



**"The discovery and development of the Namaqualand Diamond Field, 1925-1950"**

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DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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DLHANT004

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**COMPULSORY DECLARATION**

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree.

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**ABSTRACT****The Discovery and Development of the Namaqualand Diamond Field, 1925 – 1950****Anthony Vernon de la Harpe, Department of Historical Studies, University of Cape Town**

Drawing on archival sources, secondary published materials and interviews, this thesis is a historical study of diamond mining in Namaqualand, Northern Cape Province of South Africa, during the period 1925 to 1950. It is a history that led to the region becoming synonymous with diamonds. The focus then is the first diamond find on the coast near Port Nolloth, as well as subsequent mining operations at Alexander Bay (the first State mining venture which contained some socialist elements) and Kleinsee (an extension of the De Beers Consolidated Mines empire). Captain Jack Carstens, ex-soldier and amateur prospector, is generally credited with having discovered the first stone in Namaqualand. However, vague rumours that there were earlier finds in the interior of Namaqualand can now be confirmed. The role of the major players – the State, the mining companies and the workers – is central to this study. Diamond mining has indeed had (and continues to have) a major impact on the local economy and society. By 1925 the harsh socio-economic conditions resulting from closure of the copper mines in Namaqualand, were compounded by drought, unemployment and widespread poverty. Against this background came the fortuitous discovery of the first precious stones on Port Nolloth Reserve or Commonage. This was followed by the astounding discoveries on the coastal terraces at Alexander Bay and Kleinsee, which quickly outdistanced the importance of the copper industry founded in Namaqualand in 1852. This thesis also throws light on the historical relations between the mining companies and their workers who were recruited from the local communities and elsewhere. The discovery of diamonds brought with it migrant labour housed in single-sex hostels or compounds, as well as the entrenchment of wage labour. What originated as a response by labour to economic circumstances would, in time, become entrenched in policy in the interest of the mining houses. Attention is furthermore drawn to the external political and economic forces that during the mid-twentieth century shaped the dominion of the companies over the people on and around the mines. In this way, the wider history of inequitable relations between a white-controlled state and white capitalists on the one hand, and on the other, the local people dispossessed of their historic rights to land and a fair share of the mineral wealth of the district, is illuminated. The labour force was, in addition, racialized along lines of race, ethnicity and class specifically in regard to the preferred status of “poor whites” in the mining industry. In short, the thesis examines how the history of mining sustained the racial hierarchies of colonialism, segregation and apartheid, and the marginalisation of non-white labour.

Today, the diamond diggings on the Alexander Bay coast and the closed down mines of Kleinsee along the lower Buffels have simply emphasised the fact that Namaqualand’s wealth and potential lie beneath the ground. Unrehabilitated mining sites and huge mine dumps bear witness to a century of diamond mining which left local communities uncertain and having little to show. The future, however, points in the direction of undersea diamond reserves off the coast. Marine mining will certainly continue to grow in importance as the onshore deposits are depleted, opening a new chapter of mining history.

## **Acknowledgements**

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In chronological order: my wife Jenny, for support at all material times; Rushdia and Raphael for not only suggesting the project but funding it generously; Anthea for silent encouragement; and finally, Nicole and André (the IT test engineer, always on call and ready to iron out the problems).

## Introduction

### Rationale for the study

The infrastructure of the town of Port Nolloth has always pointed to its past. Recalling boyhood impressions and memories of the 1950s, there was the few remaining miles of a narrow-gauge railway. This railway link <sup>1</sup> connecting the seaport with the interior, crossed the sandy coastal plain towards the distant mountain range until it reached the Okiep Copper District and its mines, 100 miles away. By the 1950s the transition to more intensive diamond mining began. Heavy road trucks now transported goods from the port to the diamond mines on the coast, and to the copper mines further inland.

On a personal level, while growing up there was also a collection of photographs of diamond mining activities showing power station operators, pictures of diamonds, and dark x-ray plates of the torso developed by mine security personnel. Overhead, gleaming DC Skymasters transferred the precious cargo from the State Alluvial Diggings at Alexander Bay to Cape Town. Armed with these images from childhood, it was only natural that the thread leading to the copper <sup>2</sup> and diamond industries would be followed up.

A native of Namaqualand and conversant with mining and research into land claims, the researcher's rationale for choosing this topic – "The Discovery and Development of the Namaqualand Diamond Field, 1925-1950" -- is therefore self-evident. Mining has had a profound impact on the course of Namaqualand history. Focussing on the period 1925 – 1950, this thesis sets out to explore aspects of the history of the discovery of the Namaqualand Diamond Field from the earliest finds to certain present-day developments. The mineral revolution of late nineteenth-century South Africa was, in fact, heralded by the working of copper in Namaqualand in 1852, and the region has since 1928 been a significant producer of gem quality diamonds. The region does not, however, reflect the riches extracted from its soil and as such, calls for a separate volume. It would also be hard to ignore a local population crippled by colonialism, segregation and apartheid and not say something that might throw some light on their condition of disadvantage.

Mining has come at a cost to both humans and nature in terms of migrant labour, low wages and workplace discrimination, as well as degraded landscapes. There is also the impact of closed mining towns on the wellbeing and mental health of the workers and their families although this is offset, they say, by the material benefits, physical security and close inter-personal relationships. It is however the inevitable fate that after a century of operations, the diamond

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<sup>1</sup> Between the years 1869 to 1876, Thomas Hall designed and constructed the 92,5-mile line of 2' 6" gauge, for a total cost of £164, 218. At that time, the first and main railway line extended from Cape Town to Wellington, a distance of just over 30 miles. The Port Nolloth-Okiep railway line was scrapped and sold after World War II when the transportation of copper was done by road. (Graham Ross Ref. MSB 965. Spec. Coll. NLSA. National Library of South Africa, Cape Town).

<sup>2</sup> A. V. de la Harpe, "The sale of the farm Melkboschkuil and the start of copper mining in Namaqualand, 1850-2000", M.A., University of the Western Cape, 2015.

mines there will face scaling down and eventual closure after the finite, wasting resource has been depleted.

In the course of work or study (Surplus People Project, the Land Claims Commission: Western and Northern Cape, and the University of the Western Cape), this researcher has conducted interviews and fieldwork from 1993 to 2015. The materials so collected have proved to be adequate for current purposes. For the PhD thesis, technical detail and in-depth responses were required which my interviewees did not necessarily have, so I relied on occasions of social interaction where queries about my ongoing research provided the required responses. The idea of formal, structured interviews was therefore dispensed with. This project is as a result mainly a literature-based study relying on primary archival and other secondary sources. Most of the information is lawfully and publicly available and the legal risk of defamation of character and reputational damage is therefore extremely low.

As far as could be established, this investigation is the first full-length academic thesis on the discovery of diamonds in Namaqualand, although two separate books have been written on the State Alluvial Diggings (an account of White labour from the Afrikaner viewpoint <sup>3</sup>) and De Beers Kleinzee Mine (a very good study from the liberal (White) English-speaking viewpoint <sup>4</sup>). What is perhaps needed, is looking at the same material through a different lens. Also, both books do not link their accounts to the broader South African picture.

The history (in particular, mining history) of the region known as Namaqualand remains largely unexplored and under-researched. Hopefully, this thesis will assist the teaching of local and regional history in schools and contribute towards a “History of Namaqualand”. Apart from an undergraduate report <sup>5</sup> (1989, 43 leaves), this thesis is also a fresh attempt at presenting evidence-based material challenging (as a sub-theme) the orthodox version of the discovery of the “first” diamonds in Namaqualand. Written and oral sources regard Jack Carstens as the man to have discovered the first officially registered diamond in Namaqualand. This myth is now uncovered based on official sources in the archives.

### **Aims & Objectives**

The aim of the research project is then firstly to illuminate the discovery and early years of Namaqualand’s diamond industry and to shed light on the two main actors, the State Alluvial Diggings (S.A.D.) at Alexander Bay and De Beers Namaqualand Mines of Kleinzee -- as well as on their mining activities and the issues affecting the development of their workforce.

The romantic history of the development of its mineral resources belies the underdevelopment of the region of Namaqualand. The government received the diamond revenues and taxes while dividends from the private mining companies found their way to shareholders in other parts of South Africa and the world. This research therefore seeks to identify certain issues which led to

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<sup>3</sup> Pieter Coetzer, *Baai van Diamante: Die Geskiedenis van Alexanderbaai, 1926 tot 1989* (Bloemfontein: Instituut vir Eietydse Geskiedenis, Universiteit Vrystaat, 1997).

<sup>4</sup> Peter Carstens, *In the Company of Diamonds: De Beers, Kleinzee, and the Control of a Town* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2001).

the underdevelopment of the area and its people, and briefly looks at efforts by the current government and others to address historical inequalities.

The main objective of the research is thus to investigate, against a narrative background, whether the present conditions of impoverishment and underdevelopment can be traced to the following causative factors:

- (a) Did the State as an external political force neglect through its Treasury and the national budget to address developmental issues? Political realities at the time dictated that revenues be diverted from the Namaqualand community to other projects beyond their boundaries. Diamonds were of course firstly kept for the use of the *Volk* and the revenue utilised for '*Volkswerke*' such as the Buchuberg Irrigation Works.<sup>6</sup>
- (b) Were local mining companies such as the State Alluvial Diggings and De Beers Namaqualand Mines accountable for capitalising on and exploiting Namaqualand's mineral wealth for close on a century without showing due care and corporate responsibility?
- (c) What part was played by the workers and the broader population of Namaqualand in their own hard luck or adversity by being uninformed and ill-equipped to assert their civic and labour rights ?

### **Structure of the thesis <sup>7</sup>**

**Chapter 1 *The Diamond Coast of Namaqualand*.** In 1908, the diamond discovery in then German South-West Africa aroused great interest. Before long, prospectors turned their attention to the British side of the Orange River. Towards the end of 1909, their efforts would be rewarded as several discoveries on the south bank of the lower Orange River were reported. Chapter 1 sets the scene by describing the first officially reported finds of diamonds in Namaqualand. When copper mining operations practically came to a standstill after the First World War, the local economy would soon be rescued by spectacular discoveries of precious stones on the coast.

**Chapter 2 *The Discovery of the Namaqualand Diamond Field (1925)*** This chapter attempts to reconstruct the events surrounding the first discovery on the coast, which event set off a "diamond rush". The first find near Port Nolloth by Jack Carstens was followed by more discoveries at Kleinzee and at Alexander Bay. The diamond market was thereupon thrown into a considerable state of excitement. On 22 February 1927, a proclamation was issued prohibiting until further notice all prospecting and mining for diamonds on State land along the coast. **The**

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<sup>6</sup> MNW 1027 MM 1368/30. Letter from the Minister of Mines & Industries to Dr W. P. Steenkamp, MP, Namaqua House, Burg Street, Cape Town, 13 November 1935.

<sup>7</sup> It should be noted that in the early years both mines at Alexander Bay and Kleinzee employed a few African workers as individuals, except for a sizeable group of Owambos from South-West Africa recruited by De Beers during the 1940s. These workers, as such, formed part of the groups discriminated against. Records of early African migratory workers on the Namaqualand diamond mines are scanty, so they do not expressly form part of this investigation.

diggers sent an ultimatum to the Government that unless some ground was made available as a public digging, they would take Alexander Bay by force.

**Ch 3 *The establishment of Kleinzee diamond mine.*** At the mouth of the Buffels River two “worthless” freehold farms called ‘Kleine Zee’ and ‘Annex Kleine Zee’ became the site of the Kleinzee diamond mine. In 1942, the new mining town of Kleinzee was in terms of its layout and design, typical of segregated South African mining towns. The mine’s policy of white labour preference clearly showed a bias towards the employment of local “European” labour. After 1956, there was enormous industrial expansion by De Beers of its alluvial diamond mining operations in Namaqualand -- until the mine was sold off in 2014.

**Ch 4 *The establishment of the State Alluvial Diggings.*** The discovery of rich deposits here signalled yet another important chapter in the mining history of Namaqualand. The State would indeed take its share with the establishment in April 1928 of the State Alluvial Diggings. Government policy would also turn the state alluvial digging into a blessing to the poor whites in Namaqualand. As was the position at Kleinzee, most white contract workers were accommodated in compounds and employed in the mining area, doing pick-and-shovel work. No person was allowed to enter, and no women or children were permitted to reside upon or enter the State Alluvial Digging, except under the authority of a permit.

**Ch 5 *The Great Depression in Namaqualand*** focusses on the harsh socio-economic conditions which reduced many inhabitants to poverty amidst a potential wealth of diamonds. Added to this was the problem of poor whitism and the political imperative to retain White control. Against this general background of distress, the inhabitants of Namaqualand naturally expected that their district should be put in order with at least a portion of the wealth generated by diamond mining. But to ward off large-scale unemployment among Whites, the state implemented public works programmes at discriminatory rates of pay.

**Ch 6 *The Richtersveld Community Land Claim.*** The community of the Richtersveld was of no particular interest until the discovery of diamonds when the State resumed about half of their historical land area of over 700 000 morgen. With the support of two NGOs, the community in 1997 lodged a claim for restitution of an 85 000 ha. tract of diamond-bearing land. Under the Restitution of Land Rights Act No. 22 of 1994, a claim for restitution of land rights may be lodged on land dispossessed after 19 June 1913 because of past racially discriminatory laws or practices. In 2003, the Constitutional Court (CC) in a landmark judgement ruled that the people of the Richtersveld had a legitimate claim to the ancestral land and minerals appropriated by the State and mined by Alexkor Limited.

**Ch 7 *The political economy of Namaqualand with special reference to diamond mining.*** The anomaly is highlighted here of a region that gave the Union of South Africa an economic windfall but despite this, no proportionate amount in diamond revenues was ploughed back. Diamond revenues were put into the Central Revenue Fund from where these were (and still are) allocated by the government to various budgets. In 1992, a post-mining scenario loomed for De Beers Namaqualand Mines at Kleinzee. In Alexander Bay, the well-known Gupta family had by 2011 opened a new front in their “state capture” project. The modus operandi of state capture would later be laid bare by the Zondo Commission of Inquiry.

**Ch 8 *The psycho-social impact of closed mining towns.*** This chapter shows that often life and work in remote (and closed) mining towns come at great cost to both nature and the mental well-being of people. Doctors working for De Beers Mines: Namaqualand Division had in the past frequently remarked on the number of psycho-social problems among the residents of the closed mining towns. These difficulties presented as anxiety, depression, and neuroses. Studies have established that company-town life in a highly regulated environment with artificial barriers put in place against the outside world, do have unfortunate psycho-social consequences that leave workers vulnerable once they leave – services, amenities, and high rates of pay notwithstanding.

**Chapter 9 Conclusion** points out that by the 1950s this impoverished region was left with crippled communities because of colonialism and apartheid. For over a century and a half, mining produced the major share of the region’s output. This situation has led to a near total dependence of the community on a wasting asset. After the depletion of land reserves, the future of diamond mining in the region points towards deposits in the sea. Following the 1994 transition to democracy, the new government – cognizant of the historical backlogs - sought to create a regime for governing extractive industries that would respond to the claims for redistribution of land and wealth “to the benefit of all South Africans”. Decades of large-scale mining operations have had long-term impacts on local communities and the environment. The mining industry, in addition, has not always lived up to its Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). It is against this background that the historical, social, political, economic, and environmental legacies of a century of diamond mining along the coast of Namaqualand must be seen.

### **Literature Review**

Namaqualand’s history has been one of sporadic entry into the mainstream of national events such as the working of copper deposits in the 1850s, experiencing a brief few months of the Anglo-Boer War, or the discovery and exploitation of diamonds in 1925. Many historical studies have been undertaken on the gold and diamond mines and the political, economic, and social impact they have had on the Southern African region. Namaqualand has had its people studied by anthropologists, and its length traversed by missionaries and prospectors, governmental officials and botanists, yet comparatively little historical research has been done on its mines and the region’s economy. <sup>8</sup> Nonetheless, this arid and uninviting district possesses the most romantic history, particularly regarding the development of its mineral wealth, enthused one visitor. <sup>9</sup>

There has always been a degree of secrecy surrounding mining operations and information, particularly about the diamond industry. The geological map of the Springbok Area has for example been of great economic significance, primarily because of the copper mineralisation and the alluvial diamond deposits along the coast. But when detailed geological mapping of the region was undertaken by the Council for Geoscience South Africa, the geological department of

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<sup>8</sup> Cf Anthony-Glenn Von Zeil, “A reconstruction of events surrounding the first reported discovery of diamonds along the Namaqualand coast in 1925”, BA History project, University of Cape Town, June 1989.

<sup>9</sup> Owen Letcher, *Namaqualand: Cradle of Mineral Development in Southern Africa* (Reprinted from the *Mining & Industrial Magazine*, Johannesburg: Sept. 1932). A series of articles constituting an outline of the history and development of the territory and a survey of its main physical features, geology, mineralization, etc.

De Beers Namaqualand Mines at Kleinsee proved reluctant to release technical information.<sup>10</sup> The company archives of De Beers Consolidated Mines in Kimberley have also since the mid-1980s been closed to researchers.

On a visit to Alexander Bay on 8 November 2021, the mine's archives were inaccessible on account of dust and the state of the documents. Personnel from the Mc Gregor Museum in Kimberley were to assist, but months later the situation had not been resolved.

Researchers at the Central Archives Pretoria (SAB) have in the recent past not had access to the following selective sample of official files which have a particular bearing on chapters 1 to 4 of this investigation:<sup>11</sup>

- URU (SAB) Vol. 66 Ref. 2762 The issue of a proclamation prohibiting prospecting on all Crown Lands in the Division of Piquetberg, Namaqualand, Aberdeen, Kenhardt and Barkly West, Cape Province, advertised for disposal by sale. (1911)
- URU (SAB) Vol. 187 Ref. 1135 Proclamation prohibiting prospecting on certain Crown Land in the Division of Namaqualand. (1914)
- URU (SAB) Vol 194 Ref. 1753 Issue of title deed to lot named "Groot Derm", Namaqualand. (1914)
- URU (SAB) Vol. 286 Ref. 2093 Prohibition of prospecting for precious and base minerals and precious stones on certain Crown Land situated in the Division of Namaqualand. (1916)
- URU (SAB) Vol. 3305 Issue title deed to Lot 473 (Dreyerspan) Namaqualand in favour of Kotzee. (1925)
- URU (SAB) Vol. 786 Ref. 3576 Issue title deed to Lot 470 (Oubeep) Namaqualand in favour of G J Mostert, senior. (1925)
- URU (SAB) Vol. 883 Ref. 459 Withdrawal of all Crown Land in Division of Namaqualand from prospecting for precious stones. (1927)
- URU (SAB) Vol. 883 Ref. 460 Withdrawal of all private land in Division of Namaqualand which precious stones or minerals are reserved to the Crown from prospecting for precious stones. (1927)
- URU (SAB) Vol. 2463 Ref. 2900 Issuance of proclamation excepting farms Annex Kleinsee and Sandkop, Division of Namaqualand, from operation of Proclamation No 75 of 1929 (1947)
- URU (SAB) Vol. 4952 Ref. 1772. Gedeeltelike terugtrekking van Proklamasie Nr 80 van 1927 Sekere gedeelte van die Richtersveld-Kleurlinggebied, Afd Namakwaland. (1965)

The following documents were likewise inaccessible, reinforcing this sense of extreme confidentiality:

"Namakwalandse Edelgesteentes" K119 (1961-1962). Not accessible, SAB, Pretoria (1989).

"Mynregte" K192 (1965). Not accessible, SAB, Pretoria (1989).

"Namakwalandse Edelgesteentes" K119 (1961-1962). Not accessible, SAB, Pretoria (1989).

"Mynregte" K192 (1965). Not accessible, SAB, Pretoria (1989).

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<sup>10</sup> J. A. H. Marais, A. L. D. Agenbacht, M. Prinsloo and W. A. Basson, *The Geology of the Springbok Area* (Pretoria: Council for Geoscience, 2001).

<sup>11</sup> Special application to the authorities must be made.

This preoccupation with secrecy invariably produces investigators such as Janine Roberts, a campaigner with a mission to deliver explosive exposés through films, books, and investigations. As a result of her investigations, more people have been made aware of the seamy side of the diamond trade, revealing “a very secret and unromantic” world. Roberts has hunted down the shady dealers of the diamond cartel and of De Beers itself. While the subject of the book is fascinating, and the information contained useful, it is not professionally written. The story is a relatively hard-hitting account but not verifiable and does not blow off the covers of the diamond industry.<sup>12</sup>

**The industrial revolution comes to South Africa. C. W. (Cornelius William) de Kiewiet (1902—1986).**

*A History of South Africa: Social and Economic* (1941) by De Kiewiet remains one of the general histories often cited and quoted. This seminal work was the first to note that mining sparked what would become a decisive moment in South African history: the advent of the industrial revolution.

De Kiewiet’s approach to South African history was distilled in a letter to his publishers dated 16 January 1939. In it he spoke of the difficulty of writing on contemporary South African problems with its great social and racial inequities. So much of South African life was an indictment that a pure impartiality would not be possible. Fortunately for him, the accident of birth (Dutch), a childhood and young adulthood in South Africa, and a career and domicile in a third continent (USA), created the advantage of distance. He was therefore sufficiently removed from the area of study to take an impartial look at a conflicted society. De Kiewiet the historian therefore succeeds in giving us through his synthesising-analytical style of writing a fair and balanced picture of a large and complicated subject.

The pioneer of South African economic history singled out three major factors that hampered the country’s growth -- its low-grade ore, its low-grade land, and its low-grade human beings. Blessed with abundant and diverse “low-grade” human potential and immense “low-grade” mineral resources, yet these could not be imaginatively converted into a fair, decent and socially just society. Indeed, a land of contrasts and paradoxes, blessings and curses.

De Kiewiet also made the acute observation that reliance on African labour represented a threat to the future of white society who at bottom was motivated by fear and insecurities. Luckily for them, there were differences of skill and development which favoured them and served as justification for higher rates of pay and a higher standard of living. Of crucial significance was the intractable race relations between European (white) and non-European (black).

Poverty remains an important concern throughout the book and is the explicit focus of chapter 8: “Poor Whites and Poor Blacks”. In dealing with poverty, his view of the white poor appears to be less empathetic than that towards the black poor, observed one reviewer. This can partly be explained by his reference (in the same breath) to “Poor Whites” and “Poor Blacks”. That is, “Poor Whites” being needy and lacking resources which were happily supplied by the state; and “Poor Blacks”, not only in need of the necessaries of life, but poor (humble), exciting pity.

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<sup>12</sup> Janine Roberts, *Glitter and Greed: The Secret World of the Diamond Cartel* (New York: Disinformation Press, 2007).

De Kiewiet's diagnosis of the South African condition has been seen as rather gloomy but entirely realistic. It will remain this way, as indirectly alluded to by De Kiewiet, if the attitudes, values, beliefs, culture and world view of white and black are not aligned. If not in sync, the situation will prevent them from constructing a common vision and goals.

*Migrant Labour in South Africa: report to the South African Council of Churches, 1972* was written by Frances Wilson at the request of the South African Council of Churches. It aims to change the policy which is responsible for oscillating migrant labour. One of the unfortunate practices of the South African industrial revolution was the introduction of the migrant labour system which Wilson clearly regards as painful and little short of a tragedy. First confined to mining and agriculture, oscillating migrant labour would over time also characterise industrial and all other forms of urban employment.

Three decades after his report on migrant labour, Francis Wilson followed up with "Minerals and Migrants: How the mining industry has shaped South Africa" (2001). Here he argues that the most significant consequence of the way in which mining shaped the political economy of South Africa was perhaps the introduction of a system of forced oscillating migrant labour. This system lay at the heart of its industrial revolution. As early as 1889, the diamond mines at Kimberley housed their black labour force in huge single-sex compounds. This practice, adopted by the gold-mining industry, meant that workers on contracts of limited duration were compelled to return to the rural areas on a regular basis. Moving back and forth between home and mine was enforced by means of "pass laws" – a system of labour control which had roots going back to the abolition of Cape slavery in the 1830s. The pass laws, enacted by the state at the behest of the Chamber of Mines, regulated the supply of black labour. The result was that those workers who, over time, might have chosen to stay near the mines and have their families join them, were prevented from doing so by laws designed specifically to discourage such urbanisation from taking place.

There were three major sets of consequences to this system of migration. The economic consequences were damaging in that the capacity of those sending areas to generate income for the increasing population declined despite the remittances the workers sent to steadily impoverishing home regions. Over time, those areas essentially became labour reserves of the mining town. The political consequences were equally devastating. While it would certainly not be correct to argue that the pass laws were enacted solely in response to the needs of the mining industry, it is nevertheless clear that the pass laws were used for the long-term maintenance of the forced oscillating migrant labour system. It was this system of migrant labour, developed and refined by the gold mining industry, that the architects of apartheid took as their model for regulating the labour supply in the urban areas after 1948.<sup>13</sup> The social consequences of this policy may prove to be the most devastating of all. Sensitive observers have long warned of the destruction caused. The painful reality was that "(i)n no other economy in the world has so large a proportion of the labour force stayed in single-sex accommodation and worked at a place where their families were unable, by law, to stay with them".<sup>14</sup> The system of migrant labour was to survive the abolition of the pass laws in 1986. It has even survived the

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<sup>13</sup> F. Wilson, 'Historical roots of inequality in South Africa', *Economic History of Developing Regions*, Vol. 26, 2011.

<sup>14</sup> Idem.

creation of a democratic government in 1994, maintaining to a certain extent a condition of social imbalance.

Francis Wilson's final work, *Black White and Gold: reflections on political economy* published in 2023, is a compilation of essays written over a period of sixty years and spans more than a century of South African history. The book focuses on the political economy of apartheid and its transformation at the end of the twentieth century. Wilson asserts here that the realities of poverty, unemployment and inequality are, throughout this historical epoch, woven into the social, economic, and political fabric of South African society. The essays trace these trends in agriculture, mining (specifically gold mining), migrant labour, and urbanisation that have resulted in squatter camps.

The experience of compounds and dangerous underground mines put Wilson on the path of a life-long mission of exploring this harmful and consequential system of labour. A determined move away from this system of oscillating migrant labour was long overdue, Wilson asserted. It was important though that the mining industry did not discard the rural areas of Southern Africa for which it bore moral responsibility.

### **Company literature and reports**

Company reports and publications in general highlight the employees' dependence on the mining company. The paternalistic mining company thus presents itself as moral, generous, well-run, accident-free, and clean. By extrapolation, one might read into this approach what the company expected from the workers. First, a sense of 'obligated loyalty'. Then the worker must be moral (no diamond theft), generous (give the company all that is due in terms of labour), accident-free (do not affect production, allow your company to run smoothly), and clean (keep the environment clean and save costs). It shows the pervasive effects of company power in workers' lives. But despite these limitations, the texts of company literature do offer a look inside an institution that has been largely closed to outsiders for most of its history.

In collecting material for their jubilee brochure,<sup>15</sup> the editorial committee of Kleinzee Mine acknowledged that they had had "great difficulty in obtaining and verifying facts about the early years in Kleinzee" as there were "very few written records of the beginning of things and we have had to rely on bits and pieces of information gleaned from various sources". The compilers of the anniversary brochure nevertheless hoped that the information gathered, though they could not vouch for its accuracy, would prove interesting to their readers and a worthwhile souvenir of fifty years of the life of a diamond mine. Ironically, when Peter Carstens arrived in 1992 to start research on his book, *In the Company of Diamonds*, it was the wealth of detail contained in the mine records, especially those from 1926 to the mid-1960s, that contributed most to the reconstruction of the history of Kleinzee. What was more, "These priceless documents ... had been rescued from a garbage dump (a few months earlier) by an enlightened employee and given to the local museum (at Kleinzee) for safekeeping".<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> De Beers Consolidated Mines Limited, *De Beers Consolidated Mines Ltd: Kleinzee Mine Golden Jubilee 1926-1976*.

<sup>16</sup> Peter Carstens, *In the Company of Diamonds: De Beers, Kleinzee, and the Control of a Town* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2001), Preface and Acknowledgements, xi.

As is the case with De Beers at Kleinzee, company literature on the State Alluvial Diggings is also a self-conscious and self-congratulatory exercise extolling the virtues of company town life and performance. But a decade after the start of the Alexander Bay mine, the perception of doing time in a state prison persisted – described as the most comfortable and convenient prison facility anywhere, surrounded by a sea of sand. In *Die Delwer/The Digger* of 1938, editorial comment lamented the generally disappointing standard of contributions and called for more humorous articles in both Afrikaans and English, reflecting everyday life on the mine. In response, one anonymous contributor could only come up with a rather grim “Ten Plagues of Alexander Bay”, reminiscent of Pharaoh of ancient Egypt. In this instance, the State Alluvial Diggings saw the need to soften the bleak side of closed company town life and endeavoured to inject a sense of humour whereas Kleinzee Mine did not show a similar approach.<sup>17</sup>

In their glossy annual reports, the management of the two Namaqualand diamond mining companies probably misread the slow shift in awareness already under way. An opinion survey of, for example, Komaggas, Steinkopf or Hondeklipbaai inhabitants would today report that current issues such as retrenchments, mine closures, regional development and corporate social responsibility are seen in a less than positive light.

Towards the end of 1955, B. J. Rudd & V. U. T. Watson compiled a brief *History of the Namaqualand Diamond Discoveries* (Johannesburg: E. Oppenheimer & Son Ltd, March 1956). According to the authors, this account aimed at being a factual record of the events leading up to and following the discovery of diamonds in Namaqualand. It had been prepared at the request of De Beers Consolidated Diamond Mines chairman, Sir Ernest Oppenheimer. Both Rudd and Watson were longtime senior employees of De Beers and stalwarts of the diamond industry. There is naturally a detectible slant in the publication towards the interests of the company, which is fortunately offset by the valuable materials contained such as photographs, interviews, copies of contracts and agreements, letters, production figures and extracts from mining journals.

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13 Alexander Bay *DIE DELWER/THE DIGGER. Tien-jarige bestaan van Alexanderbaai gevier (1928-1938)*.

See also: *Alexanderbaai – Herdenkingsuitgawe by geleentheid van die vyf-en-twintigjarige bestaan van die Alluviale Staatsdelwerye Alexanderbaai (1953)*. (Silver Jubilee Celebration) (SA Parliamentary Library).

Alexanderbaai - *VYFTIGJARIGE bestaan gevier, 1978. Alluviale Staatsdelwery Alexanderbaai, 1928-1978: Namakwaland(er) ... Waarvandaan ... Waarheen?*.

Alexanderbaai - *State Alluvial Digging Alexander Bay 1985. Die Alluviale Staatsdelwery Alexanderbaai 1985* (anon).

De Beers Consolidated Mines Limited, “A quest for brilliance”. Kleinzee: Namaqualand Mines, 1994. A ten-page glossy brochure describing the history, workings and community services related to the De Beers operation at Kleinzee.

