitimacy expanding, and making way for a post-modern approach.

This text is post-modern. It may seem daring in its approach, but it is guided by sound reason and scholarly endeavor. There are some controversial issues raised in the work which will hopefully provoke certain observers into positive action.

\* \* \*

***Waging War on Epistemology, Methodology and Ideology  
in the Post-Modern World***

*Trust the tale, and not the teller.*

D.H. Lawrence

**‘Choice of Position’: developing a reflexive methodology.**

Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault are regarded by some to be the fathers of post-modernism. The very mention of their names locates historians on the edge of an abyss at the bottom of which the great monsters of epistemology, methodology and ideology twist and writhe, and threaten to entangle those who attempt to bridge the gaping void in a seemingly endless knot of heads and tails. There are those historians who today stand at various vantage points along this abyss, contemplating the world beyond, or even turning from it, silently awaiting the death of post-modernism. There are others, however, who clamber down its precipitous sides and like the gallant St. George attempt to pacify the ‘beast’.

As any astute tactician might, the historian who grapples with post-modernism must first come to understand the ‘enemy’ and all its machinations. This in itself is highly problematic because post-modernists see nothing as fixed or solid and this in itself jeopardises the sorts of attempts that they make to define what they see themselves as part of, while some commentators (self-described post-modernists notwithstanding) the very existence of the condition.<sup>1</sup> Having sought for meaning in the broader context of post-modernism, and sought for it in vain, the astute tactician must turn to the nerve centres in the enemy camp, namely the councils of war out of which strategies are born and attacks launched. The forefathers of post-modernism were Martin Heidegger and

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<sup>1</sup> Callinicos, A. Against Post-Modernism, Oxford, Polity, 1989

Friederich Nietzsche, whose respective maxims 'Language speaks'<sup>2</sup> and 'So I willed it'<sup>3</sup> epitomise their own individual reappraisals of their positions as they have adjusted to what Jenkins calls 'the wider socio-economic, political and cultural slippages underfoot'.<sup>4</sup> The fathers of post-modernism, namely Foucault and Derrida fought hard, from their own respective positions, within their own discourses, to establish a foundation for their positions. But, like their forefathers they found that no foundations existed, not for themselves or for anyone else: every idol has had feet made of clay.<sup>5</sup> As a result of this process of reappraisal and repositioning, scepticism and more damaging, nihilism, became the dominant, underlying intellectual presuppositions of the post-modern world we know today. Jacques Derrida provided post-modernism with the vocabulary and basic concepts of 'deconstruction': 'the 'aporia' of discourse, the indeterminacy and contrariness of language, the 'fictive' and 'duplicitous' nature of signs and symbols, the dissociation of words from any presumed reality'.<sup>6</sup> Foucault gave to post-modernism new insight into the 'power structure immanent not only in language- the words and ideas that privilege the hegemonic groups in society- but in the very nature of knowledge, which is itself an instrument and product of power'.<sup>7</sup> What the combined effect of these doctrines spells out in terms of the discipline of history, is a complete denial of the fixity of the past. The principle of reality no longer exists in the eyes of the post-modernists, and following swiftly in the wake of the death of reality comes the death of any objective truth about the past. As Gertrude Himmelfarb points out:

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<sup>2</sup> Heidegger, Martin *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter, New York, 1971

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in Jenkins, Keith *Re-thinking History*, Routledge, London, 1992

<sup>4</sup> Jenkins, p. 64

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, p. 64

<sup>6</sup> Himmelfarb, Gertrude *On Looking into the Abyss*, Vintage, New York, 1994, p. 132

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, p. 132

‘Postmodernist history...recognises no reality principle, only the pleasure principle – history at the pleasure of the historian.’<sup>8</sup>

The gallant historian now glances over his/her shoulder at the *terra firma* s/he relinquished in order to do battle with the epistemological, methodological and ideological, and is perhaps drawn to the relative sanctity of modernist history which, although relativistic has its relativism firmly rooted in reality. Modernist historians are sceptical of absolute truth, but not of partial truths, and they certainly don't deny the reality of the past itself. As Felipe Fernandez-Armesto eloquently asserts in his book entitled Truth:

*Historians today are the priests of a cult of truth, called to the service of a god whose existence they are doomed to doubt. While colleagues in other disciplines abandon ancient faiths, dethroning truth from their altars in favour of new gods, some historians, at least, remain amidst the ruins, like guardians of a pagan temple during the decline and fall of Rome. The barbarians at the gates include philosophical sceptics, scientific re-evaluators of criteria of evidence: all the vandals and victims of the doctrine that objectivity is an illusion.*<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Himmelfarb, p. 133

<sup>9</sup> Fernandez-Armesto, Felipe Truth, Black Swan, London, 1998, pp. 161-162

The absolutistic relativism of post-modernism is the very thing that post-modernists celebrate<sup>10</sup> most. Modernists, aware of the deficiencies of most historical records, and the fallibility and subjectivity of historians and the selectivity they exercise in their writing, still attempt to attain as much objectivity and unbiased truth as possible through the strict adherence to an ideological structure and methodology which constitute the 'discipline' they call history. Post-modernists on the other hand 'take the rejection of absolute truth as a deliverance from all truth and from the obligation to maintain any degree of objectivity.'<sup>11</sup> As Gertrude Himmelfarb expounds further:

*This is the twofold agenda of postmodernism: to free history from the shackles of an authoritarian ideology, and to release it from the constraints of a delusive methodology. The ultimate aim is even more ambitious: to liberate us all from the coercive ideas of truth and reality.*<sup>12</sup>

Himmelfarb's views are extreme, as might be expected from a defendant of a minority group of elite political historians. However, it is important to have critics who challenge the bounds of perceived progress, and in doing so expose dangerous new territory into which we can advance, or from which we might ultimately recoil. This body of work, for example, is certainly post-modern to a large degree, and the ensuing discussion on epistemology, methodology and ideology is crucial if the reader is to begin to locate the work, and appreciate what it is trying to achieve. Foucault, Derrida, Nietzsche and even

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<sup>10</sup> Himmelfarb, p. 137

<sup>11</sup> Himmelfarb, p. 137

<sup>12</sup> Himmelfarb, p. 137

Himmelfarb raise interesting and challenging issues with which the present day historian needs to address. The expanse of their visions and sheer audacity of their claims, provides a broader scope in which all texts can begin to locate, or re-locate themselves in the face of a changing historiography. As Richard Evans notes:

*Declarations by eminent historians discussing the history of the great majority of human beings in the past as trivial, meaningless or impossible to study are legion.*<sup>13</sup>

This text is an attempt to subvert the canon of elite political history which Himmelfarb so vehemently defends, and to advocate a means of studying and writing history in a way that makes meaning of a small community which is a component of the vast majority Richard Evans is referring to above, and will hopefully promote similar efforts in the future. So let us join our adventurer once again, armed, as it were, with a sense of broadening scopes, and that there are problematic yet pertinent issues emerging out of the melting pot of epistemology, methodology and ideology.

As drawn to the seemingly more tangible and well cemented ideology and methodology of modernism as our gallant historian might be in the face of the ethereal<sup>14</sup> nature of post-modernism, the intrepid adventurer pauses to locate ‘the self’ in this landscape of knotted vines and dead ends. It is in this interregnum, in this absence of an overtly alluring doctrine that our hero begins to question the importance of the historian

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<sup>13</sup> Evans, R. *In Defence of History*, Granta, London, 1997, p.162

<sup>14</sup> Himmelfarb quotes Terry Eagleton, a Marxist and New Historicist, author of *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, Minneapolis, 1983, p. 145: ‘(Post-modernism’s) rejection of modernity...provides no grounds for resistance. “Since it commits you to affirming nothing, it is as injurious as blank ammunition.”’.

as 'self', and introspectively begins to position his/her thoughts and formulate an ideology in an effort to nullify the helplessness s/he is feeling.

The world we live in today can only be described as post-modern, yet very few historians are willing to run 'historically' with the consequences of post-modernism. Jenkins argues that if historians were willing to embrace this new trajectory of democratising, sceptical/ironic social formations then a space exists 'for the desirable outcome of as many people(s) as possible to make their own histories such that they can have real effects in the world'.<sup>15</sup> Our hero may well ask the question: 'Why do some critics view post-modernist history as being of little importance to the profession at large, while others regard it as being the 'orthodoxy of today'<sup>16</sup>? Why does this polarity exist. Himmelfarb explains the appeal that post-modernism has, especially among the younger, brighter historians who cannot resist pioneering the new landscape of history, especially when it has been sanctioned by some of the most respected minds in the discipline:

*How can they resist the appeal to be on the "cutting edge" of their profession, when it carries with it not only the promise of advancement but the allure of creativity, imagination and inventiveness? And not only creativity but liberation from the tedium and rigor of the old "discipline" of history?<sup>17</sup>*

The *tedium and rigor of the old "discipline"* that Gertrude Himmelfarb is referring to is the prescribed methodology of modernist history intrinsic in the canon of evidence, and

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<sup>15</sup> Jenkins, pp. 67-68

<sup>16</sup> Grossman, Lionel Between History and Literature, Cambridge, Mass., 1990: Quoted in Himmelfarb, p.156

<sup>17</sup> Himmelfarb, p. 156

*which has stood its ground in the face of attacks from some of the older 'new histories'*<sup>18</sup>.

Post-modernism, however, regards this methodology as arbitrary and privileged. This methodological liberation which threatens to rob history of the very structures and practices that make it such an exacting discipline, assigns any historical work to the realm of the aesthetic, where montage and pastiche are the styles adopted by an artist whose absolutist relativist view of the world has forced him/her to abandon any concept of truth and reality. To be on the cutting edge is exciting and very appealing to a young mind that is trying to carve out a niche in a discipline that has arguably been rooted in and dominated by an authoritarian, patriarchal and privileged ideology. In fact it may well be the exuberance of youth and 'desire to challenge' which drove our hero over the precipice and into the abyss in an attempt to find 'a way through'. The old style romanticism of self-sacrifice which is inherent in modernist history, in which the historian has to constantly suppress his/her own personality, exercise mammoth self-restraint, in an effort to 'give life to generations long dead'<sup>19</sup>, has fallen away to the 'new'. In the post-modernist view, the romance is the liberation and democratisation that culminates in the decay of truth and reality.

There are those historians who quite simply feel that post-modernism is nothing more than a phase – a cause being championed by a bored and fickle academia.<sup>20</sup> These are the historians that stand on the edge of the abyss at various vantage points and silently await the death of post-modernism. They are the *guardians* of Fernandez-Armesto's *pagan temple*. They watch as the few who form the vanguard of post-

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<sup>18</sup> New Histories would include Social History, 'History from Below', Gay History, Women's History, Cultural History, Microhistory. See Evans, R. *In Defence of History*, p. 163

<sup>19</sup> Himmelfarb, p. 13

modernist history pour over the landscape of the past and the present: some are struck down by modernist rhetoric, others may well be run through by a newer mode of history, while others still lose sight of their cause and stray. The custodians of the 'old' have witnessed the death of philosophical, literary modes and phases, the death of the social histories and of existentialism, and they look beyond the abyss for the coming of a *counter-revolution which will lead to the restoration of an older mode of history*<sup>21</sup>. The historian as 'self' in the milieu of post-modernism and the evolution of history is required to recognise a pleasure principle and identify those aspects of 'doing history' that excite him/her most. As mentioned earlier in this text post-modernism recognises the pleasure principle – history at the pleasure of the historian. Under post-modernism there is an acute denial of the reality principle, it may be more correct to say 'fictional history' at the pleasure of the historian/teller/novelist. In modernism there is a parallel 'pleasure principle' which modernists and their sympathetic observers believe may well attract the next wave of bright, young historians:

*[Modernist history is] [h]ard –but exciting precisely because it is hard. And that excitement may prove a challenge and inspiration for a new generation of historians. It is more exciting to write true history (or as true as we can make it) than fictional history, else historians would choose to be novelists rather than historians; more exciting to try and rise above our interests and prejudices than to indulge them; more*

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<sup>20</sup> Himmelfarb, p. 156

<sup>21</sup> Himmelfarb, p. 157

*exciting to enter the imagination of those remote from us in time and place than to impose our imagination upon them; more exciting to write a coherent narrative while respecting the complexity of historical events than to fragmentize history into disconnected units; more exciting to try and get the facts (without benefit of quotation marks) as right as we can than to deny the very idea of facts; even more exciting to get the footnotes right, if only to show others the visible proof of our labours.<sup>22</sup>*

Assuming that the young historian, our adventurer, is drawn in by the seemingly paradoxical pleasure principles of modernist 'labour', and turns from the possible pleasure, however ethereal, of 'doing' post-modernist history (if indeed we can call it history), how does s/he negate or dissociate him/herself from the notion that 'old' history or modernist history is rooted in an authoritarian, patriarchal ideology? If modernist methodology, and therefore modernist ideology, seem to the serious young historian the most suitable, how does the historian avoid being sucked in to a master-narrative which, as Greil Marcus observes in his book, *The Dustbin of History*, *[ is ] a narrative that cannot be easily interrupted, revised or seized, but can only in certain moments, be replaced<sup>23</sup>*? The answer quite simply lies in the realisation for the young historian (or any historian willing to attempt history in the post-modern world), that the master-narrative is a lie. It is this realisation that allows the historian to weave into the master-narrative the

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<sup>22</sup> Himmelfarb, p. 159

<sup>23</sup> Marcus, Greil *The Dustbin of History*, Picador, London, 1996, p. 27

histories of people who have been previously excluded: *[this insertion will not] change the narrative, but initiate those once excluded into its untruth*<sup>24</sup>. Liberation for the historian from the authoritarian ideology of the past lies in learning the need to question the means to liberation.<sup>25</sup>

This is the very liberation Jenkins alludes to when he proposes the historian adopts a 'reflexive methodology'<sup>26</sup> Jenkins makes use of Roland Barthes's argument that the past can be represented in various ways, adopting various modes of history, some of which are less mystifying than others simply because they overtly draw attention to the process of production adopted.<sup>27</sup> What Jenkins is self admittedly advocating is a complete and radical historicisation of history. The historian today needs to contextualise histories by examining the way in which they have been constructed, the methodology adopted and their content. Only then will s/he be in a position to develop a self-consciously held position, which will undoubtedly align him/her with some previously adopted ideology and reading of the past, and pits him/her against others. This 'taking sides' is inconsequential in the broader context of what is being put forward by the historian: in positioning the reading/interpretation of the past the historian is contextualising the work for those readers and observers who then become cognisant of *a history that is aware of what it is doing*<sup>28</sup>.

Marginalised communities overlooked by the master-narrative of the past, the 'privileged' narrative, are the focus of many historians in a world where 'liberal

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<sup>24</sup> Marcus, p. 27

<sup>25</sup> Marcus, p. 28

<sup>26</sup> Jenkins, p. 69

<sup>27</sup> See Barthes, Roland The Discourse of History

<sup>28</sup> Jenkins, p. 69

democratisation' is a catch phrase and the pursuit of 'history from below' is fashionable and in many ways politically correct. As Marcus explains there are *[e]vents that do not change shape into power, or occur outside the normal circuits in which power is exchanged, outside the normal circuits of legitimacy...such events in certain ways do not make history at all.*<sup>29</sup> The popular ideology of 'history from below' is itself problematic, as Himmelfarb is quick to point out: *History from below may seem...innocent. Yet confronted with the abyss, it is as evasive and delusive as the other [fashionable schools of history]. If it cannot take the measure of greatness, neither can it appreciate the enormity of evil.*<sup>30</sup> What Himmelfarb is referring to is the tendency of the fashionable histories to deconstruct the major events of the past by portraying them as mere aesthetic constructs of various historians. It is important that the historian wishing to write 'history from below', establishes him/herself positionally, overtly divulging the methodology being adopted for the work, and the basic ideology governing the work. This having been done, the historian is then in a very commanding position from which reference or acknowledgement to the great events and peoples of history can be made without jeopardising the ideological principles underpinning the work or the integrity of the historian who is attempting to break free of the authoritarian master-narrative.

Another criticism levelled at 'history from below' is that ultimately it becomes an exercise in condescension, because the people with whom the historian is trying to empathise are denied any connection with a universal consciousness *over and above the ordinary concerns of their daily lives*<sup>31</sup>. Jenkins would probably argue, however, that the

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<sup>29</sup> Marcus, p. 37

<sup>30</sup> Himmelfarb, p. 18

<sup>31</sup> Himmelfarb, p. 39

historian, by adopting a reflexive methodology intrinsically introduces the people/subjects of the history into a universal consciousness: the history is aware of what it is doing and is thus locating itself in a broader context of historicism, thereby facilitating the insertion into the master-narrative by a previously excluded group. By the very nature of this reflexive approach, the marginalised group is connected with a universal consciousness and their daily existence is suddenly located and positioned in the canon of history.

Jenkins regards the most desirable approach to history in the post-modern world as an approach *designed to develop a democratising critical intelligence laced with irony*.<sup>32</sup> Jenkins outlines two criteria for meeting this approach: firstly, to adopt a critically reflexive methodology, and secondly, to select content appropriate for this practice.<sup>33</sup> It is this selection of content that will form the focus of the second part of this text.

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<sup>32</sup> Jenkins, pp. 68-69

<sup>33</sup> Jenkins, p. 70

*In the post-modern world, then, arguably the content and context of history should be a generous series of methodologically reflexive studies of the makings of the histories of post-modernity itself.*

Keith Jenkins

### **Wupperthal: thoughts on doing oral history in a post-modern world.**

One of the great challenges facing historians in South Africa today is to accommodate and facilitate the insertion of microhistories in the canon of South African history. Marginalised communities (marginalised along cultural, and certainly racial lines in the past) are now beginning to find representation in the various historical narratives that are emerging, many of which are microhistories. Alf Wannenburg's Forgotten Frontiersmen<sup>34</sup> is an example of an early attempt to introduce obscure and marginalised characters into the master-narrative of South African. Unfortunately what relegates this charming compilation of historical narratives to the realm of historical fiction is the distinct absence of references and acknowledgement of source material. Post-modernist? Well, maybe, but not consciously so. Though a useful springboard from which to launch into the investigation of the lives of some of the more obscure characters of South African (and particularly Cape history), the book offers little more else to the canon. The recently released publication Rogues, Rebels and Runaways: Eighteenth Century Cape Characters<sup>35</sup> by Nigel Penn, is an example of a collection of historical narratives which

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<sup>34</sup> Wannenburg, Alf Forgotten Frontiersmen, Howard Timmings, Cape Town

<sup>35</sup> Penn, Nigel Rogues, Rebels and Runaways: Eighteenth Century Cape Characters, David Philip, Cape Town, 1999

bring into the circles of legitimacy a range of Cape characters who could well have *remained buried in footnotes and obscure archival documents had it not been for Penn's attempts to subvert the canon. The authoritarian voice of the past narratives falls silent* and the historical narrative of Penn's work echoes with the voices of those marginalised *characters in a democratising narrative that is laced with irony. The microhistory incorporates a degree of reflexive methodology and introspective questioning which the author is obliged to reveal to his/her audience before exposing the silenced voices. Penn is the first to admit that although historical narrative may approach the truth it is not, of course, the truth.*<sup>36</sup> Penn's reflexive methodology is reflected in the following comment on narrative:

*Narrative is, indeed, an essential and defining element of history writing and I make no apologies for trying to make stories out of the evidence I have consulted. The fact that these stories are imaginative creations whose meaning emerges from the way in which they have been constructed should not lead readers to the extreme postmodernist conclusion that history is just another form of fiction.*<sup>37</sup>

There is an ever-growing concern among historians to strengthen the explanatory side of their work. A lot of the explanatory aspect of the work has to do with the application of theory, reflecting an ideology; but, of even greater concern is the location and evaluation

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<sup>36</sup> Penn, p.5

<sup>37</sup> Penn, p. 5

of sources.<sup>38</sup> On reading Rogues, Rebels and Runaways, the reader is struck by the marked violence which characterised 18<sup>th</sup>-century Cape society. Penn, once again adopting a reflexive mode, asserts that *one might argue that this impression of violence is an exaggerated one, propagated by the specific nature of the sources consulted*<sup>39</sup> (namely the court records of the V.O.C. ). But the narrative style Penn adopted for the text does not lend itself to an overt portrayal of violence in Cape society *per se*, instead all the available evidence confirmed that the 18<sup>th</sup>-century Cape was indeed a violent society. It is only recently that historians are beginning to acknowledge the use of 'other' sources that break away from the conventional Rankean mould of acceptable source material, and evaluating these new sources through sceptical, reflexive methodological approaches to their work. One such 'other' source is oral sources. Both categories of oral sources, namely 'oral history' and 'oral tradition', are still located outside the mainstream of the historical profession, even though Tosh points out that:

*[O]ral sources of both kinds provided the bulk of the evidence used by those who are now looked back to as the first historians – Herodotus and Thucydides. The chroniclers and historians of the Middle Ages were hardly less dependent on oral testimony; and although written sources grew rapidly in importance from the Renaissance onwards, the older techniques still survived as a valued adjunct to documentary research. It was only with the emergence of modern academic*

<sup>38</sup> Tosh, John The Pursuit of History, Longman, London, 1991

<sup>39</sup> Penn, p. 7

*history in the nineteenth century that the use of oral sources was entirely abandoned.<sup>40</sup>*

‘Oral history’, by which most historians refer to the first-hand recollections of people (their oral reminiscences) interviewed by an historian<sup>41</sup>, is slowly enlarging the scope of social history. Particularly in industrialised countries around the world, oral history has given social history a human face<sup>42</sup>. In underdeveloped countries or the newly termed ‘developing’ countries of the world, oral history is proving to be a valuable means of constructing social histories, especially of marginalised communities/ ethnic groups. In South Africa where the suppression of cultures and ethnic groups has scarred our political and social past, there exist communities that remain outside the historical master-narrative of this country. The essential corrective voice of the marginalised and suppressed is to a large extent unheard. Only through the efforts of a few historians, anthropologists and even archaeologists are these rich communities’ pasts being introduced into the canon that is South African history.

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*Ask any South African school child what happened in eighteenth-century South Africa, what personalities or people existed, or whether they have any mental images of the period at all, and the answer is likely to be a blank.<sup>43</sup>*

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<sup>40</sup> Tosh, p. 207

<sup>41</sup> See Tosh, p. 206

<sup>42</sup> Tosh, p. 211

<sup>43</sup> Penn, p. 2

Trying to fill in this *blank* that Penn mentions, is the great challenge to historians in South Africa today. The challenge requires the historian to break the Rankean mould of enquiry, and shed the authoritarian crust that prevents 'new' histories from permeating the dark, sacred core of blinkered history. How does the historian achieve this? By adopting the approach to history that Jenkins advocates, as outlined earlier in this text: adopt a sceptical, critical reflexive methodology, and the selection of content appropriate for this practice. Selecting content suitable for this practice: therein lies a paradox, for surely any part of the past lends itself this reflexive approach? What Jenkins is actually saying is that although any part of the past will suffice, it would be more beneficial to fledgling historians to produce *a series of histories that helped us to understand the world that we live in and the forms of history that have both helped produce it and which it has produced*<sup>44</sup>. Jenkins would have historians producing histories to understand and locate history in the post-modern world – getting to grips with the phenomenon of postmodernity. In South Africa the experiment is subject to a unique and challenging set of constraints. Firstly, there is the reality that certain sectors of the population are 'privileged', well educated and economically established, while there are developing sectors of the population that lack formal education, where illiteracy is rife and among whom economical development is slow to take root (for what ever reasons). Then of course there is that sector of the population located between the two, whose introduction into the post-modern world is clashing with their efforts to get to grips with the modern world, the footholds of which are fast disappearing in the wake of the post-modern.

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<sup>44</sup> Jenkins, p. 70

These philosophical social structures and paradigms can be debated and manipulated *ad nauseam*, which goes beyond the scope of this text, but the fact remains that trying to adopt an approach to history whereby we gain a greater understanding of the world we live in and the forms of history it has produced (and that have produced it) remains tricky in a society fraught with communities that seem to be in a time warp, and which have circumvented the onslaught of the post-modern. This may sound like a romantic notion of settlements ensconced in bucolic bliss and earthly toil, far from the hungry, industrial, proletarianizing machine of the modern economy, but the truth is not far off that mark. Yet, these communities are very much part of a collective consciousness, especially as historians are beginning to construct their social histories and there is a vast cultural awakening after the enforced slumber during Apartheid. Although this incongruity exists in South Africa in terms of those 'touched' by the post-modern and those not, the fact remains that the media (TV and radio especially) are drawing marginalised, sleepy hamlets into the mainstream, while on the other end of the continuum, those observers (historians, anthropologists, social-workers) who deal with the post-modern on an almost daily basis, are conscious of the ever decreasing void and that in itself forms part of their collective consciousness that effects their view of the post-modern world.

A way for historians in South Africa to embrace the challenge of representing the history of marginalised, or previously marginalised communities in a way that reflects the post-modern world and contributes to our understanding of all that shaped it, is to adopt a very inter-textual approach. This way the historian is able to adapt to the specific parameters, constraints and idiosyncrasies specific to a particular social history and its subjects. An inter-textual approach allows the historian access to all manner of evidence

from the 'conventional' to the obscure, and this serves to not only broaden the historian's knowledge of the community and its surroundings, but adds to the finished work a texture and richness that may well have been missed. The aesthetic of the work is important, as is the pleasure principle, and the historian can accommodate both by opening up the field of enquiry and going beyond the mundane and dry evidence traditionally looked for. Provided the need for the historian to unveil the methodology and ideology governing the process is observed at all times, the flirtation with the obscure and probing into new areas for their potential source value are easily accommodated.

### **Wupperthal.**

The peaceful mission community of Wupperthal in the heart of the Cederberg mountains in the Western Cape will form the focus of the last section of this text. Wupperthal is the nerve centre of a mission community that is spread out over a considerable distance, tucked away in satellite stations from Langkloof in the South to Heuningvlei in the North. The community is presently undergoing complex social changes and restructuring, largely due to the advent of modernist thinking and even post-modern pop-art culture which is either introduced via the media or by outsiders from the cities. Oral history research conducted in and around Wupperthal has already highlighted some of these changes and the dichotomy that is emerging between the older generations and their perceptions of the world, and that of the younger (and I hesitate to say 'enlightened') generations that are pursuing a new lifestyle.

The greatest threat is that in the changing milieu of the mission society the past might well fade from a consciousness that is beginning to focus on what lies ahead. The proud oral tradition of the community may well give way to literature and writing, and basic conversation may fall silent in the wake of TV and radio. Father Time is the oral historian's greatest adversary. While the advance of Time assigns many lives and stories to the dustbin of history, and jeopardises the validity of the reminiscences, the historian feverishly tries to rescue the past to comment on the present. What makes the task even more challenging for the oral historian is the fact that s/he can never gather enough oral testimonies, and the question of selection is brought into play. But whatever the criteria used to select the interviewees, and the interpretative process employed, post-interview, it is largely dictated by the ideology of the historian/author guided by an intrinsic bias. The intricacies of the methodology of oral history and the arguments for and against the process are important, but fall outside the scope of this text. The primary concern is for the oral historian to overtly state the intention behind his/her work, and to reveal the methodologies employed. Obviously in the process, the merits or demerits of the methodologies should also be identified. By contextualising the work in this way the history assumes a position, a ground point in the multi-layered, complex canon of South African history.

There are specific reasons why oral history, as a methodology, is suited to social history research in the Wupperthal area. In a community like Wupperthal (by which I am referring to the greater community, i.e. those people living at the satellite stations too), the importance of language as an integral part of a collective group consciousness and group identity cannot be underestimated. As one resident of Heuningvlei pointed out:

[It is] the love for the unique way of using your Afrikaans language –you never hear a word of English around here... That I speak English today is quite an exception... So your language is also a strong tie.<sup>45</sup>

There is a distinct vernacular that is very much a part of the Wuppertal consciousness, and there is a proud oral tradition in the community that has its roots in the daily experiences of a rural people whose basic means of preserving a group identity and group consciousness was through the spoken word; orality. In his classic rebuttal of criticism levelled against the use of oral history in the 1960s, Alessandro Portelli observed:

*[O]ur awe of writing has distorted our perception of language and communication to the point where we no longer understand orality or the nature of the writing itself.<sup>46</sup>*

Portelli also noted:

*The tone and volume range and the rhythm of popular speech carry implicit meaning and social connotations which are not reproducible in writing- unless, and then in inadequate and hardly accessible form, a musical notation.<sup>47</sup>*

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<sup>45</sup> Interview with Mr Tom Abrahams, Heuningvei, 27 Sept. 1998 (Permission to use Mr Abrahams' name has been obtained)

<sup>46</sup> Portelli, Alessandro "What Makes Oral History Different" in Perks and Thomson (eds) *The Oral History Reader*, Routledge, London, 1998, p. 64

<sup>47</sup> Portelli, p. 65

Certainly the arrival of the Rhenish missionaries from Germany did much to further the use of writing in the community, but only on a very basic level. The richness of their existence, the daily grind of their bucolic lifestyle was and is captured in the spoken word, whereby stories and events are told and retold in a vernacular that is even today indefatigable, and born out of the material culture of the people. It is also worth noting that the education the inhabitants received at the hands of the Rhenish missionaries was Euro-centric and rooted in an authoritative body's perception of what constituted a 'suitable education', whereas the oral tradition preserved by the community remained recalcitrant and largely theirs. To be able to capture this vernacular on tape is in essence to capture in the rhythms and tones of the voices the individual's reactions to certain events and experiences. The recording of oral history enables the researcher to glean an understanding of the individual and collective mindset of a community in response to a certain event, depending of course on the type of interviewing system being used.

Of vital significance to the history of Wupperthal is the impact the physical environment had on shaping group consciousness over the years. As Megan Anderson points out in her thesis entitled "Elandskloof: Land, Labour and Dutch Reformed Mission Activity in the Southern Cederberg, 1860-1963", *the distance of each mission from the colonial centre and the nature of its environment enabled the landscape to resist, for some time, the imposition of colonial hegemony*<sup>48</sup>. It would be a grave mistake for any historian conducting social history research in Wupperthal to ignore the importance of the environment. The daily existence of the community and the tasks the individuals performed from one day to the next were and are largely dictated by the

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<sup>48</sup> Anderson, Megan "Land, Labour and Dutch Reformed Mission Activity in the Southern Cederberg, 1860-1963", BA Hons, Thesis, UCT, 1994, P. 98

nature of their environment (particularly their physical environment). The ability of the community and the landscape to resist the hegemony of the colonial government and even later, the Nationalist government, meant that they developed at their own pace in a manner which was not confined to the dictates of a collective consciousness being perpetuated in the world outside of Wupperthal.

The world of the Wupperthalers is one given to appreciation of the aesthetics of human existence. Theirs is not a world of Shakespeare and Conrad, or even of Boerneef and Leipoldt; theirs is a world of oral delight. Certainly education and the meagre portion of literature it dished up has its place and shouldn't be excluded from their consciousness. Far from it. But it is essential to stress those aspects of their existence which assume the pole positions. By the very nature of the doctrines and celestial claims on which the community was founded, and which the religious leaders continue to propound, Wupperthalers have cast the foundation of their collective consciousness on the basis of a myth. In the same way that they have been incorporating the celestial mysteries and myths into their consciousness for over one hundred and sixty years, so too have the ethereal truths of their secular awareness been incorporated. The rhythms of the land, the change of the seasons, the affinity the people feel for the odd shaped rocks and even the transmudane relationship they have with their stock, all these elements are very much a part of their existence although an outsider may ignore them, either through sheer ignorance or because s/he have assigned them to the realm of the insignificant and unintelligible. But it is in identifying these obscure components and facets of a communities collective consciousness, and teasing them out through oral history research that the historian soon realises (as do other observers) that what was previously deemed

obscure and insignificant is actually very relevant if we are to attempt to give the past a voice and contribute to our understanding of the past and its multi-layered truths.