De Beers Consolidated Mines Limited *Kleinzee Mine golden jubilee: 1926-1976*, Kleinzee: DBCM, 1976. A 45-page booklet, describing the history of the mine, with many articles contributed by old timers, and several photographs.

### Academic Theses: Mine Closure

Janeen Dunne<sup>18</sup> is the only investigator so far to devote a master's thesis in economics to the subject of Namaqualand's economy. Initiated by the Second Carnegie Conference on Poverty in South Africa, this study analyses the causes and extent of underdevelopment and poverty in Namaqualand and outlines an approach to redress these problems. Relevant literature is reviewed to elucidate underdevelopment and the scope for future development. The conclusion drawn is that no body of theory adequately explains Namaqualand's underdevelopment or offers workable solutions. An eclectic approach is suggested and adopted.

De Beers Consolidated Mines: Namaqualand Division (DBNM) anticipated in 1992 that the financially viable diamond reserves at their mines on the West Coast would, after sixty years of operations, be depleted by 2002. DBNM thus commissioned the Environmental Evaluation Unit (EEU) of the University of Cape Town (UCT) to assess the social and economic impacts of future mine closure and to recommend measures to mitigate the negative impacts. The researchers, after making several sensible suggestions, generally agreed with Iona Blair<sup>19</sup> that although the company initially indicated they were committed to leaving a positive legacy from nearly a century of mining in Namaqualand, De Beers had since reneged on key social and environmental responsibilities. The company saw these instead as burdensome liabilities to be minimised or avoided.<sup>20</sup>

### Secondary Sources

J. F. Hein's *Dagboek (Dagverhaal), 1844-1866* (NGK Communitas Argief, Stellenbosch) is a plain anecdotal account in diary format of daily life at Kuboes and the Richtersveld surrounds. There are accounts of how the mission started, of visits to the congregation and the trader at the mouth

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<sup>18</sup> Janeen Dunne, *Towards a regional development strategy for Namaqualand* (Cape Town: SALDRU, 1988).

<sup>19</sup> Iona Blair, "In the wake of Diamond Mining: A Critical Assessment of Environmental Governance and Corporate Social responsibility in the Namaqualand Coastal Region", MPhil, Department of Environmental and Geographical Sciences, University of Cape Town, 2011.

<sup>20</sup> See also: Judy Beaumont, "Closure of De Beers Namaqualand Mines in 2002: A Socio-economic Impact Assessment", MPhil, Dept of Environmental and Geographical Studies, University of Cape Town, 1992;

S. F. Brownlie, "Closure of De Beers Mines in Namaqualand: A Socio-economic Impact Assessment", MPhil, Department of Environmental and Geographical Studies, University of Cape Town, 1992;

Melanie Gosling, "An assessment of the potential economic-socio (sic) impact of the future closure of DBNM's diamond mines in Namaqualand", MPhil, Department of Environmental and Geographical Studies, University of Cape Town, 1992;

Karen Liane Greeff, "Socio-economic impact assessment of the proposed closure of De Beers Namaqualand Diamond Mines by the year 2005", MPhil, Department of Environmental and Geographical Science, University of Cape Town, 1992;

Andrew G. MacKenzie, "A Socio-Economic Impact Assessment of the Future Closure of a Diamond Mine in Namaqualand, South Africa: Planning for mine closure a decade in advance", MPhil, Department of Environmental and Geographic Science, University of Cape Town, 1992;

Gregory McCulloch, "Socio-economic impact assessment of De Beers Namaqualand Mines closure in 2002", MPhil, Department of Environmental and Geographical Science, University of Cape Town, 1992.

of the Orange River. Entries also include references to the corrupting influence of early European copper miners among the local Nama maidens, which compelled the reverend to suggest the erection of a fence. There was also the notorious canteen at Port Nolloth and its temptations of liquor for his flock. This diary proved invaluable in the Richtersveld Community Land Claim (see chapter 6 of this thesis).

Born in Dublin on the 29<sup>th</sup> of October 1855, William Charles Scully emigrated to the Cape Colony with his parents when he was twelve years old. At King William's Town Scully received, for six months, his only formal training at a school run by George Mc Call Theal, whose interpretation of South African affairs was the model for Scully's own *A history of South Africa: from the earliest days to Union* (1915).

Scully has become part of South African indigenous literature, a body of writing produced by whites and blacks in response to the history, landscape, and tensions of this country. Two volumes, *Reminiscences of a South African Pioneer*, and *Further Reminiscences of a South African Pioneer* are filled with personal reminiscences of nearly half a century.

Living an adventurous and unconventional life, the 18-year-old in 1873 travelled to the newly opened diamond diggings at New Rush (afterwards Kimberley). For a year W. C. Scully lived in the tent of the brothers Frank, Herbert, and Cecil John Rhodes. But he had no luck with diamonds and when in the same year gold was struck in the Lydenburg district, Scully decided to try his fortunes there. In the earlier discoveries of diamonds and gold, Scully was fortunate to be close to the centre when the region was startled from the simplicity of her rural life (*Reminiscences of a South African Pioneer*). In 1912, Scully visited the Transvaal where he observed substantial changes in the landscape, architecture and administration and recorded his nostalgia for the Africa he once knew. He was never able to accept the depredation caused by the mines and the destruction of human lives which they brought.<sup>21</sup>

In this regard, there is the article of Kai F. Herzog exploring the intersection of labour and sexual violence in Namaqualand's copper mining district in the late nineteenth century. Women of Nama and Baster origin working as domestics or labourers on the sorting floors of the mines, were exposed to sexual harassment and violence (including rape and murder) by male labourers, particularly white miners. Resident magistrate Scully therefore raised concern that such cases from these parts met with half-hearted measures and indifference from staff of the justice department in Cape Town.<sup>22</sup>

The second volume, *Further Reminiscences of a South African Pioneer*, takes up his better ordered life as civil servant. At the age of twenty-one he decided that it was time to give up his wandering life and take up regular employment. He joined the civil service and continued until his retirement as chief magistrate of Port Elizabeth in 1914. In 1883, Scully was appointed resident magistrate and civil commissioner for Namaqualand based at Springbokfontein. During the years he spent there he began writing articles, short stories and poems which were published.

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<sup>21</sup> W. C. Scully, *The Ridge of White Waters* (Creative Media Partners, LLC, 2019).

<sup>22</sup> Herzog, K. F. (2024), 'Intimacy, labour and sexual violence: Nama and Baster women in Namaqualand's copper mining district, c. 1879-1900'. *Africa* 94, 57-76.

He found Springbokfontein an attractive village of some 200 residents where he hoped to put the prisoners in his gaol to better use than had hitherto been the case. Following the example set by De Beers Mining Company in Kimberley, Scully intended hiring out convicts to the Cape Copper Mining Company to work their Springbokfontein open-cast mine. Such an arrangement could not be agreed upon, so, in the absence of a village management board at Springbokfontein, convicts were used on the repair and maintenance of the streets and roads, refuse removal, and cleaning public wells and dams.<sup>23</sup>

Scully provides an ironic filter through which he perceives people and events, and his observations are founded on fact (reminiscent of some aspects of life on the diamond mines of Namaqualand). In his inimitable style he describes one of the most objectionable characters he had to deal with. It was the Superintendent of the Cape Copper Co., an autocrat who with impunity wielded his power over the copper mining towns. Except for the air they breathed, the inhabitants were totally dependent on this “preposterous” person:

“The Cape Copper Company practically owned the bodies, and consequently tyrannized over the souls of its inhabitants”.<sup>24</sup>

The tyrannical hold of the copper company’s Superintendent even extended to ownership of ...

“the house I [Scully] lived in, the court-room in which I sat as magistrate, the gaol in which the prisoners I sentenced were confined, and the well from which was drawn the only water available for my household”.<sup>25</sup>

As is to be expected, Civil Commissioner Scully speculated on the probable life of the copper mines. In 1892, in a strictly confidential minute, he wrote that he felt it his duty to report that the prospects of the mining industry were ‘very gloomy indeed’, and that the mines had a life of only four years. Though total dependence on a wasting asset is not a desirable situation, Scully’s pessimistic prognosis was not borne out for the next century.

Following on the heels of Rev. J. F. Hein (d. 1902) and W. C. Scully, was Fred C. Cornell’s *The Glamour of Prospecting*.<sup>26</sup> The final crowded twenty years Fred Carruthers Cornell (1867-1921) spent in southern Africa, following his arrival in 1901, are well documented. His straightforward record of prospecting expeditions covered the southern Kalahari, Little Namaqualand, and southern South-West Africa. His was essentially the pioneering spirit of the prospector despite many discomforts and hardships experienced. Cornell was the first to admit that he did not know what gave him the ‘diamond fever’; but for the rough stone and the rough life searching for it, he had always had “the passion”. Yet, the luck attending these ventures was at best indifferent. This would become the *leit-motif* of his fruitless searches for diamonds. In 1910, he was walking across and examining the very terraces at Alexander Bay where sensational finds

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<sup>23</sup> W. C. Scully, *Further Reminiscences of a South African Pioneer* (London: Unwin Bros, 1913).

<sup>24</sup> *Idem*.

<sup>25</sup> W. C. Scully, *Further Reminiscences of a South African Pioneer* (London: Unwin Bros., 1913).

<sup>26</sup> Fred C. Cornell, *The Glamour of Prospecting. Wanderings of a South African prospector in search of copper, gold, emeralds, and diamonds* (Cape Town: David Philip, Second Edition, 1986).

were made in February 1927. (See Chapter 1, “The Diamond Coast of Namaqualand: Contribution of the early prospectors”).

Cornell, on one of his prospecting expeditions to the Richtersveld, observed the “wretchedly poor” Hottentots and Bastards closely at the annual *Nachtmaal* service. The only qualities the surly and suspicious natives (who had a reputation for laziness and deceit) ever possessed – hardihood, courage, endurance – had been emasculated by their newly acquired “religion”. Fred C. Cornell did not find the vast diamond deposits of the Orange River, but he left “something of lasting value”. The names “Cornellsberg” and “Cornellskop” are now “indelibly” engraved on most maps of the Richtersveld. Not bad for an amateur prospector who, after four brief visits, has given us an unflattering description of the inhabitants of the Richtersveld.

A very useful general introduction to the specific region of Namaqualand is the work of Lawrence G. Green, prolific travel writer and journalist. He takes his readers to far-off places and people that evoke nostalgia, romance, and a yearning to visit them. Written in popular narrative style, the book titles in themselves encapsulate the spirit of the wanderer. Evocative titles relating to Namaqualand include:

*On Wings of Fire; To the River's End; Like Diamond Blazing; Where men still dream; So few are free; Karoo—the story of the Karoos of South Africa; Thunder on the Blaauwberg; and South African beachcomber.*

Chapter headings refer to “The river of mystery”, “The diamond road of South Africa”, “Riches of the Orange River”, “Home of Strange Tales” and “Through Namaqualand”. Some place names germane to this research include Alexander Bay, Bitterfontein, Hondeklip Bay, Kleinzee, Leliefontein, Pella, Port Nolloth, the Richtersveld and Vioolsdrift. Also mentioned are historical characters with a bearing on this account of the Diamond Field of Namaqualand – people such as William Carstens, Jack Carstens, Fred Cornell, Edward Heyes, Hendrik Louw of Grootderm, Dr Hans Merensky, Solomon Rabinowitz, W. C. Scully, and Carl Weidner of Goodhouse.

Topics such as – “Tales covering Port Nolloth”, “IDB (Illegal Diamond Buying)”, “Namaquas of the Richtersveld”, the “Alexander Bay diggings”, “Namaqualand places and happenings”, “Tales of Bushmanland”, the “Richtersveld”, aspects of the coast from Hondeklip Bay to the Orange River, and the narrow-gauge railway from O’okiep to Port Nolloth - are of use for giving general context to this study.

Importantly, the Heerenlogement Cave is also mentioned. Many of those early travellers visited this cave on their way north to Namaqualand and beyond, or on their return, southward bound. Travellers ranging from Dutch company officials such as Jan Danckert in 1650 to later mineralogists and missionaries, spent the night there and engraved their names or initials inside the shallow cave situated about 20 km north of Graafwater in the Western Cape.

Lawrence G. Green’s limited historical vision and context did not, however, allow him to place the history of the “weird and misty region” at the Groot Rivier (Orange) mouth in a wider context past Diaz (1487), Colonel Gordon (1779), Captain James Alexander (1835), and the brothers Hendrik and Giel Louw (1890s).

Later writers were very laudatory in their assessments of the role played by Fred C. Cornell in the mineral exploration of the North-West Cape. One of them, Lawrence G. Green, wrote several articles in the *Cape Argus* about the diamond discoveries on the Namaqualand coast. His books which commanded an enthusiastic readership, frequently refer to the Cornell legend, recalling the latter’s unshakeable belief in the so-called Bushman’s Paradise with its rumoured

wealth of huge gemstones. This was in line with the colonial dream of mineral wealth which was to benefit the country.

Namaqualand mining history owes some debt to the work of several anthropologists (W. P. Carstens, E. A. Boonzaier, J. S. Sharp, and M. E. West among them) who attempted to put their studies in historical context. In his study of the rural community of Steinkopf (*The Social Structure of a Cape Coloured Reserve*, 1966), W. P. (Peter) Carstens was the first to point out that the local economy depended on the labour migration of its men (and women) to the mines. Carstens is, however, careful to point out that in stressing the economic advantages of migrant labour to the mines, it was not in any way intended to convey the view that the system was being condoned. On the contrary, his analysis shows the extent to which migrant labour perpetuated low wages and harsh conditions on the mines. An especially valuable feature of the book is the consistent use of history in the analysis of all local social institutions of the Coloured Reserves of Namaqualand.

In a later publication, *In the Company of Diamonds* (2002), Carstens made a further valuable contribution to local diamond mining history. The book's primary focus is the town of Kleinzee, and there is not much about the connection of the town and its mine to the larger tapestry of South African history. The central event is the advent of diamond mining in Namaqualand which is indebted to the discovery there of diamonds by small-time prospector, Jack Carstens. Apart from the early history of the mine at Kleinzee, the dimensions of work and life are covered: work conditions, migrant labour, wage rates, the racial hierarchy, the tight security measures, and the tribulations of living in a closed (literally and figuratively) community. Carstens' book reflects both personal experience (he lived in Kleinzee as a child) and field and archival research from about 1950 to 1965. He concluded that Kleinzee, in essence, remained a modern company town that existed solely to maximise corporate profits based on a racially stratified society paid differential salaries/wages. This was despite the adoption in the mid-1980s of the non-discriminatory Paterson wage system based on worker responsibility and decision-making. At the same time, the abolition of apartheid in the workplace by De Beers was for him just that: a reconfiguration of its racial policy.

P. W. Kotze's book, *Namakwaland: 'n Sosiologiese Studie van 'n Geïsoleerde Gemeenskap* (1943),<sup>27</sup> is based on his doctoral thesis that surveyed sociological conditions in the Northwest Cape. While it contains important statistics on the population, housing, farm ownership, family income, education, health and religious affiliation, the information on white migrant labour in the diamond mines is rather sketchy. In contrast, H. A. Rossouw - a contemporary observer and teacher by profession who sided with General J. M. B. Hertzog and his policy of a state diggings at Alexander Bay - could report first hand that agitators from the political stage incited disgruntled folk to take the "stuff" (diamonds) left there by God for the Namaqualanders.<sup>28</sup>

Pieter Coetzer's *Baai van Diamante: Die Geskiedenis van Alexanderbaai*<sup>29</sup> is written from the perspective of white mineworkers referred to as "Alexanderbaaiers". During 1992, the board of

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<sup>27</sup> P. W. Kotze, *Namakwaland: 'n Sosiologiese Studie van 'n Geïsoleerde Gemeenskap* (Kaapstad: Nasionale Pers, 1943).

<sup>28</sup> H. A. Rossouw, *Namakwalandse kroniek* (Stellenbosch/Grahamstad: Universiteitsuitgewers en -Boekhandelaars, 1973), 99-100. Rossouw was born in 1898 on a farm in the Kamiesberg, Namaqualand.

<sup>29</sup> Pieter Coetzer, *Baai van Diamante: Die Geskiedenis van Alexanderbaai 1926 tot 1989* (Goodwood: Nasionale Boekdrukkery, 1997).

Alexkor Limited diamond mine (formerly State Alluvial Diggings) commissioned Pieter Coetzer to write up a general history of former Alexander Bay mineworkers before their recollections and memories were lost to posterity. The result is a good informal history, richly illustrated, and recording the life and times of workers between the years 1926 to 1989. Although there are no extant formal records, Coetzer strangely appears to believe the stories about Bushman and Nama children playing with “shiny stones”. Also, that travellers to Namaqualand - Simon van der Stel (1685) and James Alexander (1835) - would not at the time divulge information they might have had about precious stones.<sup>30</sup> This same cavalier treatment of history is carried over to the world of well-fed pick-and-shovel diggers. Their comings and goings and other minutiae of their culture are lovingly recorded, including horseplay and glib references to visits to ‘the port’, instead of the formal ‘Port Nolloth’ - as if they now owned the place. The State Alluvial Diggings was established in 1928 in part to create work for poor White Namaqualanders who were provided with free or subsidized accommodation, food, health care and sport facilities. No wonder that it came as a shock to Coetzer and others that while they were enjoying their socio-political come-uppance, the “Coloureds” had been formulating their claims on land between the Buffels and Orange rivers, which included Alexander Bay and its diamonds.<sup>31</sup>

### Local historians of Namaqualand

The following are writers of local history who had all been intimately connected to the diamond mining industry in Namaqualand: H. A. Rossouw (*Namakwalandse Kroniek*, local historical sketches, 1973); Freddy Du Pokoy (*Riemvasmaak*, autobiography, 1995); “Abraham Balie of Henkries” as sketched by Pieter Coetzer in *Baai van Diamante*, 1997; J. F. “Boeboe” van Wyk (*Klipfontein bring Herinneringe*, local history, 2015; and Henry Stone et al (*Die Stones van Namakwaland*, a family history, 2018). These native Namaqualanders left interesting and valuable records.

Contemporary observers Henry Stone, James Stone and collaborator (*medewerker*) Jasper Stone published *Die Stones van Namakwaland*, the chronicle of a family descended from the 1820 British Settlers who became Afrikaans in Namaqualand. The family history spans, inter alia, the period of the Great Depression and the poor-white problem of the Afrikaner. During this time, several Stone family members were in the first group of recruited diggers employed on the State Alluvial Diggings at Alexander Bay. Since the start of mining in 1928, prospects at Alexander Bay were a real godsend that brought immense relief to those without land. It was better than collecting and selling firewood or eking out an existence as so many *bywoners* (tenants) on uneconomical farms. By 1938, power station worker Gert Stone had managed to scrape together and save a deposit to purchase (together with his twin brother) the farm

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<sup>30</sup> Idem, 1997, 1.

<sup>31</sup> At the annexation of the territory in 1847, the historical claim of the natives of Little Namaqualand encompassed the land occupied and controlled by Kido Witbooi and his captains: between the Gariep and Kouse rivers and stretching west from the sea up to the Augrabies Falls in the east. The Reverend Ferdinand Brecher, in his petition of 1891 to the colonial authorities, set out the land claim along these lines. See Carstens, W. Peter “The community of Steinkopf: an ethnographic study and an analysis of social change in Namaqualand”, PhD, University of Cape Town, 1961. (Annexures: “The Rev. Brecher’s petition to the Hon. Speaker and the Members of the House of Assembly (12 June 1891); “Letter from Imperial Government” dated 14 Sept. 1842 acknowledging undisturbed possession and rights of Natives (Steinkopf); Barnabas Cloete’s Letter “Aan die Kommissie van Naturellesake”, Steinkopf 15 Oktober 1928).

Taaiboschkraal, just south of Springbok. Today, after years of struggling to make repayments on the bond,<sup>32</sup> the farm is still in the hands of the family.

Tough economic conditions during the Depression, followed by the difficult post-war years, forced most Stone family members - along with others - to find a means of livelihood in the towns and on the mines of the area. In the end, the Stones made good for themselves. James qualified as an auditor and during the 1990s went on to become the chairman of the board of the State Alluvial Diggings where his father, Gert, had started out as a very young man at 6 shillings per diem in 1928.

Fellow-Namaqualander of the Stones, J. F. “Boeboe” van Wyk, late Speaker of the Northern Cape legislature and former teacher, wrote up his memories of Klipfontein.<sup>33</sup> The hamlet of Klipfontein, part of the Coloured Rural Area of Steinkopf, and located about 5 km west of Steinkopf town on the road to Port Nolloth, was also the site of a small railway station that boasted the local Klipfontein Hotel. The Okiep-Port Nolloth rail line was built by the old Cape Copper Company to export its production via Port Nolloth to Swansea in Wales. During the 1930s, Klipfontein’s families were no longer able to support themselves practising on a modest scale mixed livestock and grain farming. It became an economic necessity that at least one male member of each family seek work as migrant labour on the diamond mine at Kleinzee or Alexander Bay. Migrant labour - the main source of employment - would in time lead to the weakening of family ties and neglect of the age-old form of mixed farming.

When operations started in 1928, Kleinzee mine was still raw and undeveloped. Diamonds were found in large quantities and could be easily picked up. The poor migrant workers from Steinkopf mission station were, however, cautious and resisted the temptation so as not to get into trouble with mine management. These workers on contract were treated poorly, living amid harsh conditions in overcrowded wood-and-iron structures, while white diggers were better paid and accommodated. Van Wyk’s father himself was during the 1950s employed in the State Alluvial Diggings.

During the Great Depression there were few job opportunities in the diamond mines. The people of Klipfontein were as a result largely dependent on food rations distributed from the local hotel. The subsequent decline of the quaint little hamlet and its traditional way of life can be traced to the closure of the copper mines after the First World War. Today, the dilapidated state of Klipfontein is testimony to the changing fortunes of the mining industry.

In 1948, Abraham Balie from Henkries in the Steinkopf Reserve started off as a 17-year-old working on the chicken farm of the State Alluvial Diggings.<sup>34</sup> As migrant worker, the young Balie augmented a meagre salary with doing the laundry of the white diggers. At the end of each month, he dutifully sent home a remittance. Some 50-odd years later in 1985, Senator Abraham Balie of the National Party delivered his maiden speech on Alexander Bay in the South African parliament. At every

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<sup>32</sup> Between the years 1910 and 1935, the Union Government through its Land Bank introduced a broad range of measures to support commercial farming. This included subsidies, loans, land redistribution and legislation.

<sup>33</sup> J. F. “Boeboe” van Wyk, *Klipfontein bring Herinneringe* (Steinkopf: Steinkopf Bronnesentrum, 2015).

<sup>34</sup> A brief sketch of Abraham Balie’s career. In: Pieter Coetzer, *Baai van Diamante: Die Geskiedenis van Alexanderbaai 1926 tot 1989* (Bloemfontein: Instituut vir Eietydse Geskiedenis, 1997).

opportunity, Balie would promote the interests of Alexander Bay and its people and fight for the scrapping of the system using “traps” to entice people to take part in illegal diamond dealing.<sup>35</sup>

A fellow migrant worker of “Abie” (as Balie was known) during the mid-1950s was Freddy Du Pokoy of Riemvasmaak Crown Land near Kakamas. Du Pokoy is quite outspoken about his experiences in Alexander Bay.<sup>36</sup> In the Binnekamp (Inner Camp) which resembled a “concentration camp”, the workers were housed in the overcrowded rooms of the compound or hostel and spent most of their time “locked up”. Sport activities were popular. White sports teams travelled by company bus to wherever sports meetings were arranged while coloured football teams had to travel on an open flat-bed diesel lorry without any railings.

According to Du Pokoy, Abie later graduated to become the “boy” (helper) of the mine captain. He was in effect the latter’s secretary – a fact not recognised as the designation “secretary” was reserved for Whites only. In 1957, Du Pokoy left Alexander Bay for better prospects. Later, as a retired primary school principal, he joined what turned out to be a successful struggle for the return of their ancestral land at Riemvasmaak which was dispossessed by the state in 1973 to establish a military camp. A card-carrying member of the National Party himself, Du Pokoy could only pray that God grant them (the Riemvasmakers) the strength and grace to pray for the evildoers.<sup>37</sup>

Patrick R. Carstens (born in Cape Town, raised in Canada) wrote *Port Nolloth: The making of a South African Seaport*.<sup>38</sup> It is a history of people, places and events which are central to this thesis. The author, a non-academic, must be commended for attempting the first full-length book on this “frontier” town of copper, diamonds, fishing, and the illegal diamond trade.

To liven up the narrative and add intrigue, Carstens allows himself novelistic licence. The author’s fascination with gun-running traffic and the illegal diamond trade are subjects to which he frequently returns. The “frontier” town of Port Nolloth is therefore sensationally elevated to a “major” supply point, a “major black-market port” for these unlawful activities, without the author revealing the sources. Here, according to Carstens, diamonds were bought and sold in scenes “that might have rivalled the stock exchanges ... in any of the world’s capital cities”. Illicit diamond buying (IDB) effectively made the unpretentious little harbour town “one of the great diamond smuggling ports of Africa”. And for a brief spell the enormous diamond finds around Port Nolloth had the potential of bringing down the international diamond market and, along with it, the government of South Africa! Namaqualand, a region currently faced with downscaling and mine closures, is described in exaggerated terms as a land of “untold wealth”, “too rich to measure in terms of human value”.

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<sup>35</sup> Pieter Coetzer, *Baai van Diamante: ...* 1997, 145. The Trapping System was open to abuse when used for unlawful ends or motives of personal spite. The victims are then placed at the mercy of unscrupulous detectives.

<sup>36</sup> F. Du Pokoy, *Riemvasmaak* (Pretoria: Benedic Boeke, 1995).

<sup>37</sup> Idem, 1995.

<sup>38</sup> Patrick R. Carstens, *Port Nolloth: The making of a South African Seaport* (Bloomington, Indiana: Xlibris Corporation, 2011).

Despite the promising title - “The Making of a South African Seaport” - there are unnecessary errors and distortions of fact which undermine the integrity of the text and threaten to become its unmaking.

### **The discovery of the first diamonds on the coast of Namaqualand**

Published literature acknowledges the deep ties between the Kimberley diamond field, the trade and Jewish history, and many diamond entrepreneurs and traders were Jewish. In turn, Namaqualand Jews were instrumental in uncovering and unlocking the diamond deposits in their region: shopkeepers and lawyers such as Sors Klass, Herman Klass, L. Nankin, Solomon Rabinowitz, the Gelb brothers, Caplan brothers, Gordon brothers, and others who occupy the pages of this thesis.

When news of the Kimberley diamond discovery broke in 1869, Jews joined the thousands of fortune seekers to start a new life at the diamond diggings. Joining them were members of merchant families who set up shipping, transport and financial services. These businesses also established the channels connecting African resources to European finance and manufacturing, and finally to markets in the United States of America and Europe.<sup>39</sup>

In 1895, the *Jewish Chronicle* published in Great Britain, called attention to the prominent part played by Jews in the development of the resources of South Africa, referring particularly to the flourishing transatlantic diamond trade. By the time the *Chronicle* editorial appeared, close to fifty million carats - at an estimated value of £62 000 000, a full third of the total exports of the entire Cape Colony - had been excavated and transported via British steamships to London. South Africa had not only become the primary supplier of diamonds to the world, but its diamond fields was also one of the formative sites of modern capitalist production.<sup>40</sup>

The over-representation of Jews in the growing diamond industry played into the unfavourable anti-Semitic stereotypes such as the newspaper caricature, Max Hoggenheimer – a shady, rapacious character. In the long run, diamonds certainly benefitted and empowered many Jews; their prominence in the industry, however, made their economic success suspect in the eyes of the public.<sup>41</sup>

The project of Anthony-Glenn von Zeil was the first, after Jack Carstens himself, to present us with “A reconstruction of events surrounding the first reported discovery of diamonds along the Namaqualand coast in 1925”.<sup>42</sup> It is a brief record of literary and oral research into an event which is of such historic importance for Namaqualand. The essay brings to light variations of accepted facts and fills out some gaps in the story of the discovery. It should therefore be read alongside

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<sup>39</sup> Saskia Coenen Snyder, ‘Introduction to Special Cluster: Jews and the Diamond Trade’ (*Shofar*, Vol. 38, No. 3, Winter 2020); Saskia Coenen Snyder, ‘A Brilliant Commodity: Diamonds and Jews in a Modern Setting’ (*The Journal of Gemmology*, Vol. 38 Issue 5, March 2023) (Book review). (Downloaded 30 October 2024).

<sup>40</sup> Idem, 2020; 2023.

<sup>41</sup> Idem, 2020; 2023.

<sup>42</sup> Anthony-Glenn von Zeil, “A reconstruction of events surrounding the first reported discovery of diamonds along the Namaqualand coast in 1925”, History project, BA, University of Cape Town, June 1989.

Jack Carstens' *A fortune through my fingers*.<sup>43</sup> That Von Zeil selected this topic comes as no surprise as his family was directly and intimately involved in the discovery of the first officially registered diamond on the Namaqualand coast. In fact, his grandfather Percival Hughes picked up the first stone and handed it over to Jack Carstens, Hughes's cousin.

Fortunately, A-G von Zeil realised the significance of memories and recollections before these are lost and recorded an interview with his grandfather, as well as collect relevant materials. There are brief references, within the limitations of an undergraduate essay, to the social geography, social relations and class/ethnic differences in Port Nolloth of the 1920s and 1930s. Social life for the English-speaking community revolved around sport, entertainment, picnics and the occasional film show. There are valuable photographs of the time diamond fever hit Port Nolloth and Namaqualand, as well as a hand-drawn layout of the main streets of Port Nolloth. To his credit, Von Zeil includes brief references to marginal characters to give us a fuller picture of the time.

*A fortune through my fingers* is not only about an amateur prospector who discovered "the first diamonds" in Namaqualand only to lose the rewards to a crooked business partner, but also a story of what it was like to live in the isolated community of Kleinzee, the mining town near the mouth of the Buffels River.<sup>44</sup>

While doing duty in the British Army in India after the First World War, certain events were set in motion by the prediction of an old fortune teller that took the army officer back to his native Namaqualand: "There you are going to dig in the ground and find many shiny stones. You are going to become a very rich man".

Jack Carstens in fact did uncover the first stones on the coast near Port Nolloth in August 1925 but failed to attain the tantalizing second part of the prediction and become "a very rich man" in material terms. The prediction nonetheless planted a small seed that came to define and direct the trajectory of his life and career.

Carstens was convinced that perhaps the fortune teller of India "sensed something of this knack of mine" to uncover diamonds. Against all expert advice, this uncanny ability led him to unearth "not a trickle but a flood of gems at Kleinzee". Jack, the amateur prospector with an "uncanny sixth sense about diamonds", later became extremely suspicious and dismissive of the "ingenious theories" and scientific methods of professional and "famous" geologists.

### **The Industrial Revolution comes to South Africa**

The prelude to the advent of the industrial revolution in South Africa was the discovery and mining on a very modest scale of copper deposits at Springbokfontein in Little Namaqualand. This region has since the early 1850s been the oldest modern commercial mining settlement in southern Africa with active producing copper mines. It can thus rightly be described as "the cradle of mineral development" in this part of Africa.<sup>45</sup> Almost two decades after the start of the

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<sup>43</sup> Jack Carstens, *A fortune through my fingers* (Cape Town: Howard Timmins, 1962. Reprint 2002).

<sup>44</sup> Idem, 2002.

<sup>45</sup> Owen Letcher, *Namaqualand: Cradle of Mineral Development in Southern Africa* (Reprinted from the *Mining & Industrial Magazine*, Johannesburg: Sept. 1932). A series of articles constituting an outline of the history and development of the territory and a survey of its main physical features, geology, mineralization, etc.

copper industry there, the mining world would in 1867 be shaken by the discovery of diamonds near modern-day Kimberley.

The discovery of diamonds a century and a half ago has had a profound effect on the course of South African history and proved to be the first step in the transformation of South Africa from an agricultural into an industrial society. The rush to the Kimberley diamond fields that followed not only brought fortune-seekers from far and wide, but also the country's first major injection of foreign capital. Some two decades later in 1886, the diamond mining industry would be instrumental in providing capital for the development of the newly-discovered Witwatersrand goldfields.

The exploitation of diamonds, gold, and coal in the latter half of the nineteenth century ultimately catapulted South Africa's backward economy into the modern, industrialised era. Most significantly, the mineral revolution enabled the introduction of an aggressively organised and racially dominated form of industrial capitalism, an economic system that dominated South Africa's socio-political and fiscal arena for more than a century.<sup>46</sup> The mines and mining would become both the scourge and the saviour of southern African economies.

C. W. de Kiewiet's *A History of South Africa. Social and Economic* (1941) was the first to focus on and analyse the advent of the South African industrial revolution sparked by mining. It was the discovery of diamonds followed by gold that introduced the Industrial Revolution. These minerals are thus inextricably woven into the social, economic, and political fabric of the country.

Kimberley's diamond fields were the region's industrial community where, for the first time, the modern problems of capital and labour had to be faced. There also, the new competition between its white and black inhabitants emerged for a place in industry. It is therefore almost impossible to divorce the powerful history of mining from the South African story.

A year after the rush began, Kimberley was the most populous settlement outside of Cape Town where it was insisted that the new town be based upon an economic and racial distinction between white and black. From 1871 to 1895, its mines used 100 000 native workers; in 1936 there were 340 000 blacks in all the mines in the Union of South Africa. This was evidence of the disruption of tribal life and its rural economy. Henceforth the "native problem" was urban and industrial and the start of what would later be characterised as a detribalised and landless proletariat of South African industrial towns.<sup>47</sup>

Jade Davenport in *Digging Deep* (2013)<sup>48</sup> echoes and summarises the insights and perspectives of C. W. De Kiewiet as to the great importance of mining for South Africa, which industry had, as mentioned, its beginnings in lowly, far-off Namaqualand.

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<sup>46</sup> C. W. de Kiewiet *A History of South Africa. Social and Economic* (London: Oxford University Press, 1957). Also, Jade Davenport *Digging Deep. A History of Mining in South Africa 1852 – 2002* (Johannesburg & Cape Town: Jonathan Ball Publishers, 2013), 2.

<sup>47</sup> C. W. de Kiewiet, *A History of South Africa. Social and Economic*, 1957.

<sup>48</sup> Jade Davenport, *Digging Deep. A History of Mining in South Africa 1852 – 2002* (Johannesburg & Cape Town: Jonathan Ball Publishers, 2013). Davenport was among the first scholars to thoroughly situate copper mining in Namaqualand within South Africa's history of industrial mining.

To say that the mining industry has played a defining role in South Africa's history, at least during the last century and a half, would be no great exaggeration. Nowhere else in the world has a mineral revolution proved so influential in weaving the political, economic, and social fabric of a society.

Before the advent of its great mineral revolution in the latter half of the nineteenth century, South Africa was a mere colonial backwater whose unpromising landscape was seemingly devoid of any economic potential. The region's economy was rudimentary, being almost entirely dependent on a middling agricultural sector, which itself was considerably constrained by harsh climatic conditions and the limited size of the domestic market.<sup>49</sup>

Since the late nineteenth century, South Africa has witnessed an industrial revolution which has profoundly transformed the lives of all its inhabitants, both black and white. In Britain, the process of primitive accumulation of capital gave birth to the mill or factory and its highly differentiated class system; the subordination of indigenous peoples and the compound system in mining produced industrial capitalism in South Africa.

If the 'dark, satanic mill' was the abiding image of new social relationships in Britain, it was the repressive role played by the mine compound that came to symbolise the early development of capitalism in South Africa.<sup>50</sup>

Now, the very foundations of the old way of life in farmhouse and kraal felt "(t)he shock of falling earth in the diamond mines, and the blast of dynamite in the gold-mines...", De Kiewiet wrote of the advent of the Industrial Revolution in South Africa.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Idem, 2013.

<sup>50</sup> Rob Turrell, 'Kimberley: labour and compounds, 1871-1888'. In: Shula Marks and Richard Rathbone (eds), *Industrialisation and social change in South Africa. African class formation, culture, and consciousness, 1870-1930* (New York: Longman Inc., 1982), 45.

<sup>51</sup> C. W. de Kiewiet *A History of South Africa. Social and Economic* (London: Oxford University Press, 1957).

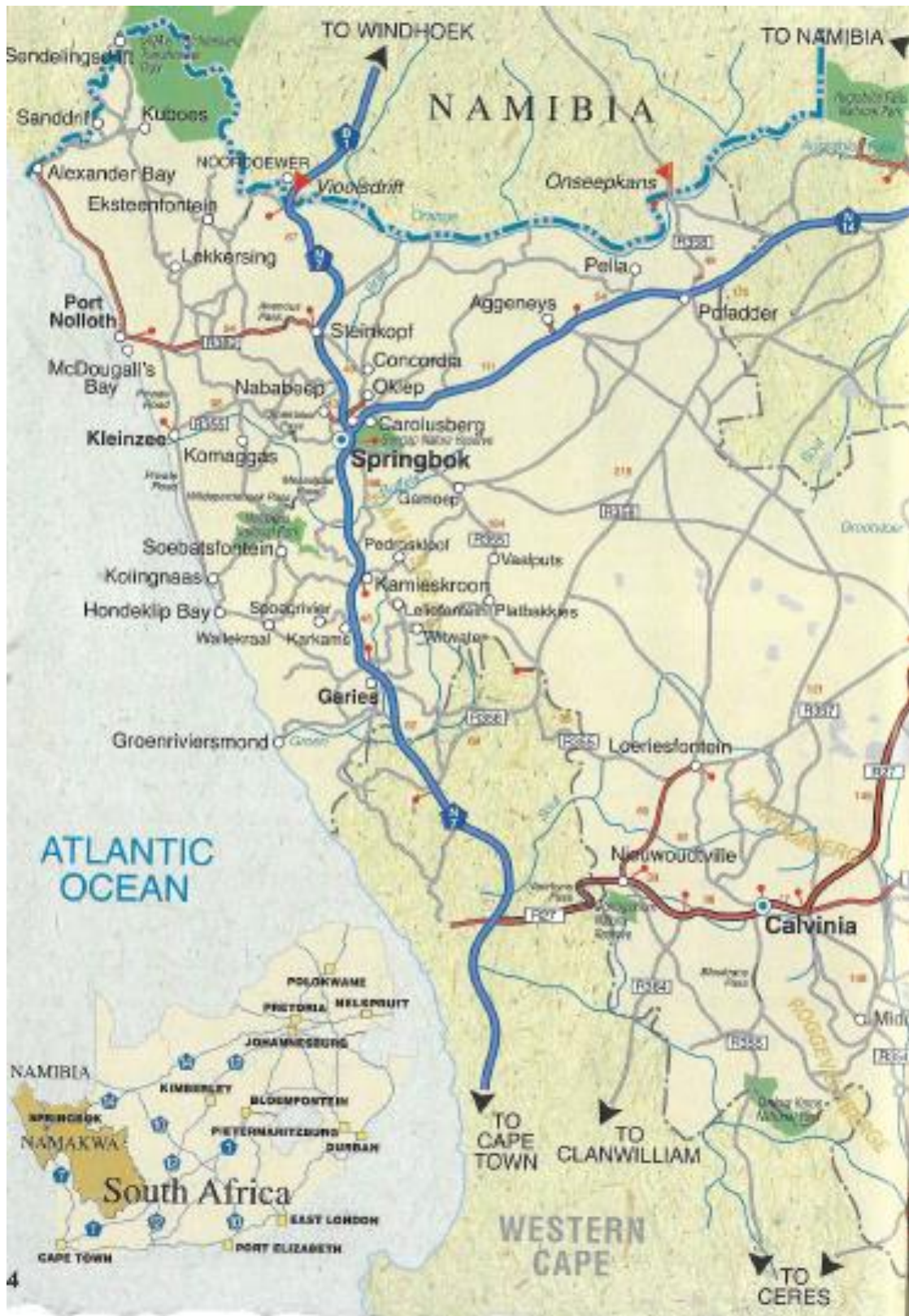


Figure 1 Map of Namaqualand District

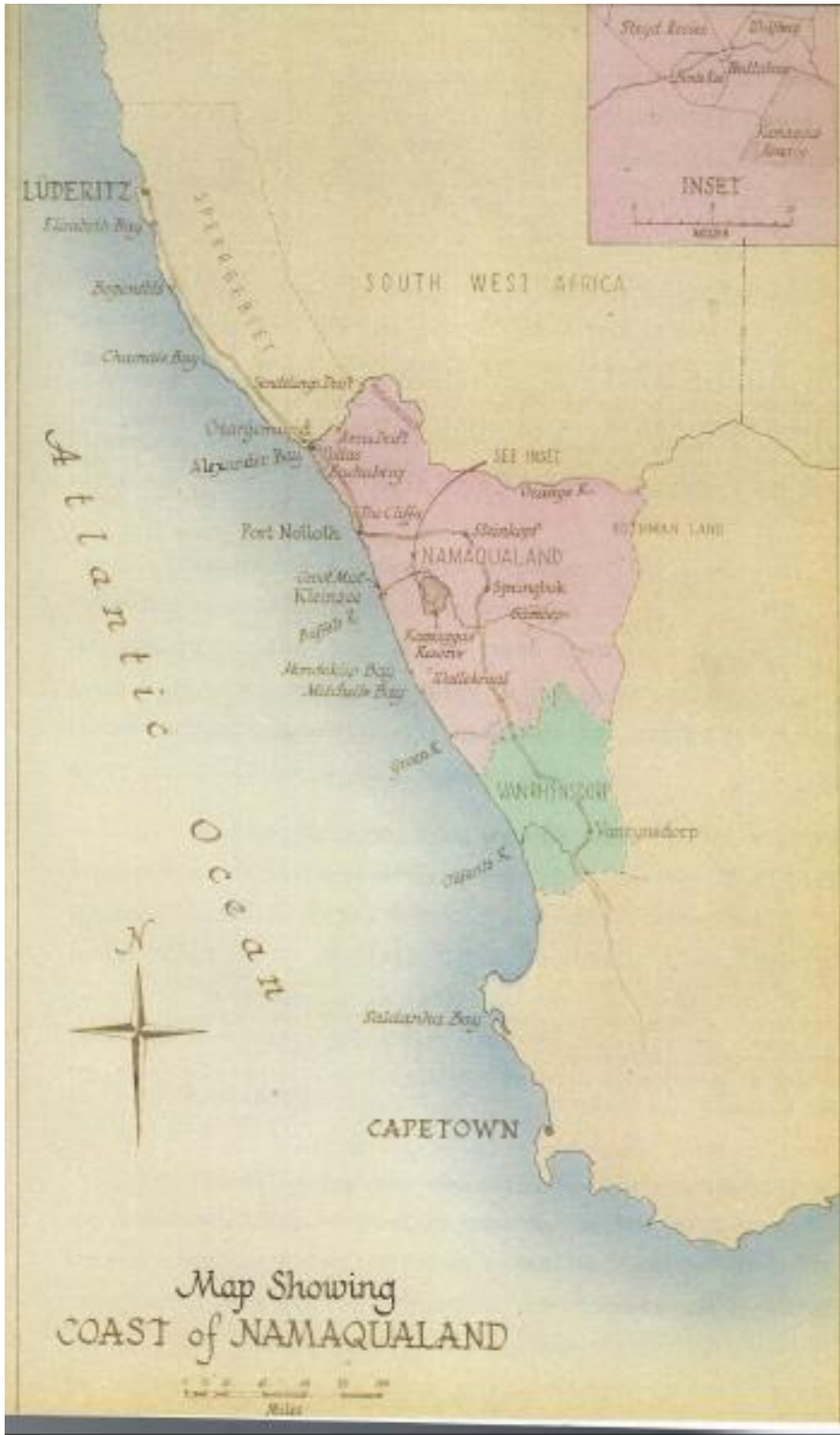
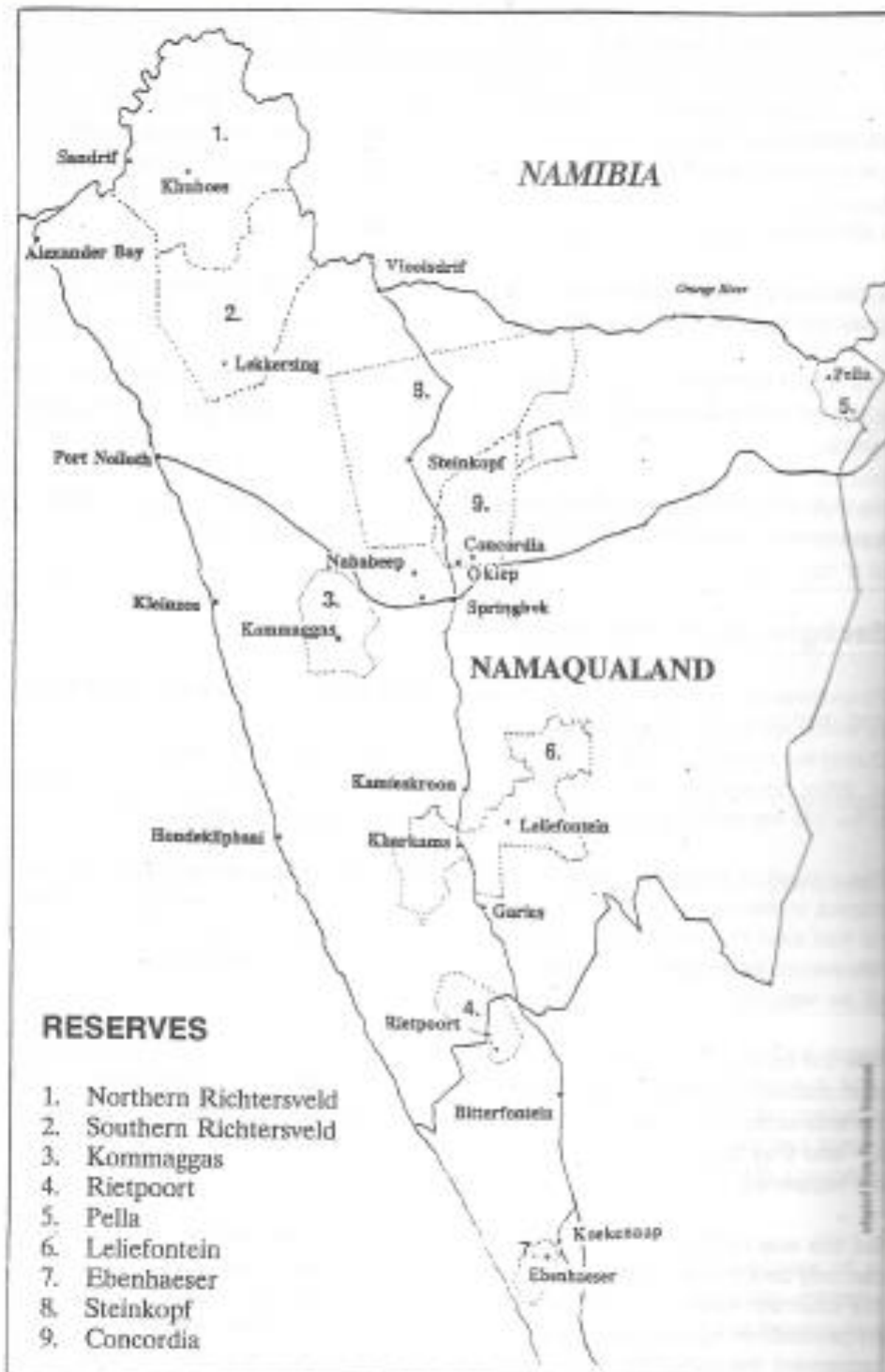


Figure 2 Map of Namaqualand Coast c. 1950



**Map 2** Location of "Coloured Reserves" in Namaqualand

*Figure 3* Location of Coloured Reserves in Namaqualand



Figure 4 Geological Map of coastal area Port Nolloth-Kleinsee. Site of first discovery, opp. Oubeepbaai marked (DA)

### Chronology of Events

- Cretaceous Period, 80 to 120 million years ago. Diamonds formed in the mantle of the earth.
- 24 BCE. Khoi pastoralists join the Bushman along the banks of the lower reaches of the Orange (Gariiep) River.
- 1795 : Proclamation of boundary the Buffels River (G Mc Call Theal : SA History since 1795, p. 127)
- 1847. Proclamation of Orange River boundary December 23 by sir H. G. W. Smith. In Cape of Good Hope Gazette of 1847. Namaqualand annexed.
- 1852. Copper mining industry founded in Namaqualand at Springbokfontein.
- 1867. Diamonds discovered near Kimberley.
- 1880. De Beers Diamond Mines established by Cecil John Rhodes at Kimberley.
- 1882. Diamond Trade Act passed by Cape Parliament. Illegal Diamond Buying (IDB) addressed.
- 1886. Discovery of gold on the Witwatersrand.
- 1889. The diamond at Kimberley house their black labour force in huge single-sex compounds.
- 1907. Diamonds discovered in South-West Africa near Lüderitz.
- 1909. August-October. Diamonds found on the south bank of the Orange River by prospectors Alfred Preuss, Albert Durheim, S. Klass and L. Nankin, and Christian Paulsen. In each case the prospector is unable to locate the place of the find.
- 1910. Union of South Africa established to bring together two Boer republics (Orange Free State and Transvaal) and two British colonies (Cape Colony and Natal). .
- 1910. August. Fred. C. Cornell lands at Port Nolloth in search of minerals (and diamonds) in the Richtersveld.
- 1911 : No 12 Mines and Works Act. To consolidate and amend the laws in force in the Union relating to the operating of mines, works and machinery, and to certificates.
- 1924. Pact government between the National Party and the Labour Party formed with J. B. M. Hertzog as prime minister.
- 1924. Industrial Conciliation Act adopted to protect white labour.
- 1925. The Wages Act forces employers to give preference to hiring white workers.
- 1925. August 15. Jack Carstens discovers first stone on the Port Nolloth Commonage. The advent of commercial diamond mining in Namaqualand.
- 1926. The Mines and Works Amendment Act reinforces the colour bar in the mining industry.
- 1926. November. First diamonds discovered at Alexander Bay.
- 1926. November. Diamonds discovered at Kleinzee Farm by Jack Carstens.
- 1927. Precious Stones Act No. 44 of 1927. To consolidate and amend the laws in force in the several provinces of the Union relating to prospecting and mining for

precious stones. This Act gave the government control of all mining in Namaqualand.

- 1927 Proclamation prohibiting prospecting in Namaqualand dated 22 February 1927 and 5 December 1927.
- 1928. March 8. Proclamation No. 58. Establishment of State Alluvial Diggings (Alexander Bay).
- 1928. Cape Coast Exploration Co. Ltd starts mining operations on Kleinzee Farm at the Buffels River mouth.
- 1928. April 27. Government Notice no. 720. Regulations under section 75 of the Precious Stones Act (1927) to administer the State Alluvial Diggings. 1928 : June 22 Government Notice 1026 (22 June 1928) to amend the Regulations.
- 1928. December. Start of the Diggers' Rebellion which ended in failure.
- 1929. Start of the Great Depression following the collapse of the New York Stock Exchange.
- 1930. Ernest Oppenheimer forms producers' co-operative and a single-channel marketing structure for diamonds.
- 1932. Report of the First Carnegie Commission of Inquiry into Poor Whites.
- 1933. Diamond Producers' Association formed to provide quotas for all producers, including the State Alluvial Diggings at Alexander Bay, as well as a single channel for rough sales.
- 1934. Ernest Oppenheimer forms the Diamond Trading Company (DTC) to buy up a major part of the world's production of stones. .
- 1948. National Party ushers in Apartheid as official state policy.
- 1950 Population Registration Act No. 30 (as amended from time to time). To reclassify the population of South Africa into White, Native and Coloured.
- 1957 Proclamation of Richtersveld boundaries, also Ebenhaeser, Komaggas, Pella and Steinkopf.
- 1964. Precious Stones Act No. 73.
- 1979. Black labour unions recognised by the government.
- 1989. Alexander Bay Development Corporation Act, No. 46 of 1989. To establish a corporation with the object of undertaking, encouraging and promoting mining, agriculture, commerce, industrial settlement and town development as well as any other economic and socio-economic development in the State Alluvial Diggings at Alexander Bay. Replaces old State Alluvial Diggings (est. 1928).
- 1991. Population Registration Act repealed.
- 1992. Alexkor Ltd. Act No. 116. Established as a juristic entity (a public company) with the State as sole shareholder.
- 1994. The African National Congress (ANC) takes over as the new South African government.

- 1994. Under the Restitution of Land Rights Act (No. 22/1994) a land claim may be lodged on land dispossessed after 19 June 1913 because of past racially discriminatory laws and practices.
- 1994. Alexkor Development Foundation (ADF) formed to contribute to the socio-economic development of the people of the region.
- 1994. September. De Beers Namaqualand Mines announces its intention to close mining operations within 10-12 years.
- 1996. The Mine Health and Safety Act becomes law.
- 1996. Constitution of the Republic of South Africa adopted.
- 1997 & 1998. Community of the Richtersveld lodges a land claim in the Cape High Court (1997) and the Land Claims Court (1998).
- 2002. Minerals and Petroleum Resources Development Act (MPRD) (no. 28/2002) promulgated to address, inter alia, the historical inequalities in mining.
- 2004. First Mining Charter attached to the MPRD (2002) signed; finalised in October 2018.
- 2012. August. Thirty-four striking miners shot dead and 78 wounded by police at Marikana, North West Province.
- 2014. De Beers Namaqualand Mines sells its diamond mines to Trans Hex Limited.
- 2015. March. Scarlet Sky 60 cc awarded the contract to market and sell Alexkor's production of diamonds.
- 2021. January. The Judicial Commission of Inquiry into State Capture (Zondo Commission) investigates incidents of state capture at Alexkor Limited.
- 2022. April. Zondo Commission Report contains a list of recommendations to pursue wrongdoers at Alexkor Limited.

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## Chapter 1 THE DIAMOND COAST OF NAMAQUALAND AND THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE EARLY PROSPECTORS

What early geologists proposed to call the Diamond Coast of Southern Africa is a strip of land often enshrouded in dense fog.<sup>52</sup> This bleak seaboard to the north and south of the Orange River at first attracted little attention by prospectors searching for deposits of precious stones. From the late 1890s, the odd prospector would make attempts to locate any diamonds until the chance discovery in 1908 in southern South-West Africa set the diamond world alight.

One of the first applications to prospect for precious stones in Namaqualand was made by a Mr D. M. Le Roux in December 1898 on behalf of a company from Kimberley, Du Toit Diamond Fields Syndicate Limited. Exploration work was carried out, but this appears to have been unsuccessful, as afterwards nothing was heard of the company and its prospecting activities.

An early prospector for diamonds<sup>53</sup> was Port Nolloth resident, John Christian.<sup>54</sup> As far back as 1906 - before the chance discovery in German South-West Africa - the Civil Commissioner of Namaqualand at Springbokfontein forwarded John Christian a Prospector's Licence for Precious Stones under Act No. 31 of 1898. The document was sent off to Christian who was then at Kamaggas Mission Station. The Civil Commissioner had earlier strongly urged Christian to rather apply for a prospector's licence for base minerals such as copper,<sup>55</sup> whereupon the Resident Magistrate of Port Nolloth, in support of the application of Christian's, gave the assurance that the applicant bore "a good character and frequently obtained prospecting licences on previous occasions". Before pegging out the prospecting area, Christian obtained through the missionary-in-charge the consent of the community to prospect in the Kamaggas

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<sup>52</sup> P.A. Wagner & Hans Merensky, 'The Diamond Deposits on the Coast of Little Namaqualand', *Transactions & Proceedings of the Geological Society of South Africa*, Vol. XXXI, Johannesburg 1929. Namaqualand is the most southerly extension of the Namib desert. When humid southerly winds pass over the cold Benguela current, the air is cooled and cannot hold much precipitation. Coastal fogs form, bringing precipitation to the otherwise arid coastline.

<sup>53</sup> Along with well-known amateur prospectors, shopkeeper William Carstens and his brother-in-law Arthur Benjamin Hughes, chief wages clerk of the Cape Copper Co. No records (official correspondence and applications for precious stones prospecting licences) have come to hand to show that the two prospectors were active searching for precious stones on or before 1906.

<sup>54</sup> John Christian, Cape Copper Company employee, butcher, part-time prospector, and one-time Special Constable during the Rinderpest epidemic of the late 1890s. Of importance to note, his eldest daughter Wilhelmina Sophia married David Ferdinand Jacobs, originally from Kimberley – so Christian must have had firsthand contact with a knowledgeable person about diamonds. (see NCD Ref. 880/1 Index Protocol Register: 25 November 1913 (Attorney Jacob Frank, Springbok): Antenuptial contract David Ferdinand Jacobs & Wilhelmina Sophia Christian) (Western Cape Archives).

<sup>55</sup> 1/SBK 5/4/9 Papers despatched September 1905 - May 1906. Civil Commissioner W. Magennis, Springbokfontein to John Christian, Kamaggas, 27 April 1906. See also S. G. 3/2/1/14 Ref. MDC 253 (J. Christian, Prospecting Licences taken out and issued in terms of the following enactments: Precious Stones Section 4 of Act 11 of 1899).

Mission Station Reserve. In this regard, the Government considered that it was only fair that the community should be consulted “as although they have no title to the land, they should not receive less consideration than an ordinary lessee of Crown Land”.<sup>56</sup>

The mining scene was dramatically changed when in 1908 a member of a railway gang, Zacharias Lewala, discovered the first diamond some 20 km east of Luderitzbucht in then German South-West Africa. Not realising the enormous significance of his discovery, Lewala<sup>57</sup> – “a coloured man from the Cape” who had worked for three years on the De Beers mine at Kimberley - handed over the “pretty stone” to August Stauch, the Railway Supervisor. Stauch and his gang of workers were sent to the railway siding, Grasplatz, to clear the line of dune sand whipped up by the wind.<sup>58</sup> The find aroused such great interest that it led to a diamond rush with hundreds of claims pegged; and within a few months the German administration proclaimed the *Sperrgebiet* – the forbidden territory – a mining area. Before long the remarkable diamond-bearing gravel deposits were proved to extend along the shore north as well as south of Luderitzbucht towards the Orange River mouth, for a distance of about 500 km.

Although diamond prices were very low and the discovery of another source of diamonds was regarded with some concern by the big producers,<sup>59</sup> prospectors ... after the sensational developments in German South-West Africa ... naturally turned their attention to the sandy wastes lying on the British side of the Orange River. Trial pits were put down on the stretch of coast near the mouth, but not “a gleam or a glint of diamonds” was discovered.<sup>60</sup>

It is unofficially recorded though that a German prospector and hotel proprietor from Aus in southern South-West Africa, F. W. Martens, decided to try his luck just south of the Orange River mouth at Alexander Bay. He is reported to have found seven small diamonds on the lower shingle terraces during 1909. Martens pegged several claims but lost interest to exploit them when he learned how small discovery areas granted on Crown Lands in the Cape Colony were in comparison with those in the German territory.<sup>61</sup> As far as is known, his find was never formally reported or followed up.

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<sup>56</sup> 1/SBK 4/8/8 Office of the Surveyor-General, Cape Town to the Civil Commissioner of Namaqualand, Springbok, 25 October 1907.

<sup>57</sup> Zacharias Lewala said: “I know what a diamond looks like”. Lewala became Stauch’s carriage driver. At the outbreak of the First World War, he – together with all the other Coloureds from South Africa employed on the South-West African diamond field – was repatriated. (Olga Levinson, *Diamonds in the Desert. The story of August Stauch and his times*, Cape Town: Tafelberg Publishers Ltd, 1983, 33. See also William Beinart, *Cape workers in German South-West Africa, 1904-1912: patterns of migrancy and the closing of options on the Southern African labour market* (1980) (Publisher S.l.: s.n.).

<sup>58</sup> Olga Levinson, *Diamonds in the Desert. The story of August Stauch and his times* (Cape Town: Tafelberg Publishers Ltd, 1983), 16.

<sup>59</sup> De Beers, “The Coastal Diamonds”, Johannesburg: Consolidated Mines Group, 1971. (South African National Public Library).

<sup>60</sup> *Mining & Industrial Magazine*, Vol. IV, No. 3, 6 April 1927, 93.

<sup>61</sup> P.A. Wagner & Hans Merensky, ‘The Diamond Deposits on the Coast of Little Namaqualand’, Johannesburg 1929.

After the South-West Africa discoveries, diamond fever reached Port Nolloth across the Orange River border a few months later. By March 1909, the Resident Magistrate of Port Nolloth reported to the Cape Town Office of the Surveyor-General the alleged discovery of diamond indicators<sup>62</sup> there. On or about 5 March 1909 a rumour had been circulating that a prospector from Angra Pequena (Luderitzbucht) was searching for diamonds. This at once persuaded residents to apply for prospector's licences for precious stones.

Near Still Bay, about 5 km north of Port Nolloth, there occurred a deposit of sandy soil containing the tell-tale crystal, garnet and emerald formation associated with diamonds. This, together with the rumour, was the cause of local excitement.<sup>63</sup> The *Cape Times* (12 March 1909) learned from a traveller who had just reached Cape Town from Port Nolloth about the discovery of diamond indications there. Claims were pegged out, it was said, at the rate of up to fifty a day, and it was difficult obtaining sufficient wood for this purpose. But the magistrate's clerk was kept busy issuing prospector's licences as many people held the optimistic view that discoveries would be comparable in extent to those made a short time before along the German South-West African coast.<sup>64</sup>

After a futile search, the excitement very much died down though a few enthusiastic people were determined to continue prospecting work in other parts of the district, mainly in the vicinity of the Orange River.<sup>65</sup> No actual finds of precious stones were however reported from any of these new prospecting areas.