In a post-modern world the historian can afford to adopt an inter-textual approach to social history whereby the very things held sacred to a community, be they art, music, story-telling, the manufacturing of goods, farming, religion, or a combination of these, are identified and acknowledged and the historian presents the methodology and ideology governing the his/her work to the reader(s), prior to the exposition. In this way the historian becomes an artist, painting a picture of the past through a series of vignettes, able to transcend the parameters of 'normal'/'conventional' history and incorporate other disciplines in such a way that they add to the texture and richness of the work, as well as given it a greater validity. This view may well be contested by the 'old' school of historians who feel that Foucault's 'death of centres' marks the death knell of history unless they cling feverishly to an unreflexive authoritarian mode of doing history which does nothing more than preserve their academic pigeon-hole. Admittedly, this 'roaming' mode of history, which threatens the rebirth of eclecticism and has given rise to a new vernacular with catch words like 'inter-textual' and 'pastiche' is problematic, and needs to be experimented with cautiously, declaring the historians/authors intentions and strategy every inch of the way. In the post-modern world the historian is held accountable by everyone, and rightly so for such is the challenge of the profession at this new level of enquiry and probing. After all, it is the duty of the historians in exposing the histories that the present produces, to expose the histories that have shaped the present, and in this endeavour they walk silently and alone.

*Early Beginnings*

*Man comes to Earth for a brief sojourn, for what purpose  
I do not know, though I sometimes think I sense it.*  
Albert Einstein.

### **Contextual Background.**

The history of the people of Wupperthal and the satellite stations is a complex one. There is not a story that can be told by simply constructing a Rankean-type account of their past by using dredged up archival records and secondary literature, to line by line weave together thin threads of a one sided story. Instead their past must be sketched using the colour of voice and memory, the very agents which have carried a proud past from one generation to the next, and allowed certain events to slip away and become lost forever. It would be an injustice to assign some crusty chronologically based system of analysis to the task, when the swift hand of the vignette artist would prove more adept. The vignettes sketched in this text will depict individuals, groups and events as they really existed and occurred for those people whose lives were shaped by specific instances in history. Besides, it would be impossible to paint a complete history of the collective community as any observer of academic history is aware. As Felipe Fernandez-Armesto observes *the limitations of the sources are felt most acutely by historians interested in silent majorities.*<sup>1</sup> But it is possible to venture into their world, albeit through seemingly obscure avenues, and glean from an array of images and depictions of events, a “feel” for how life must have been at certain junctures in the community’s past. To be able to record the oral testimonies of certain individuals and add to a two dimensional written text, a texture fashioned out of rhythm of voice, tone, the emotional content of words, of humour and laughter, would allow the text to become a multi-

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<sup>1</sup> Felipe Fernandez-Armesto *Truth*, Black Swan, London, 1998, p. 193

layered expression, which adds validity to its claim of being a history of a people. After all, the history of people should reflect the heterogeneity of their existence, and the range of their perceptions. No one story will be the same as the next, therefore, no one history will suffice. It is appropriate to heed the philosophical notion that the *oneness of everything cannot be divided, because the whole of it is present everywhere.*<sup>2</sup> In this sense the vignettes, although seemingly divided in their portrayal of the past, actually encompass the whole of the past without divulging all the details/events/characters. This text alone cannot hope to portray a singularly commanding view of life at Wupperthal at whatever point in the community's history, but it will help in filling the void which exists in terms of the history of marginalised communities as told by those communities. The circles of legitimacy are being challenged and stretched to include new faces in the canon of the history of the people of South Africa. In order to rewrite, the historian must learn to refashion, reshape the 'telling' of the story to give the silent history of this country the literary breathing space it deserves.

This section of the text will provide the reader with a contextual background against which the stories of the interviewees will be aligned. The intention of this chapter is to provide some insight into the emergence of a community at the foot of the Koueberg, where the first members hailed from and, given certain archaeological and historical findings to date, postulate what group identity existed amongst the first members of the mission community.

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<sup>2</sup> Plato Parmenides, Penguin Classics, p. 127

### **The Foundation Stone is laid.**

On the 1<sup>st</sup> of January 1830, the farm of Riedmond at the foot of the Koueberg in the Cederberg Mountains of the Cape Colony was purchased on behalf of the Rhenish Mission Society from Mr Schalk Lubbe for 2000 gilders.<sup>3</sup> On the 4<sup>th</sup> of January, Reverend Johann Gottlieb Leipoldt arrived at Riedmond and renamed the farm Wupperthal after the valley of the Wupper River in the Rhineland where the Rhenish Mission Institute at Barmen in Germany is situated. On the 17<sup>th</sup> of January, Reverend Leipoldt inaugurated the first church at Wupperthal, which was a rustic open air place of worship.<sup>4</sup> By August of the same year there were roughly one hundred Khoisan living in the valley around the mission station.<sup>5</sup> Most of the Khoisan lived on the neighbouring farms at Pakhuis, Beukeskraal, Bloemfontein, Heuningvlei and Biedeau. As news of the mission's establishment spread, more Khoisan arrived from further afield, from the Bokkeveld, Roggeveld, Cedar Mountains, Olifants River Valley and the Hantam.

Over time, tracts of land in the fertile valley were earmarked for cultivation, and garden plots were allocated to inhabitants. By the end of 1831, 15 Khoisan had been baptised, and 60 pupils attended school daily. On the 4<sup>th</sup> May 1835 the first church building was inaugurated and in 1836 a shoe industry and tannery were started in an effort to make the community a self sufficient one, and not have to rely on limited funding from the Rhenish Institute in Barmen.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> See Cock, S.B. "Wupperthal: a Historical Sketch, 1830-1979" (BA. Hons Thesis, UCT, 1979)

<sup>4</sup> Cock, S.B. "Wupperthal: a Historical Sketch, 1830-1979" (Honours Thesis, UCT), 1979

<sup>5</sup> Cock, 1979

<sup>6</sup> Cock, 1979

As Cock is quick to point out, it is interesting to note that after the Emancipation of Slaves in 1838 (the slaves having served their four year apprenticeship beginning 1834), the number of the residents in the mission ledgers tallied 163, and only rose by an additional 27 between 1838 and 1840. The words *gewezen slaaf* appears after only a handful of these names.<sup>7</sup> It is therefore safe to assume that the vast majority of the inhabitants of Wupperthal between 1830 and 1840 were in fact Khoisan. The rapid growth in the number of Khoisan inhabitants during the formative years of the mission's history can well be attributed to the effects Ordinance 50 had on the movements of the Khoisan. Ordinance 50 was passed by the British Administration in 1828, stating that Khoisan were free to own land and move around without having to adhere to the restrictive Pass Laws, which were an attempt by the government to prevent farm labourers from casually leaving their employers.<sup>8</sup> The Pass Laws curbed the free-roaming of the Khoisan to a large extent and concentrated labour in certain undesirable areas more fixedly than had been achieved in the past.

Wupperthal is also located in an area that today is recognised as having been more associated with nomadic transhumance pastoralism where *trekboers* tended to employ the skilled Khoisan herdsmen rather than slaves. By comparison, at the Groenkloof Mission in the Swartland (known as Mamre today) the mission register lists 784 residents in 1838, of which the majority were ex-slaves and not Khoisan.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Cock, 1979

<sup>8</sup> Elphick, R. and Malherbe, V.C. "The Khoisan to 1828" in Elphick, R. and Giliomee, H. The Shaping of South African Society, 1652-1840, 1989, p. 20

<sup>9</sup> Ludlow, H. "Groenkloof after the Emancipation of Slaves, 1838-52: Leavers, Soldiers and Rebels" in Bredekamp and Ross(eds) Missions and Christianity in South African History, Johannesburg, 1995

As opposed to the pastoralist lifestyle in the Cederberg, the Swartland was a labour intensive wheat producing region of the Colony, and slaves were deemed more suited to this work.

At this juncture it is appropriate to initiate a discussion on what we mean by the term Khoisan. I have cautiously employed the term in this text, each time placing it in inverted commas to denote the ambiguity surrounding, and inconsistency with which this term for categorising a particular group of people in South African history is often used. There is very little doubt that the earliest inhabitants of the mission station at Wupperthal were in fact Khoisan, but who were the Khoisan? Where did they come from? What process led them to being a seemingly impoverished collective, who sought refuge in the mission environment rather than return to being employed in the agricultural sector? Using certain historical and archaeological evidence available today, historians are beginning to piece together the puzzle that might provide some answers as to where the true roots of 'Coloured' identity lie. Ostensibly this research project is concerned with unveiling a group consciousness and sense of group identity amongst the people of Wupperthal and the satellite stations, and establishing their relation to the generic 'Coloured' consciousness that is evolving in South Africa today. In the following chapter (**Chapter 3**) the role mission stations like Mamre, Elim, Genadendal, Witwater and Wupperthal played in the shaping of this consciousness will be discussed. But, first it is important to establish who the people were that these institutions were appealing to and what influencing factors had brought the Khoisan to the threshold of ruin in order that they willingly adopted a Christian orientated lifestyle under a structured, often rigorously disciplined order.

## The Emergence of the Khoisan.

*You have no eyes for something that took two thousand years to triumph? ... That comes as no surprise: all things whose history stretches out far behind them are difficult to see, to see in their entirety.*

Friedrich Nietzsche

The eighteenth century in the Cape Colony was marked by a period of rapid agrarian expansion, during which semi-nomadic *trekboers* moved their herds further and further North up the West Coast and into the interior. Distinct phases in the expansion of the Northern Frontier of the Cape Colony can be identified and each is marked by a dramatic change in the relationship between the respective parties, namely the *trekboers* (predominantly European, but also including *Bastaards* of mixed descent), the Khoikhoi pastoralists and the smaller, more isolated hunter-gatherer communities of the San People. In an attempt to understand the complex relationships between these three respective parties it is essential to firstly establish the acute cultural identity of each group, secondly the interplay between these groups and the effects thereof. Ultimately the respective cultural identity of the Khoikhoi and the San people was broken down by the *trekboers* and the remnants of these societies came to be regarded as a homogenous group known as the Khoisan.

It is uncertain as to when cattle first arrived in the Cape. Archaeological evidence at Kasteelberg, near Vredenburg on the West Coast, and at Die Kelders at Gansbaai on

the South Coast, suggests that the earliest stock kept by pastoralists were sheep.<sup>10</sup> Agro-pastoral donor groups were obviously quite reluctant to part with their cattle to the Khoikhoi for fear of increased competition for pasture and wives.<sup>11</sup> Cattle were definitely present in the Cape one thousand three hundred years ago. The earliest pastoralists began displacing the existing hunter-gatherer population (known as the San) who, as a result, existed on the periphery of the herding society. Due to the low nutrient status of the south-western Cape veld, the emerging pastoralists or Khoikhoi were forced to adopt a transhumant strategy to ensure their animals were kept well grazed and able to produce milk, which formed the basis of their diet. The hunter-gatherers subsequently fitted into the transhumant cycle of the pastoralists by moving into the area once it had been vacated by the herders. The relationship between these two groups may well have included a degree of clientship in which small stock was given to the San for services rendered either as mercenaries, foragers or assistant herders. This form of clientship already existed further North amongst the San and the agro-pastoralists of the Namaqualand. Andy Smith suggests that the polygamous nature of the agro-pastoralists would have facilitated the incorporation of the hunter-gatherers into Khoikhoi society as low status farmers, but the extent to which this incorporation into a clearly defined social structure occurred is not known.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Smith, A.B. "The Origins and Demise of the Khoikhoi: The Debate" in The South African Historical Journal 23 (1990), p. 10

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, p. 11

<sup>12</sup> Smith, "The Origins and Demise of the Khoikhoi: The Debate", p. 11

In another article however, Smith goes so far as to say that at the time of the arrival of Europeans at the Cape, a class structure was being formed between the Khoikhoi and the San communities, but was still at its incipient stage.<sup>13</sup>

Certain historians have raised questions about the heterogeneity of the hunters and herders, and argue that hunters and herders should be regarded as a single entity.

Excavations at Kasteelberg strongly suggest a pastoralist mode of existence due to the large number of domestic livestock bones found relative to the distinct lack of formal stone tools unearthed. Yet, just twelve kilometres south, at the Witklip site, formal stone tools were found in abundance with no domestic stock, just hunted animal remains.<sup>14</sup>

This evidence strongly suggests that hunter-gatherer societies existed in parallel with the pastoralist societies at the Cape. Certain historical sources also support the notion that a separate cultural identity existed between the two groups known as the *Hottentots* (the Khoikhoi/Khoikhoi) and the *Sonqua/Soaqua* (the San), and that there was a distinct social hierarchy between the groups. In his diary, Simon Van der Stel describes the *Sonqua* (San) as being similar to the poor in Europe, and comments that each group of Khoikhoi he encountered on his journey to and from Namaqualand, had San scouts who brought news of the advancement of strange tribes in the area.<sup>15</sup>

From her analysis of the indigenous artefacts at the Ouderpost 1 site near Saldanha Bay on the West Coast, where the Dutch established a fort in 1669, Carmel Shrire concluded that they were indistinguishable from the artefacts discovered at

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<sup>13</sup> Smith, A.B. "The Disruption of Khoikhoi Society in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century" African Seminar, Collected Papers, 1983, p. 17

<sup>14</sup> Smith, "The Origins and Demise of the Khoikhoi: The Debate", p. 11

<sup>15</sup> Smith, A.B. "Hunters on the Periphery: The Ideology of Social Hierarchies between Khoikhoi and Soaqua" Kronos, 24 (1997), p. 3

assumed hunter-gatherer sites in the Western Cape, which arguably should have displayed a completely different spread of archaeological evidence.<sup>16</sup> Shrire qualifies the assumption that the Khoikhoi and the San were a single homogenous group by referring to archival evidence, namely letters sent by the postholder at the fort Jacob Titius to the then governor de la Fontaine, in which Titius refers to the indigenous people who trade with or simply frequent the fort as *Hottentots*.<sup>17</sup> Shrire interprets the word *Hottentot* as being a generic term for a homogenous group of herders/foragers who, like their European counterparts, hunted to supplement their diet of milk, and the occasional beef or mutton. However, Shrire's exercise in historical archaeology is inconclusive due to her selective interpretation of limited archival sources, thereby not providing a suitable historical context as a backdrop to the material culture she found.<sup>18</sup> It is not the purpose of this text to further illuminate the merits or shortcomings of Shrire's interpretation of Khoikhoi/San homogeneity, but simply to illustrate the manner in which complex interactions between the Khoikhoi, the San and the Dutch Colonists can be overlooked, or hastily oversimplified. It is only possible to glean an understanding of the complex processes which facilitated the disappearance of the Khoikhoi and San people as separate heterogeneous groups, and the emergence of the more homogenous Khoisan (likened to Shrire's *Hottentots*), by analysing the process of European agro-agrarian expansion and its effects within the social, political and spatial context of the Northern Frontier during the eighteenth century. Five distinct phases of *trekboer* expansion can be identified, although only the first three are pertinent to this text as they illustrate the

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<sup>16</sup> Shrire, C. "Excavating Archives at Ouderpost 1, Cape" in *Social Dynamics* 16 (1), 1990, pp. 11-21

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19

<sup>18</sup> See Penn, N.G. "Excavating Archives at Ouderpost 1, Cape: A Riposte" in *Social Dynamics* 17 (1), 1991

considerable change in attitudes towards the Khoikhoi and the San.<sup>19</sup> In his book *Trek*, P.J. van der Merwe reiterates Penn's notion of the 'phases' of agro-agrarian expansion:

*... ons gaan die territoriale verspreiding van die pioniers bevolking behandel, nie as 'n verloop van gebeurtenisse nie, maar as 'n proses.*<sup>20</sup>

(we are not going to treat the territorial expansion of the pioneers simply as a result of certain events, but rather as a process)

Having established the Khoikhoi and the San as two distinctly heterogeneous groups co-existing in the Cape before the arrival of the Dutch colonists, this text will focus on the aforementioned phases of European and *Bastaard* agro-agrarian expansion and the resultant effects on the indigenous groups.

The principle productive activity of the frontier zone during the eighteenth century was that of pastoral production.<sup>21</sup> The pastoralist societies exploited a spatially dispersed set of resources by moving their herds in transhumant cycles. It is important to understand why so many colonists became *trekboers* in the eighteenth century. There is no doubt that commercial opportunities facilitated the expansion of the *trekboer* community, for the meat requirements of the Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie (hereafter VOC) ran into the region of a quarter of a million pounds of meat a year in the 1720s.<sup>22</sup> But *trekboer* expansion into the interior was also brought about by a considerable lack of investment capital with which to purchase freehold land close to the

<sup>19</sup> Penn, N.G. "Pastoralists and Pastoralism in the Northern Cape Frontier Zone During the Eighteenth Century" in Hall and Smith (eds) *Prehistoric Pastoralism in Southern Africa*, p. 64.

Also see Penn, N.G. "The Northern Cape Frontier Zone, 1700-1815" (Doctoral Thesis), 1995

<sup>20</sup> P.J. van der Merwe *Trek*, Nasionale Pers, Cape Town, 1945, p. 9

<sup>21</sup> Penn, "Pastoralists and Pastoralism...", p. 62

<sup>22</sup> See Ross, R. "The Cape of Good Hope and the World Economy, 1652-1835" in Elphick and Giliomee (eds) *The Shaping of South African Society, 1652-1840*, Maskew Miller, Cape Town, 1989, p. 253.

Cape Town meat market. Pastoralism was an attractive means of subsistence for many of the colonists. *The rapid breeding rate of sheep and cattle meant that herds were in essence self sufficient which ensured the survival of many of the trekboers, especially* considering that nepotism in the meat industry was rife, with a handful of contractors enjoying the monopoly of supply to the VOC.

In order to ensure the efficient grazing of their herds the maligned subsistent pastoralists were forced to adopt transhumant cycles which allowed them to seasonally exploit certain regions in the Colony. It is important to identify the phases of expansion into these specific regions, and analyse the environmental conditions and pressures which may well have influenced the attitudes of the colonists towards the indigenous people of those regions. It is the changing attitudes of the colonists largely in response to the changing environmental conditions and pressure on resources, that dictated their relationships with the Khoikhoi and the San.

### **Phase I:**

The initial phase of European expansion was the movement of *trekboer* parties away from the immediate vicinity of the Cape Peninsula and into the hinterland of the south-western Cape.<sup>23</sup> The Cochoqua were the dominant Khoikhoi group in the area whose access to traditional water resources and grazing were cut off almost immediately. Because the transhumance orbit of the Cochoqua had been affected by *trekboer* expansion, fighting broke out between the two rival groups. The rapid expansion of the colonists into the Land of Waveren (the Tulbagh Valley basin) during 1700 was

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<sup>23</sup> Penn, "Pastoralists and Pastoralism...", p. 64

accompanied by numerous reports that farmers along the entire Northern Frontier were suffering huge stock losses at the hands of 'Bushmen' raiders<sup>24</sup>

As Elphick and Malherbe point out the cattle thieves were not Bushmen (San), but were in fact Khoikhoi who had lost their stock as a result of colonist raids, and the blatant abuse of bartering rights granted to the *freeburghers* (free citizens) by the VOC from 1700 to October 1702, and again in July 1704.<sup>25</sup> By 1703 the attacks on colonists had been mostly contained, and the destitute Chocoqua became thieves and bandits, living in the mountainous regions of the south-western Cape interior, preying on the stock of the colonial and other Khoikhoi pastoralists, as well as adopting a hunter-gatherer type existence resembling that of the more adept San.

Mention should also be made of the San, who were also affected by the first phase of colonist expansion. In the same way that the Cochoqua adopted a transhumance orbit to exploit seasonal resources, the game of the region adopted similar migratory patterns to exploit the good grazing and availability of water in specific regions at specific times of the year. As a result, the San were forced to adopt a seasonal migratory hunting cycle as they tracked the game year round.<sup>26</sup> As soon as the *trekboers* fell into the pattern of transhumance orbits, they began hunting in the same areas as the San, exploiting the seasonal mobility of the game in the region. This competition for food, only experienced on a very minor scale by the San prior to the *trekboer* onslaught, placed San communities in a very precarious position in terms of their future survival. As the region became over hunted, and the game was shot out, the San were left with very few options: (1) They

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<sup>24</sup> Elphick, R. and Malherbe, V.C. "The Khoisan to 1828" in Elphick and Giliomee (eds) The Shaping of South African Society, 1652-1840, 1989, p. 20

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, p. 21

<sup>26</sup> Penn, N.G. "Fated to Perish: the Destruction of the Cape San" , p. 83

could either move further north, into the harsher mountainous regions of the Bokkeveld, or even the Roggeveld, or (2) they could offer their services to the struggling Khoikhoi communities as herders and mercenaries, or (3) they could resort to thievery and banditry, which is what many did. Commandos were formed in an effort to curb stock theft and banditry in troublesome areas, but it was not until 1715 that the first purely civilian commando was formed, although it still relied on the VOC for ammunition and regulations.<sup>27</sup> However, this marked a significant development between the *trekboers* and the two indigenous groups. The commando system became a symbol of *trekboer* self sufficiency and would play a major role in the demise of the San later on.

## **Phase II:**

The second phase of *trekboer* expansion was also marked by conflict from the start.<sup>28</sup> In about 1712, the *trekboer* communities started moving across the Berg River and entered the low nutrient status region between the Berg and the Olifants River. The European pastoralist proceeded to seize watering holes, springs and vleis, once again depriving the Khoikhoi pastoralists of access to vital resources. However, it is interesting to note that at this stage of their expansion, the *trekboer* communities were becoming more scattered. This resulted in a need for more labour; their territories were growing in size as were their herds. The Khoikhoi on the other hand, were experiencing fighting amongst themselves as the competition for ever diminishing resources intensified. The result was that some of the Khoikhoi communities turned to the European pastoralists for help, with the knowledge that siding with the *trekboers* who had

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<sup>27</sup> Elphick and Malherbe "The Khoisan to 1828", 1989, p. 25

<sup>28</sup> Penn, "Pastoralists and Pastoralism...", p. 64

firearms, greatly improved their chances of survival. The relationship that was struck up between these pocket groups proved to be a symbiotic one, in that the *trekboers* also benefited from the knowledge and experience the Khoikhoi pastoralists brought to their camps. It can be safely assumed that the Khoikhoi were responsible to a large degree for the successful way in which the *trekboers* orbited in the region, exploiting the resources made visible to them by their Khoikhoi 'allies'.<sup>29</sup> This symbiosis prevailed to the detriment of those Khoikhoi who had no European allies, and to the detriment of the San who were often the subjects of commando raids who attacked them as reprisal for stock loss/theft. To add to the problems of the rapidly changing political conditions in the region, a smallpox epidemic swept through the Colony in 1713.<sup>30</sup> The Khoikhoi had no immunity to the disease whatsoever, and were the worst affected; it is estimated that one in every ten Khoikhoi survived. The epidemic spread as far north as the Tswana people over the Orange River, and then back to Little Nama people in about 1720.<sup>31</sup> Scab and other stock diseases affected the herds in the Colony from about 1714, and the Khoikhoi who were suffering under *trekboer* raids, suffered even further losses. The situation for some became too desperate, and they were forced to become *trekboer* dependants. The situation on the West Coast and in the Olifants River region prevailed until 1739 when eventually there was a large scale Khoikhoi uprising.<sup>32</sup> In 1738 an illegal raiding party comprising of renegade *freeburghers*, bolstered by Khoikhoi allies, headed north on a raiding party. Their victims were the Great Nama and Little Nama people. On their

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<sup>29</sup> See Penn, N.G. "Labour, Land and Livestock in the Western Cape during the Eighteenth Century: The Khoisan and the Colonists" in James, W. and Simons, M. (eds) The Angry Divide: social and economic History of the Western Cape, 1989

<sup>30</sup> Elphick and Malherbe "The Khoisan to 1828", p. 21

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, p. 22

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*, p. 26

return, the *trekboers* were not forthcoming with the pre-arranged share of the spoils, and were subsequently attacked by their Khoikhoi 'allies'. More Khoikhoi joined the uprising, attacking *trekboers*, seizing cattle, guns and ammunition. The Khoikhoi also saw the uprising as an opportunity to regain the land they had lost in the Sandveld. San swelled the ranks of the Khoikhoi rebels, but it would be incorrect to call the uprising a 'Khoisan uprising'. The war was in fact called the 'Bushmen War', although the majority of the rebels were Khoikhoi. The fact that the uprising and ensuing conflict was referred to as the 'Bushmen War' is testimony to the fact that to some European observers the Khoikhoi and the San were regarded as an homogenous group. However, even the misnomer 'Bushmen' indicates a base understanding of the lifestyles and cultures of the respective groups, whether they were Cochoqqua, Guriqua, Chainouqua, Hessequa or even Soaqua (San), or any other indigenous group of similar physiological make-up. As Smith points out in his article entitled "*Different Facets of the Crystal: Early European Images of the Khoikhoi at the Cape, South Africa*", the Enlightenment brought new questions about human cultural diversity, and the Khoikhoi were placed on the lowest level of humanity.<sup>33</sup> Smith also makes the comment: *it can be clearly seen that Khoikhoi names (both groups and individuals) are prevalent before 1711, but diminish markedly after this time, being replaced with the generalized name 'Hottentot'*.<sup>34</sup> So, that European observers would umbrella all surviving indigenous people under the term 'Bushmen' is not an unreasonable assumption.

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<sup>33</sup> Smith, A. "Different Facets of the Crystal: Early European Images of the Khoikhoi at the Cape, South Africa" in South African Archaeological Society Goodwin Series 7, pp. 8-20, 1993: p. 16

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, p. 17

The 'Bushmen War' of 1739 was to have devastating effects on the already tenuous position of the Khoikhoi and San. As Elphick comments:

*The 'Bushmen War' of 1739 was a turning point in the evolution of the commando. Freeburghers in threatened areas were for the first time made subject to compulsory commando service, though they were free to bring their Khoisan dependants along.*<sup>35</sup>

Just prior to the 'Bushmen War', a *burgher* revolt in the north-west of the Colony broke out, headed up by Etienne Barbier<sup>36</sup>, and the VOC, eager to placate the disgruntled *freeburghers* offered the rebel *burghers* a reprieve if they joined the commando designed to crush the Khoikhoin. For many who joined, the war was an ideal opportunity to regain stock lost to thieves and disease. Large groups of Khoikhoin and San were simply massacred, and their stock carried off.

It is important to stress that at this point in the history of the Khoikhoi and the San, the two groups are still separately identifiable to each other, if not to European observers, although the lines of difference were fading more rapidly due to the uncompromising situation the two groups found themselves in. More and more the two groups were being thrust together in a bitter struggle for survival, and *trekboers* ceased to distinguish between the Khoikhoin and the San as they would increasingly encounter the two groups together in what ever fighting took place.

### **Phase III:**

After the uprising of 1739 the *trekboers* were in a position to move further into the interior along the eastern escarpment, north and east of the Hantam, Roggeveld and

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<sup>35</sup> Elphick and Malherbe "The Khoisan to 1828", p. 26

Nieuweveld.<sup>37</sup> It is in this region that the fiercest fighting occurred between the *trekboers* and the combined forces of the Khoikhoi and the San.<sup>38</sup> By this point the Khoikhoi and San were left with no other alternative but to resist. Beyond the Roggeveld lay the great Karoo and Bushmanland where there was no water to sustain life; beyond the Nieuweveld, lay the Xhosa people in the east; and the Sotho-Tswana tribes were located across the Orange River to the north. In essence there was no other suitable area where the Khoikhoi could flee to which would support their transhumance cycles of pastoral migration. From the plentiful springs along the escarpment, the Khoikhoi and the San were able to exploit the spring vegetation and hunting grounds of the Onder Karoo, and the summer grazing north of the Sak River. Their survival depended on them retaining access to the escarpment springs, hence the fierce resistance to the *trekboer* onslaught.

It is interesting to note that the land of the escarpment and the Roggeveld underwent a dramatic environmental change, and deteriorated quite considerably between 1740 and 1800. Acock's map of the vegetation of South Africa in 1400, shows that the vegetation of the interior escarpment was a scrubby mixed grassveld type.<sup>39</sup> Today it forms part of the Karoo biome, and is totally unsuitable for cattle pastoralism, but sheep still graze this seeming wasteland. The deterioration was prevalent during the *trekboer* expansion into the area, and as a result many of the pastoralists had to negotiate the delicate environmental conditions by having two farms: one in the Roggeveld, and a

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<sup>36</sup> See Penn, N.G. "Etienne Barbier: An Eighteenth Century Cape Social Bandit?" in *Social Dynamics*, 14 (1) pp. 1-19, 1988

<sup>37</sup> Penn, "Pastoralists and Pastoralism...", p. 65

<sup>38</sup> See Penn, N.G. "Anarchy and Authority in the Koue Bokkeveld, 1739-1779: The Banishing of Carel Buijtendag" in *KLEIO*, 17, 1985

<sup>39</sup> Acocks, J.P.H. "Veld Types of South Africa". *Memoir of the Botanical Survey of South Africa* 40, 1975 cited in Penn, N.G. "Pastoralists and Pastoralism in the Northern Cape Frontier Zone during the Eighteenth Century", p. 65

*legplaats* in the Onder Karoo where they could shelter stock during the harsh winters. In the summer months the *trekboers* would move out of the Onder Karoo and seek the summer-rainfall pastures in the Great Karoo and north of the Sak River.

In understanding the delicate balance that prevailed in the area, and the environmental constraints placed on the more fortunate *trekboers*, it is possible to understand the degree of pressure the already desperate Khoikhoi and San were under in terms of trying to carve out an existence in an inhospitable region, undergoing environmental degradation and already being exploited to the full.

By 1770 the Khoikhoi who had not been forced beyond the Sneeuberge or found refuge with various San groups, had been incorporated into *trekboer* society as cheap labour. The *trekboers* valued their expertise as cattle hands, and offered to pay their dependants with tobacco, brandy, clothes and stock. Very few Khoikhoi were paid a monetary wage. Farmers would, however, withhold their payment of stock to their Khoikhoi labourers in an attempt to keep the Khoikhoi on their land, and prevent them from wandering off and establishing communities or *kraals* of their own and placing even greater strain on the limited amount of resources. The incidence of violence and abuse was high on these isolated *trekboer* farms, and Khoikhoi were flogged, tortured and murdered with alarming regularity.<sup>40</sup> It is important to be aware of the culture of violence which prevailed on the Northern Frontier amongst the *trekboers*, for it is out of this breeding ground for savagery and violence that the 1774 General Commando was born.<sup>41</sup> In a violent three-pronged campaign along the entire frontier, the General Commando

<sup>40</sup> See Penn, N.G. "Anarchy and Authority in the Koue Bokkeveld, 1739-1779: The Banishing of Carel Buijtendag" in KLEIO, 17, 1985

<sup>41</sup> Elphick and Malherbe "The Khoisan to 1828", p. 27 and Penn, "Fated to Perish: the Destruction of the Cape San", pp. 85-86

massacred 503 San and Khoikhoi. The majority of those killed were San, but they had Khoikhoi refugees amongst them; these were the Khoikhoi who had not been incorporated into the labour force. Some Khoikhoi found refuge amongst the *Bastaard-Hottentot* communities in the Pakhuis Pass, Biedeau Valley region of the Bokkeveld and Cederberg area. Between 1786 and 1795 at least a further 2480 San and Khoikhoi were slaughtered by the commandos.<sup>42</sup> The commandos' intentions were twofold: firstly, they wanted to eliminate the San males who were regarded as nothing more than vermin. They had no economic value as far as the *trekboers* were concerned, simply because they lacked the pastoralist skills that the Khoikhoi men had. They were useless as labourers, and problematic thieves as free men, so they were shot. Secondly, the commando desperately wanted to take women and children as hostages to supply the *trekboer* households along the Frontier with cheap labour. Older San men who had been spared, were used as hunters and trackers, supplying meat to the farmer and his family.