#### **Officially reported finds of diamonds by the early Prospectors**

Soon the efforts of a handful of die-hard prospectors would bear fruit. Barely five months after the flurry of activity at Port Nolloth that produced nothing, a prospector named Alfred Preuss made a declaration before C. Rose-Innes Esq., Justice of the Peace (J.P.), of the discovery of precious stones on the south bank of the Orange River. This sworn declaration was to be sent to the Civil Commissioner in Springbokfontein to enable the finder, who was then going to Namaqualand for the purpose of locating the spot and pegging the ground, to get his discoverer's rights. Significantly, the prospector's forwarding address was given as c/o the well-known shopkeeper-pro prospector, William Carstens, of Port Nolloth:

"I Alfred Preuss of Capetown (sic) do hereby solemnly and sincerely declare that I am the holder of a Prospector's Licence for Precious Stones No. C W 130 taken out at Springbokfontein, Namaqualand and dated 10<sup>th</sup> July 1909. I prospected the southern bank of the Orange River, from the mouth to Ramans Drift, and during my prospecting I found two diamonds weighing 1 ¼ carat and ¾ carat each approximately. I am unable to describe the exact spot where these stones were found but I am returning to Namaqualand to locate the exact place which will be pegged out by me. I declare the ground to be upon Government

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<sup>62</sup> Diamond indicator minerals include garnet, emerald, quartz, ilmenite, olivine, zircon, and tiger's eye.

<sup>63</sup> S G 3/2/1/45 O. C. H. Strong, Resident Magistrate, Port Nolloth to the Surveyor-General, Cape Town, March 1909. Currently the site of a mine and diamond processing plant at Muisvlakte.

<sup>64</sup> S G 3 / 2 / 1 / 45 Ref. MDC 978.

<sup>65</sup> S G 3 / 2 / 1 / 45 O. C. H. Strong, Resident Magistrate, Port Nolloth to the Surveyor-General, Cape Town, March 1909.

Crown Lands and further apply for the claims due to a discoverer of an alluvial digging".<sup>66</sup> Signed A. Preuss. Sworn before C. Rose-Innes, Cape Town, 19 August 1909.

By the end of August 1909, the Surveyor-General (Cape Town) was informed by M. M. Basson, Acting Civil Commissioner, Namaqualand, that although Mr Preuss was a holder of a prospector's licence, he had by then not produced any other proof of his discovery beyond the attached declaration.<sup>67</sup> Preuss had in fact registered on 30 August 1909 the two diamonds stated to have been found on the banks of the Orange River, 200 km away from Springbokfontein in the Division of Namaqualand, but the finder was unable to give a description of the spot as he said that diamond indications were removed from various spots and taken to Cape Town for analysis. It should be noted that the Civil Commissioner's office did not have the requisite forms in stock as no work of this nature had previously been done there.<sup>68</sup>

We also learn that after registration, Preuss retained the diamonds in his possession and since that date he had not registered any others. The Civil Commissioner was unable to say what had happened to the diamonds as Mr Preuss who had stopped prospecting operations some time before, was then in German West Africa.<sup>69</sup>

At this time, reported discoveries of diamonds in the District of Namaqualand appear to have followed a certain pattern in that the finders were invariably unable to point out the actual place. There is also the case of Albert Durrheim who, after making declarations in respect of a discovery of two diamonds on the southern banks of the Orange River on uninhabited and unsurveyed Crown land, was as well unable to describe the spot where the stones were found.<sup>70</sup> The Civil Commissioner of Namaqualand duly informed the Detective Department in Kimberley that Mr Durrheim retained the diamonds in his possession after registration and had long since stopped prospecting operations and moved off to Rhodesia.

One other discovery reported during this time was that of Messrs Klass and Nankin. As news quickly spread, local shopkeepers - Sors Klass of Steinkopf, and L. Nankin - also tried their hand at prospecting and three diamonds were subsequently found on the Orange River. These stones were sent for examination to the Surveyor-General, who in turn submitted them to the Government Analyst for a report. The stones weighed 17/64, 17/64 and 3/8 carats respectively, and were worth about ten shillings a piece; the cost of testing them amounted to ten shillings. The discoverers who had been resident in Namaqualand for years, do not seem to have followed up this find, and nothing was heard of them afterwards.

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<sup>66</sup> S G 3/2/1/45 Ref. MDC 983.

<sup>67</sup> Reported discovery of Diamonds: A. Preuss 31 August 1909. 1/SBK 5/3/14, 1909 – 1910.

<sup>68</sup> 1/SBK Papers despatched, etc. 5/4/13, June 1909 – January 1910. Acting Civil Commissioner, Namaqualand to The Chief of the Detective Department, Kimberley, 6 September 1909. Registration of Diamonds found by Prospectors.

<sup>69</sup> D. C. Giddy, Civil Commissioner Namaqualand to The Chief, Detective Department, Kimberley, 1 June 1910. 1/SBK 5/4/14 Papers despatched, etc. January 1910 - September 1910.

<sup>70</sup> 1/SBK Papers despatched, etc. 5/4/13 (1909 June - 10 January 1910) Civil Commissioner's Office, Namaqualand to Chief of the Detective Department, Kimberley, 14 October 1909.

The discovery during October 1909 of a sizeable number of diamonds on the banks of the Orange River on Crown land by one Christian Paulsen of Port Nolloth <sup>71</sup> is well documented and bears full scrutiny in the light of later claims by others of first discovery in Namaqualand. Paulsen called at the office of the Civil Commissioner at Springbokfontein on the 8<sup>th</sup> of October 1909. Magistrate and Civil Commissioner, D. C. Giddy, was absent on duty at the time; but the following day the clerk who was in charge during the civil commissioner's absence, handed him some cash saying that it was for the price of a prospector's licence which he had issued to one Christian Paulsen. The clerk made no mention to him then that this man had shown him certain stones.

He [the clerk] now explains that some stones were shewn him but that he took no particular notice of them as he thought that they were merely crystal, such as he had so often seen coming from the River; and he thought no more about the matter. On the 12<sup>th</sup> idem the stones were shown to me, and I did not know myself that they were diamonds.

It appeared that Paulsen did call at the office again after the 8<sup>th</sup> of October, but the Civil Commissioner could not remember Paulsen speaking to him about stones he had found. On October 18 the Civil Commissioner learned that the stones in question were identified as diamonds by a local resident who had considerable knowledge of all classes of minerals.

Paulsen was then away from Springbokfontein. On his return on the 20<sup>th</sup>, Giddy took possession of the stones, and pointed out that they would probably have to be dealt with as provided for by Section 34 of Act 14 of 1885 – not in possession of a duly issued prospecting licence. He then telegraphed the Surveyor-General on the same day, 20 October. <sup>72</sup> A copy of the statement regarding the discovery of diamonds in the Orange River by Paulsen was sent to the Surveyor-General for information purposes. <sup>73</sup>

Christian Paulsen states:

I was until lately in the employ of the Cape Copper Company. I went from Rahmons drift (quite 200 miles from the mouth) along the river towards the mouth. I was roaming on the banks of the river in a westerly direction looking for boys [labourers]. While peregrinating along the river one day in July last, I went into the river to fill my water bag. While filling my water bag I noticed some brilliant stones lying amongst some sand washed up by the river behind a rock. I picked up as many as I could find.

The river was very low at the time. I would again identify the spot if I choose to. I did not know that they were diamonds. I have never seen a diamond in its rough state before. I picked up the stones because they appeared so bright and so distinct from the surrounding drift sand. I found no boys and returned to Port Nolloth taking the Stones with me. I did not think anything of the stones, and I said nothing about them to anybody. I afterwards heard that people were finding diamonds in the River, and I began to think that the Stones I had may be diamonds. I then came to Springbokfontein on the 8<sup>th</sup> of October. I went to the office of the Civil Commissioner at Springbokfontein, and I saw a clerk there. I showed him the diamonds and I took out a prospecting licence for precious stones. The Civil Commissioner was away

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<sup>71</sup> Christian Paulsen and John Christian were neighbours, Paulsen residing on Lot 1, Block O and Christian at Lot 3, Block O, Port Nolloth.

<sup>72</sup> 1/SBK 5/4/13 Papers despatched Civil Commissioner & Resident Magistrate's Office, Namaqualand, to The Surveyor-General, Cape Town, 21 October 1909.

<sup>73</sup> S G 3/2/1/45 Ref. MDC 986 Civil Commissioner's Office, Namaqualand to the Surveyor-Genera1, Cape Town, 21 October 1909.

from the office at the time. I have since prospected on the area under my prospecting licence but found nothing as the river is now higher and the spot where I found the diamonds is now flooded.<sup>74</sup>

As is to be expected, Christian Paulsen's discovery of precious stones set off a frenzy among prospectors and fortune-seekers. An urgent telegram dated 5 November 1909 from "Theodolite" (the Agriculture Department) to the Civil Commissioner at Springbokfontein stated tersely: "Newspapers report 20 diamonds registered 21<sup>st</sup> ultimo by Paulsen and pegging out of 500 claims in Richtersveld. Please report fully no advice yet received from you."<sup>75</sup>

The very next day, the 6<sup>th</sup>, the Surveyor-General was informed in a letter despatched from the Civil Commissioner of Namaqualand to the effect that one Christian Paulsen had indeed found 20 small diamonds in the bed of the Orange River. At the time of the finding, he was not a duly licensed prospector and the purse containing 20 small stones was taken possession of by the Civil Commissioner and were being dealt with as provided by section 34 Act 14 of 1885. The Statement of Paulsen who now found himself under investigation, was attached.<sup>76</sup> The necessary notice had already been given but the diamonds had not yet been disposed of as the police were making enquiries concerning Paulsen, the discoverer. In case proceedings were taken under the Illicit Diamond Buying Act (1885), the stones would be required as exhibits.<sup>77</sup>

During June 1910, the Civil Commissioner at Springbokfontein informed the Chief of the Detective Department in Kimberley that Christian Paulsen had yet again found 13 diamonds in the Orange River. For the detective department's information, a copy of Paulsen's earlier declaration was attached together with a copy of the Register entry. The parcel containing twenty diamonds recovered during the find mentioned above was now sent along for the favour of disposing of them on behalf of the finder.<sup>78</sup> The latest find of thirteen diamonds was, after registration, retained in the possession of Paulsen.

Sometime back Paulsen had also handed a parcel of eleven diamonds to the Resident Magistrate, which was then forwarded to Kimberley and sold there. From the attached broker's note one can see that the sale of the stones realised £4.<sup>79</sup> Broker's commission was 1/-, commission on the money order 1/-, and receipt for registration fee 6d. Paulsen was thus entitled to the net sum of £3-17-6.<sup>80</sup>

Afterwards, as far as was known, he was not prospecting and lived at Lot 1 Block O, Port Nolloth. Christian H. Paulsen who had been described by the Resident Magistrate at

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<sup>74</sup> S G 3/2/1/45 Ref. MDC 986 Civil Commissioner's Office, Namaqualand to the Surveyor-General, Cape Town, 21 October 1909.

<sup>75</sup> 1/SBK 4/8/10 Letters Received by RM & CC from Departments.

<sup>76</sup> 1/SBK 5/3/14 Letters despatched by Resident Magistrate, etc., 6 November 1909.

<sup>77</sup> 1/SBK 5/3/14 Letters despatched by Resident Magistrate, etc. Resident Magistrate & Civil Commissioner D. C. Giddy, Namaqualand to The Assistant Treasurer, Cape Town, 15 February 1910.

<sup>78</sup> 1/SBK 5/4/14 Papers despatched, etc. Resident Magistrate, Namaqualand to The Chief Detective Department, Kimberley, 1 June 1910.

<sup>79</sup> Twelve pennies (12d.) amounted to one shilling (1/-), and 20 shillings (20/-) to one pound sterling (£1).

<sup>80</sup> 1/SBK Papers despatched, etc. 5/4/14. D. C. Giddy, Resident Magistrate, Springbokfontein to the Resident Magistrate, Port Nolloth, 19 July 1910.

Springbokfontein as “an ignorant type of man (who seemed) quite open about this affair”, disappeared from the official records and was then last seen at Hondeklip Bay in 1914.

But Paulsen’s discovery of precious stones on the Orange River had indeed set off a mini rush by prospectors. On 3 November 1909 a telegram from the Reuter’s correspondent at Port Nolloth (one William Carstens) announced the diamond finds on the banks of the Orange River by “a farmer” named Paulsen, and that five diamond syndicates had been formed at Springbokfontein. All the prospecting parties were operating on Crown land on the banks of the Orange River in the Richtersveld where, according to reports, over 500 claims had been pegged.<sup>81</sup>

Several weeks later, towards the end of December 1909, the reports about the finds were followed up by W. Lloyd of Florida in the Transvaal. He wanted to know from the Resident Magistrate at Springbokfontein whether there was any truth in these reports:

In the “Rand Daily Mail” of, I think, the 21<sup>st</sup> October and 3 November last the S.A. Amal. Press Agency state that Diamonds have been found (& registered) on the Orange River at Stinkfontein in Rechtersveld (Dist), & that these diamonds fields were a continuation of the German S.W. African fields, etc.

Lloyd further enquired about the extent of the fields, whether these were “alluvial” or “pipe”. How far from the nearest railway communication, how many were working there, the number of diamonds found and what the country and roads were like, sandy or not. Durrheim, he wrote, found diamonds on the Orange River and declared them under Section 11 of Act 11 of 1899. The prospector, Alfred Preuss, also found diamonds – “he should hold a register rendered in accordance with Section 26 of Act 14 of 1885”.<sup>82</sup>

The discovery by Christian Paulsen set in motion a search for diamonds so that the number of licences issued by the Civil Commissioner of Namaqualand during the year ended 31 December 1910 amounted to: Precious Stones, 79 @ 2/6 and 9 at 7/6. Total: 88<sup>83</sup> The very next year, by contrast, a Return of Prospecting Licences issued in the District of Namaqualand showed “Precious Stones: NIL”.<sup>84</sup>

It is clear from the above that within the short space of three years prospecting for precious stones in Namaqualand had ended in an anti-climax and disappointment. Between the years 1910 and 1926, the Namaqualand littoral and inland received very little attention from prospectors for precious stones. Except for a solitary prospector named Fred C. Cornell who in 1910 and on three subsequent occasions, explored the lower reaches of the Orange River in search of minerals. Since 1909, prospecting for precious stones had in fact been closed by the authorities in several districts of the Cape Province, including Namaqualand. One can only speculate that this move had to do with the formation of Union and the interests of the diamond mining industry elsewhere in the north of the country. A further reason for the lack of interest and discontinuance of prospecting after 1910 could unofficially have been the size and value of the finds in Namaqualand. Eleven small diamonds sold by the Detective Department in

<sup>81</sup> S G 3/2/1/45 Ref. MDC 986. In: S.A. News 4—XI—09.

<sup>82</sup> 1/SBK 4/9/23 Papers Received by RM & CC, Springbokfontein. Misc. Jan. 1910 – December. W. Lloyd, Vogel Cons. Deep, Florida, Transvaal, 28 December 1909, to The RM, Springbokfontein.

<sup>83</sup> 1/SBK 5/3/16 Civil Commissioner, Namaqualand, 22 March 1911.

<sup>84</sup> 1/SBK 5/3/17.

Kimberley realised only £4, barely enough to cover the costs of an extended search. Through lack of scientific knowledge people believed that the scanty number of diamonds picked up by the early prospectors had been washed down by the Orange River from the Kimberley diamond fields. This belief hastened the end of the Namaqualand diamond discovery dream.

On learning about the unprecedented interest in prospecting for precious stones, the Office of the Resident Magistrate and Civil Commissioner at Springbokfontein had earlier on 30 August 1909 issued a notice regarding applications for mineral rights along the banks of the Orange River. It had to be proved to the Civil Commissioner that in the case of precious stones, the person who wished to secure discoverer's rights discovered the stones under a duly issued prospecting licence, and that such precious stones were found in workable quantities.<sup>85</sup> The Office of the Surveyor-General in Cape Town on 9 September 1909 followed this notice up with a notification to the Civil Commissioner of Namaqualand stating:

... that a prospector only becomes entitled to discoverer's rights when he has proved to the Civil Commissioner's satisfaction that he has found diamonds in payable quantities ...<sup>86</sup>

Not one of the early prospectors could satisfy the requirements as stipulated by the Surveyor-General, let alone identify and accurately describe the sites of the finds of precious stones on the banks of the Orange River. From 1909 to 1910, a handful of prospectors such as Preuss, Durrheim, Klass, Nankin, and Paulsen reported the odd finds of precious stones to the Civil Commissioner; but for several reasons, as noted, the source of the meagre harvest of diamonds was not followed up so that these speculative ventures were never proven conclusively.

Considering the above, it stands to reason that very few prospectors or diamond companies would, after 1910, pay any attention to the diamond-bearing potential of the lower reaches of the Orange River, even though diamonds had been found by Christian Paulsen and a few others. It needed the imagination and love of adventure of Fred C. Cornell, who in the early 1900s spent years traveling on foot, horseback and by ox-wagon, to include the wild, mountainous communal lands of the Richtersveld in his prospecting operations.<sup>87</sup>

Cornell and his assistants prospected these lonely parts around August 1910, looking for gold, copper and "keeping an eye out for diamonds", the latter objective no doubt couched in such terms to circumvent the 1909 prohibition on prospecting for diamonds in the magisterial district of Little Namaqualand. It now transpires that Cornell was influenced by rumours and reports of the discoveries of diamonds on the lower Orange River (cf the discussion of his *The Glamour of Prospecting* under the Literature Review). Cornell's resolve was no doubt strengthened by the pre-knowledge that his friend, Alfred Preuss, had a few months before in August 1909 deposed under oath that he had uncovered two small diamonds on the southern bank of the Orange River. In the Richtersveld Cornell closely questioned his expedition's guide on Herr Preuss. The guide of Preuss was later tracked down and grilled to throw light on his master's whereabouts at

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<sup>85</sup> 1/SBK 5/4/13.

<sup>86</sup> S G 3/2/1/45.

<sup>87</sup> Fred C. Cornell, 'Prospecting & Exploring in Klein Namaqualand', *The STATE*, November 1911, Vol. VI (No. 5), 481.; Owen Letcher, *Namaqualand: Cradle of mineral development in Southern Africa*, reprinted from the *Mining & Industrial Magazine of Southern Africa*, Johannesburg, Sept. 1932, 40.

the time he (Preuss) was searching for “copper deposits”<sup>88</sup>, but no information of importance was gathered.

After the First World War and Armistice, Fred Cornell in 1920 departed for Europe. The following year, an hour after he had delivered the manuscript of his article, “A Treasure Hunt in the Land of Thirst”, he was fatally injured in a motor car accident on the streets of London.<sup>89</sup>

### **Closing of the copper mines after 1919**

By the year 1912, before the outbreak of the First World War (1914 – 1918), the bustling harbour town of Port Nolloth was a scene of activity ... ample illustration of how important the copper mining industry was for Namaqualand during the previous 50 years.<sup>90</sup> Not long afterwards, in 1918, the larger of the two copper mining companies, the Cape Copper Co., was forced to close because of problems with shipping at the close of war, and the prohibition on the import of copper regulus to the United Kingdom.

Mining operations practically came to a standstill and distress and poverty were felt throughout Namaqualand in towns such as Port Nolloth, the terminus of the railway line from the copper mines in the interior. Scores of inhabitants – including others who had been attracted to the mines from outside the region – left to seek work elsewhere.<sup>91</sup> Between the years 1922 – 26 the further decline in output made the copper industry of Namaqualand but a vestige of its former self. O’okiep, for example, was only the shell of the busy and thriving mining town that it once was and a cessation of all operations and disposal of the company’s assets seemed inevitable. Closure indeed had widespread consequences such as loss of employment, reducing scores of those who remained in the area to a common denominator of poverty. To crown matters, the Annual Report for the year 1920<sup>92</sup> had earlier signalled a bleak time of depressed economic conditions, drought, dying stock, and rising prices of foodstuffs. By 1924, the brown and white ‘Poor of Namaqualand’ were the object of charity appeals and street collections in Cape Town.<sup>93</sup>

Until the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, the region of Namaqualand lacked an industry capable of transforming its socio-economic structure, with the result that the economy of the region remained sluggish and backward. The only sources of income were small-scale livestock farming and a little grain cultivation, but the low erratic rainfall and periodic droughts always made the area only marginally suited to sedentary farming. Although the existence of rich

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<sup>88</sup> Fred C. Cornell, *The Glamour of Prospecting: Wanderings of a South African Prospector in Search of Copper, Gold, Emeralds and Diamonds* (London: T. Fisher Unwin Ltd, 1920) (New introduction by T. J. Couzens. Facsimile ed. Cape Town: David Philip, 1986).

<sup>89</sup> *The Mining & Industrial Magazine*, Vol. IV, 18 May 1927; Owen Letcher, *Namaqualand: Cradle of mineral development*, 1932, 41. In March 1921, Cornell’s adventurous life came to an end. He was injured while travelling in a motor-cycle sidecar and died because of a fractured skull in Charing Cross Hospital.

<sup>90</sup> UG 56 – 1912, 58.

<sup>91</sup> J. Sharp & M. West, “Controls & Constraints: land, labour and mobility in Namaqualand”, Carnegie Conference Paper No. 71, University of Cape Town, April 1984, 10.

<sup>92</sup> UG 35–1920: Department of Justice.

<sup>93</sup> Jack Carstens, *A Fortune through my Fingers* (Cape Town: Howard Timmins), 1962, 44.

copper deposits in the arid region along the west coast had been known ever since the days of Commander Simon van der Stel, the earliest mining boom only came in 1852 with the opening of the Springbokfontein workings by the mining company, Phillips & King. The rich copper deposits were initially worked at an open-cast mine,<sup>94</sup> and thereafter mined underground at O'okiep, Concordia, Spektakel and Nababeep. These mines provided the stimulus for significant economic activity and heralded a cash economy and modest economic relief for the inhabitants. It is against this background that the population of Namaqualand over the years managed to survive, despite the climate and environmental conditions, and fluctuating commodity prices.<sup>95</sup>

By 1925, Namaqualand was again economically stagnant after mine closures and amid severe drought conditions. But the harsh, arid region that owes its entire development to the exploitation of its mineral wealth, would once again be rescued by its minerals. The dying copper industry would indeed soon be overshadowed by more spectacular discoveries due northwest of the first open-cast copper mine at Springbokfontein, and 100 km as the crow flies. A dispirited Namaqualand in economic and social distress, would be rescued by the discovery of mineral wealth. In this case diamonds uncovered in an abandoned course of the ephemeral Kama River on the southern border of the Port Nolloth town reserve or commonage. The discoveries of a handful of diamonds by a few early prospectors and the official registration of these stones was a prelude to the first find on the coast which signalled the advent of commercial diamond mining in Namaqualand.

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<sup>94</sup> It was only in the year 1852 that work was commenced by Messrs Phillips King & Co., a mercantile house in Cape Town and London. The first eleven tonnes of ore were shipped in the steamer "*Bosphorus*" on the 31 st of August 1852 for Swansea in Wales. The mines had gone on steadily increasing production from that date.

G 36-1857, *Report upon the Mineral and Geological structure of South Namaqualand and the Adjoining Mineral Districts*, by Andrew Wyley, 6.

<sup>95</sup> John M. Smalberger, *A History of Copper Mining in Namaqualand* (Cape Town & Johannesburg: C. Struik (Pty) Ltd, 1975).

## **Chapter 2 THE DISCOVERY OF THE NAMAQUALAND DIAMOND FIELD (1925) AND THE DIGGERS' REVOLT**

Before the discovery of the first diamonds in a dry river course on the Port Nolloth Reserve (Commonage) in early spring of August 1925, the coastal strip from the Orange River mouth to the Buffels River was still open veld, for the most part uninhabited except for the small harbour town of Port Nolloth and the tiny settlement of Grootmist near the mouth of the Buffels. Amid low scrubland and coastal dunes, tracts of unalienated Crown land and a few surveyed farms hugged a desolate coast. Then came the first finds of precious stones on the Reserve, followed about a year later by substantial recoveries at Kleinzee Farm to the south, and to the north at Alexander Bay. The astounding discovery of the latter deposit was at the time described as “the world’s richest diamond field”. The focus of the district would therefore soon shift from failing copper mines to these sensational finds.

Geologists visiting Namaqualand, starting with the government mining engineer Wyley<sup>96</sup> in 1857, had doubted this region would ever yield precious stones from the seemingly barren earth. But against all expectations, the next era of mineral development was about to begin when phenomenal wealth was wrested from the wind-swept coastal terraces.<sup>97</sup>

Geographically, Namaqualand may be divided into three easily recognizable zones. Skirting the Atlantic in the west is the Sandveld, a coastal belt of up to 200 metres altitude, extending on average 20 km inland. Seen from the ocean, the coast shows a fringe of sandy dunes, from which a belt of slowly rising flat country stretches inland to the foot of broken irregular hills, backed in the distance by blue-grey higher ranges. Parallel to the Sandveld and transversing the centre of the region is a mountain belt or Hardeveld where most of the major towns and the copper mines are found. And on the east is the plateau zone of Bushmanland, a summer rainfall area. There are no permanent rivers apart from the Orange River in the extreme north.

This chapter sets out to reconstruct the events surrounding the first discovery on the coast which set off a rush and introduced industrial diamond mining in Namaqualand.

### **Jack Carstens home at last**

Although there were rumours about diamonds going around for many years, the good fortune would fall to Captain Jack Carstens who was home at last from service in the First World War and a subsequent stint of duty as an officer in the First 3<sup>rd</sup> Queen Alexandra’s Own Gurkha Rifles of the Indian Army. Carstens, accompanied by his young cousins Percy and Richard Hughes and three workers, set off in August 1925 in search of diamonds in the sandy wastes. They made their way to the dry course of the Kama River, about 10 km south of Port Nolloth, where they went ahead to peg several claims. This event would link the name of Jack Carstens with the first

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<sup>96</sup> G 36-1857 *Report upon the Mineral and Geological Structure of South Namaqualand* by Andrew Wyley.

<sup>97</sup> GG 1423 Ref. 45 / 163, Central Archives (SAB), Pretoria.

finds on the littoral and be recorded in the annals of Namaqualand mining history as the advent of diamond mining.

Born in 1892 in Port Nolloth, “a little town of some 300 White inhabitants then ...”, Carstens was the son of William Carstens who had started a trading store there, and Annie Hughes, a Welshwoman from Aberystwyth who had earlier while still in her teens, come out to Namaqualand in a sailing ship.<sup>98</sup> Despite the experts scoffing at the thought of finding diamonds in Namaqualand, and a local shopkeeper lecturing him on the absurdity of such a search, Jack Carstens himself believed that diamonds were there “in profusion”. In a simple yet compelling narrative, he tells the story of *A Fortune through my Fingers*, an account of his discovery of the diamond field of the Namaqualand coast. It is a tale of ‘faith’ based on expectations planted in him by a fortune-teller in India, which would disprove the pronouncements of geologists and laymen.

This book is dedicated to his father, William Carstens, one of the old prospectors who, had it not been for his trail-blazing spirit, “the diamonds in this part of the world would still be lying beneath the soil”. In a glass case at his home named “Upcott”,<sup>99</sup> Carstens (senior) displayed a collection of mineral samples which included monazite, beryllium, scheelite, titanium, kieselguhr, kaolin, and, of course, copper.<sup>100</sup> But there was not much to urge his son on as “little or no profit was shown from all the prospectors’ dreams and diggings ... little or nothing to encourage (his son’s) almost unconscious compulsion”.<sup>101</sup> It was this son Jack who would be destined to make the first discovery, perhaps given a push in the right direction by the ‘supernatural’.<sup>102</sup>

It all began while captain Carstens was preparing to leave for the restive North West Frontier of India. A tall local of about 60 years wearing flowing white robes matching his snow-white beard, approached him and started to chant in a thin voice: “I want to tell your fortune, Sahib ... something interesting to tell you”. Carstens brusquely told him to go away, but later sitting on his heels the strange man took Carstens’ hand and examined it closely. In a grave voice he made one prediction which the captain recalled years later:

Sahib, you are not going to stay in the army much longer. You are going to leave the army and sail away to a far-off country. There you are going to dig in the ground and find many shiny stones. You are going to become a very rich man.<sup>103</sup>

How much weight one should attach to the prediction and influence of a fortune-teller from the Himalayan plains, is difficult to say. Or what power people claiming to foretell the future have in human affairs. In any event, this fortune-teller predicted that Carstens would dig in the

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<sup>98</sup> Jack Carstens, *A Fortune Through My Fingers* (Cape Town: Howard Timmins, 1962), 10-11.

<sup>99</sup> The Port Nolloth home similarly named as the family home, a double storey dwelling in St John’s Road, Wynberg (Cape Town), opposite the Dutch Reformed Church.

<sup>100</sup> Jack Carstens, *A Fortune Through My Fingers*, 1962, 46-7.

<sup>101</sup> Idem, 1962, 46-7.

<sup>102</sup> Olga Lehmann, *Look beyond the Wind: The Life of Dr Hans Merensky* (Cape Town: Howard Timmins, 1956), 58.

<sup>103</sup> Jack Carstens, *A Fortune Through My Fingers*, 1962, 8.

ground for shiny stones in a far-off place, which prediction probably led him to make the decision to resign his officer's commission in the British Army.

In 1924, after one or two bad starts in business in Cape Town, we find Jack Carstens back home busy on a mica mining venture about 25 miles from Steinkopf -- started in a region that was in the grip of a drought and a collapsing copper industry, and "dying on its feet". Despite putting in a great deal of work in addition to venture capital, the operation had to close. By this time Carstens was a worried man searching for a future, but he just could not bring himself to face a routine job after having for so many years led a life of adventure and danger. Perhaps in times of desperation one clutches at any straw, so he found himself recalling that strange Indian fortune-teller and the prediction about "shiny stones". Next, despite the appeals of his fiancée, Carstens turned down the offer of an office job in Cape Town and returned to Namaqualand during July 1925, with the compelling feeling that the rest of the fortune-teller's prediction might after all come true.