It is at this stage of the Khoikhoi and San demise that the distinction between the two groups became almost obsolete. The *trekboers* had referred to the stock owning Khoikhoi as *Hottentoten* and to the hunter-gatherer San as *Boesjesmans*. As the two groups were deprived of their traditional means of subsistence through the violent commando raids, and ensuing *trekboer* expansion, the distinction between their defining activities as either pastoralist or as hunter-gatherer became blurred, and the *trekboers* referred to the remnant groups of Khoikhoi and San as the *Boesjesmans-Hottentoten*.<sup>43</sup> Today the *Boesjesmans-Hottentoten* of the Northern Frontier, the last of the Khoikhoi

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<sup>42</sup> Elphick and Malherbe "The Khoisan to 1828", p. 27

<sup>43</sup> Penn, "Pastoralists and Pastoralism in the Northern Cape Frontier Zone", p. 67

and San who stood against the *trekboers*, often in suicidal defiance, are referred to as the Khoisan. However, this is not necessarily accurate. It is possible that the descriptive name *Boesjesmans-Hottentoten* was a symptom of a perception that the San were a sub-group of the Khoikhoi (*Hottentoten*). The reason for this misconception may well stem from the fact that in certain regions of the Cape prior to colonial disruption there was a high level of interaction between the San and the Khoikhoi, as pointed out earlier in this chapter. For this reason European's are unlikely to have made accurate distinctions between the two groups, simply because they lacked the linguistic knowledge and would have been unaware of various cultural signifiers. In truth, San continued to live as hunter-gatherers in the relative isolation of Bushmanland from about the 1870s until the 1890s. Today, for example there are San descendants living near Upington in the Northern Cape. (Pippa Skotnes: Outcast Exhibition). The reality of the complex history of the Khoikhoi and the San, and the subsequent emergence of the descriptive category Khoisan into the vocabulary of South African history, is that the Khoisan we refer to are among the forefathers of the 'Coloured' people in South Africa today. This is an important concept to try and grapple, because it is in this ethereal nomenclature that the identity of people like those living in Wupperthal and at the satellite stations in the Cederberg exists. If these people, and others like them are to regain a sense of identity, one which draws them into the circles of legitimacy for the first time in the mistaught history of this country, then it is essential that they are able to grasp their inheritance, and trace with the relative deftness of a seismographic needle the path their ancestors trod on the road to the present. Although the full truth will always elude them, the emphasis must be on accurate and

honest introspection which will bring the community closest to the truth, and thereby cement their notion of group identity.

Although the *trekboers* embarked on two further phases of expansion as portrayed by Nigel Penn in his doctoral thesis entitled *The Northern Cape Frontier Zone, 1700-1815*, namely into Namaqualand and then onto the Orange River settlements of the Nama people, it is the first three phases illuminated in this text that constituted the destruction of the Khoikhoi and San communities of the Cape Colony. It was during this violent and complex interaction between the respective groups that the respective cultural identities of the Khoikhoi and San were challenged, and mistakenly fused into a misconceived category known as the Khoisan. The Khoisan undoubtedly did include certain San people as might be expected given the amount of interaction between the two groups over the centuries. However, the Khoisan in the textbooks of South African history more accurately refer to the amalgamation of the Khoikhoi, *Bastaards* and *Bastaard-Hottentoten*. *Bastaards* were the offspring of European-Khoikhoi miscegenation. They were of course free under Dutch law. The *Bastaard-Hottentoten* were the offspring of Black-Khoikhoi unions, normally between slaves and Khoikhoi.<sup>44</sup> By virtue of their mother's status as a Khoikhoi, *Bastaard-Hottentoten* were not slaves, but colonists complained that these children born on the farms had to be brought up at the farmer's expense, only to desert to another employer later on.<sup>45</sup> Both these mixed groups were so numerous that one observer, a Monsieur le Vaillant, author of Travels into the Interior

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<sup>44</sup> Elphick, R. and Shell, R. "Intergroup Relations: Khoikhoi, settlers, slaves and free-blacks, 1652-1795" in *The Shaping of South African Society, 1652-1840*, p. 202

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*, p. 201

Parts of Africa by Way of the Cape of Good Hope in the Years 1780-1785, estimated in 1781-1782 that they numbered one sixth of the total Khoikhoi population of the colony.<sup>46</sup> European- Khoikhoin relations were not uncommon during the eighteenth century, especially in the north-western region of the territory, where the isolation, and brutish *trekboer* mentality made it very hard for a Khoikhoin women to resist rape or seduction by a white farmer. This is not to say that all unions were entered into under the duress of the Khoikhoin woman, some were undoubtedly rooted in mutual attraction. Wupperthal Mission Station was situated in an area where miscegenation between European and Khoikhoin would have occurred, and as a result the mission was catering for not only the indigenous Khoikhoin, but also the emerging 'Coloured' population, or what we might now correctly call the Khoisan.

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<sup>46</sup> Cited in Elphick and Shell "Intergroup Relations", p. 202

### **Wupperthal Grows:**

By 1855, the demographic breakdown of Wupperthal was 343 'Coloured' inhabitants, and 18 White.<sup>47</sup> Slowly the Rhenish Mission began purchasing surrounding farms in order to provide the inhabitants of the mission with more grazing area for their stock. The low nutrient status of the Cederberg grasses demand that farmers maintain low intensity grazing practices in order to preserve the *veld*. Heuningvlei was one such farm that was purchased from the Ockhuizen family. Today the dominant family tree in Heuningvlei is that of the bastardised Ockhuis clan.

The tract of land known as the Heuningvlei extension was purchased in 1897. Eventually Beukeskraal, Martienserus (formerly known as Moordenaarsgat), Brugkraal, Langkloof, Rietvlei, Agtervlei, Eselbank, Kleinvlei, Heiveld, Suurrug and Koueberg were all incorporated into the mission administered land holdings.

Like other missions in the Western Cape, Wupperthal was affected by the Anglo-Boer War, though it fortunately did not suffer the same fate as Lieliefontein Mission Station did (see Chapter 3). Both Boer and British Columns visited the station requisitioning stock and supplies, and trying to recruit men. By the time peace was declared in 1902, the mission had deteriorated severely due to Boer raids. A strong anti-Boer feeling was fuelled by these raids, and a 'Bastaard Border Scout' regiment used its crown-given power to settle old scores with the Boers roaming the north-western Cape under General Smuts. Many of the 'Bastaard Scouts' were recruited from the mission stations, including Wupperthal. After the Lieliefontein Massacre at the hands of General

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<sup>47</sup> See Cock, 1979, p. 9

Maritz, the 'Border Scouts' were well supported and managed to carry out several reprisal attacks on Boer horsemen.

Perhaps one of the most influential figures in Wupperthal's history, the Reverend Willy Strassberger, arrived at Wupperthal on the 4<sup>th</sup> May 1904. Strassberger arrived to assist the widowed Reverend Schmolke. Between them they managed to infuse new life into the shoe factory and tannery.

Just prior to World War I, the population of Wupperthal had swelled to 2174 inhabitants. Post the Great War, industry in Wupperthal suffered, and only Strassbergers business acumen saved the ailing factory and tannery; the industries were expanded in an effort to maintain a competitive level of supply in the market.

During the 1920s, the Minister of Internal Affairs, Dr. D.F. Malan visited Wupperthal on several occasions, commending the inhabitants on their enterprising efforts at self-sufficiency. There is very little doubt that the minister was trying to drum up the 'Coloured' vote in the region, and like any astute politician would, was canvassing most cordially. In 1931, 93 men from Wupperthal appeared on the voters' role; only six appeared in 1939, and they were all White. The 'Coloured' men of Wupperthal had been disenfranchised long before Dr. Malan's 1951 abortive attempt to strike 'Coloureds' from the common voters role by means of *organising advocates and bank evaluators to lower the valuation of the inhabitants houses, thus disqualifying existing voters, while Strassberger, who was pro Nationalist, declared low factory incomes of labourers.*<sup>48</sup>

World War II had very little affect on Wupperthal, and Strassberger did not openly display any political sympathy for the Germans, although his son is reputed to

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<sup>48</sup> Cock, 1979, p. 22

have had Nazi leanings. Recruits from Wuppertal fought in the war, as they had done in the previous one, but few returned from North Africa. Willy Stassberger retired on the 25<sup>th</sup> December 1951, by which time the Rhenish Mission Society at Wuppertal had baptised 7298 people.<sup>49</sup>

During the 1960s came the hand over of the mission to the Moravian Church. It appears that there had been an agreement between the Rhenish Mission Institute and the Nederlandse Gereformeerde Kerk (hereafter the NGK), that all Rhenish Missions would be handed over to the NGK. The two church bodies had worked closely together, and the NGK had been of great financial support to the ailing Wuppertal mission in times of crisis. During World War I when the Rhenish Institute's grants from Germany were cut off, the NGK had come to Wuppertal's rescue. Even Christian Leipoldt, the son of the mission's founder J.G.Leipoldt, had taken over the administration of the NGK in Clanwilliam. However, in 1965, Wuppertal became the first and only Rhenish Mission not to be taken over by the NGK. The interesting story surrounding this turn of events and the ensuing developments in the community under the Moravian Church will be portrayed in **Chapter 6**.

1969 saw the intrusion of 'Coloured' politics into Wuppertal's history. The majority of the inhabitants voted Labour Party. In 1975 there were 633 registered voters from Wuppertal on the voters role. The Mission was offered administrative assistance from the Department of Coloured Affairs, but it chose to remain independent, administration being handled by the *Opsienersraad*.

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<sup>49</sup> Cock, 1979, p. 26

During the 1980s Wupperthal as a community remained unaffected by the State of Emergency, and political consciousness amongst members of the community never progressed further than mere conversation and postulating. Relative isolation and the need to exist in a hostile environment ensured that the community was kept mindful of the tenuous equilibrium they had struck with their surroundings, and the desire to work the land and ensure good crops overran any political aspirant's desire to champion 'Coloured' rights in the wake of the widespread uprisings in 'Coloured' townships during the period 1985 to 1986.

In 1994 the 'Coloured' community of Wupperthal and the satellite stations was allowed to vote as a whole, provided they were legally registered voters.

Today Wupperthal is undergoing complex social changes, and political awareness is growing. The continual shift in community consciousness is fascinating to trace, and it is this social history that will form the broad focus of this text. Throughout this work, certain events and characters will be brought to the fore in an effort to offer insight into the past of a community that has evolved out of very humble beginnings and managed to survive and progress, albeit to a different tempo. This is the story of the Wupperthalers, as told by the Wupperthalers.

*A Tissue of Words and Quotations*

*The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture.*

Roland Barthes

The face of historical writing is changing. Not only are the limits of the discipline being challenged in terms of what exactly constitutes 'history' and what doesn't, but the way in which history is being written is being tested continually. The style of writing/telling is being fashioned to suit the new stories. This text is no exception.

This is a record of a journey. A journey which began three years ago and hopefully will continue even after the completion of this leg. It is a sojourn into the lives and world of the Wupperthalers, and the communities of the Wupperthal outposts. It is their story, as told by them. There is very little room for manipulation and misinterpretation on the part of the author, or the reader for that matter, simply because the oral testimonies are on cassette and in the archives for any interested party to go through.

It is hard for the oral historian not to romanticize the experience of working in the field, probing the lives of people, people who, ostensibly, live on the fringes of our modern society. This 'history'/story at times may well seem romanticized, but it is not the artist's hand that has made it such, it is the story itself, for it is born out of the memories and experiences of the people themselves as told by them. It is perhaps wise at this point to mark the words of Roland Barthes, perhaps the most influential literary critic of the modern era, for this text embodies the notion that the author is not to be considered throughout the reading of it. This Barthesian element, aptly labeled 'the death of the author' rings true throughout this text, for although the story is facilitated by the author, it is not his claim.

*Once the Author is removed, the claim to decipher a text becomes quite futile. To give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing. Such a conception suits criticism very well, the latter then allotting itself the important task of discovering the Author (or its hypostases: society, history, psyche, liberty) beneath the work: when the Author has been found, the text is 'explained' – victory to the critic... In the multiplicity of writing, everything is to be disentangled, nothing deciphered; the structure can be followed, 'run' (like one thread of a stocking) at every point and at every level, but there is nothing beneath: the space of writing is to be ranged over, not pierced; writing ceaselessly posits meaning ceaselessly to evaporate it, carrying out a systematic exemption of meaning. In precisely this way literature (it would be better from now on to say writing), by refusing to assign a 'secret', an ultimate meaning, to the text (and to the world as text), liberates what may be called an anti-theological activity, an activity that is truly revolutionary since to refuse to fix meaning is, in the end, to refuse God and his hypostases – reason, science, law.<sup>1</sup>*

In relation to this specific text it would be appropriate to take the disappearance of the author one step further, because it may be daunting for the unprepared reader to venture forth from this point without anything to cling to in terms of how to approach the text. Yes, the author is not important, but how do we tread? Michel Foucault points the way:

*...we must locate the space left empty by the author's disappearance, follow the distribution of the gaps and breaches, and watch for the openings that this disappearance uncovers.<sup>2</sup>*

<sup>1</sup> Barthes, R. "The Death of the Author" in Lodge, D. *Modern Criticism and Theory*, Longman, 1988, p.171

<sup>2</sup> Foucault, M. "What is an Author?" in Lodge, D. *Modern Criticism and Theory*, Longman, 1988, p.200

As mentioned earlier in this text, the ‘history’ portrayed here is a series of vignettes; it is for the reader to read between the openings, the gaps, and uncover for him/herself a history of a people, a community...the greater Wuppertal community.

### **Bruce Chatwin beginnings.**

Travel and story-telling are synonymous. Those who travel, inevitably tell stories of their journey. We are fortunate to have great travelers among us who bring back stories of far off places, strange encounters, most with a human ring to them. I am of-course referring to people like Laurens van der Post, Eric Newby, Paul Theroux, Philip Marsden and Bruce Chatwin.<sup>3</sup> Each paints a picture of a people or a place, an individual or an event which appeals to the reader sensually, and implants a desire to be part of that world locked in type print for us, yet a living reality for those we read about. Many of their writings, especially those of Chatwin and Marsden, are filled with incident and anecdote. But it is here, in the collection of odd facts and obscure tales that a new kind of history is captured. It is as real as the earth these writers tread on their quests, and born of it too. The people and the land combine in eternal struggles to survive; a kind of symbiosis exists in many of the remote places they write about - a ‘deal’ is struck between humans and nature, despite the swirling soup of politics and socio-economic change that threatens to absorb the people and discard nature.

As a Chatwin fan, I have always wanted to travel to places seldom visited and write about the people I met along the way. As an oral historian – a member of a nouveau

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<sup>3</sup> See Marsden, P. The Spirit-Wrestlers; Chatwin, B. In Patagonia, The Songlines and What Am I Doing Here; Theroux, P. The Collected Short Novels; Newby, E. Slowly Down the Ganges and The Big Red Train Ride; Van Der Post, L. The Lost World of the Kalahari and A Walk with a White Bushman.

clique of historians – I am able to combine my passion for travel and writing, with my passion for academic endeavor. After reading Chatwin’s posthumously published book What Am I Doing Here (the question Rimbaud asked in Ethiopia), followed by perhaps his greatest work In Patagonia, I became convinced that the obscure histories of this country could be captured in a similar way. They are too fragmented, too lost in time, to capture as a whole. The history of the Wupperthal community is no exception. Their history has been written by Euro-centric authors who had certain affiliations to either the mission institutes which furthered the growth of the community, or other interested parties. It is not the purpose of this text to highlight the shortcomings of the previous histories written about Wupperthal, but just to say that it is impossible to write the complete history, yet this has never been acknowledged...until now. As one critic noted, [Chatwin] *adhered to the great Cartesian principle “What we perceive clearly and distinctly is true”*. This text is a collection of glimpses and perceptions clearly told by certain people in Wupperthal and at the outposts, and offered as a ‘history’ of the community. The reader can make of it what he/she will, the ‘history’ contained within these pages will remain the same. It has been carried from generation to generation through oral recollection, from father to son, mother to daughter, and it will be carried further yet, accepted or not.

Indelibly linked to this oral tradition is the notion of identity, for it is from the stories of the ‘old people’ that the young men and woman of the community of Wupperthal today gain a sense of identity, as sense of belonging to an unfolding truth, a way of life of that has been experienced, shared and passed on since probably the late eighteenth century. The church played, and still plays an integral role in the shaping of

this identity. Since the its conception in 1830, Wuppertal has been a spiritual guardian of the people's souls, and it is appropriate to establish what role mission stations played in the shaping of Cape rural society during the nineteenth century. It is against this backdrop that the reader will then be able to journey through this text and glean a clearer understanding of the shaping and shifting sense of identities over the mission's 169 years. As will become apparent in this text, the emphasis of the church in their lives has changed as the role of the church has altered. In is not appropriate to elaborate on this phenomenon at this point, before portraying the role of the mission station in the earlier period of the communities' existence, and the subsequent shift in identities which occurred due to its establishment at Wuppertal.

#### **The Arrival of the Missionaries: changing the identity of the people.**

In the light of the changing historiography surrounding Cape Colonial society, the role of the rural underclasses sheds new insights into the socio-economic patterns and conditions that prevailed throughout the nineteenth century. Prior to Marxist historians beginning to rewrite the history of the Cape Colony, literature tended to focus on the role of the colonists, and the agrarian pioneers who 'tamed' the interior. More recently, however, the literature has tended to focus on the land and labour developments in the rural areas of the Cape Colony, specifically the winelands of the Stellenbosch, Paarl, Worcester and Tulbagh basin area, and of the wheatlands, particularly the Swartland. More emphasis has been placed on the roles slaves, free-slaves and Bastaard-Hottentots and Khoisan people played in the complex make-up that was the agrarian work force prior to, and post Ordinance 50 (1828) and Emancipation (1838).

It is important to establish from the outset that the mission stations collectively were not a homogenous group; what applied to one did not necessarily apply to the other. This is a point Megan Anderson illustrates when she identifies the influence 'landscape' had on the respective mission stations in terms of the human development at each.<sup>4</sup> The distance of each mission station from the colonial center and *the nature of its environment enabled the landscape to resist, for some time, the imposition of colonial hegemony.*<sup>5</sup> However, the mission stations of the rural Western Cape did share similar characteristics in terms of group identity and group consciousness. It is these similar traits that will form the main focus of the ensuing discussion.

Of the 25 000 slaves in bondage on the wine and wheat farms in the Cape Colony on the eve of emancipation, about 7000 were able to leave their former masters successfully and settle elsewhere. It is estimated that about 3000 of these former slaves settled at various mission stations within the colony. Groenekloof (or Mamre as it is known today) was one of the mission stations where slaves settled. It was the second Moravian mission station to be built in South Africa, and was primarily directed at the Khoisan. The mission register at Groenekloof listed 784 residents in 1838, of which a considerable portion were ex-slaves, and not Khoisan. The reason for the high concentration of slaves at Groenekloof can be linked to the environment Anderson and Belinda Bozzoli (1987) refer to when linking the landscape to human development. Groenekloof is about 50 kilometres from Cape Town, very near the rural village of Malmesbury, and hence in the heart of the wheat country. As more slaves were used on

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<sup>4</sup> Anderson, M. "Elandskloof: Land, Labour and Dutch Reformed Mission Activity in the Southern Cederberg, 1860-1963" (BA Hons, Thesis, UCT), 1994

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, p. 98

wheat farms as opposed to Khoisan, it follows that the majority of those who settled at Groenekloof post emancipation, were in fact former slaves. At missions like Wupperthal and Ebernezer, however, demographics tell another story. Because of their location in an environment more associated with nomadic transhumance pastoralism than domestic crop agriculture, very few ex-slaves joined these mission communities. In fact at Wupperthal, the population increased by a mere 27 people between 1838 and 1840, and the words *gewezen slaaf* were only inscribed after a handful of names.<sup>6</sup> By comparison, the rapid growth in the mission's population during its formative years after Ordinance 50 came into effect, indicates quite clearly the population group the mission predominantly appealed to in that particular environment, namely the remnants of the Khoisan. As Elbourne and Ross observe, many of the Khoikhoi, especially those in the Eastern Cape *tried to ally themselves with missionary liberalism to gain access to the white-run, legally encoded land tenure system that had so pointedly excluded them.*<sup>7</sup> The Khoisan who had been early settlers at the mission stations at Bethelsdorp, Theopolis and Hankey were among those who settled in the Kat River Valley to act as a buffer between the Xhosa and the white settlers. Although the settlement remained independent, it had long standing association with the London Missionary Society (hereafter LMS), which had persuaded the colonial administration to grant the land to the Khoisan in 1829.

In the Western Cape too, the liberalism of the LMS, the Moravian Church and the Rhenish Mission Institute, were viewed by the Khoisan and the ex-slaves as an opportunity to bridge the well defined racial divide, and gain access to land tenure. It is

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<sup>6</sup> Cock, 1979

<sup>7</sup> Elbourne, E. and Ross, R. "Combating Spiritual and Social Bondage: Early Missions in the Cape Colony" in Elphick and Davenport (eds) Christianity in South Africa: A Political, Social and Cultural History, Cape Town, 1997

interesting to note, however, that despite the opportunity for a new life that respective missions offered the disenfranchised rural underclass, in some cases there are high incidences of departure from the missions recorded. At Groenekloof, for example, 36% of the newcomers to the station in 1838 had left by 1852.<sup>8</sup> The reasons for this seemingly high incidence of departure can largely be attributed to the sheer proximity of Groenekloof to Cape Town, the gradual proleterianisation of the rural underclass into the urban economy, and to the diminishing land resources and availability of gardens to single men and newcomers to the mission itself. These are, however, issues which were specific to Groenekloof, and again, these influences and events must be viewed within the context of human development in relation to the environment in which they exist. As this text will later illustrate, what happened in Groenekloof almost one hundred and forty years ago, is happening in Wuppertal today. There is, however, one reason for the lack of staying power of some of the mission inhabitants that needs to be addressed in more depth, and that is the notion of identity. It is important to regard identity on both the individual and group level. As mentioned above, the notion of identity is a factor which strikes at the very core of mission existence. Whether inhabitants were coming or going, the sense of identity imbued upon them by the mission community was perhaps a more powerful motivating force for change and development/regression than previously acknowledged.

### **The Identity of the Individual.**

As individuals within the mission community, Khoisan, 'Bastaard-Hottentots' and ex-slaves were forced to come to terms with certain Christian principles and ways of life

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<sup>8</sup> Ludlow, H. "Groenekloof after the Emancipation of Slaves 1838-52: Leavers, Soldiers and Rebels" in Bredekamp and Ross(eds) Missions and Christianity in South African History, Johannesburg, 1995

that were previously unknown to them. As Kerry Ward observed at Mamre the Protestant work ethic and the communal values of sharing and co-operation were instilled in the inhabitants by the missionaries via the Christian doctrine.<sup>9</sup> The Christian value of honest labour was another one of the teachings intended to reform the Khoisan who had previously suffered physical abuse at the hands of ruthless masters in the semi-feudal system of labour control. Adultery was another taboo in the mission community, punishable by excommunication, and a Christian principle single newcomers had to negotiate if they longed to be part of the close-knit communities. The strict adherence to certain values was not specific to Mamre/Groenekloof or even Wupperthal alone; as Elbourne and Ross observe, in many cases the *criteria for admission to full membership of the church were strict*.<sup>10</sup> At Mamre for example, there is mention of an expulsion of certain community members for the theft of stock from the nearby farm of Klipfontein. Three men were expelled, as were others who knew of the theft and had failed to report it to the mission authorities.<sup>11</sup> Despite the pressure on newcomers to adopt a lifestyle of quietness and sobriety, to refrain from committing adultery, and to toil the land in communal interest, there seemed to be a great deal of emphasis being placed on the value of 'family'. Many single men married outside of the community, many of whom were able to locate a potential spouse on the neighbouring farms. As a result, the eager young lover would break contact with the mission, and eventually the individual's name would be stricken from the mission register. Over time then, mission society in the Western

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<sup>9</sup> Ward, K. "Remembering Mamre in the Early Twentieth Century: Life Experience and the Making of History, c1838-1938" in Bredekamp and Ross (eds) *Missions and Christianity in South African History*, Johannesburg, 1995, p. 237

<sup>10</sup> Elbourne, E and Ross, R. "Combating Spiritual and Social Bondage: Early Missions in the Cape Colony", 1997, p. 40

<sup>11</sup> Ludlow, H. "Groenekloof after the Emancipation of Slaves 1838-52: Leavers, Soldiers and Rebels", 1992

Cape became defined by nuclear families. Only those who could fester a family, settle and provide for that family within the mission grounds, would ensure a place for that family on the mission register for generation after generation. As will become evident later, in Wupperthal and at the outposts, certain families have managed to remain more or less in the same area where their ancestors settled, some of whom were there long before the missionaries arrived. There other families, however, who were unable to maintain the cycle of life and death, work and rest, and who subsequently died out, or simply left in search of spouses, work or a better life.

### **The Identity of the Group.**

Belinda Bozzolli identifies community formation as both a negative process, and as an *internal generative process*.<sup>12</sup> As a negative process the group is coping with the brutal fact of dispossession and are resisting proleterianisation. As an internal process, Bozzolli attributes the formation of a sense of community, of belonging, of identity, to the daily contact between individuals and families, and the family networking which, over time , forms links and bonds. There can be no doubt that that the appeal of the mission stations for many of the rural underclass was a means of coping with dispossession. As time progressed , education at the hands of the missionaries was seen as a powerful vehicle for tackling the issue of land tenure, labour relations and wage negotiations. Illiteracy and poor communication had proven to be a stumbling block in the past, but this handicap was swiftly being remedied. In fact many white farmers

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<sup>12</sup> Bozzolli, B (ed) Class, Community and Conflict: South African Perspectives, Raven Press, Johannesburg, 1987

complained that the 'coloured' communities at the mission stations were receiving a better education than their own progeny.<sup>15</sup>

By resisting proleterianisation and adopting the Christian doctrine, it is arguable that communities and ethnic groups were forced to abandon a great deal of their former group identity, and in a sense, formulate a new one. Elbourne and Ross make the comment that despite the fact that the missionaries in Griqualand had to often leave their mission stations after failed interventions in Griqua political and social affairs, *Christianity(nevertheless) became a core component of Griqua identity.*<sup>14</sup> In a sense there was a trade-off when resisting the onslaught of proleterianisation; it was a combination of an adherence and clinging to a new set of values, and an abandonment of the old, and out of this was born a 'mission culture'.

One of the strongest cases for a strong sense of group identity being fostered in a mission society was the descriptive terms used for new arrivals by the end of the nineteenth century. By this stage the family unit was central in mission society. Monogamy reigned, and the single newcomers found it difficult to chisel their way into the this new social environment, where single was not the norm. There was a clear distinction made by the residents between those born into the mission society, namely the *ingebore* (born-in), and those who simply arrived perhaps seeking a place of refuge, namely the *inkommers* (arrivals).<sup>15</sup> These descriptive names/labels were a product of the

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<sup>15</sup> Ward, K "Remembering Mamre...", p. 238

<sup>14</sup> Elbourne and Ross "Combating Spiritual and Social Bondage", p.40

<sup>15</sup> Ward, K "Links in the Chain: community, identity and migration in Mamre, C1838-1938" in Worden and Crais (eds) Breaking the Chains: Slavery and its Legacy in the Nineteenth Century Cape Colony, Johannesburg, 1994, p. 239

internal generative process of identity formation Bózzolli refers to. It is out of this daily contact, out of the formation of links and bonds between the people and the families that a certain sense of pride and worth starts to manifest itself. To be born into a community establishes an individual as a definite member of a collective consciousness, whereas for a individual who has arrived from 'outside' the community, it is hard for that person to adopt that consciousness, thereby becoming part of the community. Not only is the individual unaware of the internal processes of acceptance and furtherment within the society, but coupled with his/her ignorance is the fact that they have been labeled as 'arrivals'/'outsiders', therefore 'not part of our group'. Even in the Wupperthal community today, when tensions run high over an issue, do community members identify certain individuals as *inkommers*, almost as though they are establishing a secure bond between those that stand opposed to an issue, which the unfortunate *inkommer* may have proposed.

There are other factors which helped compound and nurture this sense of community. Secular music and dancing, sporting events, all night singing festivals, group Bible readings and prayer groups were all things that the community engaged in on almost a daily basis. Out of these interactions was born a group consciousness that ingrained itself in the minds of the residents, the extent to which is only too well illustrated in Megan Anderson's claim :

*The destruction of the mission community of Elandskloof has led the surviving community to seek meaning in their past through the development of an inherent consciousness which contains a strong nostalgic sense of an idyllic past that is contrasted to a stark present of death and suffering.*<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Anderson, M. "Elandskloof: Land, Labour and Dutch Reformed Mission Activity in the Southern Cederberg, 1860-1963" ,p. 102

### **Where the Voice of the Past Rings Loudest.**

The Missions of the Western Cape did provide a harbour for those elements of the rural underclass who sought a new existence, devoid of the brutality of the past and the inevitable proleterianisation into the emerging rural and urban economies of the future. For many farmers in the rural districts of the Colony, the mission stations provided a labour pool which benefited those where the labour was concentrated. Farmers further afield were forced to negotiate with labourers in order to make their terms of employment attractive in order to secure a regular workforce. Not only were the missions valuable in the sense that they provided a safe haven for the underclass, providing both education and religious instruction, but they also served as valuable reservoirs of levies, which the British Colonial Government exploited on numerous occasions in their efforts to quell the conflict on the Eastern Frontier of the Colony. Genadendal, Groenekloof and Elim are just three of the stations within relatively easy access to Cape Town which had a proud tradition of sending volunteers to fight the Xhosas on the Eastern Frontier. Many Khoisan from these missions made up the Cape Mounted Rifles (or Cape Corps as it was later renamed).

Central, however, to the role of missions in the Western Cape was the preserving of cultures and identities that had been lost due to the advancement of the political economy and proleterianisation. Previously disempowered groups and communities were allowed to regroup and preserve their identity within the constructs of a Christian doctrine they learned to accommodate. It is to the mission stations and the descendents of these early settlers there, that the modern historian must turn in order to recreate the past.

For it is these pockets of preserved identity, where culture, symbolism and ideology have not been sacrificed completely that the voice of the past rings loudest.

### **Journey to Wupperthal in Search of Voices.**

And so we travel to Wupperthal in search of these voices of the past. As mentioned earlier in this text, not all the conditions that prevailed at one mission station necessarily ran the same course at another. Each was unique in the way it developed and accommodated the physical environment, as well as the socio-political and economic milieu that swirled at its boundary fences, hanging there like jackal skulls as an ever present reminder of the threat to the fold.

As we journey through Wupperthal and stop at the outposts to talk to people, the shifts in consciousness amongst individuals and communities will become apparent. The sharp distinction between old and new ideologies and attitudes between the elderly and the young will be evident, as will the reasons for the changes. Perhaps the most disturbing distinction made is by the people of the outposts themselves, who almost see Wupperthal as separate to them. It is as though the central station operates independently of the satellite stations and that they merely feed from the scraps off its table. There is also an alarming sense of loss in the words of the people. It would be easy to label it sentimentality, yearning for the days of old; but that it comes from young voices too defines the matter as a real problem, not a nostalgic whim.

Lack of work, lack of financial resources, lack of nurturing and guidance on the church's part have led to a strong sense of stagnation at the outposts. It is as though time filters by, and the seasons change one chasing the other, but the people remain in a winter

of discontent. It is odd that the smallest gesture on the part of the church could lift this heavy cloud, but at present the communities of the satellite stations are perpetually prepared for rain.

The most glaring development of late is the growing need to establish whether or not the community can gain access to land, so that each family might own their own piece of land for the first time in over one hundred and forty years. There are mysterious transactions and dealings in the communities past which have led to the church administering all the land from Langkloof in the south, to Suurrug in the north, and from Heuningvlei in the west to Beukeskraal in the east. Further east of Beukeskraal is the community of Langboom, who although affiliated to the church, maintain their land rights and own their own land. There is evidence of underhand dealings, and gross misrepresentation on the part of the church with regard to the communities' land rights. Whether the evidence supports a truth remains to be seen, but as mentioned from the outset of this work, it is a history of the people of the mission station as told by them... it is their history, and deserves the literary breathing space this text affords it. It would be a regression into the old style of writing South African history to ignore their side of the story and rely on the very characters of power and influence who administer the land to provide an 'accurate' account of the community's development. Besides, it is very hard to assess a community's degree of compliance and acquiescence from a comfortable office in Cape Town, when daily decisions are having to be made by individuals working the land using the limited resources and assistance at their disposal to ensure a survival for themselves and their dependents. It is unforgivable that history in this country was

written by the 'powerful' at the expense of the truth. That chapter of South African history will hopefully remain closed forever.

### **The Interviewees themselves.**

All that remains is to briefly discuss the choice of interviewees made. Strict Oral History practice might dictate that the interviewer selects a random spread of interviewees across all gender lines, economic lines and political lines, from all age groups in a community. As it so happened, this was not adhered to simply because the underlying principal was that 'this is their story', and no structured approach, right down to something so seemingly trivial as the selection of interviewees in a small, close-knit community would be enforced or followed; the selection had to come from the community itself. The process was a simple one. It began with a question: "Good day, do you know who the best person is to talk to about the history of...?", and without fail a friendly traveler would insist I travel to such-and-such an outpost, to such-and-such a home and ask for "x". In each case "x" always proved to be the most knowledgeable person about a specific event in the community's history, and more often than not they had more to offer than I could have hoped for. Each interviewee, young or old, had something to offer, from detailed histories of past characters and events to simple wisdoms about the land and the people that worked it. Some of the interviewees insisted that I give them the opportunity to voice their opinion or grievances... and there are many. It is interesting to note that the majority of the interviewees are in fact male. The reason being that in the communities at the various outposts it is the males who seem to have been entrusted with the stories of the past. It is the males among them that have

made an effort to sketch the history of the area using oral tradition, story telling and, of late, various official lines of enquiry, including probing the archives in Cape Town to establish certain hidden truths. It would have been foolish not to talk to some of the elderly women in the community, who may have quietly observed the history of the community, and listened to the telling of it over the years, and formulated some notion of how the course of events flowed, and what the consequences were. However, in most cases the women offered exactly what the men had to offer, with the exception of a few references to life as a young girl in the community. It would appear that the women folk of the communities were constantly looking after the hearth and home, tending to the children and the making of food. It was then men who sat around after a long day in the fields and spoke and related stories passed onto them by the 'old ones'. This is not to say that women were excluded, it is just that they were too busy to spend as much time sitting around and talking. There is a strong patriarchal voice in this text, which accurately reflects the patriarchy of the community. The man is definitely the head of the household, and all major decisions are taken by the man of the house. Consultation with spouses was not uncommon, but inevitably it was the men who took the decisions on behalf of the household. At the Beukeskraal meeting organised by Mr Koos Zimri to allow me to meet some of the more knowledgeable members of the community, it is interesting to note that not one woman from Beukeskraal was considered. Only men. Throughout the entire meeting an elderly woman sat in the adjacent room and listened, but never once offered an opinion or was invited in. It did not seem that she was perturbed by having been excluded, it was as though she knew her place at the gathering of men. Gender politics in Wupperthal fall very much into a conservative, pre-modern era level of development, and

it would appear, accurately reflects the conservative, patriarchal notion of the family as unit prescribed by the church of yesteryear. It is odd that the emphasis placed on family, and more particularly on the man as head of the family and chief bread winner, has survived the onslaught of modernism and postmodernism where feminism and female liberation during the late eighties and early nineties was at its peak. This is simply testimony to the strong influence the church has over the community and their thinking. Although there are observable changes in the offing with regard to social dynamics and the role of women in society, the tried and tested practices of the past remain intact as the wheel of progress rolls ever slower through this peaceful valley, and the winds of change do not even flutter the leaves on the trees at the outposts.

To Wupperthal we travel.

*The German, his Tears and a Touch of Frost.*

*'The German, his Tears and a Touch of Frost'* is a rich collection of vignettes which, when strung one after the other, create a vivid history of Wuppertal in its earlier years. The ordering theme of this chapter is the theme of identity. The portrayal of the original inhabitants of the valley where Wuppertal was established relates directly to the community's sense of belonging. They are able to identify themselves as people whose forebears owned and worked stretches of land in and around Wuppertal. They identify the rural ethos which they now carry with them, young and old, and a strong identity with the land and particularly their gardens emerges. There is a strong sense of pride which the people feel for the land, and their agricultural pursuits.

The community also identifies itself through the church, and in relation to those who nurtured their spiritual development over the years. The notorious Reverend Willy Strassberge is one particular character who stands out, and the influence this man had on the way in which the community saw itself, and how individuals saw themselves, was profound. Another theme which emerges here, is the theme of relationships. The relationship of the community with the white missionaries also impacted on their sense of identity, and how they saw themselves in relation to white people in general.

The authoritarian, sometimes draconian, rules and regulations the missionaries placed on the lives of the people instilled in them a strong sense of Christian values. The elderly people in the community today who identify themselves along the strictly Christian lines advocated by the Rhenish missionaries, are alarmed at the lack of altruism and respect amongst the younger generations. The vignettes in this chapter allow us to catch a glimpse of those elements which nurtured a strong sense of identity in the older members of the community. Even the experiences of the people when they were school

children and how they had to endure hardships unparalleled today, allows the reader to understand the way in which the interviewees see themselves in relation to the youth today. The world they knew as young people is lost forever, yet like carved blocks of wood, they carry the memories and scars of that existence. It is written on their faces and carried in their words. An interesting phenomenon worth observing is the Biblical narratives which emerge as the people share their experiences. Much of what you will read throughout this text will be infused with a Biblical tone, which reflects the influence the church and missionaries have had on the collective consciousness of the community.

Perhaps the most haunting and singularly beautiful vignette in this chapter is the picture of the Reverend Willy Strassberge feeding the children sweets, like a man feeding pigeons, the tears rolling down his cheeks.

It is out of these memories of sobering Christian demure, black-humour, tragedy and hardship that an identity emerges and the voices come alive.

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*We think not in words,  
But in the shadows of words.*

Vladimir Nabakov

### **Seven Families in the Tra-Tra River Valley.**

Wupperthal, the sleepy mission hamlet, lies in the Tra-Tra River Valley. It was here that the Lubbe family lived on their farm Riedmond in the early nineteenth century, when the Rhenish Mission Institute approached Mr Schalk Lubbe about purchasing the land. But who was living on this farm apart from the Lubbe's ? To answer this question, we turn to perhaps the most knowledgeable member of the greater Wupperthal community as far as the history is concerned, Mr Koos Zimri of Wupperthal. As a young man Mr Zimri defied the conventions of youth and spent a great deal of his time in the company of the 'old ones' and in this way became one of the few inhabitants of Wupperthal who has a sound knowledge of the history of the station as passed down from generation to generation. Mr Zimri is the first to admit that he was so intrigued by the stories that the old men told, that often on a Sunday when he and his wife, Elizabeth Ockhuis would stroll the 5 odd kilometers down to Beukeskraal after church, he would excuse himself and race off to chat to the old men and listen to their stories, and emerge from the tobacco fug as the sun was setting. As mentioned earlier, the 'history' which he heard and now tells, is the history of the people. It is part of their identity; it is not some constructed story to suit their means, if it was it would have been told a long time before now. Yes, we could argue that under the Apartheid regime, 'Coloured' folk had to remain

silent about what they knew, but this text will show that the ‘history’ of Wupperthal and the people that live there and at the satellite stations is real, it exists in the here and now, no matter what has been written in the past by those ‘in power’. Whether someone acts on what unfolds in these pages remains to be seen. Not even the people themselves have pursued it to its unplumbed depths; some have made attempts to unearth a century and a half of possible lies and deceit, but the full face of the truth remains hidden...and probably will remain so, but for the glimpses of that buried façade that this text, and the texts that follow in its wake, will offer.

Mr Koos Zimri, aged 68, is often in his garden, his *tuin*. His garden is not hard to spot as it is one of the best kept in Wupperthal. Mr Zimri explains that as a member of the church council he readily sought out the elderly people in his ward, and spent many Sunday’s talking to them about the ‘history’ of Wupperthal:

*Oupa Menel is ‘n Salamo getroud. Ek het baie met Ouma Menel gesels deurdat ek vroeër, na ek getroud is, Kerk dienaar geword. Toe het ek elke sondae, namiddae, die ouers in my wyd besoek.*

*Toe sy hier gekom het, was dit nog Riedmond gewees. Hulle het in pondokke gebly...toe was daar nie huise nie. Die eerste huis wat Leipoldt opgerig het was nou daardie Leipoldt Huis wat hulle nou omgeskep het vir die toeriste.*

*Oupa [Menel] het gese Leipoldt het hier gekom toe het daar reeds sewe huisgesinne gebly. Valentyn, Weinands, Zimri, Salamo en Van*

*Schalkwyk...die huisgesinne was omtrent van die eerste huisgesinne wat hier op sentraal Wupperthal gebly het.<sup>1</sup>*

(Grandpa Menel married a Salamo. I spoke to Grandma a lot, due to the fact that shortly after I was married I was made a church warden, and every Sunday afternoon I would visit the elderly in my ward.

When she arrived here, it was still the farm of Riedmond. They lived in huts [manufactured out of clay and reed]. There were no houses at that time. The first house which Leipoldt<sup>2</sup> built was the Leipoldt House which has now been made available for tourists.

Grandpa Menel said that when Leipoldt arrived here, there were already seven families living here. Valentyn, Weinands, Zimri, Salamo en Van Schalkwyk. These families were of the original families that lived at central Wupperthal.)

Mr Zimri cannot remember the other two families, but stated off the record that they were probably the Ockhuis and Manuel families.

The families that lived in the hovels along the Tra-Tra River were working for the Lubbe family on their extensive farm. But they were not the only people living in the area. There were *Hottentots* too. These people were undoubtedly the Khoisan who had

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<sup>1</sup> Interview with Mr Koos Zimri, Wupperthal, October 1999

<sup>2</sup> Johann Gottlieb Leipoldt arrived in Wupperthal on the 4<sup>th</sup> January 1830 to begin missionary activity. He was accompanied by his wife Carolina (born Lind) and their two sons Christian and Johann. Christian Leipoldt was the father of C. Louis Leipoldt, whose grave can be seen at the top of the Pakhuis Pass en route from Clanwilliam to Wupperthal. Gottlieb Leipoldt was accompanied by Theobald Van Wurmb and his wife, but due to Theobald becoming quite ill, the couple soon left Wupperthal and returned to Germany. Reverend Gottlieb Leipoldt died on the 17th January 1872, and was buried in Wupperthal. See Heyns, H. (ed) Wupperthal: 150 Jaar, 1830-1980: Evangeliese Broedekerk in Suid Afrika, Genadendal Printing Works, Genadendal, 1986

not been roped into the agrarian labour pool, and had elected to pursue their pastoral and possibly hunter-gatherer lifestyle in the relative sanctity of the Biedouw River Valley. Remember that by this time, the early 1820's, the Khoisan had emerged as a homogenous group out of the remnants of the Khoikhoi and the San. These people were slowly incorporated into society as dock workers at the Cape Town docks, porters, domestic workers or as farm laborers. Some, however, avoided this absorption into the proletarianising society of the Cape Colony, and found refuge in mission stations. Eventually all people of brown complexion were merged under the descriptive label of 'Coloured'. The community of Wupperthal today is recognized as a 'Coloured' community, however, the ancestors of those living there today were slaves, Khoisan, and even Nama people, who are far darker in complexion than the Cape Coloured people are; yet, they are labeled as simply being 'Coloured'. As Mr Zimri says of the Khoisan and the resident families already on Riedmond when the missionaries arrived: *hulle moes gemeng het.*<sup>3</sup> (They must have mixed).

So Reverend Gottlieb Leipoldt had a mixed flock, but it was not easy convincing this assortment of peoples to join the mission at first. Mr Zimri illuminates his struggle:

*Daar is nou die klipgat waarin die Hottentots gebly het... Toe het hulle ook nou nader gekom kyk die Wit man. Toe het hy [Leipoldt] hulle later hulle aangelok met lekkertjies en tabak... toe word hulle nou mak.*<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Interview with Mr Koos Zimri, Wupperthal, October, 1999

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

(Today you can see the cave in which the *Hottentots* lived. They eventually also started emerging, to see what this white man was doing. Leipoldt enticed them with sweets and tobacco, and eventually they became tame.)

### **Leipoldt's Flock Grows.**

Trying to introduce the people of the area could not have been an easy task for Reverend Leipoldt, but he succeeded nonetheless. However, there were compromises to be made, as Koos Zimri tells:

*Toe oom Piet Koopman van Beukeskraal vir my gesê het, as meneer Leipoldt nou hier lees en sukkel om vir hulle van Jesus te verkondig en vertel, hoe Jesus vir ons gelei het, toe sê die Boesman vrou: "Moenie verder luister nie op hulle taal. Maak eers vir ons 'n pyp dat ons kan rook". Nou moet daardie meneer eers ophou sodat hulle kan nou eers rook, dan wat hy dan weer verder...Leipoldt het hulle taal ook geleer.<sup>5</sup>*

(Uncle Piet Koopman from Beukeskraal told me that when mister Leipoldt was struggling to acquaint the people and tell them about Jesus, and how he led us, this Bushman woman would say: "Don't listen to their talk anymore. First stoke up a pipe so that we can smoke. Then Leipoldt would

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<sup>5</sup> Koos Zimri, Wupperthal

have to stop while they smoked, then he could carry the lesson further...Leipoldt had learnt to speak their language too.)

As his flock grew, Reverend Leipoldt realized that he had to offer the growing community a means of subsistence in an effort to unite them and keep them within the mission grounds so that he might educate them further. Mr Zimri suggests that Leipoldt had to offer some sort of an incentive for the people to want to remain a part of the mission:

*Al hoe meer mense het kom intrek. Leipoldt het toe gesien hy moet nou vir die mense iets skep om die mense bymekaar te hou. Toe het hy vir Duitsland laat geld vra (of dit waar is weet ek nie, ek was maar net 'n klong). Hy wil nog grond aankoop want die grond wat die kerk besit was die geskenk van die Lubbe's...Esselbank, dit was ook mevrou Lubbe s'n. Die het sy vir die Manuels geskenk. Ou Sarel Meton – hy's nou vier-en-tagtig - sê hulle het op Agterstevlei gebly. Toe Esselbank daai grond van mevrou Lubbe kry, toe trek hulle van Agterstevlei af Esselbank toe. Leipoldt het vir hulle geleer boer. Saai lande maak; toe vee aangekoop; leer tuin maak. Kyk hulle het vir die Lubbe's gewerk, hulle het niks van hulle eie nie.<sup>6</sup>*

(More people moved to the mission. Leipoldt realized that he had to come up with an incentive to keep the people together. So he asked Germany for

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<sup>6</sup> Koos Zimri, Wupperthal

more money [the Rhenish Institute was situated in Barmen, Germany] – whether this is true or not, I don't know, I was just a boy. He wanted to purchase more land, because the land on which the church owned was a gift from the Lubbe's. Esselbank was also Mrs Lubbe's ground, which she gave to the Manuels. Old Sarel Meton – he is now eighty-four – said his family moved from Agterstevlei to Esselbank when she made this land available to the Manuels.

Leipoldt taught the people how to farm. He taught them to sow lands; he later bought livestock; he taught them how to work vegetable gardens. Look, they worked for the Lubbe's and owned nothing of their own.)

And so the community began to produce vegetables and work with livestock.

Leipoldt also put in a request for funds to start a leatherwork factory, where members of the community were employed in the manufacture of hats and rifle sheaths. Later on Leipoldt erected a large building to house a shoe factory. Koos Zimri also tells of how his grandfather told him that Leipoldt wanted to erect a tannery to cure the hides of the livestock they slaughtered. Transport was a problem, but ox-wagons were used to transport the manufactured goods to other centers:

*Leipoldt het hulle nou later laat vervoer; hulle het met die ossewa gery.*

*My oupa het nou nog met die ossewa gery Graafwater toe en Calvinia toe.<sup>7</sup>*

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<sup>7</sup> Koos Zimri, Wupperthal

(Leipoldt later let them transport the goods out of Wupperthal. They had to use ox-wagons. My grandfather also rode with the ox-wagons to Graafwater and to Calvinia.)

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**Die lede van die Kerk moet nie net geestelik voed nie, maar uitelik ook. Jy kan nou nie met 'n honger maag na God se woord kom sit en luister nie!** <sup>8</sup>

(The Church community had to nourish both the spiritual as well as the secular. You couldn't sit and listen to God's word on an empty stomach!)

The efforts of Reverend Leipoldt were smartly followed up by those of Reverend Schmolke, his successor.

*So het, na Leipoldt, Schmolke ook grond in gekoop; nou staan ons op se-en-dertig duisend hektar wat ons het. Nou dit was gewees vyf-en-vftig duisend morges. Ja, maar nou dit is op die kerk se naam.*

*Jy moet nou luister wat ek nou se: Vir die gemeenskap is dit aangekoop, en soos ek reeds in die begin gesê het, hier het sewe huis gesinne gebly, verstaan u?* <sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Koos Zimri, Wupperthal

<sup>9</sup> Ibid

(After Leipoldt, Schmolke also bought up land. Today we stand on thirty six thousand hectares; that was about fifty five thousand morgens. Yes, but it is in the Church's name.

You must listen carefully to what I am about to say: The land was bought for the community, and as I told you there were already seven families here, do you understand?)

Mr Zimri was eager to drive home the point that the land which the respective missionaries bought to bolster the subsistence levels of the community was purchased on behalf of the community, and that the church merely administrated the land. The reference to the seven original families can be interpreted as Mr Zimri's opinion that the land ostensibly belongs to the descendents of those seven families. This is perhaps the biggest bone of contention in modern Wupperthal history and is an issue that will form the focus of the latter sections of this text. For now, however, the focus will remain on the early missionary efforts to establish a viable and productive mission station, and how their efforts were interpreted by the people themselves.

### **The Suit Caper!**

In Reverend Schmolke's<sup>10</sup> time as head of the mission station at Wupperthal, the people were still living in the most abysmal circumstances. Mr Isaak Ockhuis from

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<sup>10</sup> The Reverend Gustav Schmolke was in service at Wupperthal from 1889 until 1920. Thus, at the turn of the century there had been very little development in terms of living standards for the people of the community.

Heiveld tells the following story of how a suit was shared amongst the members of an outpost, so that each man in turn would have a chance to be presentable at the fortnightly church services down in Wupperthal. It should be mentioned that Mr Ockhuis could not stop laughing when he told this story!

*Hulle moet al oor viertien dae by die kerk wees. Toe is daar nou 'n 'suit'. Nou die 'suit' was nou uitgelê, more is dit Sondag oormore, dan trek ek die suit aan. Volgende Sondag kry jy die 'suit'. Hy word nou so van man tot man rond gegee vir die wat nie het nie. Dit maak nie saak of die moue te lank is nie. My een oom was ook so kort as ek gewees, toe het hy op die 'suit'. Toe is die baadjie se moue te lank, nou haal hy die baadjie se moue in daar, nou stap hy... en daai moue het 'n bietjie afgetrek!<sup>11</sup>*

(They all had to be in church in fourteen days time. Now there was this suit. Now the suit was laid out. Now if tomorrow is the day before Sunday, then I [for example] would put on the suit. Next Sunday, you would get the suit. The suit was passed from man to man, to accommodate those that didn't have one. It made no difference if the sleeves were too long. My one uncle was as short as I am, and he put on this suit. The jacket sleeves were too long for him, so he took them in, and started walking to church... and the sleeves began to roll down a bit!

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<sup>11</sup> Interview with Mr Isaak Ockhuis, Heiveld, October, 1999. It must be said that this interview was conducted in Mr Ockhuis's garden. The sun was setting, and the evening was perfectly still. When he told me this story, the two of us laughed for ages. It was truly a magical setting, and a wonderful bit of 'history' to boot.

Suits were not the only articles of clothing that were thin on the ground in the early days of the community's existence. Many of the men had to leave the homestead and seek work on the neighbouring farms to supplement their income from the produce they harvested. Mr Isaak Ockhuis tells of how his father had to cope with only one change of pants, while trying to make himself presentable for work on a Monday morning:

*Daai tyd was klere skaars. Hulle moet nou by die blanke boer werk. Nou kom hulle saterdag middag huistoe; 'n bietjie koring in die sak. Maandag moet hy weer in die werk wees. Hy het miskien een ordentlik broek, die ander is nou nog nie heel gelap of so nie. Daai moet eers uit gewas word, sodat dit maandag oggend aangetrek kan vir werk. Toe het die Kerk besluit hulle gan een pak klere koop vir die mense. Want klere was skaars gewees, geld was skaars gewees. Jy werk vir nege 'pennies' per dag. Dis ongelooflik!<sup>12</sup>*

(In those days, clothes were scarce. They had to go and work for the white farmers. They would come home on a Saturday afternoon with a bit of flour in the bag. Monday they would have to be back at work. He had perhaps one pair of decent trousers, and the other pair was possibly torn or patched up. That pair had to be washed so that he could wear them to work on Monday. Eventually the Church decided to buy each person a set of clothes. Because clothes were scarce, money was scarce. You worked for nine pennies a day. That is unbelievable!)

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<sup>12</sup> Interview with Mr Isaak Ockhuis, Heiveld

### The Notorious Reverend Willy Strassberger.

There are many stories about the Reverend Willy Strassberge.<sup>13</sup> He was universally recognized as a disciplinarian. The more senior people who have contributed to this text remember the Reverend Strassberger from their childhood days. One gentleman in particular has a somewhat painful recollection of Strassberger:

*As jy 'n voud gemaak het, dan wat hy die kwepellat en slaan hy jou, en jy moet jou hande so hou [oop]. Hy't die kind dood geslaan...so gevaarlik was hy. Daai man slaan so gevaarlik...Maar hy het baie mooi kerk gehou.<sup>14</sup>*

(If you made a mistake, then he would beat you with a quince cane, and you had to hold your hands like this [he gestures open, palm up]. He beat this child to death...that's how dangerous he was. That man beat you savagely...But he held a very nice church service.)

Mr Karl Swarts from Nouwpoort-Jonsten is one of the many delightful characters from the Cederberg. He is a slight man who suffered a life threatening disease as a young child. However, he survived, but his childhood illness has left him an emaciated man, but with a zest for life. He lives alone in a single room *pondok* which is probably not far removed from the *pondokke* the early inhabitants of Wupperthal resided in. His father

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<sup>13</sup> The notorious Reverend Willy Strassberger was the spiritual leader in Wupperthal from 1904 until 1951. It was during his association with the ageing Reverend Schmolke during the early twentieth century, that he met Frieda Schmolke, Gustav Schmolke's daughter, and married her in 1910

<sup>14</sup> Interview with Mr Karl Swarts, Noupoort-Jonsten, October, 1999

built the house made of mud bricks and Piet ‘Bolletjie’ Salamo from nearby Langkloof repairs the thatch roof from time to time. Mr Swarts declared his abode the outpost of Noupoot-Jonsten, and he is as proud of his home and garden as the next man.

Whether the Reverend Strassberger actually beat a child to death is something that needs to be looked into more carefully, but nobody else mentions the incident, or recollects any such occurrence. It would suffice to say that such was the legend built up amongst the young children of Strassberges wrath, that a child being beaten to death by the man would not seem out of place. Mr Swarts does, however, admit that he never knew the child, but had just heard tell of the thrashing.<sup>15</sup>

Mr Danielle Veloen, a descendent of the slave Asjaf Veloen (who you’ll encounter in the next chapter) remembers being sent out by Strassberger to cut a quince cane so that Strassberger might discipline him, and being advised by another individual not to cut the cane too thin:

*“Moenie so dinnetjies sny nie, hy slaan seer. Sny van daai dikkers. Daai dikkers slaan jou hand dood.”<sup>16</sup>*

(“Don’t cut such thin ones [canes], they really hurt. Cut one of those thick ones. Those thick ones numb your hand.”)

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<sup>15</sup> Interview with Mr Karl Swarts, Noupoot-Jonsten, October, 1999

<sup>16</sup> Interview with Mr Danielle Veloen, Noupoot-Jonsten, October 1999. Mr Veloen and Mr Swarts are good friends, and I found the two men smoking in the shade at Noupoot-Jonsten. Mr Veloen was there on one of his regular visits.

The eighty six year old Mr Paul Meton from Esselbank also remembers Strassberger in a similar light:

*Hy was 'n man wat baie streng gewees het, maar hy was reg gewees. Ek het baie keer pak gekry ook, vir gesels en gerook. So lang as jy in die skool is mag jy nie rook nie.<sup>17</sup>*

(He was a man who was very strict, but he was fair. I was often beaten for talking and smoking. So long as you were in school you were not allowed to smoke.)

Perhaps the words of Mr B.M Van Rooy, a retired school teacher seeing out the dusk of his life in Wupperthal, who remembers Strassberger from when he was a pupil, capture most succinctly the essence of the man as missionary in the following words:

*Hy was nie streng nou om vir dit moeilik vir die mense te maak nie, maar vir orde en disipline; daarvoor is die Duitsers, en vir al die Duitse Sendelinge, hulle was nou 'experts' op daardie gebied. Ek het altyd gespot en grappe daarvan gemaak, en gese as jy nie 'n mens is nie dan maak hulle van jou 'n mens!<sup>18</sup>*

(He wasn't strict just to make things difficult for the people, but to ensure order and discipline. The Germans were good at that, especially the

<sup>17</sup> Interview with Mr Paul Meton, Esselbank, October, 1999

<sup>18</sup> Interview with Mr B.M. Van Rooy, Wupperthal, October 1998

German Missionaries, they were experts in that field. I always used to joke and tease saying that if you weren't a man, then they would make you a man!)

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### **Achtung!**

It would appear that the Rhenish missionaries were sticklers for abiding by Christian values. In an effort to ensure that the people of Wupperthal did not digress from this morally sound path, they imposed rules and regulations to govern the community's activities. Mr Tom Abrahams from Heuningvlei, the only member of the community confident enough to conduct interviews in English had the following to say about the Rhenish system of protocol:

*We had a whole set of rules which we had to strictly abide by. For instance, no dancing was allowed. No alcoholic drinks or strong drinks were allowed to be brought in to the mission station here. Any person who was found to transgress, be it by transgressing these two rules, or any of the others, either got excommunicated or even got sent away for a period of between six months and a year; you were punished according to the wickedness of your transgression.<sup>19</sup>*

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<sup>19</sup> Interview with Mr Tom Abrahams, Heuningvlei, September, 1998

Mr Abrahams is quick to point out that the people had a great deal of respect for the Rhenish Missionaries, and there was indeed a certain amount of fear at being forced to leave the community which filled their hearts:

*They had a holy respect for them. I wouldn't say that it was an open kind of relationship, it was more that you had to abide by the rules or else. So one was more or less – not disciplined into it, but you had to submit to everything... The young men who had illegitimate relationships with young girls and were found out, they were promptly sent away. And if you had an illegitimate child with a girl, you were sent away. Usually it was for a period of twelve months. Her own family had to look after her of course, and she had to scrape through by any which means she could. And of course from his side, he had the chance to work outside, in the village or somewhere else, Cape Town or wherever, and usually sent some money so that they could come through.<sup>20</sup>*

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid

### Strassberger, the Lorry and a Bottle of Wine.

If you ask Mr Piet ‘Bolletjie’ Salamo from Langkloof about Reverend Strassberger, he screws up his eyes and lets out a long ‘Ooooo’ and then says: *Daai man het geskel!* (That man used to reprimand you!). Piet Bolletjie relates the story of how, each time the railway bus pulled into Wupperthal, and it was often three times a week, then Strassberger would be waiting for it, his eagle eye scanning the luggage of the shoppers returning home:

*Die lorry het geloop drie maal in die week: maandag, woensdag, frydag – gaan haal die pos op Graafwater. Die lorry gaan staan nie hier onder by die winkel nie, hy gaan daar op na die kerk toe. Hier by die kerk kantoor is alles, die poskantoor, alles is daar. Die mense wat saam gegaan het, hulle kan hier onder af klim nie, nee. Hier staan Strassberger. Hy kom kyk; as jy wyn het, hy wat dit. Daar het ek geleer wyn drink!<sup>21</sup>*

(The railway truck ran three times per week: Monday, Wednesday and Friday – to fetch the post from Graffwater. The truck wouldn’t come to a stop outside the shop, it would carry on up to the church. The postoffice, everything was at the church office. The people that traveled on the bus couldn’t climb off at the bottom [by the shop], no. There stood

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<sup>21</sup> Interview with Mr Piet Salamo, Langkloof, October, 1999

Strassberger, he'd come to have a look. If you had wine he would take it.

That is where I learned to drink! [clandestine drinking].)

Mr Isaak Ockhuis and Mr Pieter Zimri from Kleinvlei also relate the story of how Strassberger would be waiting to inspect the bags of the travelers as they arrived home:

*As jy met wyn daar afklim, dan kom wat hulle jou, en kom maak hulle jou sak oop, dan kom kyk hulle in jou sak wat jy het. As hulle daar wyn kry dan haal hulle dit uit, dan slat die ou dit stukkend en jy kry kerkstraf.<sup>22</sup>*

(If you climbed off the bus with wine, then they would come and take you and search through your bag to see what they could find. If they found wine, they would take it and Strassberger would break the bottle right there, and you would get church punishment.)

The church punishment would inevitably involve being driven from the community for a period of time, depending on the severity of the offence. Mr Abrahams has already explained the process earlier in this text. This is what Mr Issak Ockhuis has to say:

*Vir drie maande of ses maande is jy kerkloos. En na drie of ses maande kerkloosheid dan sal jy na die kerk toe gaan en dan sal jy voor die groot gemeente op die verhoog staan. Dan word jy weer geherstel as 'n lid.<sup>23</sup>*

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<sup>22</sup> Interview with Mr Isaak Ockhuis, Mr Pieter Zimri and Mr Christy Zimri, Kleinvlei, October, 1999

<sup>23</sup> Ibid

(For three or six months you no longer belonged to the church. After three or six months you would approach the church, and stand before the greater community on the stage and be re-inducted as a member of the church.)

### Sweets and Tears.

Mr Koos Zimri can remember his childhood days, when the life of a young boy in Wupperthal was not always easy, and one looked forward to certain treats. It is as though the simplest of things brought the children much delight. A highlight of the festive year was when the church held its annual bazaar. It was a time when the community came together and ate and were merry: *Ons sien eerlik jaarliks uit na bazaar. So lekker dae was dit gewees.*<sup>24</sup> (Each year we looked forward to the bazaar. Those days were so enjoyable). Even the Reverend Willy Strassberger would drop his somber demure and manage to join in in the revelries:

*Dan wat Strassberger hierdie bak lekkers, of skottel lekkers, dan stroei hy dit soos 'n man nou duiwe kos gee. Dan lag hy sodat die trane hom so afloop, hoe ons so hardloop om lekkers optetel.*<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Interview with Mr Koos Zimri, Wupperthal, October, 1999

<sup>25</sup> Ibid

(Then Strassberger would take this bowl of sweets, or pot of sweets, and cast them around like a man feeding pigeons. Then he would laugh until the tears ran off him, as he watched us running about picking up sweets.)

Mr Karl Swarts of Nouwpoort-Jonsten remembers the fete days with much relish:

*Hulle gee vir ons ordentlike kos. By die feit het hulle borde kos gehad daar wat ons nou twee rand vir 'n bord betaal het. Dit was lekker kos gewees.*<sup>26</sup>

(They gave you decent food. At the fete they had plates of food for two rand. That was nice food.)

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*To learn one must be humble,  
But Life is the great teacher.*

James Joyce, Ulysses

### **Education a Slog!**

For many of the elderly men in the community today, the memory of school is a painful one. Not so much because of the periodic thrashings they would receive from an irate school master/mistress or from Strassberger himself, but because for many of the

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<sup>26</sup> Interview with Mr Karl Swarts, Nouwpoort-Jonsten, October, 1999

children from the satellite stations it was a long walk to school. The children from Langkloof would walk close on thirty five kilometers to school. They would stay over in Wupperthal under the watchful eye of Mrs Frieda Strassberger, and then be allowed to return fortnightly to their homes. Old Mr Paul Meton remembers how his father had to purchase a house in Wupperthal so that his sons might have a place to stay during the school week:

*Skooldae was ook maar nie so aangenaam nie. Ek moes alleen daar onder; my pa moet 'n huis kry daar onder. Ons het niemand gehad wat ons oorsien nie.*<sup>27</sup>

(School days were not that pleasant. I had to fend for myself down there [in Wupperthal]. My father had to secure a house down there. We had nobody to look after us.)