Port Nolloth, on his return, was a seaside town in decline, eerily quiet as the copper mines inland had closed. On his first night home, Carstens tossed about restlessly in bed as sleep evaded him. In the early hours of the morning, he dozed off and sleep brought with it a vivid dream. There, standing over the bed in front of him, was the fortune-teller of the plains of Bareilly, saying quite distinctly: "You will dig in the ground, Sahib, and find many shiny stones. Go to it, Sahib. You are very near the place I told you of". The dream had been so clear that he woke up with a start.<sup>104</sup>

Meanwhile, on the same night of Jack's return, his father had been spending some time looking for a report from a Dr Marloth whom he had sent some gravels in 1913. Unfortunately, he could not find it, but he recalled the report read something like this:

The gravels you sent me I found most interesting, and they are without doubt diamondiferous. You tell me they have come from six miles south of Port Nolloth, but I can hardly credit it. You no doubt know that some very prominent geologists have made many trips to Namaqualand, and they have all reported that the chances of finding diamonds south of the Orange River are very remote. But I must repeat ... that I like the look of the sample.<sup>105</sup>

Carstens (senior) explained why he had not at the time followed this up. He had gone to Cape Town to see his old friend, Sir David Graaff, who was interested right away. It was agreed that a syndicate should be formed to test the gravels, but for some reason this took longer than anticipated and before they could come to some arrangement, war broke out and the whole matter was forgotten. These events were of more than a decade earlier and he was a little hazy as to the exact spot where those gravels had been found. He remembered though that it was in an old riverbed, a tributary of the Kama River,<sup>106</sup> quite near the north-west boundary of a farm,

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<sup>104</sup> Jack Carstens, *A Fortune Through My Fingers*, 1962, 47.

<sup>105</sup> *Idem*, 1962, 47-8.

<sup>106</sup> The Nama language has left its mark on Namaqualand. Kama River: 'kama' in Nama, meaning water, blanket (snug, cozy or sheltered) or love, depending on the articulation of the initial click sound. The equation of water with shelter or love symbolises its deep social significance for people of the arid regions. (Source: Charles F. Hein, Springbok, 1998). See also G. S. Nienaber & P. E. Raper, *Hottentot (Khoenkhoen) Place Names*, 1983; P. J. Nienaber, *S.A. Pleknaamwoordeboek* (Kaapstad: S.A.

Obeep. At the time, a Coloured man, Van Reenen by name, brought him the gravels, but this man's whereabouts were unknown, and they would have to set out to find him as without him, it would be like searching for a needle in a haystack.

The story of the run-up to the original discovery was afterwards related by William Carstens to the journalist, Owen Letcher:

A few months prior to the outbreak of the Great War ... my attention was directed to a certain deposit of gravel lying along the coast at a distance ... about six and a half miles to the south of Port Nolloth. A farmer brought me some of this wash, and he in turn had been interested in it because some children had been playing with the variegated stones and pebbles which were found in association with the wash. I immediately decided that the gravel might contain diamonds. I took a trip to Cape Town with a view to securing capital to open the deposit. Then the war broke out and the diamond market collapsed. My sons went to the front, and in the face of greater and more stirring events the prospects of finding diamonds on the Namaqualand coast faded into insignificance ... It was not until about August of 1925 that we tackled the gravel again. My sons became interested in the occurrences, and we decided to give the venture a thorough trial.<sup>107</sup>

### **A reconstruction of events surrounding the discovery of the first diamond on the Namaqualand littoral: first-hand accounts by Jack Carstens & William Carstens**

After a search, Van Reenen was eventually tracked down and the two-man expedition, Jack Carstens and Percy van Reenen, trudged off through the heavy sand and low bushes. Carstens was armed only with a prospector's handbook as guide which simply said: "alluvial diamonds are usually found in old riverbeds, among water-worn pebbles and large boulders". Under Van Reenen's general direction, they spotted an old riverbed. As they walked along its course, he suddenly pointed to a rounded boulder in the bed and said: "There, Baas, is where I found those gravels."<sup>108</sup> As Van Reenen was quite positive that this was the site of the gravel he had years before brought to Carstens senior, Jack returned to Port Nolloth enthusiastic and hopeful of success. He was now convinced that he knew exactly where to start on what turned out to become a great adventure – but how to start? On enquiry, he learned from the Special Justice of the Peace at Port Nolloth that a Precious Stones Prospector's Licence had to be taken out first. This he acquired from the magistrate's office in Springbok.

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Boeksentrum, 1963); J. Burger, "Oorsprong van Namakwalandse plekname", PhD, University of Stellenbosch, 1989.

<sup>107</sup> Owen Letcher, *Namaqualand: Cradle of Mineral Development in Southern Africa*, reprinted from the *Mining & Industrial Magazine*, Johannesburg Sept. 1932, 42.

<sup>108</sup> Jack Carstens, *A Fortune Through My Fingers*, 1962, 49.

Figure 4 Geological Map of the Coast, between Port Nolloth and Kleinsee (J. A. H. Marais et al, *The Geology of the Springbok Area*, 2001)



It was early in August 1925 that Jack Carstens and three boys set out to seek his fortune in the Namaqualand coast without having the foggiest idea how to prospect and mine for diamonds. The party was fitted out with a pack donkey and nondescript mining equipment consisting of three picks, three shovels and the two small meal sieves.<sup>109</sup> Two of the team of labourers were poor White Namaqualanders<sup>110</sup> known as *Vuil Koring* (Dirty Corn) because of their association with the Coloured community.<sup>111</sup> The *Vuilkorings* loved to air their knowledge of English. The other worker was a “slightly Coloured man”, Harry Jacobs of St Helenian parents, who claimed to be closely related to one of the leading members of the English aristocracy – and said he could produce evidence to confirm this.<sup>112</sup>

<sup>109</sup> Jack Carstens, *A Fortune Through My Fingers*, 1962, 51.

<sup>110</sup> Frederick Gysbert (Freddy) Griffiths (in 1950 classified Coloured), and Cornelius van den Heever (White) who married Frances Griffiths, Freddy’s paternal aunt.

<sup>111</sup> At Steinkopf Mission Station they were known as “onse Boere” (our Boers), while the Komaggas Mission Station dwellers simply referred to those Whites to whom they leased lands for grazing and cultivation of grain, as “our Hottentots”.

<sup>112</sup> Jack Carstens, *A Fortune Through My Fingers*, 1962, 51.



Figure 5 General view of the original claim of Jack Carstens on the Port Nolloth Reserve at Mile 6 ½.

(Rudd & Watson, *History of the Namaqualand diamond discoveries*, 1956)

Putting down a prospecting pit on the site, they found a deposit of lime-cemented shingle in what appeared to be an old course of the Kama.<sup>113</sup> Having located the promising rounded boulders, the only thing to do was to remove the overburden and see what Nature had in store. Shovelfuls of gravel thrown up from below had garnets, jaspers, cat's-eyes, epidotes ... indicators normally found in association with diamonds.

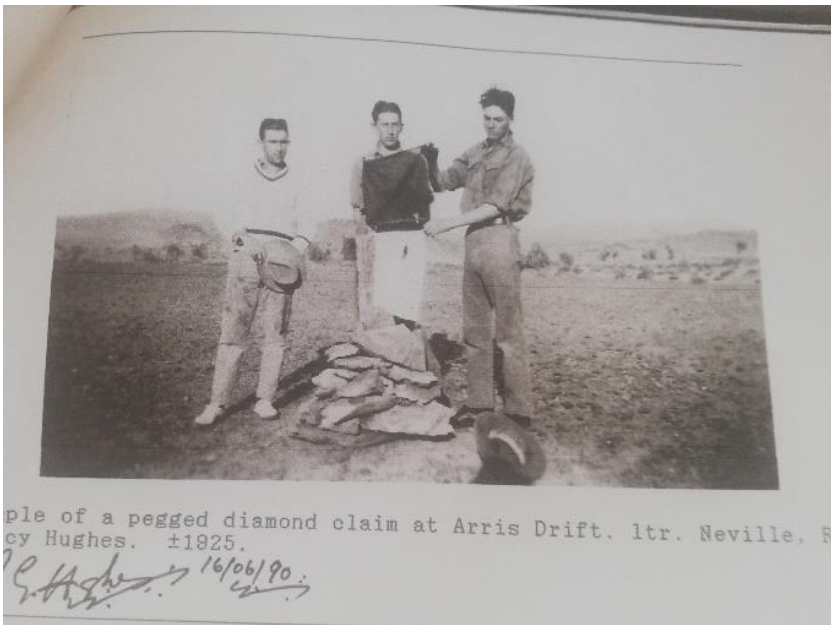


Figure 6 (L-R) Neville, Richard, and Percy Hughes at a pegged diamond claim, Arris Drift (1920s). (Courtesy: P. Hughes)

Accompanying Jack Carstens to the prospecting claim was his young cousins, Percy and Richard Hughes, who had happened to be in Port Nolloth on holiday from Stellenbosch High School (now Paul Roos High). Percy, sitting on the ground watching the pile of washed gravel spread out on sheets of newspaper, suddenly shouted and rushed over to show Jack a peculiar crystal

which turned out to be the first diamond found on the Port Nolloth Reserve.<sup>114</sup> The crucial acid

<sup>113</sup> P. A. Wagner & H. Merensky 'The Diamond Deposits on the Coast of Little Namaqualand', *Transactions & Proceedings of Geological Society of South Africa*, vol. XXXI, Johannesburg, 1929, 2. (See Dr W. A. Humphrey's 'Note on the occurrence of diamonds near Port Nolloth', *Trans. Roy. Soc., S. Afr.*, 1926, Vol. XIV, Part 3, pp. 217 – 218).

<sup>114</sup> Jack Carstens, *A Fortune Through My Fingers*, 1962, 55.

test was to decide the stone's fate, and there defiant was that shiny gem. The little solitary specimen weighed only half-a-carat, "but the diamond that lay in our hands on that night of August 15, 1925, led to the greatest discovery of alluvial diamonds in the history of South Africa".<sup>115</sup>



Figure 7 (L-R) Two unidentified persons, Marion Burrows, Freddy Griffiths holding a jig, and William Carstens at the Original Claim of Jack Carstens on the Port Nolloth Reserve (1925). (Courtesy: Percy Hughes)

The little prospecting party tried to keep the discovery while on "a fishing trip" a secret, but the news spread like wildfire after Jack Carstens had shown some diamonds to shop owner, Herman Klass.<sup>116</sup> The excitement was too much for Klass who blurted out the news of the find in the Cape Copper Company Officials' Club. William Carstens, the Reuters correspondent for Namaqualand, was the first to cable off the news report of the find made by his son that set the diamond world alight.

Travelling up to Okiep on the Cape Copper Company's narrow-gauge railway, Jack Carstens next consulted John Barry, the Claims Inspector in Springbok. With his

assistance the stone was registered in August 1925 ... "the first diamond ever to be found on the Namaqualand coast of South Africa".<sup>117</sup> Carstens must have been aware of the earlier discoveries on Crown land on the banks of the Orange in the interior. He therefore qualified his statement to a site on the "coast", without admitting the prior discoveries. As a result, Jack Carstens has by default become the person generally credited with the first find in Namaqualand.

Back at the diggings, their patience sifting through promising gravels was rewarded with the odd stone. But when Carstens got back to the workings one day, the whole area around the camp was fully pegged out for precious stones. And the first peg he came across was in the name of his friend, Herman Klass, the very same local shopkeeper whom he had knocked up

<sup>115</sup> Jack Carstens, *A Fortune Through My Fingers*, 1962, 57.

<sup>116</sup> Herman Klass, older brother of Sors Klass. Lithuanian Jewish immigrants to Namaqualand during the 1890s. In the Western Cape Archives there are references to H. Klass's naturalisation papers and his application for immigrant status for his 16-year-old brother, Sors.

<sup>117</sup> Jack Carstens, *A Fortune Through My Fingers*, reprint, 2002, 58.

one night to buy cigarettes and shown some stones, asking Herman to keep the news to himself.<sup>118</sup>

As the prospecting drama unfolded and the news quickly spread, a rush of prospectors and several geologists, as well as a horde of fortune hunters, were attracted to the area which was open to all and sundry. In contrast, when diamonds were discovered at Lichtenburg in the Western Transvaal in 1926, the area was first proclaimed a public digging. As many as 25 000 people took part in a single rush by foot to stake their claims, but pegging of claims was carefully organised. The diggers who rushed into both areas – Lichtenburg and Namaqualand - were however not concerned with long-term visions of a regulated industry. They simply wanted to make as much money as they could in the shortest possible time.<sup>119</sup>

### **The search for precious stones moves south**

For the next seven months, John Eustace (Jack) Carstens worked and prospected his claim at the Kama River, recovering 72 diamonds weighing in all 19 ½ carats, after which he applied for and was granted ‘Discoverer’s Rights’ under the old Cape Precious Stones Act No. 11 of 1899.<sup>120</sup> Following several unsuccessful efforts to obtain capital and partners to develop the claim, Carstens was about to approach Sir Ernest Oppenheimer, the diamond magnate, when a Mr Harry Saunders arrived at the camp. Saunders was a former chief evaluator for the Diamond Detective Department in Kimberley and an expert on diamonds. After introductions, he invited Carstens to accompany him to meet his principal, Albert Truro,<sup>121</sup> in Cape Town. They arranged to meet at the Civil Service Club in Church Square where after getting down to business, it was decided that Truro, Jack Carstens, and the latter’s father would operate as partners. Truro would finance the venture and Carstens (jun.) would oversee operations.<sup>122</sup>

When Jack Carstens suggested approaching attorneys to draw up the necessary documents and formalise the agreement, Albert Truro shrugged it off as quite unnecessary, declaring fervently: “My word is my bond”.<sup>123</sup> On the recommendation of Carstens, the newly formed partnership was to take options to buy up all the coastal farms from Obeep on the border of his diggings, to Hondeklip Bay and beyond if found necessary. Returning to their rooms in the Grand Hotel, Saunders assured Carstens over a glass of beer that he (Carstens) was in (business) with

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<sup>118</sup> Jack Carstens, *A Fortune Through My Fingers*, 1962, 61.

<sup>119</sup> George G. Blakey, *The Diamond* (New York & London: Paddington Press Ltd, 1977), 111-112.

<sup>120</sup> P. J. Parvus, ‘Namaqualand will be the diamond field of the future’, *Industrial Review of Africa*, Dec. 1953, 23.

<sup>121</sup> Prof. Peter Carstens, in the foreword to his father’s book *A Fortune Through My Fingers*, reprint 2002, informs the readers that Albert Truro was in fact a fictitious name used for his father’s “partner”, George Scott Ronaldson, the Kimberley businessman who had deprived Carstens (senior) of his share in the Kleinzee diamond field. Kleinzee was taken over by Oppenheimer’s companies in 1927. The name Albert Truro is a play on “True Robber”, the author suggests.

<sup>122</sup> Jack Carstens, *A Fortune Through My Fingers*, 1962, 67.

<sup>123</sup> Apart from his lack of business acumen, the uncritical acceptance by Jack Carstens of this bold declaration was reflective of his South African English middle-class upbringing: old school tie, sport, networking, Victorian values and the code of conduct in the military of “an officer and a gentleman”.

“the Whitest man in Africa”,<sup>124</sup> who would never let him down – famous last words not to be forgotten by Jack Carstens.<sup>125</sup>

B. J. Rudd and V. U. T. Watson present an alternative version of the Truro-Carstens partnership in their *Report on the Namaqualand Diamond Discoveries* (1956).<sup>126</sup> Mr G. S. Ronaldson (Albert Truro) of Kimberley, on being impressed by the diamonds, paid Jack Carstens £200 for an option to purchase and the right to prospect the claims during the period 1 January to 31 July 1926. If the claims proved payable, Rudd and Watson wrote, Ronaldson could purchase the rights for £3000. In addition, Ronaldson engaged Carstens at £25 per month to act as his agent in Namaqualand. By March 1926, the geological reports on the Carstens claim were however discouraging to Ronaldson and associates, so they discontinued work. Meanwhile, Ronaldson had become positive about the potential of other diamondiferous ground along the coast and instructed attorneys Becker & Rosenberg to secure options over the coastal farms.

The next thing Carstens heard from a passing farmer was that towards the end of August (1926), diamonds were discovered at Grootmist and in the vicinity of the Buffels River by a man named H. W. Alberts. Alberts was in fact contracted to build additional classrooms at the Grootmist primary school. While visiting a site known locally as “The Crater” in search of limestone required for white-washing purposes, he by chance unearthed a diamond, and within two months approximately 600 carats were recovered from the surrounding area.<sup>127</sup> At first Carstens dismissed the initial report as being yet another wild rumour, but the find was verified a few days later and Carstens at once sensed that he had to act without delay.<sup>128</sup> It was agreed to close the digging on the Kama temporarily and that Carstens go down south to investigate the latest find in the Grootmist area, practically next door to Kleinzee Farm on which the Truro-Carstens partnership had secured an option to purchase.

Early in 1927, Jack Carstens hired a lorry and with a tent, an assortment of picks and shovels, water drums and a small rotary pan of three-foot six inches diameter, they set off along the sandy coastal track for the farm Kleinzee (literally, Little Lagoon) at the Buffels River mouth, about 50 km due south of Port Nolloth.<sup>129</sup> The co-owner of part of Kleinzee farm was (oom) Jan Kotze who lived with his family in a 3-roomed stone cottage on a part of the land near the mouth. As times were hard and the parched veld had seen no rain for months, several young white Namaqualanders from neighbouring farms came looking for work. Within a day or two of

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<sup>124</sup> “Whitest man in Africa” signifies the powerful appeal of whiteness, whose bona fides or integrity is not to be questioned.

<sup>125</sup> Jack Carstens, *A Fortune Through My Fingers*, 1962, 67.

<sup>126</sup> B. J. Rudd & V. U. T. Watson, *History of the Namaqualand Diamond Discoveries* (Johannesburg: E. Oppenheimer & Son Limited, March 1956).

<sup>127</sup> J. A. H. Marais et al, *The Geology of the Springbok Area* (Pretoria: Council for Geoscience, 2001), 89.

<sup>128</sup> Jack Carstens, *A fortune through my Fingers*, 1962, 72.

<sup>129</sup> The Buffels River is the only semi-perennial river in the area. All other streams on the prospecting areas along the river are episodic, flowing for a short while after heavy rain. Besides the Buffels, there is no surface water.

his arrival, Carstens engaged at 3s 6d per diem two Mosterts and a Goosen – familiar surnames in those parts.

Several prospecting pits were put down on this barren stretch of sand and bush along the lower terraces, but the young washed-gravels did not show the tell-tale mineral indicators one looks for in a diamondiferous deposit. Feeling despondent after a fortnight of dashed expectations, Carstens was quite prepared to leave and admitted as much to Oom Jan who, disappointed himself, nonetheless prevailed on Carstens to have just one last look before deciding to pack up.

A dried-up pan on the south-west corner of the farm where oom Jan had found some garnets, was the most likely place for a final attempt. In the third wash of gravel, there, in the centre of the gravitating sieve, lay a beautiful blue-white 2 ½ carat diamond:

“My God!” said Oom Jan. “And I have just sold this bit of my farm for £250!”<sup>130</sup>

Hard up and in need of some quick cash, he had argued that a dried-up clay pan with no grazing for sheep or goats was of little use to him. An urgent telegram about the find on Kleinzee farm brought Albert Truro post haste down from Kimberley.

Buoyed up by the discovery, Carstens now employed several coloured labourers to dig pits in straight lines on the higher terraces to uncover the gravels which are remnants of buried ancient river channels and beaches, while he himself worked in and around the pan. Further fantastic finds on the terraces followed. One pothole yielded 3 000 carats in one day, worth more than £36 000 on the market. Day after day a veritable treasure chest was opened until by the end of that month of November 1926, Kleinzee farm had produced some 30 000 carats of diamonds with a market value of more than £400 000.<sup>131</sup>

At first, living conditions at Kleinzee mining camp were very primitive, the only quarters canvas tents which provided little shelter against the wintry gales. Later small huts of corrugated iron were put up, each a room nine foot by nine foot as sleeping quarters fitted with a bed, table, and chair. The only advantage over the tents was that the shanties did not blow down. And given the typically drab and ad hoc nature of this camp, no casual observer - had there been any around - would have guessed at the enormous wealth that lay under the soil.

### **The search for precious stones moves north**

After Carstens' first discovery on the reserve, professional prospectors and diggers and others flocked to Port Nolloth; but this time they concentrated on the coastal area to the north of the town. Many disillusioned prospectors and fortune seekers also decided to return and leave Namaqualand to its fate. One of those who remained was Robert “Sonny” Kennedy from Kimberley, who went into partnership with another prospector, Misdall, and the local Special Justice of the Peace, Alan White. They decided to search the coastline for diamonds and so Kennedy and Misdall set off with their provisions on a wagon along the sandy track north. Eleven miles outside Port Nolloth they pitched camp on top of some cliffs, a site that is a sheer 300 ft drop into the sea. Here at The Cliffs, several prospecting pits at likely spots produced only sterile beach deposits. Disappointed, they turned their wagon back to Port Nolloth. A few days

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<sup>130</sup> Jack Carstens, *A Fortune Through My Fingers*, 1962, 76.

<sup>131</sup> Idem, 1962, 80. (Minimum current market value at R8 000 per carat, R240 million).

later Kennedy alone went back to The Cliffs and began working the area that had first attracted his attention. Within the first week he recovered fourteen diamonds averaging  $\frac{1}{2}$  carat per stone, but he was quick to realise that a three-man syndicate could never make a fortune without capital. Four months later they sold out to the Namaqualand Diamond Company, Friedrich Knacke's South-West Africa firm.<sup>132</sup>

News of the finds at The Cliffs spread rapidly, so prospectors converged on the area to peg large sections of the coastal tract. Options began to change hands at escalating prices while strangers appeared from places such as Kimberley, Johannesburg, Cape Town, and South-West Africa. Soon the focus shifted further north, up beyond The Cliffs. Peggars got to work and before long the greater part of the coastline from The Cliffs up past the Holgat River on to the Buchberg and Peacock's Roadstead was pegged.<sup>133</sup> At the place called Buchberg (a range of low-lying hills ending in the two remarkable kopjes known as "The Twins"), a Jewish storekeeper-pro prospector from Steinkopf named Solomon Rabinowitz<sup>134</sup> made some rich strikes. When he declared 334 diamonds weighing  $74\frac{1}{2}$  carats, the last remaining potential diamond-bearing land of this northern section was quickly snapped up. It was said that bribes were offered to the postmasters at Port Nolloth to induce them to provide any useful information passing through their telegraph department.<sup>135</sup>



Figure 8 The Cliffs, north of Port Nolloth, with workings on the plateau above (c. 1928).

(Rudd & Watson, *History of the Namaqualand diamond discoveries*, 1956)

Assaying of gravels was limited to places where they cropped out or were covered by a relatively shallow overburden.

The first exceptional recoveries would however be made at Alexander Bay on the claims bought by Dr Merensky from Messrs Gordon, Caplan and Loubser during December 1926.<sup>136</sup> By this time, several syndicates had been formed in Namaqualand to exploit the various discoveries made northwards to The Cliffs and beyond, and to the south of Port Nolloth, near the Buffels River at Grootmist and Kleinzee.

<sup>132</sup> Olga Lehmann, *Look beyond the Wind*, 1956, 59.

<sup>133</sup> *Mining & Industrial Magazine of Southern Africa*, Vol. IV, no. 2, 23 March 1927.

<sup>134</sup> Rabinowitz was a seasoned prospector and trader who had come to Namaqualand as a young man scarcely out of his teens. Pack on his back, 'King Solomon' went off in search of minerals and from about the year 1905 penetrated the wilds of the Richtersveld on foot, on horseback, and in donkey carts. He died in 1947. (Cf Carel Birkby, *Thirstland Treks*, London, 1936, 91-94; Lawrence G. Green, *Like Diamond Blazing*, London, 1967, 83-84).

<sup>135</sup> Olga Lehmann, *Look beyond the Wind*, 1956, 60.

<sup>136</sup> U. Keyser, *The occurrence of diamonds along the coast between the Orange River estuary and the Port Nolloth reserve* (Pretoria: South African Department of Mines, Geological Survey, 1972) (Bulletin No. 54).

<sup>137</sup> One of these syndicates, composed of the brothers Caplan, the Gordon brothers and later a Mr Loubser, <sup>138</sup> had become interested in the Alexander Bay area. The Gordon-Caplan Syndicate – the original four-man syndicate -- was at the time quietly making plans in Port Nolloth to try out the area around Alexander Bay and the banks of the Orange River. None of the syndicate members had any idea of prospecting.

This informal Namaqualand syndicate in November 1926 proceeded to the Orange River mouth accompanied by two prospectors, Louw and Laubscher, together with Theunis “Blootvoet” (Barefoot) Coetzee, a farmer of Rietfontein south of Alexander Bay. <sup>139</sup> The party put up their camp, a traditional mat-house, under the lee of some rocks at the south end of the bay. Twenty claims were carefully pegged near the shoreline. When the work was done, Coetzee and Laubscher were resting on the last claim when suddenly Coetzee bent over and picked up something at his feet. It was a diamond. Barely able to contain the excitement, they all scratched around and found another stone ... the prelude to several more stones being uncovered. <sup>140</sup> Thus, while the little diamond works at Kleinzee was going through its teething phase and finding its feet, a new venture was opening in Namaqualand, this time at the mouth of the Orange River.

Towards the end of 1926, a Dr Hans Merensky was visiting his family in Germany after a twenty-year absence. While in London on a business trip, he heard a rumour in the wings of the London Stock Exchange that diamonds had been discovered in Namaqualand. Eight days later his secretary in Johannesburg was able to verify the rumour and as Merensky walked into the foyer of the Adlon Hotel in Berlin, the receptionist handed him the cable: “Prospector named Carstens has found diamonds in Namaqualand”. <sup>141</sup>

Merensky, a geologist who had previously done work on the South-West Africa diamond field, had always suspected the existence of diamonds to the south of the Orange River mouth. <sup>142</sup> He at once cut short his visit and arrived back in South Africa on 15 December 1926. <sup>143</sup> From Johannesburg he wasted no time to organise a high-powered advance prospecting party which included two geologists, Dr Ernst Reuning and Dr I. Celliers, as well as a prospector named Maree, and (Anglo-Boer War) general Manie Maritz who was known to practically every Boer farmer in Namaqualand. Maritz’s job was to introduce the two geologists to the owners of farms

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<sup>137</sup> *Mining & Industrial Magazine of Southern Africa*, Vol. IV, no. 2, 23 March 1927.

<sup>138</sup> Myer (Mick) and Caple Caplan, UK-born brothers, shopkeepers of Steinkopf. Brothers Israel and Julius Gordon (both attorneys at Springbok), as well as siblings Leon, Victor and Benjamin. Loubser, the livestock inspector based in Springbok, was roped in on account of his 2 or 3 prospecting claims on the Orange River.

<sup>139</sup> Israel Gordon, ‘How the first Diamonds were found at Alexander Bay’, *The Mining & Industrial Magazine*, Vol. IV, No. 6, 18 May 1927.

<sup>140</sup> Olga Lehmann, *Look beyond the Wind*, 1956, 60.

<sup>141</sup> *Idem*, 1956, 52.

<sup>142</sup> Dr Hans Merensky, ‘How I found the richest diamond fields in the world - The story of the finds in the worthy doctor’s own words’, *The Mining & Industrial Magazine*, Vol. IV No. 6, 18 May 1927.

<sup>143</sup> Olga Lehmann, *Look beyond the Wind*, 1956, 61-2.

with potential diamond-bearing gravel deposits.<sup>144</sup> Merensky himself only arrived in Namaqualand toward the end of December 1926. After the advance prospecting party had studied the general conditions in Namaqualand, they heard one day that during the Christmas holidays a syndicate consisting of Messrs Gordon, Caplan and Loubser had discovered stones at Alexander Bay. As fate would have it, the party had also heard of a Dr Hans Merensky and believing him to be rich and a potential buyer or backer of their property, they invited him and Dr Reuning to visit their claims on 28 December 1926.

On arrival at Alexander Bay, the geologists found that the claims the syndicate were working had small diamonds found among young fossil oyster shells. Dr Merensky and his associates believed these shells from a remarkable extinct oyster to be an indication of a zone of diamond concentration and termed this gravel layer the Oyster Line. This distinct geological feature was the area immediately south of the Orange River mouth, where Messrs Gordon and Caplan were at that time prospecting and had found several small diamonds.<sup>145</sup> Upon examining the Gordon-Caplan claims, Merensky and Reuning there and then decided that the mineral indications were sufficiently encouraging to warrant offering a substantial sum of money.

Dr Merensky being averse to the world of business negotiations, it was left to Dr Reuning to negotiate a deal with the syndicate. That evening, Reuning managed to reach a verbal agreement with them which allowed a six-month option (£500 payable immediately) over the claims, effective from 1<sup>st</sup> February 1927; and fifty percent of the value of stones recovered during the option period was to go to the syndicate.<sup>146</sup> The terms offered were accepted and the parties agreed to meet in a few days' time to sign the contract.



Figure 9 General view of the Caplan Area, Alexander Bay. Note the shallow deposit. (Rudd & Watson, *History of the Namaqualand diamond discoveries*, 1956)

Merensky and Reuning arrived back in Port Nolloth on New Year's Eve. The local hotel was gaily decorated with paper streamers, coloured lights, and balloons. Now that Merensky had made

<sup>144</sup> Olga Lehmann, *Look beyond the Wind*, 1956, 54-55.

<sup>145</sup> *The Mining & Industrial Magazine of Southern Africa*, Vol. IV No. 6, 18 May 1927, 267-8.

<sup>146</sup> B. J. Rudd & V. U. T. Watson, *History of the Namaqualand Diamond Discoveries*, 1956, 13.

up his mind, he acted quickly. Reuning had to miss the party as Merensky wanted him to leave the same night for Alexander Bay to peg all the unclaimed land around the syndicate's claims, thereby securing the whole of the Oyster Line.<sup>147</sup> And so Reuning was to spend the last night of 1926 in his car, near Alexander Bay. At first light he began pegging, Merensky arriving later in the day to assist. Then they began an intensive two-day inspection of the whole area.

On January 4<sup>th</sup>, 1927, Merensky and company met the syndicate to finalise the contract, but by then the members of the syndicate had changed their mind about the terms of the agreement and first wanted to consult their wives who were married in community of property. As negotiations dragged on, neither party would agree to any modification and tempers became somewhat frayed (the syndicate now wanted £20 000). Following a round of drinks (whisky and soda) in the mat-house,<sup>148</sup> the tension dissolved into 'cordiality' – Merensky having left, as noted, the talking to Reuning as the former very much disliked the wheeling and dealing associated with the commercial world.<sup>149</sup> Withdrawing to discuss the offer of an outright sale of all the rights to the claims and diamonds recovered, the syndicate later returned to the table to finally settle for £17 500.<sup>150</sup> The deal involved twenty-two claims along the seashore and along the river.<sup>151</sup> The formal offer to purchase the Gordon-Caplan Syndicate's property was accepted without question and signed on January 4, 1927: £17 500 in cash, of which £1 000 was payable immediately, and the remaining £16 500 on 31 January 1927.<sup>152</sup>



*Figure 10 Original Caplan Camp with mat house, Alexander Bay.*

(Rudd & Watson, *History of the Namaqualand diamond discoveries*, 1956)

Merensky immediately decided to return to Johannesburg to find the outstanding money from financiers, leaving the claims on January 6<sup>th</sup>. Dr Reuning, assisted by two

<sup>147</sup> Olga Lehmann, *Look beyond the Wind*, 1956, 64.