The format would always be the same. In the morning the minister would come and read the Bible lesson for the day, and then the learning would commence. After school came out the children would busy themselves with chores. The young girls would collect wood for the hearth, or fill the buckets in the stream to ensure that the household had water for the afternoon and evening. There was much to do in the way of meal preparation too, and the young ladies of Wupperthal had very little time to themselves. The young boys and men were encouraged to find work in the village and in that way contribute to the well being of the community. They would help the more elderly men in

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<sup>27</sup> Interview with Mr Paul Meton, Esselbank, October, 1999

their gardens. There were certain community projects which the young men got involved in too:

*As ons uit die skool uit, het elkeen sy werk. Ek het my werkies  
gedoen... bome plant, bome nat gooi. Daai bome wat agter die kerk staan  
is wat ek gehulp plant het.<sup>28</sup>*

(When we came out of school, each had his/her work to do. I did my work planting trees, watering trees. Those trees that stand behind the church today, I helped plant.)

When Mr Meton was a young man there was no boarding house in Wupperthal. Some of the other elderly gentlemen remember their time spent in a boarding house, but Mr Meton was attending school in Wupperthal just before 1920, and as he explains, life was a far cry from what it is for the young boarders at Wupperthal today. At eighty six years old Mr Meton is the oldest member of the community, and the few years that he has on everybody carry with them the 'history' of Wupperthal as few ever experienced it:

*Na skool, namiddag, het ek by daai ander mense gewerk, of gaan stap in die veld, gaan haal vir my 'n bietjie houd. Vanaand maak ek vir my 'n stukkie kos, sodat daar weer more oggend alles gereed is om skool toe te gaan. Daar is nie iemand soos 'n moeder of vader wat daar onder is. Ons het ons huis alleen gehad... Ons was vier kinders van dieselfde familie.<sup>29</sup>*

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid

<sup>29</sup> Interview with Mr Paul Meton, Esselbank, October 1999

(After school, in the afternoons, I went and worked for other people, or I went into the *veld* and collected wood. That night I would make a bit of food, so that in the morning everything would be ready for school. There was nobody like a mother or father down there. We were alone in the house... There were four of us, all from the same family.)

The children who followed Paul Meton, had their lives made a little easier by the introduction of a boarding facility. Mr Danielle Veloen remembers his days in the boarding house, and of how he had to leave school at sixteen to help his struggling family make ends meet:

*Ek het in daardie koshuis gebly. In daardie tyd het dit so swaar en moeilik gegaan dat ek nie nog kan van sestien jaar af op skoolbank kan sit en leer. Ek het gaan werk. Die geld was daai tyd min gewees. Daai tyd was die geld meer waarder as wat hy nou is. Goeters was goedkoop gewees.<sup>30</sup>*

(I stayed in that boarding house. In those days things were so tough and difficult that at the age of sixteen I could no longer afford to be at a school desk, sitting and learning. I had to go and work. The money was scarce in those days. At that time money had more value than what it does today. Things were cheaper then.)

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<sup>30</sup> Interview with Mr Danielle Veloen, Nouwpoort-Jonsten, October, 1999

As things progressed, not all the children of the community were forced to go to school in Wupperthal, and at Heuningvlei a little classroom was erected. However, despite cutting down on the travelling time for many of the children who made the fortnightly pilgrimage to Wupperthal for yet another two week stint, the children from some of the western outposts still had a way to travel, but now it was on a daily basis. Mr Petrus Johannes Ockhuis of Witwater tells of the hardship of getting to school in the winter:

*Skool was goed gewees. Dis omtrent dertien kilometer wat ons moet stap skool toe. Die vlei wat ons deur af loop le wit van die kapok, ek meen die ryp. Daai tyd het ons nie geweet van skoene dra nie. As ons van die skool af kom en ons loop met die voetpad, daar le nie spoor van ons van vanoggend nie, so hard is daai grond.<sup>31</sup>*

(School was good. We had to walk about thirteen kilometers to school [everyday]. The marsh that we had to pass through used to be white with snow, I mean frost. In those days we were not familiar with wearing shoes. When we returned home from school along the footpath, we wouldn't be able to see our tracks from that morning, that is how hard the ground was.)

In order to thaw out the chilled children the teachers would ensure that there were a couple of jerry-can fires burning when the children arrived at school:

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<sup>31</sup> Interview with Mr Petrus Johannes Ockhuis, Witwater, October, 1999

*Ander mense wat daar rond bly het houd aangebring vir ons, en daar word nou vuur gemaak. As ons daar soggens kom is die vuur al aan die brand om ons warm te maak. So koud is ons.*

*Ons Godsdienst het ons somer daar langs die vuur gehou. Ons kan nie skool in gaan nie, ons is te koud. Pary keer as ons nat gereën is, dan moet ons eers droog maak.<sup>32</sup>*

(Other people that lived around there [Heuningvlei] brought wood, and a fire was made. When we arrived in the morning the fire was already burning to warm us up. That is how cold we were.

The morning sermon would be held right there alongside the fire. We couldn't go into the classroom, we were too cold. Sometimes when we were soaked through by the rain, we would first have to dry off.)

The elderly men of Kleinvlei remember journeying to Wupperthal every morning to attend school. The frost used to blanket the *veld* they had to cross when they took a short cut through a *kloof*. The journey would take them an hour and they would do it barefoot.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Interview with Mr Petrus Johannes Ockhuis, Witwater, October, 1999

<sup>33</sup> Interview with Mr Isaak Ockhuis, Mr Pieter Zimri and Mr Christie Zimri, Kleinvlei, October, 1999

## Up In Smoke!

Tragedy struck at the Heuningvlei school one afternoon, but the community accepted the event as the people tend to do with all things good and bad. There is an incredible coping mechanism inherent in each of the members of the community, young and old. From devastating fires, to poor crops, to disease and death. All things are weighed against the fullness of their existence and the wheel continues to turn in the face of adversity. Theirs is a silent defiance of hardship and toil.

*Namiddag speel ons daar in die rivier. Ons het geswem en dan le ons daar teen die wit sands in die son. Toe sien ons later hier op Heuningvlei is 'n vuur besig om te brand. Ons hardloop huistoe en se vir die mense "Op Heuningvlei daar brand dit!". Toe hulle daar kom is die skool daar af gebrand. Alles, boeke, banke, die laaste wat die skool besit het, is alles uit gebrand. Reen dae moet ons iemand se huis vra om daar skool te hou. More oggend skyn die son weer, dan leer ons buite, somer onder die bome. Ons het so rond getrek van boom tot huis sodat die leer kan aangaan.<sup>34</sup>*

(In the afternoon we were playing in the river. We swam and then lay on the white sands in the sun. Then we noticed a fire burning at Heuningvlei. We ran home and told the people "There is a fire at Heuningvlei!". When they arrived there, the school had burnt down. Everything, books, benches,

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<sup>34</sup> Interview with Mr Petrus Johannes Ockhuis, Witwater, October, 1999

to the last one that the school owned, everything was burnt. On rainy days we had to ask someone to allow us to have school in their home. The next morning if the sun was shining again, we would learn outside, underneath the trees. We just moved from tree to home so that the learning could continue.)

*The Slave, the Golden Guinea and the Englishman's Grave*

forebears nurtured this coping mechanism. In its history the community has had wage war on poverty on almost a daily basis. The seasons have not always been kind to the farmers. The community was plundered in a time of war by both sides. Apartheid, proleterianization and political misconduct have all at times posed a threat in one form or another, yet the community displays fortitude in the face of adversity, and somehow find the humorous side of events. This humour is conveyed in their tones of speech, and the words they use to tell the stories they do. They are a remarkable people, and the vignettes in this chapter reflect this.

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*It seems that smart men think abstractly; wise men think autobiographically. Smart men remove themselves from the problem about which they are thinking; wise men bring all of their experience to bear. Smart men think quickly, with the conscious mind; wise men slowly simmer and allow the unconscious to play. Smart men live in the moment and believe that any problem that can be defined can be solved; wise men recollect the past and respect the perennial limits of the human condition. Smart men are usually young; wise men are usually old.*

Sam Keen

### **“Onder die Akkerboom” / Under the Oak Tree.**

If you travel to the Moravian Church lands of Wupperthal deep in the heart of the Cederberg Mountains of the Western Cape, and ask to speak to Piet Bolletjie, the directions are always the same: *Langkloof... onder die akkerboom.* (Langkloof<sup>1</sup> ...under the Oak Tree). After an arduous climb out of the Tra-tra River Valley (even in a Land Rover) where Wupperthal slumbers at the foot of the Koueberg (Cold Mountain), the traveler finds him/herself on a mountain top that stretches south, with the towering peaks of the Cederberg range to the left. It is a terrible road, and the dust rises thick and fast in the dry spring air. Despite the altitude it is hot, drifts and trickling streams crossing the road are welcome cooling off spots. Through the settlement of Esselbank, and around a large protruding mountain wall, nestled in a *kloof* (valley) lies the outpost of Langkloof. A gate asking you to ‘shut it after passing through’, bars the road at the top of a small rise, and it is from this vantage point that you first sight the white washed houses with their roofs of thatch and corrugated iron sheeting. As you drive up to the houses, a majestic oak rises up, and it is under this sentinel of Langkloof that you find Piet

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<sup>1</sup> *Langkloof* literally means the ‘long valley’. The settlement nestles against the southern wall of the Langkloof, and great walls of rock lie to the north, on top of which the towering buttresses of the Cederberg loom in broken majesty.

Bolletjie. He is a carpenter. His make-shift workshop is clamped to the base of the old tree, and an old packing pallet serves as a work area where the old man sits and methodically works the Ceder wood into small trinket boxes, tea trays or whatever he thinks will catch the tourist's eye. He greets you with a smile, his pipe hanging out of the corner of his mouth. Piet Bolletjie is Piet Salamo. There is a Salamo at virtually every outpost, and they were one of the original families of Wupperthal who worked on the Lubbe farm Riedmond, which the Rhenish Mission Institute purchased in 1830. Piet Bolletjie knows the history of Langkloof well, because as he says: *elke aand vertel pa my 'n ou storetjie* (every night father told me an old story). He knows the history that the people of Langkloof have been told from generation to generation, and have probably told few Europeans before.

On first meeting Mr Salamo in the winter months, when it had been bitterly cold, as it can get in the Cederberg, he had been sitting under the old Oak. His response to this was that he had been sitting under that tree for many years. He had tried to get up once and had blacked- out; something to do with his blood sugar levels! Although being humorous, and making light of his medical condition, Piet Salamo is not very mobile. He can walk, but a hard life of toil, and the great distances he covered in the mountains in search of wood to work with has taken its toll, and he struggles to walk any great distance, bent over in an awkward posture. He is a loveable character, always humorous, yet behind his laughing eyes lay memories and stories of the old days, stories of untold hardship and labour that is very much a part of who these people are. They have known no rest, and life has always been a struggle. It seems fitting then that Piet Bolletjie begins his history of Langkloof with a story about a slave:

*Agtien dertig, twee-en-dertig... slawe tyd. Toe werk daar hier op 'n plaas Kromrivier, hier in die Sederberg, 'n slaaf onder die Niewoudts – ek weet nie waarvanaf hy gekom het nie – die man se naam was Asjaf Veloen.<sup>2</sup>*

(1830 or 1832, in the time of slavery, there was a slave who worked on the farm Kromrivier/"Skew River" here in the Cederberg – I don't know where he came from – this man's name was Asjaf Veloen).

Asjaf Veloen may have been one of the few slaves who worked this far north of Cape Town, for as mentioned earlier in the text, the majority of the slave labour was concentrated in the winelands and wheatlands of the Cape. However, contemporary historical writings suggest that there may have been a far larger slave population in the northern frontier zone than previously thought.<sup>3</sup> It was Asjaf who first settled at Langkloof:

Oordat hy nou so 'n gooië rekord gehad het, na die vrystelling van die slawe, gee die staat Langkloof aan ou Asjaf...Hy sal nie wegloop nie. In die winters gaan hy daar in die Karoo alleen. Hulle het nie gedaag hy sal gaslag en wegloop nie, so getroud was hy.

(Because he had such a good record, after the Emancipation of Slaves, the government gave Asjaf Langkloof...He would never run away. In the

<sup>2</sup> Interview with Mr Piet Salamo, Langkloof, October, 1999

<sup>3</sup> See Penn, N. 'Drosters in the Bokkeveld and Roggeveld, 1770-1800' in Eldredge, E. and Morton, F. (eds) Slavery in South Africa: Captive Labour on the Dutch Frontier, Westview and University of Natal Press, Pietermaritzburg, 1994

winters he went all the way to the Karoo alone, because they knew that he would never slaughter stock, or desert, so trustworthy was he.)<sup>4</sup>

### **Asjaf's Bares Fruit.**

So Asjaf was set free prior to 1834 by his grateful master and established himself and his family in the isolated Langkloof. Piet Bolletjie relates a story about Asjaf's lavatory habits which is humorous, yet illustrates the meaning the people assign to certain features or events. The reason being, that it is through these signs, shapes and form that the people of the Cederberg gain a sense of identity. In a sense they are able to leave a mark on the landscape, one that is not necessarily jarring to the eye. Perhaps the story will illustrate this better:

*Nou op die plaas is daar 'n plek waar hy bossies toe, gaan lavatory...Daar het hy geloop, en daar kom 'n appel boom op. 'n Wilde appelboom. Die ding het 'n groot boom geword. Toe is dit net nou in die tweede wêreld oorlog, toe is daar nou twee Hollanders hier op die plaas wat ek sal nou nie se wat vegkryp nie, maar saans is hulle sigbaar, maar nie bedags nie. Toe vat hulle daai appelboom se beste houtjies en maak 'n veldstoeletjie.<sup>5</sup>*

(There was a place on the farm where he went to the lavatory. He went there, and sure enough up came an apple tree. A wild apple tree. It became

<sup>4</sup> This is an interesting and pertinent point raised by Mr Salamo. The Bokkeveld, Roggeveld and Hantam was an area renowned for thieves, murderers and escapees. As Penn observes: ... *the fact that the region was notorious for fugitives and 'squatting' populations whose reputed predations on the livestock of farmers were a constant source of concern.* In Penn, N. 'Drosters in the Bokkeveld and Roggeveld, 1770-1800. pp.41-49

<sup>5</sup> Interview with Mr Piet Salamo, Langkloof, October, 1999

a very large tree. Recently in the Second World War, there were two Dutchmen here on the farm who were – I won't say hiding- but they were visible at night but not during the day. They took the best wood from that tree and made a rough stool out of it.)

As Piet tells this story, the indignation in his voice is potent. The tree was a tribute to the founder of the farm, which was carelessly hacked down by two nervous Dutchmen seeking refuge during the war. Whether they were pro-Nazi or not is not clear, but their presence left an impression on the community, who resent the fact that Asjaf's tree was chopped down. These people have very little in the way of material possessions, and they define their environment through the use of certain features; trees are one such feature; rock shapes are another. This home stretches beyond the hearth, and they acknowledge this openly. They know the land well, and apart from the dwellings, it is all they have to establish a sense of identity. They define themselves and their existence through the landscape.

### **Wil(l)y Strassberger?**

Perhaps the one Rhenish Missionary that left the greatest impression on the community was the Reverend Willy Strassberger. His intention was to create a haven for the people of the area, and guide them spiritually. However, Strassberger knew that in order to ensure the mission was self-sufficient, he had to procure land, administer it and ensure that the church received certain tidings to maintain the livelihood of himself and the other Wupperthalers. How the Rhenish Mission Institute secured the land holdings which have been handed over to the Moravian church today is a mystery. People from the

outposts offer opinions and even tell some stories related to them by the older people who Strassberger would have had dealings with. Piet Bolletjie tells how Langkloof fell into the hands of the Rhenish missionaries:

*Strassberger se "Kyk Asjaf ek wat nou papier, kaart en transport, vir Langkloof. Daai stuur hom nou af; daai ding raak weg of jou huis brand uit, en die ding brand nou ook uit."*

*Daai tyd was die mense nou dom. Gloë my, want ek is ook nou nog dom.*<sup>6</sup>

(Strassberger said to Asjaf: "Asjaf I am taking your deed of ownership for Langkloof. Send it down to me in Wupperthal, because it could get lost, or your house might burn down, and it might get burnt with it.")

In those days the people were a bit dim; believe me because I'm also a bit dim.<sup>7</sup>

Whether Strassberger asked for the Asjaf's deed of ownership out of Christian concern, and intended keeping it safe, or whether he used certain wiles to secure the deed in order to have the official document to administer the land, we will never know. However, what ensued strongly suggests that Strassberger used a double edged sword in his reasoning with Asjaf:

<sup>6</sup> Interview with Mr Piet Salamo, Langkloof, October, 1999

<sup>7</sup> A work worth consulting with regard to the issue of land and land ownership in this specific region of the Western Cape is Nell, D. 'Land, Land Ownership and Land Occupancy in the Cape Colony during the Nineteenth Century with Specific Reference to the Clanwilliam District' (B.A. Honours, UCT, 1997). Nell's inquiry highlights the manner in which 'Coloured' members of the Clanwilliam community were systematically dispossessed of their land, and access to land rights became a constant source of racial and political tension in the community. Also see Anderson, M. 'Elandskloof: Land, Labour and Dutch Reformed Mission Activity in the Southern Cederberg, 1860-1963' (B.A. Honours Thesis, UCT, 1994). Anderson outlines the manner in which the community of Elandskloof were dispossessed and the former mission station was eventually sold off as a private farm. In the light of these events, it is not unlikely that similar underhand means were employed by the missionaries to ensure that the land occupancy rights of the Wupperthal Station would be governed solely by the institute, with no degree of autonomy being offered to the original family occupants of the land.

*Strassberger stuur sy mense sommer net uit die bloute uit. Toe moes ons huur betaal.*<sup>8</sup>

(Out of the blue Strassberge sent his officials here, and we had to start paying rent for the land.)

Piet is not to sure when Asjaf died, but he left behind a son, Hansie Veloen, who was born in 1854. Hansie Veloen in turn had two sons, Joost and Herman.

### **Joost's Cursed Blessing.**

Joost Veloen was the lay preacher at Langkloof, as was the custom for the missionaries to appoint such an individual at the outposts to act as representatives in areas not readily accessible to them.

However, Piet tells of how Joost erred as *Ouderling* (lay preacher) and as a result was driven off the land:

*Die Joost Veloen is nou Ouderling – in daai tyd is dit nou dat die predikant nie die mense kom begrawe nie; die Ouderling moet dit nou maar doen. Die kerk sit nou daar onder. Nou hier is 'n paar Wupperthalers. Toe die ou nou klaar is, hy begrawe sy man, toe spreek hy die seën. Van die Wupperthalers loop se vir Schmolke: "Joost het nou seën gespreek". Kom die wit papiertjie: binne ag dae moet hy trek. Hy't 'n wa gehad en agt esels. Dit was in die Anglo-Boer Oorlog se tyd, agtien nege-en-neentig. Toe trek hy Wupperthal deur.*

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<sup>8</sup> Interview with Mr Piet Salamo, Langkloof, October, 1999

*Hy's hier weg gejaag soos 'n hond. Die kerk het nie eers dankie gesê nie...Joost het niks gekry vir sy huis nie.<sup>9</sup>*

(Joost Veloen was the lay preacher – in those days the minister didn't come and bury the people, the lay preacher had to do it. The church was down in Wupperthal. There were a few Wupperthalers at the burial. When Joost was finished burying the man, he said the blessing. One of these Wupperthalers went and told Reverend Schmolke: "Joost said the blessing". Within eight days a white piece of paper arrived instructing him to pack up and leave. He had a wagon and eight mules. This was in the time of the Anglo-Boer War, 1899. So he trekked through Wupperthal. He was chased away like a dog. The church did not even thank him for what he had done. Joost got nothing for his house.)

However, the destitute Joost Veloen's woes did not end here, because on the road to Clanwilliam, near the present day farm of Traveler's Rest, where he and his family spent the first night, the party was accosted by a Boer Commando. It was not unusual that a Boer Commando was moving through this area, as the war was in full spate, and marauding commandos moved through the Cederberg in search of fresh supplies. The Boers were travelling East down the Pakhuis Pass and happened upon Joost and his co-travelers, including his mother, Annetjie Veloen who had grown up in Wupperthal before marrying Hansie Veloen. Piet tells further:

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<sup>9</sup> Interview with Mr Piet Salamo, Langkloof, October, 1999

*Sê die Boere: "Vat net julle beste goed." Hulle sê nie wat hulle gaan maak nie... Dan kom 'n kerel, hy ry mos perd, hy't nog 'n bietjie in die bottel, toe strooi hy dit so, en hy steek die vuur in. Die esels het los geruk en weggehardloop. Toe moet hulle die goedjies wat en dra op die rug. Die ou trommeltjie met die goue pond of Kruger pond – ek weet nie hoe die mense se nie – die trommeltjie het die ou nog. Clanwilliam gekom; toe moet die ou 'n nuwe begin maak.<sup>10</sup>*

The Boers said: "Take your best stuff". They didn't say what they were going to do to them. Then a chap on a horse with a little bit left in his bottle, sprayed the wagon with the liquor and set it alight. The mules pulled loose and fled. So they had to carry everything on their backs, including a trunk with a golden pound or Kruger pound in it – I don't know what people call it – Joost still had this trunk. He arrived in Clanwilliam and had to make a new start.

The golden pound Piet refers to is obviously a golden guinea, which must have been a small fortune to someone of Joost's disposition. How the coin came into his possession, no one knows.

Joost Velen was not the first in his family to suffer at the hands of the Boers. The communities at the outposts all have stories about the Boers and the British columns moving through the area, and an interesting phenomenon was observed at Heiveld as a result of the war. The stories the people tell are better read against a backdrop to the war in the Cape Colony, and the hand it had in shaping attitudes amongst the respective

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<sup>10</sup> Interview with Mr Piet Salamo, Langkloof, October, 1999

cultural and social groups. Once we have a better understanding of the complex processes of group relationships in the Cape, then the history the people tell takes on a richness and texture that makes for good 'listening'.

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**The Anglo-Boer War in the Cape Colony: a complex series of diverse community experiences and rural protest.**

*Some people in the two ex-republics (Transvaal and Orange Free State) have been inclined to be scornful of the warm national spirit that has reigned in the Cape since the Boer War, as if the spirit could be no more than a pose, held by folk who had never known independence nor ever suffered for the sake of it; but, while it may not have been universal, there was no part in South Africa where we found a stronger love of their nation and traditions, nor a greater readiness to sacrifice individually for their sakes, than in the Cape Colony.*

Commandant B.D. Bouwers  
Smuts Commando

The above statement by Commandant Bouwers, who entered the Cape Colony as a member of the Smuts Commando on the 31<sup>st</sup> October 1901, indicates the strong pro-Republican political alignment that prevailed in parts of the Cape Colony amongst the Dutch rural class, during the South African War of 1898-1902. By analyzing the relationships between the various groups involved in the conflict, especially the rural communities the Boer Commandos came into contact with, we will be able to determine just what caused this pro-Republican mindset in some, and vehement anti-Republican

feeling in others. Specific reference must be made in this part of the text that observers feel shaped the nature of the relationships between the Boers and the non-white rural underclass. It is important to note that the pro-Republican verve alluded to by Bouwers did not reflect the attitudes of the 'Coloured' population in the Cape. This again must be qualified by pointing out that only certain 'Coloured' communities in the Western Cape aligned themselves politically in any way. In an effort to understand how the Anglo-Boer War affected group relations in the Cape it is important to view its effects in the context of the landscape itself, and the uneven distribution or concentration of Dutch, Coloured and British people in the Western Cape.

The change in Cape Afrikaner mindset from the outset of the war to one year later in 1900 was marked. In 1899 the majority of Cape Afrikaners were not pro-Republican.<sup>11</sup>

By the same token they could not be said to have been completely pro-Imperial Britain.

<sup>12</sup>Isolation in the rural backwaters of the Cape Colony had to a large extent lulled them into a political apathy, and only the politically mobilized, yet arguably politically vague, Afrikaner Bond members and the wealthier Afrikaans families who had direct political involvement, were in a position to form a collective mindset about where their allegiance lay. However, during the first year of the war, the Cape Colony was not directly involved, except as a port of call for the thousands of British troops and reinforcements which landed at the Cape Town docks and were then transported by rail to the hot spots further

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<sup>11</sup> For greater insight into Afrikaner politics and political alliances just prior to the outbreak of the Anglo-Boer War, see Tamarkin, M. *Cecil Rhodes and the Cape Afrikaners*, Johnathan Ball Publishers, Johannesburg, 1996. Tamarkin clearly illustrates to what extent political alliances were largely a class issue amongst the Afrikaner people of the Cape Colony. The social elite enjoyed economic prosperity as a result of their alignment with Cecil John Rhodes and his pro-Imperialist movement

<sup>12</sup> Another interesting insight into Afrikaner political alignment can be found in Leipoldt, C.L. *Stormwraacht*, David Philip, Cape Town, 1980. Although largely fictional, Leipoldt portrays the seemingly political incongruities among the Afrikaner population of Clanwilliam. Local sympathies and loyalties in Clanwilliam were not as clear cut as one might have thought.

north. As news of the conflict spread into the Cape interior, Afrikaners, united by language, culture, religion and history, began to align themselves with the Republican movement; their efforts were naturally precipitated by the botched Jameson Raid. . . . British authority was beginning to be challenged. Constantine identifies a number of reasons why, by 1900, conditions in the Western Cape were ideal for the cultivation of a rebellion by the Dutch rural class. Firstly, the white population was composed almost exclusively of Boers who had united under the umbrella of Afrikanerdom and identified strongly with the Republican movement's drive for an autonomous Boer state, free from the liberalized decrees of British colonialism (which is a contradiction in terms). Secondly, except for the extreme northern (Namaqualand) and southern (Boland) parts of the region, the Western Cape comprised of isolated rural communities with a relatively low concentration of populace of all creeds and colours. The virtual absence of railways rendered British counter guerilla strategies ineffectual.<sup>13</sup> These sentiments are reiterated by Deneys Reitz:

*From now onward, the circumstances of our expedition into the Cape radically altered for the better. Here in the far west there were no railways, and the country was so difficult for large bodies of troops that we had reached comparative sanctuary. North, stretching towards the Orange River hundreds of miles away, lay a great territory practically free of the enemy, save for the rare columns passing by, and a few*

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<sup>13</sup> Constantine, R.J. "The Guerilla War in the Cape Colony during the South African War of 1899-1902" (M.A. Thesis, UCT, 1996)

*garrisons scattered long distances apart, so that we had the country almost to ourselves.*<sup>14</sup>

At this stage of the war Reitz and the rest of the Smuts Commando were not aware of the severe suffering their comrades in arms amongst the disheveled remnants of the Free State and Transvaal Commandos were enduring to the north. The effectiveness of the block-house system was strangling the guerilla war effort in the Free State, coupled with the lack of arms and ammunition, horses and clothing, not to mention starvation too. Adding to the Boer despondency was the heavy death-toll among the Boer women and children who had been interned in the British concentration camps. Universal ruin had overtaken the land further north and east in the wake of Kitchener's Scorched Earth Policy. There is no doubt that the Smuts Commando enjoyed great success in the Western Cape, but for the time being they were contained in a strategically insignificant quarter of the colony, while the British concentrated the bulk of their war effort in the Free State and the Transvaal.

It is interesting to note that initially the isolation factor mitigated against the growth of rebellion in the Western Cape, and in the dying throes of the war, isolation served to restrict and curtail Smuts's success and his force became in a sense *prisoners of that region*.<sup>15</sup> So, in a sense the isolation of the Boer sympathisers acted as a double-edged sword against the commandos except in the brief period between October 1901 and early 1902, when they enjoyed overwhelming success in the Western Cape,

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<sup>14</sup> Reitz, D. Commando: A Boer Journal of The Boer War, Johnathan Ball Publishers, Johannesburg, 1990, p. 265

<sup>15</sup> Constantine, p. 128

capitalizing on prevailing conditions which proved to be tenuous and limited.<sup>16</sup> It is during this period of bounty that the Boers probably frequented the Wupperthal area, and enjoyed the supplies they requisitioned at the outposts.

### **The Invasion of the Cape.**

In December 1900, Colonels Hertzog, Kritzinger and De Wet met to plan a three-pronged invasion of the Cape Colony. It was unanimously decided that the key to a Boer success in the region lay in a general Cape uprising. De Wet's legendary stature as the quintessential republican soldier was seen as a tool with which to insight an uprising and call to arms the apathetic Cape rural class. It was generally agreed that the course of the war would be determined by the degree of Boer success in the Cape Colony.<sup>17</sup>

However, after much misfortune and hardship endured in the face of advancing British columns, De Wet was forced to abandon his desperate pretence at an invasion on the 20<sup>th</sup> February 1901.<sup>18</sup> A small scout corps under the leadership of WW.C. Malan did make headway into the Cape Colony after having acted independently of De Wet's ailing main force. The party was 25 strong, all high caliber soldiers whom would later feed the ranks of the commanding officers who would lead the rebellion in the Western Cape. An important event occurred shortly after the failed invasion of the Cape Colony, which to a large extent determined the course of Boer-Black relations for the rest of the war.<sup>19</sup> The term 'Black' in this context refers to all non-white peoples. On the 18<sup>th</sup> February 1901,

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<sup>16</sup> See Strauss, J. 'Die Veldslag van Nouroegas' and Legassick, M. 'Context, Historiography, Sources and Significance' both in KRONOS No. 21, November 1994

<sup>17</sup> Constantine, p. 29

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, p. 33

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, p. 36

Malan and his crack scout corps wrecked and burnt a train at Taaibos, killing ten British soldiers on the train. This successful attack stalled British counter guerilla activities for over a week. Seeking reprisals, the British authorities, acting on false evidence given by 'Blacks' who witnessed the attack, arrested five Boer wagon-drivers and charged them with complicity in the attack. The five accused were found guilty before a martial law court and three of the five were executed at De Aar on the 9<sup>TH</sup> March 1901. Realizing the all too compliant witnesses had given false testimonies implicating five Boer civilians, saying that they were among Malan's attacking party, the attitude of the rebels became revengeful. To a large extent the Taaibos incident evoked a savage response in the invading Republican forces which manifested itself in later incidences, particularly the Leliefontein massacre. There are incidences that come out of the oral history of Heiveld, Langkloof and Witwater which reflect the almost savage spirit invoked in the Boers, as the reader will see later in this text.

It is important to heed Bill Nasson's warning when trying to determine the impact the war had on the Cape Colony, and particularly the Western Cape, for *the trajectories of conflict differed from one locality to another*.<sup>20</sup> Despite the Taaibos incident, relations between the Republicans and rural 'Blacks' were not always an unrelenting test of military violence.<sup>21</sup> Yet, many rural communities, whether or not they offered any form of armed resistance to the Republican forces, did however find themselves victims of

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<sup>20</sup> Nasson, B. Abraham Esau's War: A Black South African war in the Cape, 1899-1902, Cape Town, 1991, p. 115

<sup>21</sup> Nasson, p. 114

commando suspicion and malice.<sup>22</sup> In 1901 Kritzinger ordered his subordinates operating in the Cape Colony to shoot on the spot not only British auxiliaries but any Black person of whom they were suspicious. Two commando leaders in particular left a bloody trail, namely Jan Maree and Hermann von Doornek, as between them they executed fifty Coloured people, including children, as they trekked through the Rietfontein, Matjiesfontein and Sutherland districts between August and December 1901. The following story is told by Piet Bolletjie about two individuals from Langkloof who happened to surprise a group of sleeping Boers who then gave chase. (It must just be said that the people of Langkloof, as at the other outposts were mostly pro- British, and the Boers probably suspected as much.)

**“Daar Sit die Boere” /There Sit the Boers.**

*God, daar sit die Boere; hulle slaap in die saal. Die skote val later, maar hulle ry. Daar voor is 'n hek, en toe wil die ou se maat die hek oopmaak. Toe sê hy: “Jong, jy kan nou nie afklim nie!”. Toe skop hy toe die hek, en daar swaai die hek oop. Toe skiet hulle hom altwee sy bene, net vleis wonde; hulle het gelukkig nie sy bolyf getref nie.<sup>23</sup>*

(God, there were the Boers, sleeping in their saddles. The shots rang out later, but they rode away. In front of them was a gate, and the guy's friend wanted to open it, so he said: “You can't climb off now!”. So he kicked

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<sup>22</sup> Nasson, p. 106

<sup>23</sup> Interview with Mr Piet Salamo, Langkloof, October, 1999

the gate, and it swung open. But they shot him in both his legs, but just flesh wounds. Luckily they didn't hit his upper body.