<sup>148</sup> Portable traditional round dwelling of the Namaqua. Of functional simplicity, it is made of reed-mats over semi-circular boughs, enabling these pastoralists to come and go with the seasons.

<sup>149</sup> Olga Lehmann, *Look beyond the Wind*, 1956, 64.

<sup>150</sup> The syndicate invested the proceeds of the sale in a property named Namaqua House on Greenmarket Square, Cape Town.

<sup>151</sup> Olga Lehmann, *Look beyond the Wind*, 1956, 64.

<sup>152</sup> B. J. Rudd & V. U. T. Watson, *History of the Namaqualand Diamond Discoveries* (1956), Agreement of Sale dated 4 January 1927, 63. (See Figure 11, Annexure 1: Merensky – Gordon/Caplan Agreement of Sale).

farmers, was left in charge to do the development work on the claim on which the small diamonds had been found. One afternoon, a few days later, the two farmer-labourers came to Reuning's tent with several stones, among them a few above ten carats. The stones found by the Coetzees, brothers Theunis and Jan, proved to be quite different in character from those up till then found in the district.<sup>153</sup> Intensive prospecting operations were immediately started so that by January 14 the first big finds were made. The recovery of diamonds increased, and it soon became evident that at Alexander Bay a diamond-bearing field of astonishing richness had been found. Dr Reuning proceeded to develop the ground of the Oyster Line methodically and with great skill. Up to the time operations were suspended with the prohibition on prospecting of 22 February 1927, diamonds of superb quality aggregating 12,500 carats and valued in round figures at £150 000,<sup>154</sup> were recovered within six weeks only.

The secret of Alexander Bay was at first well kept ... "nobody outside a favoured few in Namaqualand knew of what was going on up by the distant mouth of the Orange River". Then news started filtering through, resulting in an article in the *Mining & Industrial Magazine* of 23 March 1927, the first article to appear on the remarkable developments there.<sup>155</sup> The diamond market was thrown into a considerable state of excitement, leaving the Government and the big stone producers very concerned about the future and the increasing production from the Western Transvaal alluvials. It was common knowledge that the major diamond producers had been pressurising the Government to restrict the output from the Lichtenburg district.<sup>156</sup> And now, without warning so to speak, came a fresh threat to the security of the market from a hitherto unsuspected quarter – Namaqualand. The situation brought about further difficulties because the new diamonds, especially those from Namaqualand, were of remarkably high quality and as they came onto the market, world prices were forced down.

### **Prohibition on Prospecting, February 1927**

Dr Hans Merensky's initial excitement about the sensational finds made by his prospecting party, now the Hans Merensky Association or H. M. Association,<sup>157</sup> was soon replaced by something close to "panic". What was going to happen to this fantastic store of wealth that he had been responsible for uncovering? Merensky kept on thinking. What would happen to the diamond market that was still staggering under the impact of the Lichtenburg discoveries? What would happen to the hordes of diggers who would pour into Namaqualand? They had barely

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<sup>153</sup> *The Mining & Industrial Magazine of Southern Africa*, 18 May 1927, Vol. IV, 268. The "Blootvoet" (Barefoot) Coetzees would later in the Cape Supreme Court lodge a civil claim for compensation against Dr Merensky's H. M. Association.

<sup>154</sup> *The Mining & Industrial Magazine of Southern Africa*, 18 May 1927, Vol. IV, 268. (Cf Olga Lehmann, *Look beyond the Wind*, 1956, 70).

<sup>155</sup> *The Mining & Industrial Magazine of Southern Africa*, Vol. IV, No. 2, 23 March 1927, 142.

<sup>156</sup> *The Mining & Industrial Magazine of Southern Africa*, Vol. IV, No. 3, 6 April 1927.

<sup>157</sup> Towards the end of January 1927, the H.M. Association was formed with a total capital of £50 000, of which Merensky owned half. The three members were Merensky, G. A. E. Becker and Sir Julius Jeppe, who later disclosed that he was acting for Sir Abe Bailey. Sir Ernest Oppenheimer also bought his way into Merensky's Association. By July 1927 he had obtained £500 000 worth of shares to become the dominant personality on the Diamond Coast.

managed to survive in the Western Transvaal, so what could they hope to do in this inhospitable desert?<sup>158</sup>

Suddenly Merensky saw himself responsible for nothing less than a “national catastrophe” that could only be averted by swift Government action. Whether he was motivated by social conscience or self-interest is difficult to decide. In the event, Merensky decided to leave for Cape Town at once and see prime minister J. B. M. Hertzog about the crisis. The House was in session, but he sent an urgent message through to the Prime Minister who wasted no time in calling a meeting with General Smuts, the Leader of the Opposition, Minister of Mines F. W. Beyers, and H. Pirow, the Government Mining Engineer. Merensky urged them to take direct control to avoid a Lichtenburg-type diamond rush and its consequences. A stampede of fortune-seekers to the Diamond Coast would see most of them simply die of hunger or thirst in the harsh conditions.<sup>159</sup> (Contemporary observers in Port Nolloth invariably described these diggers as “tough Joburg crooks”<sup>160</sup>).

The government took prompt action. On 22 February 1927, a proclamation was issued prohibiting until further notice, all prospecting and mining for diamonds on State land along the Namaqualand coast. Eight days were allowed in which to wash the gravel already recovered. The prospectors were furious, even several of the syndicates were caught on the wrong foot. According to officialdom, this proclamation was intended to end all the “disorganised and random” prospecting operations which were then being carried out. Seen as harsh but essential, this measure also aimed at bringing the entire coast under firm control. Continued unlimited exploitation of these fields could, it was argued, only bring about chaos to the market with a total collapse in the market value of diamonds. Thus, after a few months of feverish activity, silence once again descended on this lonely coastal region which hereafter became forbidden territory. Today, only a few small mounds of soil next to half-filled pits, with perhaps a few rusty pieces of machinery, remain as evidence of this period.<sup>161</sup>

It was only natural that consternation would be caused by this proclamation as large sums of money had been expended in alluvial prospecting areas. Syndicates and individual diggers and peggers had all been severely hit by the decision. From Grootmist and Kleinzee in the south up to the Orange River mouth, prospecting and washing operations had been in progress for several months and in certain areas dotted along this littoral, diamonds were found in what appeared to be payable quantities. Subsequent discoveries at Alexander Bay disclosed rich deposits of gravel. The general opinion was that these amazing discoveries were the main reason for the Government’s edict prohibiting further prospecting in the territory.<sup>162</sup> It should, however, be pointed out that this right of prospecting provided for by Act 11 of 1899, was subject to the statutory powers of the Governor-General to prohibit prospecting in any place.

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<sup>158</sup> Olga Lehmann, *Look beyond the Wind*, 1956, 68.

<sup>159</sup> *Idem*, 1956, 68-69.

<sup>160</sup> Elderly Coloured matrons of Port Nolloth reminiscing in the 1960s about the upheavals caused by the discovery of diamonds and the Transvaal diggers.

<sup>161</sup> U. Keyser, *The occurrence of diamonds along the coast between the Orange River estuary and the Port Nolloth reserve*, 1972, 1.

<sup>162</sup> *The Mining & Industrial Magazine*, Vol. IV, No. 2, 23 March 1927, 51. Proclamation No. 50, 1927.

There was much speculation as to what line of action the government would next take in the matter. Even though decisive action had been taken by the prohibition on prospecting, the situation in Namaqualand turned out as Merensky had anticipated, with hundreds of people finding themselves stranded. This occurred despite repeated warnings issued by the government that diggers should stay away from Namaqualand; but they continued to arrive in numbers from all corners of the Union. Meanwhile vast stretches of Namaqualand lay idle. Not only the pegged areas, but drought-stricken farms were also left deserted. After another year's crops had failed, impoverished farmers abandoned their homes and drifted into Port Nolloth where at least they hoped to find work as road gangers.<sup>163</sup> The town was consequently crowded with idle farmers as well as idle prospectors whose work had been interrupted by the government decree on prospecting.

By March 1927, the Divisional Council of Namaqualand felt compelled to bring to the Prime Minister's attention the grim situation prevailing in the district.<sup>164</sup> The following resolution was unanimously passed by Council at its Meeting held on 17 March 1927:

This Council views with grave apprehension the closing down of the Diamond Workings in Namaqualand, and trusts that same is only a temporary measure.

This Council fully realises the danger to the Diamond Industry due to the discovery of the Diamonds in such large quantities in the Union – and admits the necessity of some Government Control – It also admits the danger of 'Proclaiming' the Namaqualand Fields owing (sic) to the lack of water and to [the] barren nature of the country and transport difficulties – at [the] same time it fails to see why workings in this District should be closed down by Proclamation while the Transvaal and other Districts in the Union are allowed to carry on.

This Council has frequently pointed out that the state of poverty prevailing in this District is due to the generations of neglect and want of work – and regrets that, now that the discovery of Diamonds seemed likely to open the country and give employment to many half-starved creatures, the Government should have thought fit to close all work in so peremptory a manner.

The Council expresses the hope that this is only a temporary measure ... My Council trusts that this matter will receive your due consideration.

The Prime Minister's Office was not impressed at all by the Council's unanimous resolution complaining about the government's seeming lack of consideration for the "neglected", "half-starved creatures" in Namaqualand, and was particularly riled by that local body pointing out that the Transvaal and other districts in the Union were allowed to carry on mining for diamonds.

### **The Precious Stones Act No. 44 of 1927**

The Precious Stones Act No. 44 of 1927 aimed "to consolidate and amend the laws in force in the several provinces of the Union relating to prospecting and mining for precious stones, to amend in certain respects the laws relating to the diamond trade, and to provide for matters incidental thereto". The task undertaken by the Minister of Mines was admittedly a most difficult

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<sup>163</sup> Olga Lehmann, *Look beyond the Wind*, 1956, 72.

<sup>164</sup> 4/NQD 4/1/4 Namaqualand Diamond Fields Closure. Divisional Council Office, Springbok Namaqualand to The Right Honourable the Prime Minister General J. M. B. Hertzog, Cape Town, 21 March 1927.

one. Every proposal and representation made was bristling with difficulties, and the Minister had a challenging task in selecting the most equitable principle to embody in the Bill.

Nevertheless, in April 1927, the eagerly awaited Precious Stones Bill was launched in the House of Assembly. The moment the opening speech tossed the Bill into the arena of the House, it was torn to shreds by the Opposition. The Minister was determined to push it through, though.

It was an extremely important event for the mining world as this was the first comprehensive Act for precious stones that would be applicable to the whole of South Africa. Before this Bill, there had been a separate law for every province which caused no end to confusion and contraventions of the law. As mentioned, the Bill was attacked from every side and characterised through the columns of the press as a “Bolshevik attack on vested interests,” and “if this Bill goes through it will be the most revolutionary attack on private interests ever attempted in any country outside Russia”.<sup>165</sup>

But the dire situation in Namaqualand required the intervention of the Governor-General who in his opening speech to both Houses of Parliament on 14 October 1927, said that it had been thought necessary to assemble Parliament earlier on this occasion because his ministers did not consider it advisable that the resubmission to Parliament of the Precious Stones Bill should be delayed any longer. They felt that the interests of the country demanded that it be passed at the earliest possible moment. The expectation was that these measures would be disposed of in time for Parliament to adjourn early in December for the Christmas recess.<sup>166</sup> At long last, on Wednesday 9 November 1927, a Joint Sitting of both Houses convened to deliberate and vote on the “Precious Stones Bill” as proposed by the House of Assembly. The Precious Stones Act, having been amended and changed many times since it was first tabled, was finally passed. The new act would also control both the production and disposal of diamonds to prevent a flooding of the market that could ruin the industry.

Namaqualand, in the grip of a severe drought since 1924, had all along been suffering for months because of the delays and proposed amendments to the Bill, which only added to their woes.<sup>167</sup> The good news, however, was that Clause 75 of the Precious Stones Act of 1927 now provided that a State digging could be set up and the poor people in Namaqualand find jobs with the Government. The State Alluvial Diggings (S.A.D.) was officially opened on 1 May 1928, with the express goal, amongst others, of tackling the Poor White problem in Namaqualand.

### **The Diggers’ Revolt (1928)**

Amid threatening signs of social upheaval, a deputation of leading farmers representing the farming community in the District of Namaqualand on 19 December 1927 interviewed the Magistrate at Springbok. Ways and means had to be found to relieve the distress brought about by the drought. A telegram from the Magistrate to the Department of Mines & Industries captured the seriousness of their plight:

They were very urgent Minister should open state digging and give employment also allow prospecting on farms thus giving landowner chance make some money x They fear Lichtenburg diggers will be allowed

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<sup>165</sup> Olga Lehmann, *Look beyond the Wind*, 1956, 72.

<sup>166</sup> Union of South Africa: H.A. Debates, Vol. 10, 14 October 1927 – 3 April 1928.

<sup>167</sup> J. P. Mostert MP Namaqualand (1919-1929). Union of South Africa: H.A. Debates, Vol. 10, 14 October 1927 – 3 April 1928.

come here and oust Namaqualanders x ... Please reply soon so I may acquaint these gentlemen Minister's decision.<sup>168</sup>



Figure 12 Meeting of diggers during the Diggers' Rebellion, Port Nolloth, January 1929. (Pieter Coetzer, *Baai van Diamante*, 1997)

The Government simply turned a deaf ear despite appeals that the State Diggings at Alexander Bay should be thrown open as a Public Diggings for a large number of diggers. The Department of Mines and its minister were of the view that all Namaqualand claims were exceptional because of several very rich runs of gravel while its mining inspector argued that a digging community was out of the question considering the precarious water supply, isolation and risk of starvation on a difficult terrain. Of equally serious concern was the possibility of falling prices if the market was flooded with high quality stones.<sup>169</sup> In reaction, public resentment against the State and the Hans Merensky Association was building up to form a formidable force. In fact, December 1928 saw the start of a rebellion when several farmers whose stock losses and crop failures had driven them to Port Nolloth, called on the local magistrate. Ignoring the magistrate's warning that Buchuberg was forbidden territory, the farmers told him in no uncertain manner that they were off to prospect there.

The disaffected farmers sprang into action, and a convoy of cars sped off in a cloud of dust, the men armed with revolvers, spades, picks, and knives. They clearly meant business. At the end of their 60 km drive they found the police waiting for them at Buchuberg, and no sooner had they stepped out of their cars, then they were handcuffed, bundled back into the cars, and driven off to Port Nolloth.<sup>170</sup> The abortive effort to rush Buchuberg was only stopped by this decisive police action.

<sup>168</sup> MNW 903 Ref. mm 2621/27. Telegram Magistrate, Springbok, to Dept Mines & Industries, Pretoria, 19 December 1927.

<sup>169</sup> Colin Newbury, *The Diamond Ring: Business, Politics and Precious Stones in South Africa, 1867 – 1947* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989) 290.

<sup>170</sup> Olga Lehmann, *Look beyond the Wind*, 1956, 88.

Somehow the news had meanwhile reached Port Nolloth, and as the cars entered the town, an angry crowd suddenly materialised to demand the release of the men involved. Amid boos and jeers the police commander had no alternative but to release them. What can be regarded as an admission of defeat on the part of law enforcement, now emboldened the disgruntled Namaqualanders.<sup>171</sup> This incident signalled the start of what became known as the Namaqualand or Digger Rebellion.

At the time, Port Nolloth was bursting at the seams with a flood of hopeful diggers, impoverished local farmers and scores of others ... some of them from as far away as Lichtenburg in Western Transvaal. All were disgruntled, and most of them existed in shocking conditions of squalor. Among this community, it was therefore not considered a crime to rob the State or Merensky's diggings, and simply bad luck but not a disgrace to be caught. Successful diamond smugglers were much admired as poor Robin Hoods engaged in social banditry. The atmosphere was therefore charged with open talk of rushing the restricted areas at Alexander Bay as it appeared to them that the newly discovered mineral wealth of the area would be carried off for the benefit of only a few individuals, and Namaqualand left to its poverty.<sup>172</sup>

A teacher-political organiser and contemporary observer from Bushmanland, H. A. Rossouw, commented as follows:

To steal or deal illegally in diamonds is your right, they are being told by agitators. From the political stage (disgruntled folk) are incited to 'take the stuff, it's yours'. The diamonds of Namaqualand belong to the Namaqualanders ... Our inheritance left there by God is indeed now guarded by barbed-wire fencing and police.

Agitators drive around inciting people. Angry letters appear in the press. The government is insulted and threatened from the political stage ... Alexander Bay must be taken by force ... (And) when it comes to bragging and boasting, who can beat the Transvaaler?<sup>173</sup>

At Port Nolloth, the situation was allowed to fester during the rest of December 1928. Many disgruntled would-be diggers were all in favour of marching to Alexander Bay at once, but good sense won through, and they had a meeting instead. Raubenheimer, the MLA for Bechuanaland, was asked to arrange a meeting with the Minister of Mines in Cape Town and inform him that unless their demands for a public diggings were met by December 28<sup>th</sup>, they would take Alexander Bay by force. Instead, Raubenheimer sent an urgent wire to the Minister to the effect that ...

Poverty is rampant in Namaqualand and the people are desperate ... if the people storm Alexander Bay, they won't stand any interference, and I'm afraid that if the police fire even one blank cartridge it may lead to serious bloodshed ... in any case what can the police do to stem a tidal wave. There are 32 policemen at the diggings and 8 at Port Nolloth ...<sup>174</sup>

Minister Beyers' reply was to the point. He regretted that he could not open the Diggings, instead he reacted by ordering twenty-five handpicked police to be rushed from Pretoria to Port

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<sup>171</sup> Olga Lehmann, *Look beyond the Wind*, 1956, 89.

<sup>172</sup> T. V. Bulpin, *Discovering Southern Africa* (Cape Town: Reader's Digest, 1980), 173.

<sup>173</sup> H. A. Rossouw, *Namakwalandse kroniek* (Stellenbosch/Grahamstad: Universiteitsuitgewers en -Boekhandelaars, 1973), 99-100.

<sup>174</sup> Olga Lehmann, *Look beyond the Wind*, 1956, 89.

Nolloth. For now, the Government continued to remain impassive to the demands of the diggers, insisting that everything was quite peaceful. The Minister simply voted £15 000 for the relief of poverty among the diggers, stepped up road-making wages from 3/6 to 7/6 per day, extended the offer of employment on road works and the railways in various parts of the Union, and sent an Industrial Inspector, Joubert, to Port Nolloth to enlighten people about what was being done for them.<sup>175</sup>



Figure 13 *View of a Diggers' meeting in front of the Office of the Special Justice of the Peace, Port Nolloth. The Marine Hotel at centre.*

*(Courtesy: Ms P. Burrows)*

During the last days of the year 1928, the atmosphere in Port Nolloth grew more tense as additional police reinforcements kept arriving. By then, there were also what can be described as internecine running clashes among the main protagonists: the Namaqualanders Committee (White)

versus the Government (White), and the Namaqualanders Committee (White) versus the Lichtenburgers Committee (White). It was an all-white affair with the bemused non-whites all the while looking on. The Namaqualanders had for a long time shown resentment towards Lichtenburgers as outsiders who had come to exploit their country. They were moreover convinced that the Lichtenburgers and their wild ways were prejudicial to their case and presented a stumbling block in their negotiations with the Government about social relief and a public diggings. Thus, when the Lichtenburgers tried to put forward suggestions at meetings, they were invariably hissed at and drowned out by energetic hymn singing, which treatment further infuriated them.<sup>176</sup>

All indications now pointed ominously to a fiery start to the New Year. By that time, the reports about the Namaqualand discovery of precious stones and its attendant difficulties were already making newspaper headlines throughout the Union of South Africa. As the fateful date to storm Alexander Bay drew nearer, a story was doing the rounds that the Prime Minister and the Minister of Justice would arrive on the 6<sup>th</sup> (January 1929) to attend the meeting on the Big Day. Far-fetched rumours flew about, which led to more speculation based on the few reliable facts available. Inside the State Alluvial Diggings police and workers were preparing for the siege.<sup>177</sup>

### **Stormy Meetings and the Digger Revolt**

After one stormy meeting held by the diggers, an ultimatum was now sent to the Government that unless some ground was made available as a public diggling by 28 December, they would

<sup>175</sup> Olga Lehmann, *Look beyond the Wind*, 1956, 90.

<sup>176</sup> *Idem*, 1956, 91.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, 1956, 91.

take Alexander Bay by force. At a subsequent meeting, the offer from the state of material relief and jobs was shouted down, and a fresh ultimatum sent. Alexander Bay would be stormed on the 7<sup>th</sup> of January 1929 unless a public digging was proclaimed. The atmosphere at Port Nolloth became even more charged, with more and more police arriving and the diggers increasingly defiant. Bars and tearooms were packed with men holding meetings while police on patrol marched up and down the two sandy main streets of a town wracked with tensions.

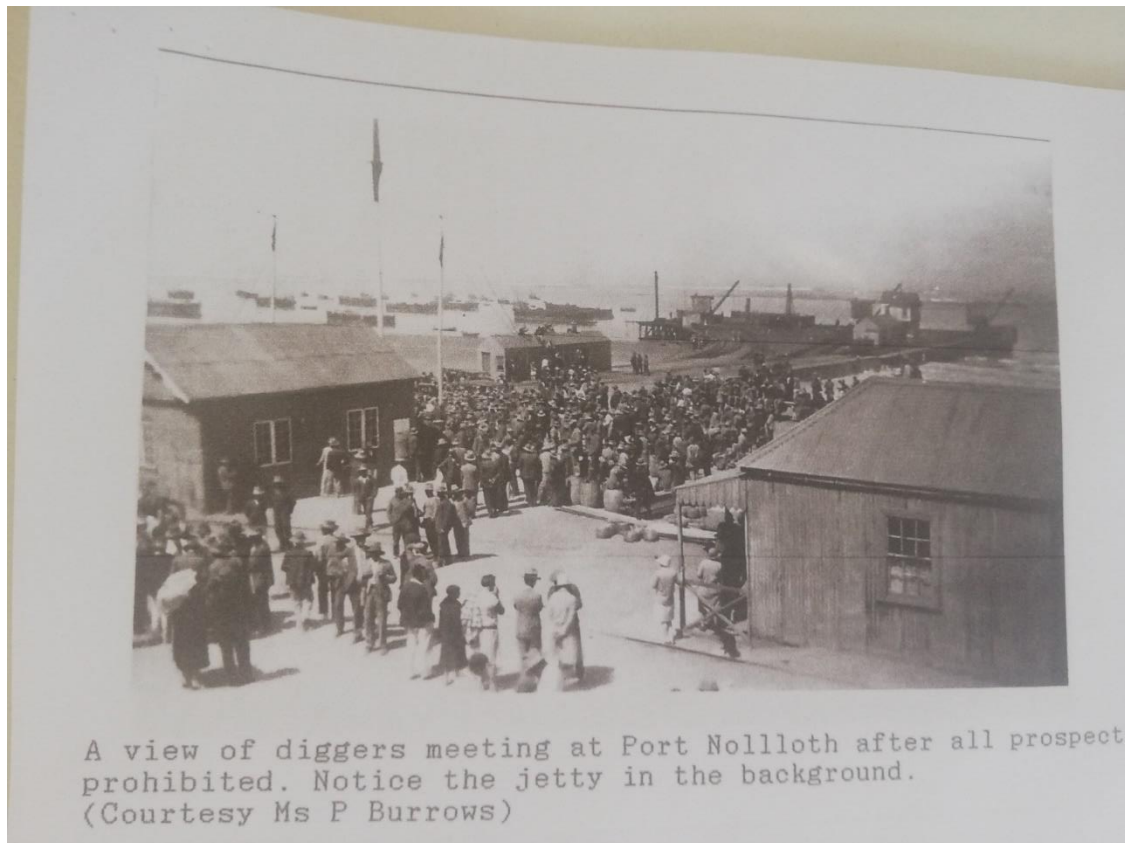


Figure 11 Diggers' meeting after all prospecting was prohibited, February 1927. (Courtesy: Ms P. Burrows)

On 31 December, New Year's eve at 3.10 p.m., the Deputy Commissioner of Police sent off a telegram to the Commissioner of Police about the looming assault on the State Alluvial Diggings. This intelligence communication submitted that ...

Probably nothing special will occur before the 7<sup>th</sup> proximo x If before that date substantial consideration is shewn (sic) by Government to Namaqualanders then likely nothing will happen except possibly unimportant clash between Namaqualanders and Transvaalers which I can deal with x Should Namaqualanders receive no acceptable answer to their resolution ... they will undoubtedly endeavour collect as many persons possible and enter State Diggings x Our intelligence discloses their present plan as follows x To enter State Diggings in ten places simultaneously pulling down fence flat which present not slightest difficulty ... they estimate they will have one thousand men ... my force quite inadequate arrest such large body men on nine mile front and to prevent rescues x I clearly understand you do not wish firearms used so represent position in order that you can reinforce me if you consider this advisable or otherwise instruct before 7<sup>th</sup> prox x Position may change and I am of opinion that if Namaqualanders sympathetically considered other claims can be ignored x Acknowledge<sup>178</sup>

<sup>178</sup> JUS 512 File No. 5717/29.

On the late afternoon of 5<sup>th</sup> January, a lively meeting got under way in the square in front of the magistrate's court, with frank opinions being expressed within earshot of the judicial officials inside. The next day, crowds began to stream into Port Nolloth from outlying villages, farms and from the other towns of Namaqualand. People (all White) came in cars and trucks and lorries and wagons. The 6<sup>th</sup> of January passed with a great flurry of activity, the opposing sides rushing around preparing for the day of reckoning. The bickering between the Namaqualanders and the Lichtenburgers intensified though, and only the leadership of the well-known, in some quarters notorious, general Manie Maritz, kept the two sides to focus on their main objectives.<sup>179</sup> At Alexander Bay meanwhile, police set up machine guns and all preparations were made to repel any attack.

The following entry dated 7<sup>th</sup> January in the diary of the Roman Catholic bishop for Namaqualand reads:

The police have been reinforced. They actually number about 450 men armed to the teeth. What is going to happen? It is feared that there will be bloodshed. We shall soon know. Meanwhile we are praying for our missionaries at Port Nolloth that they may be spared if any disorder should break out.<sup>180</sup>

In time, it would become clear why general Manie Maritz stayed on in Port Nolloth to orchestrate events. He acted as a double agent, leaning of course towards the side of the Government who had sent him there. Nonetheless, with the involvement of Maritz, the revolt gathered fresh momentum. It must be remembered that during the Anglo-Boer War Maritz had enjoyed legendary status amongst farmers sympathetic to the Republican cause – in fact, his picture was to be seen in every farmhouse in Namaqualand.<sup>181</sup>

Playing his role as an agent planted to defuse a politically explosive situation, Maritz did his best to pacify both sides, the Lichtenburgers and the Namaqualanders. After having put aside their differences, the diggers called a committee meeting for eight o'clock the next morning, to be followed with a mass meeting for ten o'clock on the same day, Monday 7<sup>th</sup> January 1929. The whole of South Africa was indeed eager to see what would happen in Namaqualand as the revolt was certain to have some effect on the impending general elections.

A further diary entry by the bishop for 7 January 1929 under "Diamond Fever" noted:

At Port Nolloth the people are becoming more and more agitated. About a hundred adventurers [mainly diggers from Lichtenburg] who are eager to gain hold of the diamonds ... are trying to force the hand of the

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<sup>179</sup> Olga Lehmann, *Look beyond the Wind*, 1956, 95.

<sup>180</sup> J. M. Simon, *African Memories, Part 2: 1909 – 1932. Journal of Bishop Jean M. Simon, O.S.F.S., 1858 – 1932*. Translated by Sister Thérèse Bernard Thünemann, O.S.F.S. (Uppington: TransOranje Drukkers, 2006), 144.

<sup>181</sup> At Leliefontein Mission Station in the Kamiesberg, Manie Maritz was remembered in a different context. When a Boer force invaded the mission station on 27 January 1902 presumably to enjoin the inhabitants not to participate in a war between Whites, the burgers fired on the intruders wounding several of them. The following day, Maritz led a revenge attack which was resisted by the locals with a few rusty old rifles. The attack which struck fear into the natives, wiped out the settlement, leaving scores of casualties. (See Leliefontein Collection (1902), National Library of South Africa, Cape Town: Account of attack by Boer forces under genl. Manie Maritz on Leliefontein Coloured Reserve Mission Station, 28 January 1902). Also, Human Sciences Research Council, *Dictionary of South African Biography*, Vol. I (Cape Town: Tafelberg-Uitgewers, Second Print, 1976), 513.

Government... The public does not accept this new law, which is so contrary to the old ones. The thought that they could become millionaires within a few weeks has spurred them on to plan a revolt. These hundred strangers have called upon those who share their avidity. They now number a thousand at Port Nolloth. This very morning, they are in council. Their decision will be telegraphed to the Government. It will be an ultimatum, they say. If the law is not repealed, leaving everyone free to search for and expropriate the diamonds, they will disregard the law, come what may. <sup>182</sup>

As the crowds gradually gathered around the magistrate's court on the morning of Monday 7<sup>th</sup> January, Maritz and the Labour Inspector Joubert were inside presiding over the joint Namaqualand-Lichtenburg committee meeting to consolidate their plan of action. But the two sides simply argued for five exhausting hours while some two thousand impatient would-be rebels outside cried out for leadership and action. Soon after one o'clock somebody came out onto the verandah to tell the crowd that the Namaqualand Committee had resigned because they could not agree with the decisions that had been made. Despite this setback, the mass meeting got under way at 3 o'clock that same afternoon. Maritz urging caution and discretion, "probably for the first time in his life", won the day and the meeting ended with a vote of no confidence in the Government.

With "ears on the ground" and regular reports and telegrams to update events, the diary entry for the 8<sup>th</sup> of January 1929 reads:

A telegram from Port Nolloth tells us that diamond prospectors to the number of 3 000 have gathered to protest against the law of the Government. The cars in which they came were loaded with picks and shovels. It was expected that they would take possession of the diamond fields, which had been closed to the public, and begin digging for these precious stones. But nothing happened. They proved to be the greatest cowards. They were filled with fear when they saw the police so well armed under the command of a Captain and a General. <sup>183</sup>

Confronted with a well-armed police force, the rebellious would-be diggers turned to ex-general Maritz who, of course, had been sent to the spot on a mission which became very clear. Employed as the representative of Dr Merensky in Namaqualand, he at the same time played a double role as agent of the Government to defuse a potentially dangerous situation among rebellious diggers.