It is important to emphasize that not all Boer leaders and rebels conducted themselves in this way. It most certainly was a war of excesses, examples of which will be discussed shortly, but the excessiveness was not general, and more often than not a series of randomly directed acts of reprisal and vengeance. Deneys Reitz recounts the occasion he dislodged a *Hottentot soldier*<sup>24</sup> from his mount with the butt of his rifle, and identifying him as a scout or dispatch-bearer for the British, he immediately demanded the gentleman hand over his dispatch, upon which the soldier did. Elated to read that the dispatch located the Smuts commando, Reitz writes:

*All was therefore well with the commando, and we were still on the right track, so we divested our prisoner of his horse, rifle and ammunition, and told him to clear off, a command he obeyed with a cheerful 'Dag, mij baasies', as he trotted up the road.*<sup>25</sup>

The restraint exercised by Reitz in dealing with this particular 'Coloured' soldier portrayed in his amusing recollection, is testimony to the fact that not all rebels were intent on carrying out harsh acts of revenge and acting with what Nasson refers to as *unprecedented conceit and personal arrogance*.<sup>26</sup> However, there were acts of vengeance carried out by the Boer commandos which were savage and unwarranted, even in the

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid, p. 251

<sup>26</sup> Nasson, p. 107

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<sup>26</sup> Nasson, p. 107

name of War. With specific reference to two particularly brutal acts of massacre and violence, this text will now examine the complex and strained relationships that prevailed in the rural Western Cape during the conflict, particularly between the rural 'Coloured' and Dutch communities.

### Abraham Esau and his 'faithful children'.

On the 5<sup>th</sup> January 1901, Abraham Esau, a 'Coloured' blacksmith from Calvinia was murdered on the Calvinia-Williston border.<sup>27</sup> Esau's killing was in one respect another act of Boer reprisal and personal vengeance.<sup>28</sup> But in the same breath Nasson is quick to point out that a striking feature of Boer rebel conduct towards the 'Black' civilians is that it did not consist only of a mass of randomly directed vendettas: *actions and demands carried the flavour of a generalized repressive determination.*<sup>29</sup> The Boers certainly did impose restrictive proclamations on the Coloured rural underclass in the Western Cape, particularly with regard to the freedom of movement and association. These proclamations were sanctioned under a Native Republican Law the Boers imposed on the rural communities they annexed during their campaign. The Boer rebels were informed by the local Dutch farmers that the Coloured communities in certain districts were engaged in activities of espionage and readily supplied information about commandos activity to the Namaqualand Field Force Intelligence Department.

Prior to being captured and executed by the Boers, Abraham Esau had done much to instill in the Coloured rural communities between Carnarvon and Graafwater a pro-

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<sup>27</sup> Constantine, p. 116

<sup>28</sup> Nasson, p. 120

<sup>29</sup> Nasson, p. 120

Imperialist attitude. Esau's followers, who he referred to as his *faithful children* formed a solid core of spies, snoops and informers.<sup>30</sup> The knowledge that the likes of Esau and other pro-Imperialist non-whites were keeping British Intelligence abreast of Boer movements, coupled with the spread of rumours surrounding Esau's associations with high ranking British officials, meant that a tense situation prevailed in the Western Cape between pro-Republicans and loyalists, particularly in the Clanwilliam and Calvinia districts where anti-Boer mobilization was strongest. It is no wonder that the Boers caught napping by the two gentlemen from Langkloof didn't hesitate to send sally after sally in their direction, as the information of their whereabouts could send them on the run again from any British column patrolling the area.

*As days passed, Esau's known role as a British agent made his presence in the eyes of local Republican sympathizers an increasing affront. Frightened by the reputed size and menacing nature of his personal following, most colonists in Calvinia wanted to have his influence smuffed out.*<sup>31</sup>

It is worth noting that Abraham Esau typified the emerging Coloured artisan and independent craftsman that started to assert themselves at the turn of the century in the rural Western Cape. For example, the one son of Joost Veloen

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<sup>30</sup> Nasson, p. 127

<sup>31</sup> Nasson, p. 128

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<sup>30</sup> Nasson, p. 127

<sup>31</sup> Nasson, p. 128

who was so unceremoniously evicted from Langkloof by Willy Strassberge became a blacksmith in the Calvinia area.<sup>32</sup>

As Nasson notes:

*Paradoxically, at the turn of the century when the arteries of segregation in South Africa were hardening, rooted in social ideals as assimilation still persisted strongly in the Cape.*<sup>33</sup>

Esau and other Coloured artisans had individual and collective class aspirations which rural Dutch people resented. This emerging class of Coloured artisans was undoubtedly seen as a by-product of British liberalism which threatened the relative autonomy the Dutch colonists enjoyed, where certainly in the more isolated quarters of the Cape, they were at the pinnacle of the social hierarchy. In the more populated urban areas it was the British and Dutch elite who enjoyed this position. A complex web of allegiances and cross allegiances between Boers, wealthy Dutch, underclass Dutch and British farmers, Trekboers and 'Coloureds' seems to have prevailed in the Cape during the war. On inspecting the No. 1 Fort at o'Kiep after it had been captured by the Boers, Deneys Reitz discovered two bodies which had fallen due to his inspired sniping efforts the previous day. One of the dead men was *a young local volunteer named Van Couvorden, son of the doctor from Holland.*<sup>34</sup> This discovery indicates that the allegiance in the Cape was not necessarily based on nationality or common ancestry, but suggests that perhaps a sense of class distinction was emerging. Contrary to Deneys Reitz's observations noted earlier

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<sup>32</sup> Interview with Mr Piet Salamo, Langkloof, 1999

<sup>33</sup> Nasson, p. 122

<sup>34</sup> Reitz, p. 293

with regard to the support the Boers received from the Republican aligned Cape people, it would seem that the wealthier Dutch or Afrikaans families supported the British war effort. As Constantine notes, the pro-Imperialist attitudes of prominent Afrikaner families in the Western Cape, namely the Melcks, Kohlers, de Kocks and Van der Bys families in particular, meant that class was a strong determinant of ideology in the Western Cape.<sup>35</sup> The poorer rural Dutch underclass tended to support the rebels, but not in all cases. In the Olifants River Valley the Boer commandos were all looked after by the Dutch farmers:

*The inhabitants sympathized with us, and looked upon us as their champions, so we were welcomed wherever we went, and, despite the long grueling journeys on muleback, I enjoyed myself, for I was not above feeling a pleasant glow when the women folk waved from before the farmhouses, and the men shouted greetings from the roadside.*<sup>36</sup>

The welcome that Reitz and his companions received from the Dutch farmers in the Olifants River Valley is understandable, for at the end of the war when the 3437 Cape rebels surrendered, the second largest contingent came from the Clanwilliam district.<sup>37</sup> This could not have boded well for the Wupperthal settlement and the greater community, as they would have been powerless in the face of such pro-Republican verve. But, the battle for survival for the Wupperthal mission community was never one fought with arms against the rebel Boers; instead, it was a daily struggle fought in the gardens and in the *veld*. As will become evident throughout this text, their lives seem to hang from a very thin thread which has resulted in their lack of focus on the outside world, and

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<sup>35</sup> Constantine, p. 123

<sup>36</sup> Reitz, p. 267

<sup>37</sup> Cock, S.B. "Wupperthal: a historical sketch, 1830-1979" (B.A.Honours Thesis, UCT, 1979)

the political and socio-economic developments of late, and to worry about whether or not the frost will fall so thick tomorrow that the crop will be ruined. It is as simple as that.

The rural Dutch underclass included the *Trekboer* (nomad) population and not just the Dutch farmers who had inhabited vast stretches of *veld* in the Cape. Deneys Reitz encountered *Trekboers* on his journey through the Cape:

*From Tontelbos we moved through country thinly occupied by Nomad Boers (trek Boers), who spend their lives going from one well to another with their flocks, like the old peoples in the Bible. They are a primitive patriarchal folk, knowing little of the outside world, but of a brave and sturdy stock, and many of them were under arms.*<sup>38</sup>

British authorities were aware of the mounting tension between the Coloured and Dutch population in the western Cape. Esau had done much to arouse Coloured protest and a *species of Cape British 'national' identity bubbled into life, visible in colourful and rowdy pro-Imperial petitioning and demonstrating.*<sup>39</sup> In fact when Esau requested that the British authorities sanction the arming of the Coloured populace to protect themselves against the Boer forces, the British authorities turned down the request, for they realized that an embittered rural Dutch population were itching for any pretext to rebel, and that by arming the Coloured rural communities would risk playing straight into the arms of the Boer rebels who were in favour of a general Cape uprising.

Boer commandos had to not only contend with the openly hostile demonstrations towards them by the Coloured communities in places like Calvinia and Clanwilliam, but

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<sup>38</sup> Reitz, p. 269

<sup>39</sup> Nasson, p. 123

Coloured recruits formed the bulk of the Namaqualand Border Scouts. Deneys Reitz notes that in Springbok, O’Kiep and Concordia, the towns were being held by mixed garrisons of *British troops and Hottentot levies*.<sup>40</sup> Martial Law had been declared in the Clanwilliam and Calvinia districts on the 7<sup>th</sup> January 1900, and resident Boer rebels had shown little respect for the lives and property of the ‘Bastard Hottentot’ communities. Until January 1902, any Coloured person caught with arms ran the risk of being summarily executed as a British collaborator.

**Wupperthal is spared the fate of the Leliefontein Mission.**

Piet Salamo gave the following reply to the question of whether the communities supported the British or not: *Hulle was min of meer daai*.<sup>41</sup> (They were more or less supporters). It would not be unreasonable to assume that the Rhenish missionaries avidly discouraged the community from becoming involved in the conflict, by either joining British garrisons, or even the Border Scouts. Not only would it have been a violation of the Christian moral code which the people held so dear, but it may well have brought reprisal attacks on the mission if the institution was seen as a feeder for enemy recruits. This is not a wayward notion considering the following incident:

In the wake of heightened racial tension between the Boers and the non-whites in the Western Cape came perhaps the most brutal and savage Boer reprisal targeting a Coloured community, namely the destruction of the Leliefontein Mission Station. In the face of enlarging markets for produce due to the war effort, coupled with good rains,

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<sup>40</sup> Reitz, p. 287

<sup>41</sup> Interview with Piet Salamo, Langkloof

Leliefontein had prospered, causing much resentment among the Boer farmers in the district. Inhabitants of Leliefontein worked as guards on the supply route from Carnarvon to Williston. They worked as muleteers and wagon-drivers on the British supply route from Port Nolloth to Lambert's Bay. A group of 'Leliefontein Boys' known as 'Cooper's Camels' worked for British Intelligence, scouting the Western Cape for any Boer activity. These activities provoked the enmity, and often too, the fear of pro-Republican settlers in the Cape.<sup>42</sup> Farmers were angered and frightened by uniformed and armed *Basters* impertinently questioning them and impounding their cattle on all manner of pretexts.<sup>43</sup> Much valued labour was poached by the Namaqualand Field Force which comprised predominantly of Coloured/Bastard recruits, leaving Dutch farmers either destitute or horribly under staffed. For the most part, mission stations in the Western Cape did not suffer too heavily at the hands of the Boers, or even the British troops. Leliefontein was an exception. Wupperthal is another mission station which suffered a little more than most. Soldiers from both sides requisitioned horses, shoes, rifle sleeves and hats, and food as they passed through this enterprising community. Boer raids were carried out on Wupperthal as Piet Salamo and others mentioned in this text will relate, and cattle and crops were stolen. Reverend Schmolke at Wupperthal hid tobacco, leather and shoes from the station's shoe factory from the marauding Boers, and there was much discontent amongst the Coloured community of Wupperthal which fueled long felt resentment for the Boers.<sup>44</sup> Perhaps hearing of the way in which conditions at Wupperthal had deteriorated at the hands of the raiding parties from both the British and Boer camps, the

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<sup>42</sup> Nasson, p. 108

<sup>43</sup> Nasson, p. 108

<sup>44</sup> Cock, pp. 10-19

Leliefontein residents were not prepared to let the same thing happen to them. Deneys

Reitz recounts the events on the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> January 1902:

*He [Gerhardus Maritz] had ridden into the station with a few men, to interview the European missionaries, when he was set upon by armed Hottentots, he and his escort narrowly escaping with their lives. To avenge the insult he returned next morning with a stronger force and wiped out the settlement, which seemed to many of us a ruthless and unjustifiable act... We lived in an atmosphere of rotting corpses for some days.*<sup>45</sup>

Long standing racial hatred flared up considerably due to the Leliefontein incident. The Namaqualand Border Scouts engaged the Boers on several occasions following the incident. In two separate clashes Commandant W.H.de Vos and Commandant M. Boonzaaier (who had led the Brandvlei rebellion) were killed. Commandant Bouwer then ambushed eleven Border Scouts near Grootkouw, east of Springbok. Despite the open clashes between the recognized forces, Boers still pursued their malicious flogging of non-whites in rural communities and executing suspicious individuals in an effort to crush any resistance, and deter any potential resistors from taking up arms.

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<sup>45</sup> Reitz, pp. 285-28

### Almost Civil War.

Although the tension between the pro-Imperialist Afrikaners and pro-Imperial Coloured communities on the one hand and the Boer rebels and their subservient *agterryers*<sup>46</sup> on the other hand, never escalated into Civil War as such, largely due to the sporadic and isolated nature of the skirmishes between the respective groups, the conditions and conflicting ideologies had certainly set the stage for one. The Boers undoubtedly did have the upper hand in the Western Cape, but it was in a territory that had very little strategic importance, and the British were content to deploy only one column of soldiers to pursue the rebels until the final stages of the conflict when more columns were seconded to the Cape. As Constantine points out, after Smut's return from the Vereeniging peace talks, and made his announcement that the rebels had lost the war, many Boers felt that he had betrayed them and refused to surrender. They could not believe that in the light of their success in the Western Cape, that Boer forces elsewhere had been reduced to small groups of desperate men fighting a lost battle.<sup>47</sup>

The conditions in the Western cape had been suitable for a Civil War. The mounting tension between the rural European class, who were predominantly Dutch speaking, and the rural Coloured/non-white class provided the setting for a general uprising. The Dutch rural class were united by culture, religion, language and history yet they could not, or would not mobilize into a united front and jeopardize their livelihood and families in a region that for the most part of the war had been free of conflict, and

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<sup>46</sup> See Nasson, pp. 95-108. The *agterryers* or 'Those that ride behind' were the loyal, subservient vassals of the Boer families who had followed their masters into war, and would cook and tend to the preparation of camp, as well as serve as a rear guard

<sup>47</sup> Constantine, p. 131

had displayed a high degree of liberalism prior to 1900. The complex relationships and mindsets of the respective parties involved directly and indirectly in the fighting in the Western Cape reflects the extent to which there was disparity and incongruity between the conditions and race relations in various centers of the rural Western Cape.<sup>48</sup> The conditions which prevailed in one district, or even town, did not necessarily apply to the next. It was in this fluid and inconsistent milieu of allegiances and political alignment that the Boer commandos tried to impose Native Republican Law across the board, and hence met with fierce resistance in some quarters of the Cape, while being welcomed with open arms in other quarters. It is even true to say that there were still parts of the Cape that were totally unaffected by the conflict, where the Dutch, British and Coloured population were not thrown into a melting pot of ideologies and forced to confront each other along racial, class and ethnic lines. Aware, yet unaffected by the conflict, some rural communities simply carried on with their everyday existence, an attitude adopted at most of the Wupperthal outposts, which were not marauded as often as the central station.

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<sup>48</sup> See North, M. 'Clanwilliam During the 1899-1902 South African War: Considerations of Social Conditions and Context as Determinants of Local Loyalties' (Unpublished), UCT, 1997  
North manages to paint a very vivid picture of the complex social processes that occurred in Clanwilliam during the war. North raises the interesting notion that, due to the staunch pro-Republican support from the Clanwilliam district in terms of rebel conscripts, many members of the community from all race groups were acutely aware of the danger of flying the wrong flag in the wrong quarter, as it were. Masquerading as a means of survival may well have been a viable option at this point in the lives of many white and non-white inhabitants in many of the urban and rural centres of the Western Cape. Wupperthal would not have been an exception in the face of continued Boer and British raids.

### What Sort of War was it?

To answer the above question in terms of the effects the war had on the Western Cape, requires the patience and scope of a study far broader than this brief interlude can offer. However, there are certain truths which need to be acknowledged. The effects the war had on certain communities, in particular the Wupperthal community, are rooted in the diversities of local experiences. As Nasson observes:

*In their 'symbols of resistance and interpretations of the past', black subordinate classes are not bound by identical objective determination and a single, common consciousness.*<sup>49</sup>

The reasons for this disunity can be traced back to the individual and localized experiences of certain 'Black' underclass communities during the war at the hands of the Boer rebels. Although the collective consciousness of certain Coloured communities was rooted in their experiences in the war, the answers of course do not lie within this narrow binding force. The effects of advancing proleterianisation and the absorption of many communities into the capital economy that emerged after the Anglo-Boer War offers yet another insight into the shaping of a collective Coloured consciousness in the Cape. What this text highlights is the delicacy with which observers should view the effects which the war had on the Western Cape in terms of social development, inter-racial tolerance, and even social regression, due to the complexity of the various group and race relations that prevailed. There are many unresolved and contested meanings that have emerged over

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<sup>49</sup> Nasson, p. 140

the years as a result of the conflict, and only by analyzing the conflict in terms of the effects it had on a specific community, operating under specific conditions, in a specific physical environment, can the modern reader of history attempt to unravel the textured layers of complex meaning, and hope to provide answers to some questions now being posed.

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As you travel from one outpost to the next stories of the war can be heard, and it is when you consider the fierce tension that prevailed at the station between the inhabitants and the raiding parties of both the British and the Boers, that you understand just how powerless the community was. Had they tried to vent this frustration at periodically being cleaned out by hungry soldiers, having their horses requisitioned or their mules taken from them to carry their own corn out of the valley, and offered any armed resistance they would undoubtedly have met with the same fate as the Leliefontein mission community. Shrewd tactics on the part of Reverend Schmolke ensured not all was lost, and as for the people themselves, well they were too busy trying to make it from one sunrise to the next, and their apathy was not a conscious one, as much as an unconsciously practical one. But like Piet Salamo, there are others who heard tell of certain incidents, or who offer interesting anecdotes to the war:

**Onderbaadjie se Hoek. (Waistcoat Bend)**

*My pa se pa het daar gestap – of dit nou die Engelse gewees het of hoe, weet ek nie. Toe het hulle daar geskiet op oupa. Gelukkig het daardie vroeeste mense onderbaadjies gedra. Toe het hy 'n onderbaadjie aan, en*

*toe het hy vinnig weggehardloop toe hy hoor hulle het begin skiet het, en hulle skiet hom nou nog mis. Toe trek hy sy onderbaadjie uit en gooi sy onderbaadjie so in die lug in, en hy kry pad na toe; en toe skiet hulle na sy onderbaadjie toe. In die manier is hy toe die kant van die pad waar hy die bosse daar kry... Vandag se ons daar 'Onderbaadjie se Hoek'.<sup>50</sup>*

(My grandfather was walking one day – whether it was the English or not, I don't know. But they began to shoot at my grandfather. Fortunately in those days the earlier people wore waistcoats. He was wearing a waistcoat, and he quickly ran and hid when he heard they were shooting at him, but they kept shooting miss. He took off his waistcoat and threw in the air, and he slipped away, while they shot at his waistcoat. In this manner he managed to reach the side of the road where the bushes were to hide.

Today we call that spot 'Onderbaadjie se Hoek' (Waistcoat Bend).)

The bend where grandfather Ockhuis managed to trick his attackers is on the section of the Clanwilliam-Wupperthal road between the gates to Bushmanskloof Resort and the Englishman's Grave just before the turn off south to Wupperthal. Grandpa Ockhuis was probably being shot at by Boers; especially dressed in a waistcoat he would have epitomized the educated Cape Coloured from the mission stations that the Boers detested. The fact that he was on the road to Clanwilliam which was a British garrison town, meant that he was able to gain access, and was therefore not a Republican. Any of these factors

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<sup>50</sup> Interview with Mr Isaak ockhuis, Heiveld, October 1999

may have come into play, or perhaps it was idle horsemen from a Boer commando or a British patrol having a bit of fun at the expense of an elderly traveler. Who knows?

*Oupa Ockhuis* wouldn't have been the first casualty of war along this stretch of desolate Cederberg road had a bullet found its mark that day. The Englishman's Grave, a haunting testimony to the senseless loss of life in war, stands beneath a solitary tree alongside the Clanwilliam-Calvinia road just before the turn-off to Wupperthal.

Lieutenant Graham Vinicomb Winchester Clowes lies buried here. He was a member of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Gordon Highlanders, and was killed on the 30 Jan 1901 by a Boer sniper who was riding with Commandant Theron on their return from Wupperthal, where they had been since the 14<sup>th</sup> January.<sup>51</sup> Clowes and his charges were on a requisitioning run for horses in the Pakhuis and Biedouw Valley's. It would seem the Boers favoured this stretch of road for sniping at unsuspecting souls.

#### **A British Column at Witwater.**

At Witwater (White Water) which is situated in the valley that runs north-south from Heuningvlei to Kleinvlei, there is an elderly gentleman, Mr Petrus Johannes Ockhuis. He tells of a British Column which came from the south and moved through the *veld* around Witwater.

*As die troepe hier deur kom [indicating a south-north run] – die Britse troepe- dan word daar nou nie gevra nie; want ek het miskien 'n trop beeste of vee van my wat hier in die pad is waar hulle nou 'travel'. Dan slag hulle van die bees of skaap. Hulle klim net af, dan slag hulle. Daar*

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<sup>51</sup> Paulsen, C. "Vanrhynsdorp in die Anglo-Boere Oorlog", Unpublished, 1999-2-23

*word nie gevra nie...Die eienaar gaan ook nie vra "hoekom maak jy so of so?". Dan gaan jy koeël kry.*<sup>52</sup>

(When the troops came through here – the British troops- there was no asking. Because I might have a herd of cattle or sheep that are in the road that they are travelling along. Then they just slaughter the ox or sheep. They just dismount and slaughter them. Nobody asks permission... The owner is also not going to ask "Why are you doing this or that?" otherwise you'd get a bullet.)

Petrus Ockhuis also tells of how when the Boers engaged the British in the *veld* of the Cederberg, and there was no time for burying their fallen they would just leave the bodies in the crevices and crags: *As hulle geskiet is word hulle nie begrawe nie; word hy net hier in die klipskere gelos, dan ry hulle nou verder.*<sup>53</sup> (If they were shot, they weren't buried, just left in the crevices, then the rest rode on.) When asked if the bones of the dead men could still be seen wedged in the crevices and crags, Mr Ockhuis replied that the evidence had been there but after nearly a century *is daar nie meer 'n bewys van so iets nie.*<sup>54</sup> (there is no longer any evidence of such things).

As a young boy, like most of the young boys from the outposts, Mr Ockhuis would walk in the mountains, exploring the caves with the Bushman paintings or the beacons left by the early herders. It was on one of these boyhood walks that he came across the ruins of a British stockade/blockhouse:

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<sup>52</sup> Interview with Mr Petrus Johannes Ockhuis, Witwater, October 1999

<sup>53</sup> Ibid

<sup>54</sup> Ibid

*Hier in Groot Krakadouw is daar plekke. 'n Groot sirkel met gate deur.*

*Daar is nou in troep binne daardie hok; dis 'n groot sirkel...Dit is nou klip mure wat gebou is in die ronde.<sup>55</sup>*

(Here on the Groot Krakadouw (mountain) are places: Great big circles with holes through them. A soldier is placed inside this cage; it is a big circle... They are stone walls that are built in a circle.)

### **Scars at Esselbank.**

Stories of Boer sniper efforts are in Mr Paul Meton's arsenal of tales about the war. Mr Meton is eighty six years old from Esselbank, and as sharp as a knife. He remembers one gentleman from Esselbank (on the plateau south of Wupperthal) whom he knew who sported a scar on his throat where a Boer bullet had torn his skin:

*Op sy keel het hy so 'n merk gehad waar die koel hom gevang, maar daar nie in sy kop nie!<sup>56</sup>*

(On his throat was a mark where the bullet caught him, but it didn't enter his head!)

### **The Sweet Manure of War.**

The following story was told by Mr Isaak Ockhuis from Heiveld, and though anecdotal is worth mentioning, because it illustrates that war can literally change the face

<sup>55</sup> Interview with Mr Paul Meton, Esselbank, October 1999

<sup>56</sup> Ibid

of a landscape, and it need not be caused by shells exploding, or bullets tearing through the earth; it would appear that war has a subtle side too.

*Hier is nou 'n sekere soort gras wat een van my ma se broers – baie oud  
gewees – hy't gesê hier was nie hierdie sekere soort gras gewees nie.  
Maar van die Boer Oorlog het daai gras in die omgewing opgegroeï... dit  
het in die perde mis gewees. Ja!..Dit is 'n soort gras, hy teer op 'n ander  
plant. My oom het gese dit is die Engelse perde wat dit hier kom uit mis  
hier.<sup>57</sup>*

(There is a type of grass here that my mother's brother – he was very old – said never used to be here. But, during the Boer War, this grass began to grow in this area; it was in the horse manure. It's true! It is a sort of grass that climbs over other plants. My uncle said that it was the English horses that came and defecated here.)

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And so the History of Wuppertal carries with it the memory of war. Of Boer and British raids, of tension and conflict, yet the mission stood firm, and the post war years brought with them new challenges and new twists of fate, some good, some bad.

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<sup>57</sup> Interview with Mr Isaak Ockhuis, Heiveld, October 1999

*Changing Hands*

*'Changing Hands'* is the story of the handing over of Wupperthal by the Rhenish Mission Society to the Moravian Church. The theme of identity comes through very strongly in this chapter. The community was forced to affiliate themselves with a certain church body, and their perceptions of 'self' and their own sense of identity came into play. The community had to establish what their relationships were like with various interested parties, and then identify themselves in relation to these groups. This is a fascinating account of the processes which led to the handing over of the mission to the Moravians.

\* \* \*

*Die Kerkraad bid  
 Mooi in gelid  
 Dat die Here  
 Vir mense  
 Vat vlug  
 Oor hongergrense  
 Brood moet gee...  
 Maar hulle vergeet  
 Wat hulle moet weet:  
 Gee julle  
 Vir hulle  
 Iets om te eet.<sup>1</sup>*

Carl Boplaas, Soetsop Virre Klipkind

### **The Pear Tree Blossoms at Wupperthal.**

1965. The winds of change swept over Wupperthal in this year, and brought with them a new era in the 'history' of the community. A new governing body, new means of administration and new rules for living. The changes, though seemingly innocuous, have in fact had adverse effects on the community. It would seem that the price of 'liberty' in terms of lifestyle and freedom of choice has been an expensive one, and the community has been left pondering the decision they took thirty four years ago.

### **Dutch Reformed or Moravian?**

Cock outlines many of the explanations that have been offered for the seemingly out of kilter proceedings which led to the Moravians, and not the Nederlandse Gereformeerde Kerk (hereafter NGK)<sup>2</sup>, taking over the mission station at Wupperthal. It

<sup>1</sup> The Church council prays/ in sweet song/ that the Lord/ will feed/ those people/ who flee/ over hunger's borders/ But they forget/ what they should know:/ that they themselves/ should give the hungry/ a meal.

<sup>2</sup> Dutch Reformed Church

has been suggested that the community made a hue and cry about the prospect of falling under the proverbial wing of the NGK, simply as a protest against the patronizing and authoritarian design of the Rhenish Mission Society. In a sense then, we could assume that the community decided to introduce the Moravian Church into the equation simply because the Rhenish missionaries had solicited the help of the NGK without properly consulting the community. Cock goes so far as to suggest that perhaps the community would have invited the NGK to the negotiating table had the Rhenish missionaries introduced the Moravians as their successors.<sup>3</sup>

Another explanation proffered was that the community were openly displaying their long felt disdain for an institution they ostensibly saw as being ‘pro-Boer’. The NGK was the white Afrikaans farmer’s church. There can be no doubt that the community harboured some resentment for the white Afrikaaners who had exploited them on the neighbouring farms, and even taken pot shots at them during the Anglo-Boer War, not to mention rustled their cattle and pillaged their vegetable gardens. ‘Coloured’ discontent would have been spurred by Apartheid, and anti-NGK feelings would have been understandable. The people of Wupperthal reveal a different sequence of events, which run contrary to the ‘history’ written in the past. It is to these voices we now turn to discern a fuller truth:

*Nee, dit het nie baie kalm verloop nie. Ons het nie daardie tyd – toe het ek op die Raad verdien – die vertrou gehad in die Moraviese Sending nie.*

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<sup>3</sup> Cock, pp. 31-40

*Ons het nie geglo dat hulle sou die uitelike ook kon [hanteer] soos die Reinse Sending.*<sup>4</sup>

(No, it [the transition] did not go too calmly. At that time – I was serving on the church council – we didn't have much trust in the Moravian Church's ability. We didn't believe they could handle the secular life issues in the same way the Rhenish Church had.)

There are people in the community today who feel that this mistrust was well founded, as the Moravian Church has not lived up to the expectations of the community, especially the people at the outposts. However, some of the members of the community felt that the transition was not a jarring one, and only posed problems for the elderly people who were so set in their ways, and had perhaps become socialized and moulded by the 'patronizing' Rhenish Mission Society:

*For the old people at this time...for them it was an 'aanpassing' [adaptation]. The adaptation caused them a lot of problems, from the Rhenish to the Moravian. Although the ceremonies etc., there isn't such a big difference. Both are German based. So it wasn't such a big difference, but for the old people it was – for them it might have been traumatic. For the younger generation at that time, it wasn't such an issue.*<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Interview with Mr Paul Wynand, October, 1998

<sup>5</sup> Interview with Mr Tom Abrahams, Heuningvlei, September, 1998

One gentleman who was in the throw of the debate as to who should succeed the Rhenish missionaries was Mr B.M. Van Rooy. Mr Van Rooy was a school teacher in Wupperthal for many years and was also the principal. Mr Van Rooy's recollection of the events surrounding the handover in 1965 accurately capture the mindset of the community at that time:

*Dit was moelik, want ons was nie geken in die saak nie. Kom ek vir u nou se, in neentien dertig het hier 'n Reinse Sending inspekteur gekom... en hulle met die NG sending Kerk oor een gekom dat daardie predikante wat daardie tyd in diens was – ek praat nou van die Duitse sendelinge – wanneer hulle die aftree ouderdom bereik dan gaan daardie gemeente automaties oor na die NG sending Kerk. En so het dit gebeur, een na die ander oor gegaan... op die ou end was dit net Wupperthal en Serepta oor. En toe kom Wupperthal aan die beurt, en ons het nie geweet dat Eerwaarde Strassberger al lank met die NGK onderhandel het, as gevolg van daardie ooreenkoms van destyds, het hy met hulle onderhandel as hy aftree dan moet hulle die stasie oorneem. Maar hy het niks met ons daaroor gepraat nie, ook nie met die rade nie, die Kerkraad, Opsienersraad, niks; hy het dit alleen gedoen.<sup>6</sup>*

(It was awkward because we were not aware of the issues at stake. Let me just tell you, in 1930, the Rhenish Institute inspector arrived at Wupperthal and struck a deal with the NGK, that when the Rhenish missionaries in

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<sup>6</sup> Interview with Mr B.M. Van Rooy, Wupperthal, October, 1998

service at that time, reached the age of retirement, the communities would be automatically handed over to the NG Mission Church. And so it came to pass, one after the other, until eventually Wupperthal and Serepta were left. Then Wupperthal's turn came, and we did not know that Reverend Strassberger had negotiated back then that when he retired, the NGK would take over the mission. He hadn't said anything to us, and had said nothing to the committees, the Church committee, the Administrative committee, to no one; he acted alone.)