'Here is our man', they said. 'He knows the business of overthrowing a government'. So they approached him, saying: 'You are our leader. Lead us on an assault on the diamond fields. We'll follow you everywhere'. <sup>184</sup>

But Maritz who had become wiser through war, rebellion, court trials, exile, suffering and "repentance" answered: <sup>185</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> J. M. Simon, *African Memories, Part 2: 1909 – 1932. Journal of Bishop Jean M Simon, O.S.F.S., 1858 – 1932*, 2006, 144.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*, 2006, 144.

<sup>184</sup> J. M. Simon, *African Memories, Part 2: 1909 – 1932. Journal of Bishop Jean M Simon, O.S.F.S., 1858 – 1932*, 2006, 147.

<sup>185</sup> Salomon Gerhardus (Manie) Maritz, b. Kimberley 1876, d. Pretoria 1940. Unwilling to become a British subject after the Anglo-Boer War, Maritz left for Europe in 1902 but returned to the Cape in 1904. An enlisted officer in the defence force, he planned a rebellion to recover the independence of the former Boer republics. When ordered to take part in the invasion of South-West Africa, Maritz in October 1915 went into active

To lead you in an assault on the diamond fields is easy enough; I know that work. But what is more difficult is to bring you back safe and sound. I am convinced that if you go there, you will remain there and come back no more. I advise you, therefore, not to expose yourselves to danger; rather go home.<sup>186</sup>

And that is what they did - all 4000 men disappeared and returned home with their picks and shovels, poorer now than before their “show of pretended bravery”. They did not yet admit their defeat, though. To cover it up they told people that they had given the Government a month to reply to their ultimatum, but ...

The month will pass like the rest, and the agitators will forget their boasting and take up again their modest life as sheep farmers and agriculturists.<sup>187</sup>

They held their meeting and contented themselves with passing a vote of no confidence in the Government and making a demand for its resignation, commented Bishop Jean Marie Simon in his diary. The authorities, of course, took no more notice of these discussions than of what was happening on the moon. This whole “greedy crowd” simply returned to their homes without perhaps even unloading their tools. All they would have gotten out of the whole affair was the expense of having travelled thousands of kilometres to Port Nolloth.<sup>188</sup>

A committee was thereupon appointed to interview the Minister of Mines on January 25<sup>th</sup>. This meek climb-down signalled the end of the Diggers’ revolt. It was later to be followed by the appointment by the Government of Maritz as Welfare Officer for the Distressed Portions of Namaqualand.<sup>189</sup>

The gathering at Port Nolloth of 4000 diggers from all parts of the Union ended in humiliation and there was continued silence on the part of the authorities despite the bravado of the restive diggers. For the next forty-eight hours, after the aborted onslaught on the State alluvial Diggings, a gale-force south-west wind<sup>190</sup> swept over the Diamond Coast and even the most revolutionary of men (and women) sought shelter. The spirit of insurrection was dispersed by the wind and when calm returned, there was only the hardship and poverty they had been left with.

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rebellion with a force of largely poverty-stricken conscripts. Forced to flee, Maritz found his way to Europe via South-West Africa and Angola. On his return from Europe, Maritz was arrested, tried for high treason, and sentenced to three years’ imprisonment. He was released in July 1925, after having served only three months. (Human Sciences Research Council, *Dictionary of South African Biography*, Vol. I. Cape Town: Tafelberg-Uitgewers, Second Print, 1976), 513-515.

<sup>186</sup> J. M. Simon, *African Memories, Part 2: 1909 – 1932. Journal of Bishop Jean M Simon, O.S.F.S., 1858 – 1932*, 2006, 147.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*, 2006, 147.

<sup>188</sup> J. M. Simon, *African Memories, Part 2: 1909 – 1932. Journal of Bishop Jean M Simon, O.S.F.S., 1858 – 1932*, 2006, 145.

<sup>189</sup> Olga Lehmann, *Look beyond the Wind*, 1956, 96.

<sup>190</sup> The prevailing “endless” wind on the coast that forms dunes overnight, the biting fury of its sand particles peeling paint off walls or scouring car number plates. (Olga Lehmann, *Look beyond the Wind*, 1956, 56).

### Source of Namaqualand's diamonds <sup>191</sup>

But where, we may ask, is the source of these precious stones which aroused such passions and nearly led to death and destruction? At the time of the discoveries in Namaqualand, geologists attempted to throw light upon the vexed question of the origin of these coastal diamonds. Despite the widespread occurrence of alluvial deposits, to date the locality of their primary source has not been conclusively established. Most authors postulate an origin somewhere in the interior from where the diamonds were transported to the coast by rivers such as the Huab, Ugab, Orange, Buffels, Swartlintjies, Groen, and Olifants. An interior source is clearly favoured by the fact that the richest deposits and largest stones occur close to the Orange and other rivers; also, that the rivers themselves are flanked by diamondiferous terrace gravels. Geologists J. P. Van Wyk and L. F. Pienaar have therefore concluded that "(i)t can no longer be disputed that the diamonds concentrated on the West Coast of South Africa originated on land and were transported to the coast by rivers draining the plateau." <sup>192</sup>

The diamonds occurring in gravels along the West Coast were formed aeons ago in the mantle of the earth in the interior of South Africa during the Cretaceous period, between 80 and 120 million years ago. The stones were formed of carbonaceous material subjected to extreme heat and pressure, <sup>193</sup> about 150 – 250 km below the surface, and crystallised into diamonds as they were brought to the surface in streams of molten magma. This diamondiferous magma known as kimberlite <sup>194</sup> spewed out in various places over the southern African subcontinent, solidifying in magma pipes leading up to the surface. Geological evidence indicates that since the time of emplacement the topmost parts of these diamond-bearing kimberlite pipes <sup>195</sup> have long since been eroded by extremes of climate and temperature, and by wind and water. This process of erosion resulting from continental uplift has removed as much as 1,400 metres of the kimberlite pipes and transported the material down the paleo-Orange River to the sea.

Over geological time, this kimberlite material containing an estimated 3 billion carats of diamonds was transported over great distances along the drainage systems to reach the coast. Here powerful wave action and longshore drift have produced diamondiferous deposits along the length of the west coast - from south of the Olifants River up to the present-day Orange

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<sup>191</sup> Account based on the following sources: De Beers Consolidated Mines Ltd, *Diamonds in the Sand. The story of the Namaqualand Mines Division of De Beers Consolidated Mines Ltd* (n.d., n.p.) Origin of the Diamonds: Introduction, p. 3.

Global Diamond Resources, Inc 2001 <http://www.globaldiamond.com/page 10.htm> (accessed 11 January 2002).

J. Gurney, *Mining Mirror*, Vol. 2 No. 5, Sept. 1989. Report prepared by Prof. John Gurney.

<sup>192</sup> J. P. van Wyk & L. F. Pienaar, 'Diamondiferous Gravels of the Lower Orange River, Namaqualand'. In: C. R. Annhaeusser & S. Maske, *Mineral Deposits of Southern Africa*, Vol. 2, Pietermaritzburg (1986), 2309.

<sup>193</sup> Under extreme heat and pressure, the element carbon crystallizes to 1 000 times harder than steel.

<sup>194</sup> Named after Lord Kimberley, the British Colonial Secretary in 1870. The city of Kimberley was also named after him. (Department of Mineral Affairs & Energy, "Operating Diamond Mines in South Africa", 1986).

<sup>195</sup> Named after Lord Kimberley, the British Colonial Secretary in 1870. The city of Kimberley was also named after him. (Department of Mineral Affairs & Energy, "Operating Diamond Mines in South Africa", 1986).

River, and along the Namibian coast at least as far north as Conception Bay. These diamonds rank among the world's best since they have survived many cycles of erosion and deposition on their journey to the coast where further sorting has taken place in the high-energy beach environment. Poor-quality, flawed, and industrial-quality stones have been winnowed out, as have the large and very small diamonds.<sup>196</sup>

The handful of diamonds initially discovered by Jack Carstens in August 1925 near Obeep farm came from the Namaqualand coastal megaplacer of ancient beaches and small fluvial paleo-channels buried under up to 100 metres of overburden. The channel systems have been reworked by marine processes during transgressive and regressive cycles of the sea which were determined by the melting or formation of Ice Ages. These cycles were followed by prolonged periods of sea-level standstill leaving high concentrations of diamonds. From the start of mining in 1928 up to 2016, approximately fifty-three million carats (Mct) of diamonds had until then been recovered from the Namaqualand megaplacer. The bulk of the production came from the Buffels River deposits (40.0 Mct), Alexkor operations centred around Alexander Bay (12 Mct), and a smaller amount from Namaqualand's offshore concessions (1.3 Mct).<sup>197</sup>

Jack Carstens in fact did uncover the first stones on the coast near Port Nolloth in August 1925. This event would link the name of Jack Carstens with the first finds on the littoral and be recorded in the annals of Namaqualand mining history as the advent of diamond mining.

As regards the Diggers' Revolt, the whole of South Africa was at the time indeed eager to see what would happen in Namaqualand as the revolt was certain to have some effect on the impending general elections. The failed rebellion is in some respects reminiscent of the 1875 Black Flag Revolt on the Kimberley diamond fields. Not unlike Namaqualand, the potential of wealth from minerals in the newly annexed Griqualand West created tensions around land ownership, and rights to the minerals. In 1922, the Revolt on the Witwatersrand against the newly-instituted colour bar – unlike the Namaqualand revolt - took the form of a major general strike that quickly changed into a mass insurrection against the government with the resultant bloodshed.

The white Namaqualanders, by nature "order-loving people", took credit through Dr W. P. Steenkamp for the absence of violence and bloodshed during the diggers' revolt. These "law-abiding" natives did not "move a finger" to cause disorder and bloodshed during the diggers' revolt. They were resigned to rather suffer loss although there was the sad sight of aeroplanes carrying away their treasures. So much so that in February 1929 it was the influence of the Namaqualanders which prevented the hot-headed diggers from the Transvaal from causing disturbances. In the end it worked to the detriment of all in that no major relief measures and development programmes were put in place by the government.

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<sup>196</sup> J. Rogers et al, *Cenozoic Geology and Mineral Deposits along the West Coast of South Africa and the Sperrgebiet*. Guidebook Geocongress '90 (*Geological Society of South Africa*, PR1, 1990), 69.

<sup>197</sup> M. de Wet et al, 'Overview of Diamond Resources in Africa', June 2016, Episodes, Vol. 39, No. 2, 2016. (95776-194801-1-PB [1]). (One carat (ct) equals 220 milligrams (0.2 gram)).

### Chapter 3 THE ADVENT OF DIAMOND MINING IN NAMAQUALAND: THE ESTABLISHMENT OF KLEINZEE MINE

#### Disposal of State Land on the Namaqualand Coast after 1900

At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the judicial and fiscal division of Namaqualand still had huge tracts of ungranted Crown land such as the Sandveld, a sandy coastal strip containing the traditional grazing lands of the Richtersveld, Steinkopf, Leliefontein and Komaggas mission stations. A great deal of work surveying these Crown lands was done with “careful and unremitting attention”, and the White farming community were assured from official quarters that their interests were not being lost sight of.<sup>198</sup> In a part of the District Port Nolloth - south of the O’okiep-Port Nolloth railway line and stretching towards the Buffels River - lay about 64 000 morgen of semi-arid land. This Sandveld area was surveyed from 1906 to 1910 by Mr Garwood Alston, the government land surveyor, into “useless little farms” of about 7 000 morgen each. The farms may have appeared to an outsider too large for one or two farmers, but big farms were regarded as an absolute necessity in that part of the district, if the settler were to make any sort of a living. Immediately after the survey was completed, the farms were open for selection and offered for sale or lease on easy terms to bona fide farmers under the provisions of Act 40 of 1895.

The government was nevertheless still under pressure from farmers like Field Cornet Andrew Rich to make more land available as there was no other recourse for them but to apply to the Steinkopf and Kamaggas Mission people for sowing land along the Buffels River. The farmers had always resented the mission dwellers being “in occupation of thousand and thousand (sic) of morgen of splendid sowing land” while the same natives were “unable in every way, through want of energy and poverty, to make use of these splendid opportunities”. Over generations, many Whites in Namaqualand have coveted the lands that were set aside as reserves for the indigenous people and their descendants. The reasons are complex and go back to the nineteenth century when various tracts of land were held in trust by the Cape Colonial government on behalf of them. The Field Cornet nonetheless felt ...

... convinced that the Government have the interest of the farming population at heart and means (sic) that everything should be done to the interest of Folk and Country; ...<sup>199</sup>

Mounting pressure from land-hungry farmers soon yielded results. By 1912, on recommendations from Resident Magistrate D. C. Giddy at Springbok, the following “useless little farms” were listed for disposal: Dreyer’s Pan (7 269 morgen 198 SQR), Divisional Council valuation 6d per morgen; Oubeep (8 921 M 523 SQR), DC valuation 1/- per morgen; Tweepad (7 641 M 472 SQR), DC valuation 6d per morgen.<sup>200</sup> Barely two decades later, these dry arid and “useless” farms on the littoral would form part of an amazing alluvial diamond field discovered at the mouth of the Buffels River. Two such

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<sup>198</sup> 1/SBK 5/4/9 Resident Magistrate Magennis, Springbokfontein to Cornelissen Esq, P.O. Spektakel, dated 3 May 1906.

<sup>199</sup> JUS 97 File No. 1/566/11. Andrew Rich, Field Cornet, Groot Mist to the Resident Magistrate, Port Nolloth, 6 January 1912. General Information as regards the Buffels River Area: Port Nolloth. Report.

<sup>200</sup> 1/SBK 5/3/18. Resident Magistrate & Civil Commissioner D. C. Giddy, Springbokfontein, 11 March 1912. Recommendations as to the Disposal of Farms.

“worthless” farms were the freehold land called ‘Kleine Zee’ and ‘Annex Kleine Zee’, later to become the sites of the first De Beers Kleinzee diamond mine. The farm Kleine Zee No. 194, in extent 1 058 morgen and located just south of the mouth of the Buffels River, is situated in the Division of Namaqualand (formerly Clanwilliam) and was originally granted and transferred in favour of the estate of the late Robert Ripp on 1 September 1852.

We learn from a communication of the Colonial Office (Cape Town) to the Surveyor-General on 22 June 1850 that following on a Memorial from Robert Ripp to the Governor for a grant of land, a certain piece of ground called Kleine Zee at the Mouth of the Kouzie or Buffalo (Buffels) River was granted. This was in consideration of the services rendered by Ripp when he was employed by Captain Alexander as interpreter on the exploring expedition to the Damara Country in 1836 and 1837. One thousand morgen of land was allowed at the place mentioned, upon the payment annually of a moderate Quitrent which His Excellency left to the Surveyor-General to fix.<sup>201</sup>

In the years following World War I, a new demand for land grew, encouraged by the 1926 Agricultural Land Credit Act which made loans available to farmers. This pressure gained enormously in strength after the discovery of diamonds and led to the final surge of colonial expansion in Namaqualand.<sup>202</sup> With the discovery of diamonds, leaseholders exercised their rights to purchase the land they occupied while Syndicates and others who competed for a share in the mineral rights, bought up these farms. Along this way, De Beers Consolidated Mines through its subsidiary, Cape Coast, systematically purchased virtually all original grant farms along the coast and several further into the Sandveld.<sup>203</sup> This carefully schemed exercise of acquiring the properties along the coast had involved many parties, not least the tracing of scores of persons holding shares in the family farms.



Figure 15 Sorting gravel for precious stones with Dr Merensky at an original claim. (Rudd & Watson, *History of the Namaqualand diamond discoveries*, 1956)

Jack Carstens’ version of the acquisition of the coastal farms by Albert Truro/Scott Ronaldson is not corroborated by Rudd and Watson in their history of the Namaqualand diamond discoveries.<sup>204</sup>

As developments came with astounding rapidity towards the end of 1926, George Scott Ronaldson’s

<sup>201</sup> LDE 3681 File No. 5947. Colonial Office, Cape Town, to the Surveyor-General, Cape Town, 22 June 1850. (Cf J. E. Alexander, *An Expedition of Discovery into the Interior of Africa, through the hitherto undescribed Countries of the Great Namaquas, Boschmans, and Hill Damaras. Performed under the auspices of Her Majesty’s Government, and The Royal Geographical Society.* (In Two Volumes) (London: Henry Colburn, Publisher, Great Marlborough Street, 1838).

<sup>202</sup> D. G. B. Slade, “Aspects of the rural occupance of Namaqualand, South Africa”, PhD, University of Liverpool, 1974, 231) (Microfiche in S. A. National Public Library, Cape Town).

<sup>203</sup> D. G. B. Slade, “Aspects of the rural occupance of Namaqualand, South Africa”, PhD, 1974, 280-281.

<sup>204</sup> B. J. Rudd and V.U.T. Watson, *History of the Namaqualand diamond discoveries* (Johannesburg: privately compiled and issued by E. Oppenheimer, March 1956).

Kimberley Syndicate did indeed acquire, according to Rudd and Watson, numerous options over coastal farms in an almost contiguous block stretching 100 km from Port Nolloth to Hondeklip Bay. In these ventures, Ronaldson was associated with Joe van Praagh.<sup>205</sup> Other companies such as the Anglo American Corporation, Barnato Brothers and Consolidated African Selection Trust Limited, also moved quickly and each started buying potentially diamond-bearing farms. At the time, many rather backward farmers thought that the mining houses were turning to sheep farming and laughed behind their backs knowing that Namaqualand was not ideal for sheep. By the end of 1927, all these companies agreed to pool their holdings by forming a company, Cape Coast Exploration Company Ltd. The chairman of Cape Coast was Sir Ernest Oppenheimer and, on the board, served none other than George Scott Ronaldson and Joe van Praagh themselves.<sup>206</sup>

During November 1927, one year after the first discovery of diamonds at Kleinsee, Mr J. P. (Koois) Mostert, MP for Namaqualand, examined a list of farms in Namaqualand at the Surveyor-General's to see how many there were with a free title. On enquiry he found ...

that there was only one farm in Namaqualand with a free title, namely 'Klein See', which no longer belonged to the actual farmers but had been transferred to a diamond miner. In Namaqualand, which had drawn so much attention then, there was only one case of a private farm, and fortunately for the new owner, the farm was exempted from the Precious Stones Act No. 44 of 1927 as diamonds were discovered there before the promulgation of this Act.

Good fortune would continue to smile on the capitalists. The Minister of Mines & Industries himself, during the parliamentary debate on 11 May 1928, washed his hands of the Kleinsee case when he exclaimed ...

I cannot help it if the ordinary small man sells his rights for a mess of pottage to the Capitalist ... The farm belonged to an ordinary small man. He thought fit – and we cannot control him – to sell his farm to Ronaldson and Van Praagh of Kimberley, ...<sup>207</sup>

This opened the way for De Beers to exploit the mineral wealth of its newly acquired property.

### **Kleinsee Mining Camp (1927--)**

The early history of Kleinsee, between the years 1928 and 1943, was characterised by stop-start activities brought about by the Great Depression, the war years, and the imposition of government production quotas. Although initial progress was bumpy, it followed an upward trajectory. In 1928 the Cape Coast Exploration Company Ltd purchased the property and started mining operations on this farm. The following year, diamond production at Kleinsee was at a standstill after Cape Coast was permitted to complete the rest of the 1929 quota in view of raids and threatened attack by armed men. This was done in a few weeks, and the company then concentrated on construction. A fairly big scheme included the erection of housing and a power

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<sup>205</sup> B. J. Rudd and V.U.T. Watson, *History of the Namaqualand diamond discoveries* (Johannesburg: privately compiled and issued by E. Oppenheimer, March 1956). 6.

<sup>206</sup> *Idem*, 1956, 82.

<sup>207</sup> H.A. Debates, Vol. 11, 4 April – 1 June 1928, 4059 – 4060.

plant, new offices and police quarters, two powerful searchlights and the introduction of other up-to-date methods of protection.<sup>208</sup>

The recovery plant was completed in 1930, and the process of mechanically extracting diamonds produced 5 826 stones, weighing a little more than 7 008 carats.<sup>209</sup> Kleinzee operated in difficult conditions as diamond prices continued to be dogged by oversupply, but the company managed to weather the early years of the Great Depression while the copper industry, once the bedrock of the regional economy, saw its final closure in 1931. The spurt of economic activity along the coast at Kleinzee was not to last as the bottom of the diamond market took a bad knock. Early in 1932, barely two years after construction of the town was completed, the effects of the Depression on the diamond market forced the company to suspend mining operations temporarily and have the mine mothballed until the market recovered. Of a workforce of 222 Whites and 36 Coloureds, all the white contract workers as well as most of the coloured workers were laid off. When the mine closed, workers were given ten days to pack their belongings and leave town. The company decided to retain a skeleton staff on half pay whose job it was to maintain the buildings and plant, guard the diamondiferous deposits and prevent illicit mining until the Depression was over.<sup>210</sup>

The news of the mine's reopening on 1<sup>st</sup> October 1937 -- after five long years of enforced idleness -- spread quickly. Hundreds of white Namaqualanders once again applied for pick-and-shovel work and things in general returned to normal. On the first Saturday after the re-opening a welcoming dance was held at the Recreation Hall and it was a joyous sight to see the excited faces of these men as they once again moved across the floor with their wives to the good old "vastrap" (country dance) music.<sup>211</sup> Sadly, there was a second closure of the mine the next year, followed by the declaration of the Second World War in September 1939. The declaration of war was a signal to Ernest Oppenheimer, now chairman of De Beers, to make an offer for the entire share capital of Cape Coast Exploration when it went into voluntary liquidation in 1941.<sup>212</sup>

Mining operations under De Beers did not begin until August 1943. During the war years the only visual contact Kleinzee residents had with events was the sight of occasional ships passing along the treacherous coast. From the middle of June 1943 onward, a steady flow of employees arrived: fitters and turners, electricians, boilermakers, carpenters, and other tradesmen, who worked day and night so that operations could begin by August 1. The job of the new manager-

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<sup>208</sup> MNW 982 Ref. mm 1511/29. *The Star*, 17 September 1929. "Namaqualand today". "Reconstruction in both camps".

<sup>209</sup> Peter Carstens, *In the Company of Diamonds*, 2001, 78.

<sup>210</sup> Peter Carstens, *Diamonds are dangerous: Stories from the Early Days in Namaqualand 1925—1960*. Prologue. (Printed in USA: Xlibris Corporation, 2006), 13.

<sup>211</sup> Jack Carstens, *A Fortune Through My Fingers*, 1962, 139-140.

<sup>212</sup> 1/SBK 9/5. Correspondence Files 1927 – 1951. Cape Coast Exploration Ltd. Acting Manager Wilson to the Magistrate, Springbok, 15 December 1941.

engineer included the building of new houses, repairing all the existing buildings, extending and modifying the gravel processing plant, and employing a teacher to educate the growing number of junior children. The expansion, limited though it was by later standards, declared the economic muscle of De Beers Consolidated Mines and gave hope to the workers that another shutdown as in the past would be only a remote possibility.<sup>213</sup>

### **Kleinzee Mining Town and Segregation (1942)**

Travelling to Kleinzee in the early days was a long, dusty, hot journey over pot-holed gravel roads. For those employees from outside entering Namaqualand, the journey from Bitterfontein railway station was a great discomfort, the passenger bus invariably being overcrowded. Europeans sat in the front seats, Non-Europeans at the back with an assortment of luggage and merchandise which sometimes included fish. On more than one occasion, to add to the discomfort, the bus would break down a couple of times before reaching Springbok.

The site chosen for the new town of Kleinzee was, for security reasons, located away from the ocean. In terms of its layout and design, Kleinzee is typical of South African mining towns, and perhaps served as an early blueprint for the segregated 1950s gold mining towns of Anglo American Corporation on the Gold Fields of the Free State.<sup>214</sup> Here Anglo proposed to build married quarters on its Free State mines for at least 10 per cent of the black workforce. This initiative, if successfully implemented, would have begun to dismantle the system of migrant labour and the single-sex hostels for black workers. After the 1948 election, however, the Minister of Native Affairs, Dr H. F. Verwoerd, refused Anglo permission to house more than 3 per cent of its black mineworkers with their wives. Anglo American Corporation Ltd did not manage to meet even the low 3 per cent threshold, a missed opportunity Harry Oppenheimer later regretted.<sup>215</sup>

The history of Kleinzee nevertheless contributes to our understanding of the complex South African mining history as regards labour policies, migrant labour, colonial politics, and social dynamics. At Kleinzee, a hierarchical distinction was even made between the White complement - between staff members on the one hand, and contract labourers and guards on the other. With few exceptions, the staff were English-speaking and represented the South African English establishment. All the white labourers and guards were Afrikaans-speaking and held very different political attitudes to the English-speaking employees.<sup>216</sup>

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<sup>213</sup> Peter Carstens, *In the Company of Diamonds*, 2001.

<sup>214</sup> Bench Marks, "Corporate Social Responsibility" (Johannesburg: Bench Marks Foundation, 2009).

<sup>215</sup> Michael Cardo, *Diamonds, Gold and Dynasty*, Cardo, Michael *Oppenheimer: Diamonds, Gold and Dynasty* (Cape Town & Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball Publishers, 2023), 102-3.

<sup>216</sup> Peter Carstens, *In the Company of Diamonds*, 2001, 45.



*Figure 16 View of Kleinzee mining town across the Buffels River mouth (1956).*

(Jack Carstens, *A Fortune Through My Fingers*, Reprint 2002)

Very close to the town was the actual mining area (“the diggings”) which was connected to the white labourers’ barracks by a security corridor made of barbed

wire, through which workers had access to the mining pit. To the north of the barracks or compound for white workers was the site of a separate camp for workers of mixed-race descent (Coloureds). Within walking distance were the police station, shop, and hospital. To the east were the staff quarters set aside for single men, supervisors and artisans, married men, and, further on, four larger houses for senior staff. Like other company towns, the design and construction of Kleinzee town was the rational decision of the board of directors whose main goal was efficiency and production at the lowest cost. One should also bear in mind that the company mining towns of Kleinzee and Alexander Bay were conceptualized in boardrooms where the interests of the company and its European/White employees and their families determined the design and construction of infrastructure, amenities, and services. In the process, general terms such as “community” or even “development” and “employees” became skewed and distorted.



*Figure 17 Aerial view of the modern town of Kleinzee.*

### The marginal status of Coloured Labour <sup>217</sup>

The policy of “white labour preference” of the early years can be clearly seen from the bias towards the employment of European labour. The Government urged that the labourers to be taken on should, in the first place, be White men from the locality, and by negotiation with the Cape Coast Exploration Company at the end of 1931, the Department of Labour ensured that the labour employed at Kleinzee Diggings would be drawn from Namaqualand. It should also be noted that the government of the day determined that coloured contract labourers employed at Kleinzee and Alexander Bay should not exceed 20 percent of the total contract labour force, so that their impact in the workplace was further minimised. The start of the State Alluvial Diggings and the Kleinzee Mine in 1928 thus initially had little effect on people of colour in the towns and the Reserves, since the bulk of employment opportunities were for many years reserved for the Poor Whites of the region. <sup>218</sup>

But what was the status of Coloured labour? Over time, the mission stations and later the mining towns incorporated many people of diverse backgrounds called Coloureds. Descendants of Khoisan, Basters <sup>219</sup>, Slaves, Dutch frontiersmen stock, Damaras, St Helenians, and miners of European origin, all came to share a sense of ‘community’ evident in the areas of settlement at the mission stations or reserves and the other towns of Namaqualand. <sup>220</sup> The term ‘coloured’, in historical perspective, thus refers to a phenotypically diverse group of people popularly regarded as being of ‘mixed race’ and holding an intermediate status in the South African racial hierarchy -- distinct from the historically dominant white minority and the numerically preponderant African population.

These then are some aspects of the origins of the early Coloured contract workers of Kleinzee and Alexander Bay, who stood in an ambiguous relationship to everyone else in town, more so to the white manual workers with whom, despite limited contact, they shared a common culture and did the same work. Although they were culturally like the white Namaqualanders, speaking the Afrikaans language and largely belonging to the same religious denomination, their status was very different on the mine. For some reason, the Coloureds were “not well-liked by

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<sup>217</sup> “Coloured”, “coloured” etc., terms used as a pragmatic accommodation to contemporary normative usage in South Africa. The question of whether the term “coloured” should be capitalized or not is contested. One should therefore distinguish between the apartheid racial category politically constructed and imposed and a distinct ethnic group with a specific and complex history.

<sup>218</sup> LBD 1376 R1338/1. The Chief: Division of Agricultural Economics & Markets. The Chief, on his extensive circular tour of Namaqualand during 1928, visited all the mission stations (Native Reserves) and discussed matters with some of the coloured inhabitants as well as with the missionaries. The main impression the visits and interviews made was one of extreme poverty prevailing.

<sup>219</sup> Persons of mixed racial and cultural origins.

<sup>220</sup> J. S. Sharp, “Community and Boundaries: an inquiry into the institution of citizenship in two Cape Coloured Reserves, South Africa”, PhD, Cambridge, 1977, 7. See also, Martin Legassick, *Hidden Histories of Gordonia: Land Dispossession and Resistance in the Northern Cape, 1800 – 1890* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2016). Legassick (1940-2016), explores aspects of the generally unknown ‘brown’ and ‘black’ history of the Gordonia region.

the majority of the white population of Kleinzee mine, notably the Afrikaners”,<sup>221</sup> and in the 1950s following (mostly anonymous) complaints the security department started to keep coloured workers under strict security surveillance. Although no data were gathered and collated by the mining companies, the coloured workers certainly did not enjoy the same benefits, wages and amenities accorded to White workers whom they could not replace or compete with in the scheme of labour policies and legislation and the difficulties experienced in overcoming the barriers of race, ethnicity, and prejudice. This situation appears to have been the source of the underlying ambivalent feelings of fear, resentment (and envy) of Coloureds towards Whites, in particular towards the poor white Afrikaners. Such unexpressed feelings perhaps led to distrust and their “unpopularity”.

In a different context, they were valued as workers in the open copper company towns with much more labour and social mobility. Father Jean Marie Simon, the French Roman Catholic missionary from Lyon who arrived in Namaqualand in the mid-1880s, described the coloured people of Namaqualand as

... by far the best race. They are generally strong and robust. The mixture of European and native blood results in a combination of intelligence inherited from the white man and the agility of the Hottentot. Thus, they possess all the qualities necessary for life in these semi-desert lands. The pure-blooded native is content with too little. He does not think of improving his condition and consequently he will not develop the continent.<sup>222</sup>

Through French eyes, this mixed “race” seemed to be called to hold the middle course, and to make the most profitable use of this part of Africa. Their numbers had been increasing rapidly; they had large families; their youths liked to work and succeed in every trade. The copper companies therefore valued them as mechanics, wheelwrights, carpenters, and miners. They also excelled in agriculture and matched the whites in the raising of flocks and the training of animals. They spoke Afrikaans (South African Dutch) and many of them also knew English.<sup>223</sup> A keen observer of the land, climate, livestock and people, this early missionary realised that ...