These words speak for themselves, and very little embellishment is needed, except to say that they are testimony to the authoritative and somewhat patronizing style of administration the Rhenish Mission Society adopted towards the people of Wupperthal. There is no doubt the Rhenish missionaries were inextricably devout and committed to the furtherment of the community, however, the measure of progress was subject to their yardstick, and what they deemed suitable for the furtherment of the Institute and the community. But, despite Strassberger's covert deal with the NGK, he sorely underestimated the will of the people to be administered by a body they felt would ensure their survival on an ongoing basis. Despite Strassberger's forceful personality and domineering air, the community would not be bullied into following his design for the future, and the community formed a front of resistance to the proposed hand over to the NGK. Mr Van Rooy takes the story further:

*Nou het die tyd gekom om te baklei, en toe het ons eenvoudig gesê ons gaan nie, en toe kom daar 'n sending inspekteur uit Duitsland uit. Toe moes die dinge bespreek word. Nou daardie tyd het ek nie op die rade gedien nie; hulle het net groot ou manne op die rade gehad wat mooi gese het "Ja meneer, as meneer so sê, ja meneer". [laugh] So toe moes ons probeer om die ding te keer. So ek nou gesê het, was dit net die ou manne wat daarop gedien het, enhulle het jare saam – vyf-en-twintig, dertig jare saam met Strassberger gewerk, nou hoe kan hulle nou teen die man gaan? ...dis nou ongemaklik. Toe was daar 'n onderwyser van Heuningvlei, en hy was op die raad, toe moes ons hom gebruik. En met nog 'n oom van my, Jurie Van Rooy, sy breins is op die regte plek gesit. Nou toe moes hulle die ding bespreek met die inspekteur waar Eerwaarde Strassberger by was, en toe het my oom baie reguit gepraat. Hy sê toe vir Pastor Mensl – ek onthou nog sy naam – "Ons wil nie 'n wit man hier he nie, verstaan?!" nou vir daardie tyd was dit verskriklik om so iets te se. "Ons wil nie 'n wit man op ons preekstoel he nie". Of 'n "Boer" – laat ek dit so stel, want 'n Duitser is nog 'n wit man, maar 'n Duitser is 'alright'. "Ons wil nie 'n Boer daar he nie, want as ons 'n Boer sien, dan sien ons 'n slang. En as 'n Boer ons sien dan sien hy 'n slang!" ...so reguit het hy gepraat.<sup>7</sup>*

(The time had come to put up a fight. And when we said that we would not [move over to the NGK], they sent a mission inspector from Germany.

<sup>7</sup> Interview with Mr B.M. Van Rooy, Wupperthal, October, 1998

So things had to be discussed. At that time I never sat on the committees, only the big, old men who could say “Yes sir, no sir, three bags full sir” were on the committees. So we had to try and stop the thing. Like I said, it was only the men who had worked with Strassberger for twenty five years, thirty years, served on the committees; how could they go against the man now? – it was too awkward. There was a teacher from Heuningvlei on the committee, and we used him. My uncle, Jurie Van Rooy, who was intelligent, he got involved too. So now we had to discuss the issue with the inspector with Strassberger present, and my uncle spoke very frankly. He addressed Pastor Mensel [the inspector] – I remember his name-saying: “We do not want a white man here, do you understand?”. Now for that time this was an horrific thing to say. “We do not want a white man in our pulpit”. I should say “Boer”, because a German is a white man, and a German is alright. “We do not want a Boer there, because when we see a Boer, we see a snake. And when a Boer sees one of us, he sees a snake.”...this is how frankly he spoke.)

Eventually the community succeeded in persuading the inspector that they wanted to remain Rhenish, a message which the inspector conveyed to the Rhenish Institute in Germany, and to the administrative headquarters in South West Africa. The community’s request was granted, and the Reverend Dittmer was sent out to continue the work of the Rhenish missionaries at Wupperthal in 1952. The NGK had lost the bid for Wupperthal, and in 1965, the mission station was taken over by the Moravian Church. Mr Tom

Abrahams has an interesting, though by his own admission, an unsubstantiated explanation for the Moravian Church taking over the mission:

*If they [the members of the Geneva Convention] should decide that South West Africa should not remain a protectorate anymore, and should become like Swaziland, Lesotho etc. – a republic on their own, or something on their own, and it wasn't a protectorate of South Africa anymore, then this little part which also belonged to the Rhenish Mission whose headquarters were in South West Africa, then it should be more or less confiscated by the South African government. That is what they were afraid of. So rather than have this area confiscated by the government of that time, rather give it to another German society. So that is why we became Moravian, and because their headquarters were in Cape Town, nothing could happen.<sup>8</sup>*

Mr Koos Zimri adds weight to Mr Abrahams's notion that the hand over of the mission in 1965 was a political move to circumvent the possibility of falling under the administration of the Apartheid government or even the church institution which was seen as the spiritual bastion of Afrikanerdom. As 'Coloured', second rate citizens in South Africa at the time, the people of Wupperthal exercised the only recourse open to them in terms of defying the will of the Afrikaaner administration which threatened to engulf them and relegate them to the status of second rate Christians. The Wupperthalers

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<sup>8</sup> Interview with Mr Tom Abrahams, Heuningvlei, September, 1998

take their spirituality very seriously and in a sense it provided them with a breathing space in which they had some control over their well being. To be incorporated under the banner of the NGK was for them, unthinkable:

*In Esslinger se tyd het dit gekom in 1965, toe moes Suid Wes Afrika sy onafhanklikheid kry. Nou is Duitsland te ver om ons daarvan af te bedien. Want ons was nou bedien uit Suid Wes uit. Maar as Suid Wes nou onafhanklikheid kry, dan kan hulle ons nie verder bedien nie. Toe kan ons gemeente nou kies by watter kerk ons wil nou aansluit; of ons nou NG wil word, of by die Evangeliese Lutheran Kerk wil aansluit. Dit was nou 1965, toe dien ek op die raad, die Opsienersraad. Toe besluit die leeraars wat op die sinode dien, die Moraviese Broedekerk is nou in verwantskap by die Reinsesending as die Evangeliese Lutheran Kerk, of ons nie maar Moraviese wil word nie...Hulle het met ons vergadering gehou. Toe het hulle gevra ons moet nou asseblief by die Moraviese Broedekerk aansluit. Nou man daar sit vir my die ongemak wat ek nou meer sit, ons wil ons eiendomsregte kry.*

*Nou sê die Moraviese Broedekerk, Meneere Habbegaan en Schaaberg, dat ons met hulle 'n ooreenkoms aangegaan, 'n skriftelike ooreenkoms: hulle hou alles vir ons in trust. Hulle bewaar dit, die ses-en-dertig duisend hektar grond wat ons mense op bly. Hulle bestuur ons, maar daar sal net*

*een verskil wees: hulle doen nie uitelike dinge nie. Uitelik moet ons maar self ontwikkel. Hulle doen net geestelike werk.*<sup>9</sup>

(In Esslingers time it came to pass, in 1965, that South West Africa had to become independent. Now, Germany was too far away for us to be administered from there, so we were administered from South West. But if South West got its independence, then they would no longer be able to administer us. So the community could choose which church we wanted to become a part of, whether we wanted to be Dutch Reformed of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. It was 1965, and I was serving on the council, the administrative council. So the officials who served on the synod decided that the Moravian Mission Church was in kinship with the Rhenish Mission Society, more so than with the Evangelical Lutheran Church, and asked us if we wouldn't rather be Moravian... They held a meeting with us, and asked us to please affiliate ourselves with the Moravian Mission Church. Now, therein lies the discontent with which I now live, we want our land rights to be recognised.

Now the Moravian Mission Church, Messers Habbegaan and Schaaberg drew up an agreement with us, a written agreement: they were holding everything in trust for us. They were overseeing it, the thirty six thousand hectares of land on which the people lived. They were going to administer us just as the Rhenish Mission Society had, except there would be one difference: they would not be responsible for the secular things. We would

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<sup>9</sup> Interview with Mr Koos Zimri, Wupperthal, October, 1999

have to develop the secular side of things ourselves. They would just take care of the spiritual aspects of life.)

### **The Ignorant and Detached.**

It is important to note that not everybody in the community was in the know. The hand over to the Moravians 'just happened' for some people, particularly the people at the outposts who were relatively isolated with no ready means of communication or transport to keep them in touch. It was as though the sun set on a Rhenish day, and rose to a new face in the pulpit. The effect: minimal. But today, the outposts are feeling the effects of Moravian administration, and discontent runs thick through the valleys and across the plateaus surrounding the central station. For one lady, the change was an atemporal event.

*Ek weet nie wanneer dit gewees het nie, dit het net gebeur.<sup>10</sup>*

(I don't know when it happened, it just happened.)

Not only were the people at the satellite stations excluded for whatever reasons from the proceedings at the central station at the time of the hand over, but they were also maligned to a certain degree by the central station inhabitants:

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<sup>10</sup> Interview with Mrs Griet Titus, Rietvlei, October, 1999

*Die Wupperthalers het gese die buite stasie se mense is onnoosel, hulle is dom. Daar is die afdrukkery; die buite stasie se mense is verneerdig.<sup>11</sup>*

(The Wupperthalers said that the people from the outposts were ignorant, that they were stupid. There is the oppression; the people from the outposts were demeaned.)

This feeling of detachment<sup>12</sup> will be explored in the next chapter of this text when the issues concerning the land rights of the people and the discontent with the Moravian Church will be taken further.

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<sup>11</sup> Interview with Mr Isaak Ockhuius, Heiveld, October, 1999

<sup>12</sup> See Anderson, M. 'Elandskloof: Land, Labour and Dutch Reformed Mission Activity in the Southern Cederberg, 1860-1963'. Anderson portrays the way in which the community of Elandskloof were driven off their land. News of this event would have filtered back to the community of Wupperthal and herein may lie clues as to why they were so reluctant to join the Dutch Reformed Mission Church.

***Trickery, Trust and the Communist***

*'Trickery, Trust and the Communist'* is a chapter filled with unsettling accounts of misrepresentation and dispossession. The theme of land is the overriding concern expressed in this chapter. The vignettes combine to paint a disturbing picture of how the community systematically lost tracts of land to the church and to neighbouring farmers. No doubt these stories will be strongly challenged by the Moravian Church, and by the farmers concerned. The truth behind the sense of loss the people feel over the land, may never emerge, yet their history of dispossession is now captured in this text. Though the road to finding out the truth may be a long one, the first footsteps have been taken, and one might argue they have been taken by the right people, namely the community itself.

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*Now is the winter of our discontent,  
made glorious summer by this sun of York.*

William Shakespeare, Richard III

### **A Matter of Colour.**

So why are the people of Wupperthal and the satellite stations disgruntled? The answers are numerous, and seemingly simple, yet the tendency to oversimplify issues is a pitfall to be avoided. The people of the Wupperthal community are a simple folk. This is not to say they are dim, or even ignorant. Modern media of television and radio keep them abreast of global affairs, but relative to the Coca-Cola World we all know, their existence is based on the most basic premise: to survive they must eat; to eat they must work the land. That is their primary concern, all else is secondary. It is around this seemingly simple premise that they conduct themselves from day-to-day. They have issues they want to voice, but the need to feed hungry mouths and ensure good crop yields occupies their time; but, this does not mean they are oblivious to certain goings on, but they are hamstrung. A simple lifestyle overrides the need to battle complex issues. The following chapter will explore some of these issues, many of which are being given literary breathing space for the first time in their rich history.

*Ek sê nou baie keer vir die mense hier- meneer moet nou hoor hoe dit hier*

*is – nou as hier 'n blanke predikant hier kom sal dit seker beter gaan.*

*Want die kleerling – kyk, om somer nou 'straight' te wees; ons almal is*

*mos nie 'straight' nie – die kleerling predikant, hy's nou meeste nou maar*

*daar vir die een, daar vir daai een; nou 'n blanke meneer, hy's nou*

*'straight forward'. Ek meen baie van die kleerling sê die blanke is agter*

*'bucks', maar in my oë sien is hy 'straight forward'. En 'n klerling het meer respek en gesag vir 'n blanke as vir wat hy vir sy eie nasie het.*

*Na die klerling predikant hier in kom, as ek nou sien, raak ons meer agteruit as daai tyd gewees. Kyk, hulle het altyd die predikant om gekom, dan kom bespreek hy die huur, en hy vra wat die probleem is. Maar hier kom nie nou meer 'n bruin predikant om te kom vra. Kyk, hy's nou dienaar, hy moet sy skape besoek.*

*Nou van die Moravies oor gevat het, lyk dit vir my dit raak al terugtige.*

*Ons probeer vir ons eiendom grond te sukkel en beter gerief, maar hulle wil ons nie hulp nie. Hulle hulp net binne in Wupperthal. Niks vir die buite stasies nie. Dis nou 'n saak van selfhulp. Ons moet vir ons self kyk.<sup>1</sup>*

(I often say to the people – now Sir must listen to how it actually is around here – if a white priest came here things would probably be better.

Because the Coloured – look, to be quite frank; we're not all as straight talking as this – the Coloured priest is mostly concerned for an individual here, and an individual there, but a white gentlemen is straight forward. I mean a lot of Coloured people believe that the whites are after 'bucks' [money], but in my eyes he is just straight forward. And a Coloured has more respect and reverence for a white man as opposed to someone from his own race. The way I see it, after the Coloured preachers came here we've become more backward than in previous years. Look, they [the Rhenish missionaries] always sent a preacher to come and discuss the

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<sup>1</sup> Interview with Mr Freek Swarts, Grasvlei, October, 1999 (Anon in final text)

hiring of the land, and ask if there were any problems. But, today no brown preacher comes here to ask how things are. Look he is the servant of the Lord, and he should visit his flock.

Since the Moravians took over, it seems to me that things have regressed. We try to secure our land rights, to struggle for a bit of comfort, but they don't want to help us. They only help those down in Wupperthal. Nothing gets given to the outposts. It is now a matter of self-help. We must look out for ourselves.)

### **The Right to Own Land.**

As mentioned earlier in this text, the issue of land ownership is perhaps closest to the hearts of the Wupperthal community. The people believe that the land was worked and owned by their ancestors long before the Rhenish Mission Society began administering their affairs, and some people in the community believe that even today, the Moravian Church is doing a pretty good job at keeping the issue of land ownership under wraps. It seems odd that in the face of periodic inquiries by the community into the issue of land ownership that the Moravian authorities have not given the community a straight answer, or even produced proof of their indisputable claim to the land, and right to administer the land as they see fit. The evidence suggests that there are grounds for the people's claims to land tenureship, but it is not an issue that will be resolved over night. Legal wranglings are undoubtedly in the offing, but this text presents a side of the story

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that has not been heard before, and hopefully will draw the attention of those who are in a position to do something about it.

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**‘Soos ek dit verstaan sal dit nooit my land wees nie.’<sup>2</sup>**

(The way I understand it, this will never be my land.)

### **A Bottle of Wine and a Few Pounds.**

Grasvlei is just one of the many outposts of Wupperthal. Like most of the satellite stations it was a farm, worked by *Bastaard-Hottentot*, Khoisan or ex-slaves. The land was theirs. In the isolated valleys and on the plateaus that surround the central mission station, these families lived in relative isolation from the rest of the world. But, as the Rhenish Mission Society gradually began transforming the area into a viable prospect for the farmers and the artisans, so they attracted interest in the economic potential of the region. Grasvlei was owned by Gert Koopman. Mr Freek Swarts of Grasvlei tells of how Mr Koopman was tricked out of his land:

*Gert Koopman, toe was die sy eiendom. En toe het 'n ander ou, Piet Ryns, toe het hulle hom hier verwys hy moet hier uit, toe het hierdie wit man hier kom oorvat. Hulle het hom om gekoop met 'n bottel wyn en 'n paar ponde.*

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<sup>2</sup> Interview with Mr Freek Swarts, Grasvlei, October, 1999

*Toe het hy daar vir hom daar onder die akkerboom 'n huisie loop maak... Toe het hulle hom gewys met die geweer, en toe moes hy uit.<sup>3</sup>*

(Gert Koopman used to own this land. Another man, Piet Ryns, told him he must vacate this place, and this white man came and took over. They bought him out with a bottle of wine and a few pounds. So he went and built himself a house over there [indicates across the river] under the oak tree. Then they told him to leave at gunpoint, so he had to leave.)

According to Mr Swarts, Heinie Strassberge, the entrepreneurial son of the Reverend Willy Strassberge bought Grasvlei from a bankrupt Piet Rijns and then sold it to the Moravians, or possibly swapped it for the rights to farm Voelvlei, a farm to the East of Wupperthal. Mr Koos Zimri also recounts the misfortunes of Mr Gert Koopman:

*Neentien een-en-vyftig, of twee-en-vyftig, kom hier 'n boer van 'n plaas, ons se Vleiplaas – hy le onder pakhuis Berg. Die boer kom kuier vir ou Gert Koopman op Grasvlei. Toe het Gert Koopman nog sy Kaart en Transport. Hy kom kuier weer, toe bring hy vir hom 'n bottel brandewyn, en hy maak Oupa Gert dronk. En hy kom met sy vorm, Oupa Gert moet “net hier teken” – en daar teken die ou hom af van sy grond af.<sup>4</sup>*

(1951 or 1952, a farmer from a farm we call Vleiplaas which lies at the foot of the Pakhuis Mountain, came and visited old Gert Koopman at Grasvlei. Gert Koopman still had the title deeds to his land. He came and

<sup>3</sup> Interview with Mr Freek Swarts, Grasvlei, October, 1999

<sup>4</sup> Interview with Mr Koos Zimri, Wupperthal, October, 1999

visited again, and brought with him a bottle of brandy. He made old man Gert drunk, and he produced a form saying old man Gert must “just sign here”. And so he signed himself off of his own land.)

How true this story is remains to be seen, but the event, however embellished it may have become, has been told from one generation to the next, and left an indelible mark on the collective consciousness of the community of Grasvlei who still do not own their own land.

### **Heinie Strassberger: the son of a preacher man**

One of the incidents in the history of Wupperthal that makes the blood of Mr Koos Zimri boil is the story of Heinie Strassberger, and the way in which he secured the rights to a farm Voelvlei after striking a deal with the church authorities:

*Heinie Strassberger, meneer Eerwaarde Willie Strassberger se oudste seun, toe wil hy vir Wupperthal koop. Toe gaan vind hy dit in Pretoria uit, hy's nie te verkoop nie. Hy't daar in die argief gaan krap, toe was die argief nog in Pretoria gewees, toe was hy nog nie in die Kaap nie. Hy's nie te verkoop nie. Toe beraadslag hy en sy Pappie, hy wil graag dan vir Voelvlei he – dis 'n plaas hierso, 'n saai plaas. Toe besluit hulle met die Opsienersraad en saam met die Kerkraad, hy sal nou kyk om vir ons drinkwater aan te bring, wat ons altyd met die emmer in die rivier gaan*

*skep het. Ons het nie water by die krane gehad nie; nou maar dit is 'n goeie ding, dit is ontwikkeling. Dan sal hy die leer looiery omskep meer modern, sodat ons meer modern kan produseer. En dan sal hy op die velde waar aanhoudend waters is, sal hy kyk om dame te maak vir diere se versettings. Nou dit is ook 'n goeie ding. Toe gaan hy heen, hy lê asbes pyp daar uit die kloof uit... na die reservoir tot by die Kleinrivier. Van daarvan af het hy koper pyp in gesit. Hier onder waar ons nou bly – kyk, ons bly nou by die onder end van die dorp – toe le hy half duim pypies. As die mense daar bo water tap, dan het ons nie hier water nie. Hy't net sewe krane opgesit, net reg met die pad af. Die agter straat se mense het nooit water nie. Hulle moet hier in die voor pad water kom haal by die krane. Toe gaan bou hy daar in die looiery 'n paar gatte, daar verander en verbeter, en 'n bietjie reg gemaak. En die looiery se dak ook – nie niwe plate, ou plate, maar beter houd werk ook ingesit, en dit daar versterk en weer reg gemaak. Toe gaan hy op na ons se saai plaas toe, gaan ploei hy hom net 'n bietjie los, toe maak hy met 'n kruiwa-skraper, toe skraap hy met twee muil esels die grond uit dat hy net walle maak. Toe kap hy vir hom sestien duisend morge grond toe. Hy't van onse aanhoudende waters. Hy kan kom nie reguit grense toe trek nie, hy maak hom met draaie. Die het ek vir meneer Derek Hanekom gese, en hy't gese hy sal daar in gegaan het, en daar's stilte tot vandag toe.<sup>5</sup>*

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<sup>5</sup> Interview with Mr Koos Zimri, Wupperthal, October, 1999

(Heinie Strassberger – Reverend Willy Strassberger’s oldest son – wanted to buy Wupperthal. But he found out in Pretoria that the land could not be bought. He went and rummaged in the archives, when the archives were still in Pretoria, before they were moved to Cape Town. The land couldn’t be bought. So he and his father deliberated the issue, and as a result he wanted to secure Voëlvlei for himself – it’s a farm near here, a crop farm. So they decide along with the administrative council and the church council, that he would see to it that drinking water was made readily available, because we always had to draw water with a bucket down by the river. We didn’t have water on tap – now we thought this was a good thing, this is progress. Then he would modernise the tannery, so that we could adopt more modern modes of production. Then he would make dams in the lands where there was perennial water to bring relief for our stock. Now, this was also a good thing. So off he went and laid asbestos piping from the *kloof* to the reservoir, and down to the Kleinrivier [Small River which runs through Wupperthal from the East]. From that point he put down copper piping. Down this end of the town where we live – look, we are at the bottom end of the village – he put down half inch pipes. If the people up top are drawing water off the line, then we have no water down this end. He only installed seven taps along the road. The people on the back street never had water. They had to come and draw water from the taps here on the front street. The he went and did some alterations in the tannery, knocked a few holes, made a few changes, a few

improvements. He didn't put new sheets on the roof, old sheets, but he improved the wood beams, strengthened the roof and patched it up. Then he went up to the crop lands, and ploughed the ground loose a little bit. He used a wheelbarrow plough and two mules to create a few embankments [probably to channel water]. After that he carved out sixteen thousand morgens of land for himself. He took some of our perennial water. He couldn't pull his boundary straight, he made it with twists and turns. I told all of this to Mr Derek Hanekom, and he said he'd look into it, but to this day we've heard nothing.)

Apparently Reverend Esslinger made an exchange of land with Mr Barend Lubbe of Mertenhof farm.<sup>6</sup> Mr Zimri insists that the land he offered was some of the best pasture land, and in return the community received a *hoop klippe*<sup>7</sup> (a pile of stones) in return. Farmers in the area seem to have developed a habit of erecting crooked boundary fences to incorporate the best waters. Whether this is true or not needs to be investigated further, but Mr Zimri's indignation is apparent in the following little anecdote:

*'n Sekere ou Oompie Man – die ou was doof – hy't vir my gesê “ 'n lyn, 'n lyn loop soos jy met 'n geweer skiet. Dis net by 'n rivier dat jy en jou buurman kan reëlings streek met mekaar.<sup>8</sup>*

<sup>6</sup> This transaction must have taken place sometime between 1957 and 1965, while Ernst Esslinger was the minister at Wupperthal.

<sup>7</sup> Interview with Mr Koos Zimri, Wupperthal, October, 1999

<sup>8</sup> Ibid

(A certain old Uncle Man – he was deaf – he told me “a boundary line, a boundary line runs as just as straight as you would shoot with a gun. It’s only at rivers that you and your neighbour can draw up rules with each other.)

### **Empty Promises at Nouwpoort-Jonsten.**

As mentioned earlier in this text, Mr Karl Swarts of Nouwpoort-Jonsten near Langkloof lives in a disheveled thatch-roof clay brick house. Although the church promised to build him a suitable abode, they have not followed through:

*Die mense het nou belowe hulle sal vir my daar 'n huis bou...die kerklike mense. Ek wil nie hier bly nie. Toe sê hulle: “Een van die dae kom maak ons jou 'n huis daar”. Dis nou seker twee jaar wat hulle vir my gebelowe het. Hulle het nog niks gedoen nie.<sup>9</sup>*

(The people promised that they would build me a house over there...the church people. I don’t want to live here. They said: “One of these days we’ll come and build you a house over there”. It’s been two years since they promised. They’ve done nothing about it.)

If you saw Mr Swarts’s house you would understand why he doesn’t want to live there. Although the hut has a certain rustic charm, it is far from ideal as even a temporary dwelling for someone in transit, let alone as a fixed abode. The winters in the Cederberg

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<sup>9</sup> Interview with Mr Karl Swarts, Nouwpoort-Jonsten, October, 1999

are mercilessly cold, and Mr Swarts is very exposed in his rustic shelter. He says that the rain only runs down the back wall and out the door, so the patch of floor where he throws his mattress in the evenings doesn't get wet. It does seem odd that an institution which professes to have the interests of the community at heart, cannot make some commitment to ensuring that the people which it is charged with 'protecting' at least have a solid roof over their heads.

### **A Self-Professed Murderer and Miss Vygie Swarts.**

There is an interesting story that is part of the history of Heuningvlei. Both Mr Tom Abrahams and Mr Koos Zimri knew the story well, and it is from their recollections that we are able to learn something about the Dutch farmer, Mr Scheeba who established himself at Heuningvlei, long before the Rhenish Missionaries arrived:

*He went for his studies in the Netherlands to become a priest, and he had a fiancé. But he felt he couldn't leave his fiancé out in the cold for all the time he went for his studies, so he asked his best friend: "Look here, if there is a good show or a good theatrical thing or whatever, and my girlfriend wants to go and you know she wants to go, why not take her along so that she doesn't just sit out in the cold while I'm studying. She's got to live in the meantime". Then after a year's study – that region, more or less – in that time she went out along with the bloke when there was something going. But, when he returned from his studies at the end of that year, he had the perception that his friend had taken over from him, and*

*that his fiancé wasn't as loving as she was before he went to the seminary. So, he started speaking to his friend about this: "Look here, I put all my trust in you and this is what you have done to me. You've now converted her to your side of things, and you are now Mr Man, and I am out in the cold, it seems to me," he said. Well they started having words, and these words eventually became fisty cuffs, and the fisty cuffs became so serious that he thought that he had killed his friend. And then he was afraid of what could happen after this, because – well, even if it was accidental and not meant to be killing – the consequences would be too much for him in the Netherlands. So he went and got onto one of the old sailing ships. This was early 1700s or even the mid 1700s, after 1750, something there, because this Heuningvlei is older than Wupperthal. So he went to the nearest harbour and got onto a boat as a stowaway and survived through to Cape Town. In Cape Town he slunk off the boat in the night hours and promptly started travelling inland, and eventually he came out in this area. And when he came here he started building up a place as a farm. Because of all the wild hives, beehives, near here, he called the place 'Hunig Vallei' [Valley of the Honey], and Hunig Vallei later became Heuningvallei. He took one of the natives of this land as a wife. But his wife<sup>10</sup> was barren. As in Biblical times he took unto him an extra one, and she became the mother of all the Ockhuizen children; because he changed his name to Ockhuizen after landing here, because Scheeba would be*

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<sup>10</sup> Mr Koos Zimri says that her name was Maria, Maria Ockhuizen. See Interview with Mr Koos Zimri, Wupperthal, October, 1999

*found out as a killer. In actual fact the young man's friend was only unconscious and badly hurt. Nothing ever happened to him [Scheeba], and that is how Heuningvlei started. And that is how the Ockhuis family – there are even some of them in South West Africa, current Namibia, in Vanrynsdorp, in Vredenburg, in Cape Town. The name Ockhuizen was shortened to Ockhuis.<sup>11</sup>*

Mr Koos Zimri says that the lady Ockhuizen married was a Miss Vygie Swarts, a wealthy land owner who already lived where Heuningvlei is today:

*Toe het Vygie Swarts vir Heuningvlei, en dit was 'n ryk vrou. Sy was 'n klerling vrou. Sy was skat ryk. Sy het groot grond gehad. Toe was hulle nou mos bure, Vygie Swarts en Ockhuizen. En later het hy by Vygie Swarts kuier-kuier. Dan word hy sommige aande 'n bietjie laat. Hy slaap later daar oor. Dis daar waar Ockhuizen by Heuningvlei daar in kom het Oompie Man my gese. Want sy het ook 'n testament ook na gelaat: tot die derde geslag; die vierde of sesde geslag kan die grond op vis.<sup>12</sup>*

(Vygie Swarts owned Heuningvlei then, and she was a wealthy woman.

She was a 'Coloured' woman. She was very wealthy. She had a lot of ground too. They were neighbours, Vygie Swarts and Ockhuizen.

Eventually he started visiting Vygie Swarts. Some evenings the visits would end late. Eventually he slept over too. And that is how Ockhuizen

<sup>11</sup> Interview with Mr Tom Abrahams, Heuningvlei, September, 1998

<sup>12</sup> Interview with Mr Koos Zimri, Wupperthal, October, 1999

got Heuningvlei, that's what old uncle Man told me. She also left a will binding all up until the third generation; only the fourth or sixth generation could sell the land.)

Vygie Swarts is a bit of a legend amongst the Ockhuis clan today, for she embodies the matriarch of the family that is their link to the land, and their proof of birth right, which will hopefully help access to the land one day. Mr Ryno Ockhuis of Heuningvlei tells of how the members of the community made inquiries into just how much land Vygie Swarts owned, and this is what they discovered:

*Hier bly boere op die Ockhuis se grond. Ons het aansoek gedoen vir die land, om te kyk hoe ver strek ons se grond, en ons het dit gekry. Meneer moet weet hier is ag-en-veertig plase buite Heuningvlei en sy buite stasies. Hier is ag-en-veertig plase wat behoort aan die Ockhuise, wat die Moravies verhuur.<sup>13</sup>*

(There are farmers here that live on Ockhuis' land. We made an inquiry about the land, to see how far our land stretches, and we got it. Mister, you must know that there are forty eight farms outside of Heuningvlei and its satellite stations. Forty eight farms which belong to the Ockhuis family, which the Moravians hire out.)

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<sup>13</sup> Interview with Mr Ryno Ockhuis, Heuningvlei, October, 1999

## Rumours of a Trust.

Amidst the swirling speculation and stories of deceit and trickery, one rumour emerges which is of vital importance to the community in terms of its bid for the right to own land, and that is that the land is being held in trust for them by the Moravian Church. If this is the case then the community stand a good chance of gaining access to land ownership. As mentioned earlier in this text, Mr Koos Zimri is regarded by many people in the community as being the one man in the community who has a comprehensive knowledge of the history of the community. Only last year was he approached by the Moravian minister at Wupperthal to assist in determining the right the people had to the land. It should be mentioned that since his meeting with Mr Zimri, the Reverend Willem Valentyn has stepped down and left the ministry. Whether his departure from the sect has anything to do with the possible mismanagement of the land is an issue that could be telling in the future.

*Laas jaar het ons gehad 'n sekere meneer Willem Valentyn. Hy was hier leeraar. Hy's 'n boorling van Wupperthal. Nou toe ons ons eiendomsregte wil kry, toe kom hy na my toe, en toe vra hy vir my "Oom Koos, oom moet asseblief vir my vertel van die geskiedenis van Wupperthal sodat ek kan weet hoe dit is". Toe het ek hom die goeters vertel. Toe sê hy: "Oom ek sal heen gaan en jou seker maak wie se eiendom dit is die". Toe kom hy terug – dit can op 'tape' kom, ek wil dit daarop he; kyk, ek is 'n man wat eerlik is. Toe sê hy vir ons daar in die vergaardering daar in die kerk "Hier is*

*dit: jou eiendoms van 1965, hulle hou vir ons die grond in trust". Toe sê ek: "Meneer as hulle dit vir ons in trust hou, moet hulle net dit vir ons terug gee. Ons kan nou ons self bestuur. In 1965 het ons nie die opgeleide mense gehad om dit vir ons te bestuur nie. Maar ons het so geontwikkel dat ons vir ons kinders het wat opgelei is wat die administrasie werk kan doen."*<sup>14</sup>

(Last year we had a certain mister Willem Valentyn who was the minister here. He was born here in Wupperthal. When we wanted to access our land rights he came to me and said: "Uncle Koos, please tell me about the history of Wupperthal so that I might know exactly what the story is". So I told him everything. Then he said to me: "Uncle, I will go and find out exactly whose land this is". So he came back – this can come on tape, I want it on tape; look, I am an honest person. He told us in the meeting there in the church: "Here it is: Your land is being held by them [the Moravian Church] in trust, since 1965". So I said: "Sir, if they are holding the land in trust for us, then they can just give it back to us. We can manage the land ourselves. In 1965 we didn't have the qualified people to manage the land. But, we have progressed to the point where we have children who are educated, and who can do the administrative work for us.")

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<sup>14</sup> Interview with Mr Koos Zimri, Wupperthal, October, 1999

### **The White Sheep of the Fold.**

Although Wupperthal is a 'Coloured' community, historically administered by white overseers, the community does have a white *bona fide* member on its register, a certain Mr Schiefer. He was the only white Moravian minister at Wupperthal. He is still alive today, and although retired, spends a few months every year in Wupperthal, enjoying the pastoral lifestyle the mission affords, and assisting the community where he can. When he was a minister in the community he was a highly respected man of the cloth, and the community found his contribution invaluable. However, the Moravian Church did their utmost to get him to step down, finding his presence a threat to their autonomous style of administration. There is a story that is carried on the wind that when Schiefer was eventually forced to leave and the new Moravian minister arrived in Clanwilliam to journey to Wupperthal, the people of the town lined the Koueberg pass armed with stones, and threatened to drive the man away if he ventured into the village. The nervous preacher then had to be escorted to Wupperthal the following day by the Clanwilliam police. It is hard to establish whether this actually happened, but the fact remains that the people of Clanwilliam were averse to having Schieffer replaced. There were even rumours that Schiefer was a communist and that the security police paid him a visit, but couldn't establish anything sufficient to detain him.

*Hy't vir ons vondse in Duitsland versamel. Dan bestuur hy dit uit vir die mense hier op Wupperthal, almal, die stasies. Esselbank se pad. Hy het die*

*rivier vir ons oop gestoot. Duisende en duisende rande het hy vir ons ingesamel. En daaroor kon die bestuur in die kerk he die geld moet deur hulle gaan, sodat ons nie al die geld hier kry nie. Toe wil hulle later vir Schiefer hier weg jaag oordat hy die geld direk van Duitsland laat hiernatoe kom...Dis feitlik waar daai man is nie 'n kommunist nie, Hy was 'n sosiale mens, tot nou nog toe. Hulle het hom nie uit gekry nie.*"<sup>15</sup>

(He secured funds from Germany for us. Then he distributed it to the people of Wupperthal, everybody, the outposts and all. Esselbank's road was repaired. He dragged the river for us, and got it flowing. He raised thousands and thousands of rands for us. As a result the administration in the church felt that the money should be channeled through them, so that not all the money came to us. Later on they wanted to chase Schiefer out because he was bringing the money out directly from Germany, and giving it to the community... Without a doubt, that man was not a communist. He was a socialist, and remains one to this day. They didn't get him out.)

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<sup>15</sup> Interview with Mr Koos Zimri, Wupperthal, October, 1999

***Through the Fug of Cherry Tobacco:  
The Beukeskraal Meeting***

*'The Beukeskraal Meeting'* was an experience of a life time. The microphone was taped to the handle of a broomstick and feverishly swung around the room as the discussion ensued and the participants became more and more heated. The issues of land and land ownership dominated the conversation, but many of the other themes that have emerged throughout this text were again present in this fascinating interview. The theme of the church as the all mighty voice of reason in the community emerges once again, as do the themes of distrust, and of relationships and communication.

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*Tell your heart that the fear of suffering is worse than the suffering itself. And that no heart has ever suffered when it goes in search of its dreams, because every second of the search is a second's encounter with God and with eternity.*

Paulo Coehlo, The Alchemist

### **The Beukeskraal Meeting.**

Seven men in a dimly lit room sat and smoked their pipes and rolled cigarettes.

Captured in the ethereal fug of cherry tobacco and laughter lurked the 'voice of the past', and their words rang clear across the room. Toothless smiles and wise eyes; they have seen a lot.

This chapter is a record of a meeting held at the outpost of Beukeskraal (or Bokkieskraal as it is affectionately known). It encapsulates many of the issues raised in this text, and stands as a tribute to a life the people of Wupperthal and the outposts once knew, and a reminder of the one they deal with now.

### **The Rhenish Days**

*Daai dae was baie lieflik gewees.<sup>1</sup>*

(Those days were wonderful.)

*Dit was heen en terug vyftien kilometer, wat ons moet te voet afle, ons kinders, skool toe. Dit was nie te swaar om die tog aan te pak skool toe, want dit was vir ons lieflik. Die onderwyser wat ons klas gegee het was*

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<sup>1</sup> Barend Kennedy, 83 years old, Beukeskraal, October, 1999

*lieflik. Van daardie tyd tot 1965 het ek dit baie goed gevind van die Reinse Sending. Die Reinse Sending leeraars was streng. Daar moet orde wees. Elke Sondag is die jong mense of groot mense in die kerk. In die aande het ons voorouers vir ons diens gehou, maar in die dag sal jy moet kerk toe gaan. Dit was lieflik. Daar was vrede. Daar was orde.*

*Van die Moravies oor gevat het, kan ek se ek verstaan dit nie, want ek het in die Reinse Sending groot geword. Daardie ordes wat deur beheer sit, dit was lieflik. Maar vandag alles het net tot gronde gegaan, tot op vandag toe.*

*Hier was 'n Duitse gewees wat die uitelike dinge gedoen het, en hier was baie dinge gewees wat hy moet doen het. Maar toe kom die Moravies biskop en almal het hom gevra "Gee hom net 'n kaans, nog 'n bietjie dat hy net sy dinge kan klaar maak", maar die biskop het net gesê "My nee is my nee, en my ja is my ja". Hy het nie eerlik met sy gemeente saam gewerk, en vir hulle versoek wat hulle gedoen het, het hy nie gereageer nie.*

*Ek is nou Moravies, nou moet ek saam speel.<sup>2</sup>*

(It was fifteen kilometers there and back that we had to walk as children to get to school. It wasn't too tough to take on this burden, because school was wonderful. The teacher who taught us was delightful. From those days until 1965, I found life pleasant under the Rhenish Mission Society. The Rhenish missionaries were strict. There had to be order. Every

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<sup>2</sup> Mr Willem Waterboer, 71 years old, Beukeskraal, October, 1999

Sunday the people, young and old, were in church. In the evenings our parents held services for us, but during the day you had to go to church. It was wonderful. There was peace. There was order.

Since the Moravians took over I can't understand things, because I grew up under the Rhenish missionaries. Those rules that established order were wonderful. But today, everything has just regressed, until today even.

There was a German<sup>3</sup> here who used to look after the secular running of the place, and there were a lot of things for him to do. Along comes the Moravian Bishop<sup>4</sup> and everybody asked him: "Give him a chance, just for a while longer, so that he can complete the things he has to do", but the Bishop just said: "My 'yes' is my 'yes', and my 'no' is my 'no'". He wasn't very fair with his community, and he didn't entertain the community's requests.

I am now a Moravian, and I just have to play along.)

*Die Reinse Sending se bestuur was baie streng gewees, gedisiplineerd. Ek het dit moeilik gevind, maar ek vind dit vandag dat dit vir my verder weg die beste was. Die Reinse Sending het uit sy pad uit gegaan om vir die gemeenskap te voorsien van werk. Soos byvoorbeeld die Skoenfabriek, boerdery – op verskillende buite stasies, buite plekke het hy 'n stukkie boerdery gestig om so*

<sup>3</sup> The German Mr Waterboer refers to is Mr Stopke, who was granted permission by the Moravians to run the Shoe Factory, the shop and the tannery. Mr Heinie Strassberge took care of the farming side of things

<sup>4</sup> The Bishop Mr Waterboer refers to was Bishop Habelgaan

*doen die gemeenskap werk te verskaf. En hy't ook gevoorsien dat elkeen 'n stukkie tuingrond huur en ook daar sy baad vind vir sy uitelike lewe.*

*Vandag is dit weinig. Daar waar ek dit streng gevind het, en moeilik gevind het is ek jammer dat dit nog nie vandag dieselfde reels uit geoefen word nie.<sup>5</sup>*

(The Rhenish Mission Society's administration was strict and disciplined.

I found it difficult, but today I feel it was the best. The Rhenish missionaries went out of their way to ensure we had work. For example, the shoe factory and the farming. At each outpost they initiated a bit of farming, and in so doing ensured that the community had work. They also ensured that each person hired a garden to ensure they found guidance for their secular lives.

Today it is waning. That I found it strict and tough doesn't matter, and I am just sorry that we don't exercise the same rules today.)

### **Rhenish Rules.**

*.Jy moet baie mooi manier wees. .Jy moet respek afdwing en jou opvoeding wat hulle gee, dit moet jy aanvaar. En nog, enige onreëlmatigheid was nie toegelaat nie. Soos byvoorbeeld dronkenskap, drank invoer en alle dwelms en buite-egtelike lewens, en al die sulke dinge.<sup>6</sup>*

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<sup>5</sup> Mr Johannes Gertse, 72 years old, Beukeskraal, October, 1999

<sup>6</sup> Ibid

(You had to be well mannered. You had to exude respect, and the teachings they offered, you had to accept. And any unruly behavior was not permitted. For example, drunkenness, the importing of liquor and all drugs, and un-Christianly behaviour and those sorts of things.)

*As 'n mens 'n wet verander moet jy twee keer dink. 'n Wet is oor treeding, en as ek oortree, voel ek skuldig om 'n straf te ondergaan. Ek moet aangespreek word.*

*Vandag gebeur die sulke dinge baie, soos drank invoer, drank misbruik, dwelms, baie egtelike lewens, meer met die jong mense.*

*Dit ontsuur die hele gemeenskaplike lewe.<sup>7</sup>*

(A person must think twice before changing a law. A law governs conduct, and if I break a law, then I feel guilty about the punishment which I am going to receive. I must be reprimanded.

Today these things happen a lot, such as importing liquor, drunkenness, drugs, sinful lives, more so amongst the young people.

It just sours the community life.)

### **Paying the Price**

*By die reëls en wette wat ons gehad het in die Reinse Sending tyd, dit was reëls en wette wat die leeraars saam met die rade gedoen het; die Opsiensraad, en die Kerkraad. Nou dit was streng wette gewees. En as*

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<sup>7</sup> Mr Johannes Gertse

The last law was very serious. If you committed that offence again, you were immediately driven off the land. You had to move off the land, even if you had a family.

After a year or so you could apply to become a member of the community again.

Today the young people commit offences all the time, and we are powerless against them. You have to commit a criminal offence so that the law comes and removes you from here, but when does the law ever come here? Sometimes if you stir the police in Clanwilliam, they don't even bother to come out here.)

### **Taxed for Land that is Out of Bounds**

*Ons betaal dan die Moraviese Sending 'n huur. En nou ons wei velde op onverstaanbare wyse, is daar gedeeltes wat die boere nou geniet, wat die boere besit. En ons betaal 'n huur, maar groot gedeeltes benit ons nie. Dit is nou iets wat vir ons onverstaanbaar en hinderlik is.*

*Elke periode van predikante of van bestuur, by elk een het ons daar 'n stuk verloor. Dit kom soms so dat ons dit nie eers weet, dan is daar 'n stuk afgekap.*

*By die Moraviese bestuur het ons al genade en verneem hoe dit is, dat ons nie daarop duidelikheid kan kry nie. Hulle belowe "Ja, ja" die sake werking en daar kom nie duidelikheid uit nie.<sup>9</sup>*

(We pay the Moravian Mission to hire the land. Now through means we can't understand, certain sections of our pasture land are enjoyed by the farmers, some even own the land. We pay the hire for the land, but we don't enjoy huge sections. This is something we don't understand, and it is a stumbling block for us.

Under each era of preachers or administration, we lost a piece of land here and there. Sometimes we weren't aware of what was happening, and suddenly a piece was annexed.

We asked the Moravian administration for clarity on the matter. They promised "Yes, yes" the matter is being sorted out, but no clear answer is given.)

### **Where to Draw the Line.**

*Ons het die kerk bestuur gevra hier in die 1900s, 1993/1994, waar die kerk bestuur hier op Wupperthal – al die opsieners van die buite stasies was teenwoordig. Gelukkig dien ek op die Opsienersraad, toe het ek die kerk bestuur gevra hoekom hulle oor hierdie belangrike sake soos die velde van ons wat af gaan, nie duidelikheid kan op gee nie. En of hulle kon*

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<sup>9</sup> Johannes Gertse

*nie vir ons ons buite lyne se grense gee nie. Dit geniet nog aandag tot vandag toe.*

*Ons voel ons wil graag ons eiendomsreget maar nou bekom. Laat ons onafhanklik kan wees vir die kerk. Die kerk noem dit nou as haar eiendom, maar wanneer en waar dit haar eiendom geword het weet ek nie.<sup>10</sup>*

(We asked the church administration in the 90s, 1993/1994, when the church administration was here at Wupperthal – all the council members from the outposts were present. Fortunately I was serving on the administrative council [local] at the time, so I asked the church administrators why they could not give us a clear answer about these important issues, such as the pastures which had been annexed, and why they couldn't demarcate our boundary lines for us. These issues enjoy their attention until this day.

We feel that we want our land rights now. We want to be independent of the church. The church calls it her land, but when and where it became her land, I can't say.)

### **Heinie Strassberge's Perk.**

*Selfde by Voelvie is 'n plaas. Toe het dit uitgekom dat daar 'n voorkeer is.*

*Dié Strassberger wil vir Voelvie verkoop – ek weet nie op hoe manier hy*

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<sup>10</sup> Mr Koos Zimri

*dit in die hande gekry het nie, maar hy wil dit nou toe verkoop. En hy gee die eerste voorkeer aan Wupperthal.*

*Die gemenskap is te swak om vir Voëlvlei te koop. Maar hoekom ons vir Voëlvlei moet koop. Ons weet amper nie hoe hulle Voëlvlei in die hande gekry het. Of dit sy eiendom is of hoe nie. Nou daar is geen bewys nie.*

( At Voëlvlei there was also a farm. It materialised that there was a first option reserved on the land. Heinie Strassberger wanted to sell Voëlvlei – I don't how he got his hands on the land, but he wanted to sell it. He gave first option to Wupperthal.

The community was too weak [financially] to buy Voëlvlei. But why should we have to buy Voëlvlei, we don't even know how he got his hands on the land. We didn't know if it was his property or not. There was no proof.)

*Hy moet vir die gemenskap drink water aanbring wat hy half gedoen het.*

*Hy het dit gedoen net vir Wupperthal; 'n entjie ook, nie die heel*

*Wupperthal nie. En dan moes hy die leer looiery 'n wettige leer looiery gemaak het, wat hy ook nie gedoen het nie. Hy het 'n effend van die dak verhoog, maar dis nie 'n druppel in die emmer dit wat hy moes gedoen het. En dan het die gemeenskap daar op daai laaste plateau wat jy daar kan sien, 'n saai plekkie gehad waar hulle koring op verbou het. Daar moes hy lewendige water aangebring het. Daar gat hy 'absolutely' niks*

*aaangedra nie. En toe neem hy vir Voëlvlei vir die halwe lyn water wat hy aan geloop het.*

*Toe ons ons oe uitvee is dit sestien duisend morge grond wat hy afkap.<sup>11</sup>*

(He had to provide the community with drinking water, a job which he half completed. He only did it in Wupperthal, and only for a small portion of the community, not the whole of Wupperthal. He also had to turn the tannery into a viable tannery, which also failed to do. He raised the roof slightly, but that was only a drop in the bucket compared to what he had to do. The community also had a crop farm on that furthest plateau that you can see there, where they grew wheat. He had to bring running water to the land, but he did absolutely nothing about it. And so he took Voëlvlei in exchange for this half a line of pipe which he laid.

When we dusted out our eyes, he had annexed sixteen thousand morgens.)

*In 1826 kan wees, toe hulle hier kom was hier mos mense. Hoe kan hy dan 'n eiendom dan kry? Hy kom dan na die mense hier. Hy het dit nie gekoop nie, want daar moet 'n gekoops ooreenkoms wees wat beteken hy't dit nou gekry, en kan dit vir sy seuns gee.<sup>12</sup>*

(It might have been 1826, but when they [the RMS] arrived here there were already people living here. How can he [Willy Strassberger] then buy property? He arrived after the people that were here. He didn't buy the

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<sup>11</sup> Mr Johannes Gertse

<sup>12</sup> Mr Ockers Booyesen, 51 years old, Beukeskraal, October, 1999

land, because there has to be a record of sale that indicates it was his land, and that he could just give it to his sons.)

*As dit die kerk se grond is, of was, hoekom moet klein Strassberger vir die gemeenskap iets doen om die grond in die hande te kry? Dis vir my 'n vraag.<sup>13</sup>*

(If it is, or was, the church's land, why did young Strassberger have to do something for the community to get his hands on the land? That is a question I'd like to ask.)

#### **The Moravian Proclamation.**

*Hier op van 1965 af, wanner die Moravies Broede Kerk dit orrgeneem het, nou se sy dis haar eiendom, wat sy nou ge-erf het. Maar by die oordrag van die Reinse Sending na die Moraviese Broede Kerk, het ek op die Opsienersraad gedien, so ek was by die oordrag by. Habelgaan en Schaaberghet gese, daardie oggend daar in die kerk, hulle neem ons soos die Reinse Sending ons gehad het – hulle is ons se voerde. Hulle is nie eienaars nie, hulle is ons se voerde.*

*Ons wil 1965 se ooreenkoms le want hier is baie projekte wat ons hier op die buite stasies aangebring het, op Wupperthal se gronde, op alle stasies, wat die kerk nie 'n sent bygedra het nie, wat sy se is haar eiendom.<sup>14</sup>*

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<sup>13</sup> Mr Johannes Gertse

<sup>14</sup> Mr Koos Zimri

(Since 1965 when the Moravian Church took over the mission, they have said it is their land, which she inherited from the Rhenish Mission Society. But at the handing over of the mission from the RMS to the Moravian Church, I was serving on the administrative council [local]. Habelgaan and Schaaberg both said, that morning in the church, that the church was assuming the same role as the Rhenish Mission Society had adopted, that they were our overseers. They were not the owners, but the overseers. We want to establish that 1965 proclamation, because there are lots of projects which we initiated here in Wupperthal and at the outposts, which the church never contributed a cent towards, yet she says the land belongs to her.)

*As ons ons eiedomsregte kry, en ons maak aanspreek vir die sestien duisend rand vir restoree aan jou huis, of iemand 'n nuwe gebou optrek, huis optrek, dan kwalifiseer jy daarvoor. En die kerk wil dan 'n deel daarvan he want hulle het ons gebewaar in tyd van die Apartheid regering, en dit is vir my die opperste nonsens.<sup>15</sup>*

(If we got our land rights, and we made application for the sixteen thousand rand [from Land Affairs] to restore your house, or for someone who was putting up a building, or a house, then we would qualify for it. But the church wants a portion of that because they protected us during the

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<sup>15</sup> Mr Koos Zimri

Apartheid regime, and that is the utmost nonsense as far as I am concerned.)

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Although this chapter might read like the minutes of a meeting, the reader will appreciate that the opportunity just to sit and listen to these elderly men getting quite heated about some of the central themes of this work was quite an experience. The issues that they raise are of concern and their validity needs to be established. The foundation for future work on Wupperthal has been laid and there is enough material to keep the most devout investigative scholar occupied for some years. What is encouraging is that for the first time, these people are able to talk openly about their views and perceptions of life under the Rhenish missionaries as well as under the current Moravian Church. Under Apartheid many of these issues were simply not discussed out in the open, for a second-class citizens they had no legitimate grounds to begin broaching issues on. It is here in this silent past, where the community was forced to witness events in mute objection that the transgressions of the administrators gained a foothold and became ingrained in the community's history where, like poisoned apples, they festered and soured the history, and their potency went uncontested.

***Final Thoughts on New Beginnings***

'*Final Thoughts on New Beginnings*' is a chapter which portrays a very different view of Wuppertal and its future to that which has been portrayed in the past. Documentaries on the community by both students and other investigative journalists have always portrayed Wuppertal as an idyllic community, ensconced in some paradise-like valley in a state of bucolic bliss.\* No social history of the community, no documentary has ever captured the continual mire the people find themselves in, especially at the outposts. It must be said that Wuppertal itself is a picturesque little hamlet, where the vast majority of the people have work, or are involved in some development program. But the scenario at the outposts is quite depressing. The outposts sit like pockets of dark cloud around the central station. They are a sign that all is not well in this mission community; they are a sign that the sun might not always shine on Wuppertal.

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\* See Richards, L. 'A Discussion and Analysis of the Documentary Hier Ken Ons Mekaar: Wuppertal – A Social History (B.A. Honours Thesis, UCT, 1997) and Noyce, L. 'A Discussion of the Decision-Making

*Once I moved about like the wind. Now I surrender  
to you and that is all.*

Geronimo

### **Losing Sight of the Dream**

*Pa het vir my gesê: “Kyk my seun, ek leer vir jou nou eet. En as jy vir jou  
geleer eet het, dan moet jy vir jou leer werk. Want as jy nie werk nie, kan  
jy nie eet nie.” ...Slim woorde, ja.<sup>1</sup>*

(Dad always told me: “Look here son, I am teaching you how to eat. And  
when you have finished learning how to eat, then you must learn how to  
work. Because if you don’t work, you cannot eat.”... Wise words indeed.)

The ways of the old people from the community of Wupperthal may have been  
lost forever, or are certainly not being followed by the youth there today. The strong bond  
the people used to feel with the land is withering, and more and more the children are  
being drawn to the cities to seek better employment and more lucrative lifestyles. Who  
can blame them? Wupperthal doesn’t hold much in the way of opportunity for an  
educated young individual, yet amongst the young people are a handful that cling to the  
old ways and are trying to preserve a lifestyle they see as idyllic. One such person is  
Ryno Ockhuis from Heuningvlei.

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Process Behind the Making of Hier Ken Ons Mekaar’ (B.A. Honours Thesis, UCT, 1997)

<sup>1</sup> Mr Petrus Johannes Ockhuis, Witwater, October, 1999

*Oor vyf jaar gaan meneer nie hier mense sien soos nou nie. Daar sal miskien twee of drie huisgesinne hier wees wat oorbly. Die mense het nie werk nie. Hulle het nie inkoms nie.*

*Daar's my suster...sy het 'n 'hairdresser' besigheid; sy't dit gemaak.*

*Dis leer huise wat daar staan. Ek dien nou vyf huisgesinne se grond. Ek werk vir vyf huisgesinne.*

*Die nuwe wet van die Moravies is so, as jy nou weg gaan vir meer as twee jare, hoef jy nie weer terug te kom nie. Die meeste van die mense se kinders werk in die Kaap, die stad. Hulle is gevestig daar. Hulle het werk. Hulle is geleerde kinders.<sup>1</sup>*

(In five years' time mister, you won't see people here like you see them today. There will be perhaps two or three families left, that have remained behind.

The people don't have work. They don't have an income.

There is my sister... she has a hairdressing business; she made it.

These are empty houses that stand here. I am farming the land of five families. I work for five families.

The new Moravian law states that if you leave for more than two years, then don't bother coming back. Most of the people's children work in the Cape, in the city. They are established. They have work. They are educated children.)

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<sup>1</sup> Mr Ryno Ockhuis, Heuningvlei, October, 1999

## The Young and Restless

Mr Piet Bolletjie has sat and watched the world drift by from his comfortable seat under the large oak tree at Langkloof. These are his perceptions of the various elements which are creeping into the mission society today, and which he feels threaten to rip the carpet up from underneath the community's well-rooted feet.

*Nou se hulle jy kan dan te minste 'n vyf liter, dan kan jy twee doppe en dan gaan lê. Jy mag nie rond loop nie want jy is vroeg om baklei. Ek sien as hulle nou kom is daar twintig liter. Dis nou naweke, kom hulle van die plaas af. So is dit nou vandag. En nou vandag kry die mense die dagga en dié pille. Hier kom 'n karretjie snags...jy moet net weet watter amn dit het. Hier is nou vrouens wat meer drink as mans. Dis hier op Wupperthal. Hier op die buite stasies kry jy dit vragtig nie. Hulle drink, maar nie 'n vroumens nie.<sup>1</sup>*

(Now they [Moravians] stipulate a minimum of five liters [wine], then you can have two drinks and then you must lie down. You may not walk around because you're too ready to fight. But I see them bring in twenty liters on the weekends. They come from the farms. This is how it is today. And today you also get dagga and these pills. There's a car that comes at night... you just have to now which man has the stuff.

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<sup>1</sup> Mr Piet Salamo, Langkloof, October, 1999

There are women that drink more than men down in Wupperthal. Here at the outposts you really don't get anything like that. They drink, but not the women.)

There are conflicting opinions though, and some people find the children quite respectful. Mr John Strauss from Langkuilshoek says that the children *het 'n groot respek vir jy wat ouer as hulle is.*<sup>1</sup> (they have a great respect for those that are older than themselves).

Like many of the elderly people at the outposts where the politics and social regression of the youth is not constantly an issue, Mr Strauss is quite content to see out the dusk of his life, tending his garden, watching the seasons change: *Ek het nou rus gevind.*<sup>2</sup> (I have now found my peace).

It is important to note that even in the seemingly small community of Wupperthal and the outposts, that even in this microcosm of 'Coloured' rural society, there are no set rules in terms of individual behaviour and conduct. The children that attend the schools at the outposts are not exposed to the influences of the older children down in Wupperthal, and are still schooled in the art of farming and tending stock. But, when they mature and are sent down to the boarding school in Wupperthal where every weekend outsiders arrive with alcohol and drugs, their mindsets begin to change, and the lure of the fast life in the big cities often proves too much for them.

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<sup>1</sup> Mr John Strauss, Langkuilshoek, October, 1999

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

### Dissention at the Outposts

Those people who have chosen to remain in Wupperthal and especially at the outposts have elected to start taking matters into their own hands. They are simply fed up. The previous chapter was testimony to the discontent, particularly amongst the older members of the community, to which we can glibly assign a degree of nostalgia and sentimentality to water down the effects the present administrative changes have had on them. But at some of the outposts, there are middle aged men and women that feel the same way. There are young people too:

*Dis ons se grond. Ons hoef nie huur te betaal om die grond nie. Dis hoekom ons ons se boekies in gegee het daar onder. Ons stel nie meer belang in Moraviese.*

*Ons geel boeke is iets wat jy moet teken om te behoort aan die Moravies se grond. Om te bly op die Moravies se grond.*

*Hulle noem dit die aanneeming. As jy sewentien of agtien jaar oud is dan moet jy aan aanneeming deelneem as kerk om op die grond te bly. Jy moet studeer op daai wet om te bly op die Moraviese Sending grond.<sup>1</sup>*

(This is our land. We don't have to hire this land. That is why we handed in our booklets down there [in Wupperthal]. We are not interested in the Moravians.

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<sup>1</sup> Mr Ryno Ockhuis, Heuningvlei, October, 1999

Our yellow booklets are things which we have to sign in order to belong to the Moravian land. To live on the Moravian land.

They call it the 'acceptance'. When you are seventeen or eighteen years old then you have to partake in the 'acceptance' of the church in order to stay on the land.

You have to study the laws to stay on the Moravian Mission land.)

The people at Heuningvlei who handed in their yellow booklets were not the only community to do so:

*Toe het ons op 'n tyd besluit ons gaan saam staan van hierdie buite stasies. Daar gaan ons hierna toe 'n optog bring: ons het kontrakte geteken by die kerk, maar dit was toe ons nog dom gewees het. Nou volgens daai kontrakte moet ons die wet in order handaaf by die kerk. Ons mag ook nie te veel uitbrei nie. Toe het ons besluit ons maak 'n optog, ons gee daai kaarte terug vir hulle, die geel boek. Ons is gehoorsaam om ons kerk se besonderhede reg te hou en aan die kerk belang te stel, verder stel ons nie aan die bestuur te Wupperthal.<sup>1</sup>*

(We at the outposts made a decision a while ago to stand together. We decide to adopt a new approach. We signed contractors with the church, but that was when we were still stupid. Now as a result of those contracts, we had to abide by the law of the church. We were not allowed to develop

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<sup>1</sup> Mr Isaak Ockhuis, Heiveld, October, 1999

the land further. So we decided to adopt an approach whereby we handed our yellow book back to the church. We are willing to uphold the values of the church and to maintain an interest in the church, but beyond that we do not pay any interest in the administration at Wupperthal.)

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The future of Wupperthal and the outposts quite literally does hang in the balance. If the Moravian church is not willing to listen to the demands and opinions of the community, then dissention will prevail, and eventually the matter will end in a lengthy judicial battle which the neither party it would seem can afford. However, if the Moravian administration is willing to listen to the issues which the people feel need dire attention, then the community can regroup and carry itself into the twenty first century, under a more decentralized administrative structure which accommodates the most basic right of all individuals, the right to own land.

The situation at this unique, and quite special enclave needs to be monitored by historians in the future, and in doing so the fuller picture will emerge. It has had humble beginnings in this series of vignettes put forward by this text, but the images and anecdotes will merge as more truths are uncovered, and the history of Wupperthal will enter the canon of South African History as a valuable insight into rural community development at the mission stations of the Western Cape.

## ***Conclusion***

*All things are one and the waking share one  
common world, but when asleep, each man  
turns away to a private one.*

Heruditas

-Misanthropic aristocrat of early Ephesus.

## Conclusion

So the journey ends. The text is written, the last words spoken, yet the history continues to unfold even while we retire to our own worlds. The people that have contributed to this work in such a rich way have to wake up tomorrow, face the day with new resolve, while we get to observe them for a moment frozen in time. There is scant reward for embarking on a never ending journey, which all historians do, if the flame is not carried further by those that follow in our wake.

The greater community of Wuppertal is a collection of individuals, all with different family backgrounds, ancestors who came from a multitude of places, at one time had different social standings, and left behind a legacy which is carried forth by their descendents to this day. The community can be classified as a rural 'Coloured' community for convenience sake, satisfying our desire to put everything into neat little boxes. But, as this text has shown, their sense of identity has been shaped on an individual and community level, and is far more complex than we would care to think. Their consciousness has been born out of the language they speak, the vernacular that has been cultivated over the years, by the experiences they have shared, and those they have had to face alone, or as a family. Yes, they are 'Coloured', yes they are ostensibly a rural community, living in relative isolation from the world as we know it, yet their identity is as rich and textured as any, and filters through their words, thoughts and ideas, and cannot be encapsulated in one reading of this text, or one trip to the mission station.

Rather we are treated to glimpses of it as we allow ourselves to become a part of their history, and try to understand the processes which have shaped their relative consciousness. As we look in, they peer out, and are themselves trying to establish a foothold in the South Africa of today. It would be shortsighted of us to presume that we have them taped, that we understand their inner machinations, and comprehend the sense of identity they have cultivated, for it is continually undergoing change. In the same way that the historian is eluded by the full truth which he/she chases, so too do the full answers elude the observer who believes he/she can identify with the people of Wupperthal and the outposts. The most we can hope to do, is observe, and record, for it is in the sharing of our histories that we bridge gaps, fill in holes, and create a bigger picture.

This text has achieved what it set out to achieve: it has taken the reader to a different world, as real and as textured as our own. In a sense we have now shared in a history, our worlds have merged, but when you turn this page, you will return to your private world, but you will journey richer for having glimpsed theirs.

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Mr Danie and Mrs Lucy Van Scalkwyk, Wupperthal, 29 October, 1998

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Mr Freek Swarts, Grasvlei, 7 October, 1999

Mr Pietrus Ockhuis, Heuningvlei, 7 October, 1999

Mr Ryno Ockhuis, Heuningvlei, 7 October, 1999

Mrs Gertrude Strauss, Brugkraal, 7 October, 1999

Mr Danielle Velen, Nouwpoort-Jonsten, 8 October, 1999

Mr John Strauss, Langkuilshoek, 8 October, 1999

Mr Karl Swarts, Nouwpoort-Jonsten, 8 October, 1999

Mr Piet Salamo, Langkloof, 8 October, 1999

Mr Koos Zimri, Wupperthal, 9 October, 1999

Mr Paul Meton, Esselbank, 9 October, 1999

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### **Maps:**

Fold-out map of Wupperthal and the satellite stations.

Issued by Directorate of Forestry, Department of Environment Affairs, 1981

**In Loving Memory of James Kennard: 'Oh Captain My Captain'  
He would have enjoyed it up there.**