With the natives (Damaras, Hottentots and Coloureds) the Roman Catholic Church did not lose time or money – in their poverty and humiliation they were happy to meet missionaries who took an interest in them. On the other hand, there seemed to be very little hope of converting the Boers within the district while the English were focussed on pursuing material interests.<sup>224</sup>

In former years, coloured mine workers on Kleinzee mine were not totally confined in their compound to the same degree as the white Namaqualanders who seemed to be the target of security measures, and until the 1940s, they were not subjected (as white diggers had been) to x-ray examination on leaving the mine. The white Namaqualanders, restricted to their compound, naturally resented and envied the Coloureds’ relative freedom of movement, especially their close social contact and association with female company who were kin from

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<sup>221</sup> Peter Carstens, *In the Company of Diamonds*, 2001, 120. In the closed and confined space of a heavily guarded diamond mining town, the reputed deficiencies and inadequacies of the workers of colour were clear for all to see.

<sup>222</sup> J. M. Simon, *Bishop for the Hottentots ... African Memories (1882-1909)* (New York: Benziger Brothers Inc., 1959), 49.

<sup>223</sup> Idem, 1959, 49-50.

<sup>224</sup> Idem, 1959, 44.

the reserves and other towns. Even the Ovambo workers recruited from South-West Africa during the Second World War, showed a measure of disdain towards Coloureds whom they called 'Bushmen' and who in their opinion, were the only ones equipped to harness and drive the mules drawing the cocopans at the mine pit. After the Ovambo contract workers were unexpectedly recalled by the S.W.A. administration in 1949, the Coloureds who replaced them, from their side, displayed the same race-based attitudes and objected to having to live in the compound in which the Ovambos had formerly been housed. This negative attitude can be traced to their interaction with other black Africans with whom they were in competition for jobs on the copper mines.<sup>225</sup>

Before 1950, the population of the Union of South Africa was divided for statistical purposes into four main official categories, namely Europeans, Natives, Asiatics and Mixed/Other Coloured. The last three categories formed the group termed 'Non-European'. None of these "racial" categories had any legal significance, so in 1950 an exercise was undertaken to overhaul the whole system of classification in the form of the Population Registration Act, No. 30 of 1950. This Act abolished the old pre-1950 census classification and reclassified South Africa's population into three simplified categories: White, Native and Coloured. According to this Act, a White person was (ponderously) defined as "a person who in appearance obviously is, or who is generally accepted as a White person, but does not include a person who, although in appearance obviously a White person, is generally accepted as a coloured person". A Coloured person, on the other hand, was negatively defined as "a person who is not a white person or native".

Based on the diverse origins and composition of the coloured community, there were, of course, malleable distinctions that existed regarding race in Namaqualand in the run-up to the Population Registration Act. The establishment of the State Alluvial Diggings and Kleinzee Mine, as well as public relief works during the Great Depression, was from their very inception modelled and determined by perceptions of race. Given that these State initiatives were configured in a manner that favoured poor Whites, one would in this context expect cases of people "going for white".

Individual advancement and social mobility were central aspirations to the phenomenon of "play-whites" and the economic underpinnings of racial identity. One should not fail to acknowledge that there was, of course, also a distinctly material aspect to "passing" in the form of job reservation and differential wages which underpinned the new racial identity. But in the

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<sup>225</sup> At the time, desperate Coloured workers approached the mine authorities to urgently rid Kleinzee mine of the tokoloshe (described as an essentially malicious small *black* man 18 inches tall) sent there by the departed Ovambo workers to frighten and harm them. Accounts of this creature's activities included biting the victims while they are in bed or hurling them to the floor; or switching off the electric lights while the workers are dancing in the compound. (W. P. Carstens, *The Social Structure of a Cape Coloured Reserve*, 1966, 185-6).

end, it provided an escape route from “Coloured life” depicted as lacking the capacity for meaningful action, change and mobility.<sup>226</sup>

The text of *Playing in the Light* offers an account of racial passing or crossing in South Africa, underscoring the “play-white’s” complicity with the apartheid regime’s fixation on race. The requirements of the newly-constructed identity of White involved the “endless striving for the purity of whiteness, the self-birthing narratives, and the secrecy and diminishment” that the constructed identity necessitated. It severed individuals from their families, communities, and cultural backgrounds. It forced “play-whites” to live with a level of vigilance and secrecy that invariably limited their capacity to integrate socially. Considering the sparse population of under 30 000 and the fact that most family groups knew one another, it would have been difficult “to pass as White” in Namaqualand generally. Those people who “crossed” sought the relative safety and anonymity of large urban centres. Others were not ready or prepared to take up such challenges or make such sacrifices.

Jack Carstens recorded the case of the Diamonds football team of the early Kleinsee mining camp who had during November 1927 issued a challenge to Port Nolloth. None of the makeshift eleven had ever seen a football before except for an Uitlander (Foreigner) who said he had turned out for Prieska, a town in the northern Cape province. Although the Diamonds were thumped 35-nil, the Uitlander was the hero of the day, easily putting up the best performance. But for him there was a sequel: people said a few days later that he was a Coloured man. Challenged, he admitted as much. There was nothing but to send him over to the Coloured diggers’ camp, and the Uitlander was lost to the side.<sup>227</sup>

The development of race classification, informal and non-legal at first, can be traced over time. The Colonial authorities and thereafter the South African government, would play a major role in the process of racial and social stratification according to skin colour, with unfortunate results for subsequent generations of indigenous peoples and their descendants (Namaqualand is no exception). An early instance of racial profiling, for example, involved statistical returns of ‘lunatic’ inmates of the Springbokfontein prison of the 1890s.<sup>228</sup> It was then the practice and policy to lock up mentally disturbed persons before sending them off via Port Nolloth by sea to Robben Island. The passenger list headings included categories of inmates such as coloured, other coloured, Damara, Hottentot, kaffir, Bastard, and European. It is unclear whether any of these unfortunate internees – in goal or *en route* to their destination --

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<sup>226</sup> ‘Who’s Passing Now? Mobility, Race, and Value in Zoe Wicomb’s *Playing in the Light*’ by Christine Emmett (*Muse Project: Research in African Literatures*, Vol. 52, No. 4, Winter 2022) (Article accessed 1 November 2024).

<sup>227</sup> Jack Carstens, *A Fortune Through My Fingers*. Reprint. (Springbok: Van’s Photos, 2002), 84-86.

<sup>228</sup> 1/SBK Namaqualand Magistracy Papers (1890). Prisons served a number of purposes besides their usual function of incarceration. They were “asylums for lunatics, hospitals for prisoners and chronic sick paupers, and refuges for the destitute ...”. Their facilities were certainly free but medical care was minimal. (CPP Commission on Convicts and Gaols, G2 – ‘88, First Report, ii. In: Rob Turrell, ‘Kimberley’s Model Compounds’, *The Journal of African History*, Vol. 25, No. 1, 1985, 65).

were well enough to assert their racial status and demand differential treatment vis-à-vis the other categories of patients.

The advertised sale of surplus stock of firearms from the Anglo-Boer War provides us with another early example of attempts at racial classification in Namaqualand, although as noted above, none of these “racial” categories had the force of law. In 1914, applications to purchase these firearms were received from the public. Among the applicants were Johannes de Klerk, Petrus Saal and Gert Bezuidenhout. In terms of racial and ethnic origins, the three potential buyers were officially listed in evidently descending order as: De Klerk (“slightly coloured”, “practically a white man”), Saal (“partly coloured”) and Bezuidenhout was simply dismissed as a “Hottentot”. The official report does not, however, reveal who of the three applicants fulfilled the requirements and qualified to purchase any of the surplus stock.<sup>229</sup> The sale was subsequently cancelled, no reasons given.

### **The advent of wage labour on the Namaqualand mines**

The rural scene of a coloured mission station/reserve of the 1850s was not much different to that of the 1930s where many of the inhabitants practised mixed farming. They cultivated the soil and kept a few sheep and goats and a handful of donkeys. Their success as agriculturalists depended on the annual rainfall. If sufficient rain had fallen, patches of grain were grown in the valleys and on the slopes of hills; but even in good years seldom more than a few thousand bags in total were produced.

With the advent of copper mining in the 1850s, wage labour ... though not necessarily the most beneficial to the local people ... was introduced in the area. The large population of subsistence farmers of the mission stations, depending almost entirely upon the increase of their small stock and the little land they cultivated, was now progressively transformed from mixed farmers into part-time farmers and migrant labourers. Thus, from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, mission station dwellers and others were increasingly forced into wage-labour on the mines by problems created by drought, indebtedness, the introduction of commercial goods, and shortage of land in finite coloured mission station/reserve territories. Taking up jobs in the copper mining district formed a key asset of the communities’ livelihood strategies. Members migrated to the mines between harvest and sowing time to supplement farming on the mission lands with wage labour. They set out for the mines particularly in times of want when the household could no longer live off the produce of mixed farming. The process was accelerated by the arrival of traders and pedlars readily extending credit to them. The early missionaries were followed by *smouse* (pedlars), mostly Jewish but also a few Englishmen who introduced a greater variety of Western commodities and stimulated a cash economy. The itinerant pedlar or *smous* who in this regard performed the important function of the money-lender, waited next to the threshing floor to be paid in kind. The system of wage labour did not therefore develop spontaneously “as a voluntary movement of people from the rural areas to the mining towns in response to the demand for labour”.

The physical resources of the communal reserves, never strong, had been showing a marked deterioration which continued into the 20<sup>th</sup> century that witnessed the end of the reserve as a

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<sup>229</sup> 1 / SBK 5/6/1.

self-contained economic and social unit. Those who could not support themselves by the traditional mixed-farming economy had to find a supplementary form of livelihood. The departure of at least one person from each household to the mines or towns became for many years an economic necessity for a large section of the community. In practice then, much of people's livelihoods depended on the remittances received from the many migrant workers who sold their labour to the mining companies in the region. The shift from a subsistence pastoral economy to an economy based on industrial wage employment or a combination of the two, can be hugely consequential. Seen from a cultural context, changes in language usage become necessary and concepts of seasonal and daily time must be adjusted; motives and values, and the pattern of many relationships in the community must be re-examined, to name but a few.<sup>230</sup>

It is necessary to distinguish between three categories of migratory labourers of a 1930s community: migrant labour on the mines, those in search of work in the towns, and recruitment to the farms as shepherds and domestic workers. The first category, which initially involved much less than 10 % of the total migrant labour force, found employment on the two diamond mines in the area. In Steinkopf, for instance, both the Church and the Management Board accepted and encouraged migration to these mining towns because it was easy to maintain contact with the workers in the compound, and to a certain extent control their actions as well. Acting as an unofficial labour bureau in regular contact with the mine authorities, the Management Board soon realised that it was easily enabled to demand prompt payment of local taxes from these migrants. The Church, on the other hand, appointed representatives to take care of the spiritual needs of its mine-worker congregation and to collect church dues and other offerings in cash or in kind.<sup>231</sup>

Generally, justification for supporting the principle of cheap migrant labour by the Church and Management Board (and often by the wives or parents of the labourers) was framed in moral terms, namely that "the people are properly cared for". Without a doubt, the economic benefits, despite low wages, clearly outweighed other considerations, but the system of migrant labour to the mines perpetuated low wages. The instability and insecurity of wage labour thus encouraged mission station/reserve residents to retain ties with the home territories, in particular with agriculture. Over generations, the mission reserves would serve as a social refuge and hedge against complete destitution in times of unemployment, illness and old age, or a respite from the pressures of a (hostile) industrialised and racialized world outside.

Right from the early years, the De Beers Mine at Kleinzee and the State Alluvial Diggings seemed well- content with the migrant labour system since it allowed the companies to reduce the costs of maintaining their labour force. They did not have to provide housing and other infrastructural services such as schools for the families of the workers recruited from the Reserves and elsewhere in Namaqualand.<sup>232</sup> These workers had to wait for many years for better accommodation and even longer for family accommodation. The diamond mines housed their labour force in single-sex (male) compounds or barracks, issuing contracts of limited

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<sup>230</sup> Charles W. Hobart, 'Industrial Employment of Rural Indigenes: the case of Canada', 1982, *Human Organization*, Vol. 41, No. 1, 60 (Spring 1982) (Accessed 19 January 2020).

<sup>231</sup> W. P. Carstens, *The Social Structure of a Cape Coloured Reserve* (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1966), 52.

<sup>232</sup> Cf "Copper Mine Closure 1919 – 1931" (J. Sharp, "Rural Development Schemes", No. 69, 1984, 10).



Figure 18 Izaak and Martha Cloete of Steinkopf. Kleinzee mine's shoemaker and general leather worker (1937 – 1965) and wife.

duration (6 to 12 months). This practice meant that men were compelled to return to their areas of residence on a regular basis after their contracts ended – a system of oscillating migration that was enforced by these work contracts. Those non-white contract workers who, over time, might have chosen to stay on and have their families join them were prevented from doing so by regulations and policies designed specifically to discourage and prevent such settlement from taking place.<sup>233</sup> Said the son of Izaak Cloete (1937 –

1965), a long-service migrant mineworker of Kleinzee:

My father always arranged to take leave and spend Christmas at home in Steinkopf. As a child, his absences bothered me somewhat. But I did not notice or realise it that much – the remittances and sacrifice were important. The support and upkeep of the family was of greater importance, so we accepted the situation. There was this constant longing to see him again, though ...<sup>234</sup>

The two coastal diamond mines have always had very strict regulations against unauthorised entry, and work-seekers were recruited from outside. Only a small number of the workers of colour was provided with family housing, so that a large part of the labour force was in consequence forced to migrate, leaving families and dependants behind.<sup>235</sup> By the early 1950s, seven coloured men and their wives were given quarters in the old coloured camp at Kleinzee; and according to informants interviewed, only three of these early miners were provided with proper housing for their families, namely Dick Clarke, Charlie Opper and Johannes Cloete. Dick Clarke, the foreman of the company's dairy farm, was from nearby Komaggas.<sup>236</sup>

### **Migratory labour and differential wages**

The large profits made over the years by the two diamond companies were due to the availability of low-paid labourers who, like non-unionised mineworkers everywhere, were prepared to place themselves at the service of and under the authority of the employer, with little say in negotiating wage levels. Even the labouring class of brown and white were each paid differently as part of a system of political and socio-economic differentiation designed to

<sup>233</sup> Cf “Minerals and Migrants: How the mining industry has shaped South Africa” by Francis Wilson (*Daedalus*, Vol. 130, no. 1, Why South Africa Matters (Winter, 2001), 99-121 (Accessed 10 January 2020).

<sup>234</sup> John Cloete, personal communication, Steinkopf, 9 November 2021.

<sup>235</sup> J. S. Sharp & M. E. West, “Land, labour and mobility in Namaqualand”, Paper No. 71, Cape Town: SALDRU, 1984, 13.

<sup>236</sup> Clarke, indistinguishable in appearance from ‘Europeans’, was travelling from Bitterfontein to Kleinzee with his young daughter in the section of the passenger bus reserved for Whites, compelling one little boy to enquire of his mother: “Ma, wie is hierdie oom ... hy lyk soos ‘n witman maar praat soos ‘n Hotnot ?” (Ma, who is this uncle ? ... he looks like a white man but speaks like a Hottentot). Clarke Street in Kleinzee was named after him. (Personal communication, Yvonne Wheatley, Springbok, 9 November 2021).

maintain the status quo. The enormous discrepancies between the wages paid to each “race” group was of course a typically South African practice. The labour quota system which heavily favoured whites at a ratio of three to one, was rigidly applied from mid-1930, when there were only forty-four Coloured workers at Kleinzee. They earned an average of £6-7s.-6d. per month while the 165 white workers earned an average of £11-18s.-10d. per month, including overtime. Implementation of the state labour quota system and the regulations related to it produced segregation between the two groups of workers so that all the workers employed on the ramp (the haulage system of cocopans loaded with gravel for the recovery plant) were Coloured and all pick-and-shovel workers in the mining pit were white. This caste-like labour practice was replicated in other areas of work. Coloured workers were assigned to “sanitary” (the bucket latrine, the most common form of sanitation then) and “domestic work”. The latter category was “flexibly interpreted to include the building trade ... road construction and repairs, fencing, and other important work on the plant and in the pulsator, the workshops, protection work, and shoemaking”. Whether they worked on the sanitary lorry or in the power station, the rate of pay was roughly the same. Bricklayers seem to have received a better rate, but never received a wage equal to that paid to white artisans.<sup>237</sup>

By 1960, three decades after the start of mining, Coloured workers were earning much better wages as long service and improved qualifications and skills were being recognised. Many semiskilled and fewer skilled jobs on the mine were filled by them. The pick-and-shovel work was taken over by newly recruited black contract workers from the Transkei and Ciskei. Although the state’s job reservation policy was now firmly applied throughout the country, there were not enough whites available to fill all the skilled and semiskilled jobs and these were now done by Coloureds while Black workers were meeting the demand for workers doing bedrock cleaning and other menial jobs. It is ironical that the Coloureds, who were then doing skilled and semiskilled jobs and earning higher wages, had to wait until the arrival of black contract workers for the company to revise its policies regarding social benefits to the workers. But given their marginal status in South African society, this was entirely consistent with the official position assigned to them.<sup>238</sup>

There are no reports during the period reviewed (1928-1950), of serious labour unrest and strikes among coloured mine workers or white Namaqualanders at both Kleinzee and Alexander Bay. Labour relations in the segregated town of Kleinzee were, however, handled quite differently by black contract workers from a neighbouring territory. To solve the acute labour shortage, De Beers during the years 1943 to 1949 recruited Ovambos, workers signed up from what is now Namibia, to replace the white Namaqualand mine workers.<sup>239</sup> Two general strikes involving the Ovambo workers erupted in mid-1944, the first such industrial action in Kleinzee’s labour history. The details of the 1944 strikes reflected the strength of Ovambo worker resistance and their ability to mobilise themselves with the odds stacked against them.

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<sup>237</sup> Peter Carstens, *In the Company of Diamonds*, 2001, 110-111.

<sup>238</sup> *Idem*, 2001, 121; 126.

<sup>239</sup> South-West Africa (present-day Namibia) was declared a German Protectorate in 1890. Thirty years later, after World War I, the League of Nations conferred a mandate on South Africa to administer the former German territory. The terms of the mandate stipulated that South Africa could not profit from its rights of administration.

At the time, certain white employees presumed that workers should obey every order and command without question. Notorious among these were the compound managers. When a Major Brinton, an authoritarian former policeman appointed compound manager at Kleinzee, ordered a group of Ovambo workers to load cocopans into a gale-force southwest wind, they refused. Brinton sent them back to the compound to cool off, as was the custom in the absence of a union. Instead of returning to the pit, the workers, on their return to the compound, immediately packed their belongings and walked up to the main gate where they demanded to be sent back to their homes in Ovamboland. This, of course, was refused and after a search, 52 weapons were seized, consisting of “pickaxe handles, strong long sticks, iron bars of various descriptions, thick pieces of wire, etc.” Some weeks later, Major Brinton resigned his position and would become the first of several casualties of worker solidarity, forced out by the Ovambos after the first of the strikes.<sup>240</sup>

What was remarkable about these Ovambo workers was that during their years at Kleinzee they always resolved their labour disputes through their own initiatives. Their earnings compared to other groups – Coloureds and Whites who did the same work – were pitifully low, telling evidence of their exploitation. Quite unexpectedly in 1949, they were sent back to South-West Africa because white farmers there had been experiencing a shortage of cheap black labour.

As marginal members of society, those classified as Coloured always had to make a special effort to maintain their status on the diamond workings, especially when they planned to negotiate for an increase in wages or improved working conditions. They knew they were on their own and that they had to work hard (perhaps too hard, suppressing their true feelings and opinions) at maintaining good personal relations with their immediate supervisors, and deliberately avoid confrontation with the manager.<sup>241</sup> When compelled to deal with the company, they did so in small groups, literally with (the company’s regulation) hat in hand. This was of course not to protest but to negotiate in terms of their actual, and perceived, position in the socio-economic and cultural hierarchy. They could not expect protection or assistance over wages and living conditions from the state who took minimal interest in their welfare. In short, their position marked their asymmetrical position in the company town and in the wider society because of the dictates of South African law and labour policy. The white workers were, on the other hand, protected by the state, and when they left the employ of the company, reverted to what in effect meant for them the privileged position enjoyed by their racial group.

### **Segregation and loyalties on the diamond mines of Namaqualand**

In 1938, a decade after the opening of the Kleinzee workings, there were about twenty-nine coloured labourers recruited from the Steinkopf Reserve in the employ of the company. They were housed in small, portable corrugated iron A-frame huts, ten people to one unit. The tin shacks were laid out as an open compound where they were practically under no supervision and free to roam about within limits. They cooked for themselves on primus (paraffin) stoves and outdoor wood fires. After working hours, they were under no physical restraint so that after dark they could wander about the camp if undetected ... to the exasperation and resentment of the white Namaqualanders confined in their heavily guarded and regulated compound. Whether coloured workers, if given the

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<sup>240</sup> Peter Carstens, *In the Company of Diamonds*, 2001, 97-98.

<sup>241</sup> Idem, 2001, 115.

choice, would have preferred to continue this relatively free separate existence conducting their own social customs undisturbed by white diggers, is unclear. If allowed to join the white diggers in the labour barracks, they would certainly have been entitled to claim artisan training, equal pay, monthly production bonuses, the benefits of family housing if available, social equality, and access to superior recreational and other amenities.<sup>242</sup>

Some of these workers played musical instruments – concertinas, guitars, and banjos – and they held regular Saturday night dances. Occasionally, weekend picnics at the seaside were organised, and these outings were well attended by the maids from the town to the exasperation of the White diggers who were occasionally allowed out on Sunday visits to the seaside, accompanied by their supervisors. Although the coloured workers' barracks was located at a safe distance from the white compound, the aggrieved Namaqualanders later protested and had the portable A-frame tin huts of the Coloureds removed and carried manually to a site even further away.<sup>243</sup>

The foundations having been earlier laid by colonialism and segregation policies, there was complete separation between White and non-white workers when it came to leisure activities such as organised sport, swimming, dancing, concerts, socializing, etc. There were separate sports fields and halls, the venue for whites being far superior to the small recreation hall which was usually made available to the coloured workers. It is important to note that segregation between white and non-white was largely enforced by the dominant White caste who applied it as well to informal social relations and leisure activity. Segregation was therefore discriminatory, the best (and sometimes only) facilities being reserved for Whites. The whole pattern of segregation on the diamond mines of Namaqualand – as in the rest of South Africa – was of course designed to maintain the existing class-caste hierarchy and supremacy. But despite the thrust of existing legislation and white public opinion in favour of segregation and social separation of population groups, in practice the three “races” were mutually dependent in the workplace. This much integration was by the nature of things condoned by the mining companies at Kleinsee and Alexander Bay. A mild form of integration and co-operation in the economic sphere remained a *sine qua non* for the continued existence of the mine, but nearly all contact was restricted to the stereotyped patterns of the “master-servant” relationship.<sup>244</sup>

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<sup>242</sup> Cf J. B. Allen, *The Company Town in the American West* (Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1966), 17, 102. As the number of common labourers at the turn of the nineteenth century grew, it became common practice to provide racially segregated facilities in company-owned mining and lumber-mill towns of the American West.

Separate villages or separate sections of town were provided for non-white races, “usually because each race simply preferred to live separately and carry out its own social customs without disturbance”. Even in the 1960s, “Negroes, Mexicans, and Indians often lived in separate sections of company towns where substantial numbers of their races were employed”.

<sup>243</sup> Peter Carstens, *In the Company of Diamonds*, 2001, 111.

<sup>244</sup> M. E. West, *Divided Community ... a study of social groups and racial attitudes in a South African town* (Cape Town: A. A. Balkema, 1971) for the system of segregation between the races on the social, economic, and political levels during the 1960s in Port Nolloth. Sport, social activities and economic co-operation were affected.

In Pieter Coetzer's richly illustrated popular history of the Alexander Bay diamond mine (1926-1989),<sup>245</sup> the segregated and discriminated against coloured worker is portrayed as a rather erratic figure prone to indiscretions, compared to the Kleinzee worker of colour. In fact, Kleinzee was much sought after ... but failing this, the men would approach the State Alluvial Diggings to relieve economic hardship. There was the case of one dedicated Alexander Bay worker who over the weekend would visit his wife and family 80 km away in Kuboes, a seven-hour long journey on foot (later by bicycle). Arriving at their hometown from the mine, workers usually loved showing off a bit and looking prosperous in the oven-like heat, wearing a brand-new wristwatch, a stylish blazer with self-designed badge, and branded Morris or Battersby hat.

Despite strong family ties and other loyalties, these workers on the State Alluvial Diggings were not always of the best calibre, according to Coetzer. The reasons for this situation are given as strong drink (abuse of liquor) and poor discipline (irregular work habits). On weekends off, they would pitch up several days later claiming they were unable to report for duty earlier. Most of the workers came from outlying settlements and remote stock posts. So, although the mine at Alexander Bay offered a few job opportunities, management reports showed (with no reasons given) that mining operations were on occasion handicapped by large-scale resignations of these workers.

In conversations with former workers from Kuboes, Pieter Coetzer was left impressed by their "fierce love" for Alexander Bay. Recalling the time on the mine, their faces would light up with pride and dignity, belying their suspect work ethic and tainted reputation as pointed out earlier. The deeply lined faces bore witness to the effects of wind and sun on the State workings where they had "gladly sacrificed life and limb". The interviewer, Coetzer, felt that it was rather strange that none of the workers had played a "dynamic leadership role" at Alexander Bay.<sup>246</sup> The oppressed non-white workers were, of course, not allowed or destined to occupy skilled and responsible positions such as the mine plumber and the mine electrician – let alone attaining professional qualifications and employment as engineers, surveyors and medical doctors, or filling supervisory or managerial roles. Such 'breakthroughs' were unthinkable then and not expected to happen any time soon, if ever, given the numerous obstacles they had to face.

One interviewee from the Richtersveld, Gert Cloete, declared boldly – and with unconscious irony -- that he would "never betray" Alexander Bay where he started in 1933. The town had been like a parent to him, Gert said, and he did not experience any discrimination whatsoever as a worker. In fact, good relationships with Whites were the order of the day and he, Gert Cloete, received solid training from them in the carpentry section where he was employed. It was, however, impressed upon them to pay close attention and if they failed to do so and the instructor had to explain again, they were *screamed* at. Workers certainly experienced the inevitable difficulties adjusting to life on the mine where some foremen impaired their dignity by

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<sup>245</sup> Pieter Coetzer, *Baai van Diamante. Die Geskiedenis van Alexanderbaai 1926 tot 1989* (Bloemfontein: Instituut vir Eietydse Geskiedenis, Universiteit Vrystaat, 1997).

<sup>246</sup> Abraham Balie of Henkries in the Steinkopf Reserve started off as a 17-year-old working on the chicken farm. In 1985, senator Balie of the National Party delivered his maiden speech in parliament on Alexander Bay and the trapping system used to fight illegal diamond dealing (IDB). If he had stayed on at the State Alluvial Diggings, he would have continued as a "boy" (ordinary worker) without recognition for his work as the unofficial secretary of the mine captain. (See Literature Review).

treating them as objects, Gert conceded, but as subordinates they had to carry out instructions to avoid trouble.<sup>247</sup>

The impatient white foremen at Alexander Bay were probably unaware of similarly placed migrant mineworkers in Canada. Indian and Inuit men from rural Canada who have had industrial employment, were found to be little better prepared for it than many of the indigenous people from remote areas of South America or Africa. Coming from a pastoral background, many workers from the Namaqualand countryside, like their Canadian counterparts, lacked steady employment experience requiring clock-time orientation or the expected work discipline. Their pastoral backgrounds, for example, only called for a basic understanding of the need to take care of equipment and tools and not much about preventive maintenance. And in their dealings with Whites, the Namaqualand migrant worker would also have been loath to ask sharp questions because that was traditionally seen as dangerous or being impolite to irritable white people. Like indigenous Canadians, they would have tended to defer to overseers and nod (smilingly) when they were given instructions, though they might have had little idea of what they were being told. Understanding instructions involves understanding the ‘scheme’ or ‘game plan’ which in most cases would not have been divulged to them. These difficulties often resulted in native workers requiring a longer “shakedown” or settling-in period to become adequately oriented to their jobs and job situations than did comparably placed White workers, the study of native migrant workers in Canada found.<sup>248</sup>

The rather rosy picture sketched by some former workers of Alexander Bay is contradicted by several other testimonies. One such personal interview conducted during April 1994 with Jan Louw of Swartwater in the Richtersveld differed markedly in tone, feeling and content from those overwhelmingly positive statements gathered by Coetzer.<sup>249</sup> Louw started off with the underwear “story”. Before the introduction of apartheid by its “chief architect”, Dr D. F. Malan, he said, identical sets of clothing and underwear were issued to both White and Coloured mineworkers. Good quality clothing that included underwear, socks, shirts, trousers, jackets, and so on. During the apartheid years of the 1950s, there was a sudden change of policy that required the “Hottentot” be issued with two vests only (besides the standard outfit of work clothing). Louw suspected that the supply of vests was on account of the “weak chests” of the workers of colour and their susceptibility to TB. The issuing of underpants to Coloured workers was, however, summarily stopped for reasons not disclosed to the workers, leaving them none the wiser about what lay behind the decision.<sup>250</sup>

Food of poor quality was served at the State Alluvial Diggings, Jan Louw continued. Peas, mealies, and beans. Sloppy food – not covered – was pushed on a wheelbarrow from the kitchen

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<sup>247</sup> Pieter Coetzer, *Baai van Diamante*, 1997, 54.

<sup>248</sup> Charles W. Hobart, ‘Industrial Employment of Rural Indigenes: the case of Canada’, 1982.

<sup>249</sup> Personal interview with Jan Louw (born 1932) at Swartwater on the banks of the Orange River, Richtersveld, 1 April 1994.

<sup>250</sup> In contrast, the Ovambo labourers at Kleinzee knew exactly what their rights were. For example, when one group did not receive its issue of underpants in South-West Africa en route to the mine, they complained immediately. They knew that their contract stated that “every native must be supplied free of charge with a blanket and a pair of underpants ...”.

to the dining hall or mess. Prepared and cooked by untrained staff, the food on delivery was often poorly presented.

At the time, politics was a side-issue, and he could not recall ever taking part in a discussion about a Richtersveld community land claim, except for conversations about their home town Kuboes and its residents. He very much doubted that the Richtersveld people of the 1940s were generally aware that Alexander Bay land historically belonged to them, although his mother's grave is at Kortdoorn, just outside of the town.

At Kleinzee mine, the new intake of Coloured workers of the 1950s were required to sign six-month contracts, renewable for another six months. The conditions contained in the new contract reflected a change in attitude toward the workers. The contract now contained a clause making compassionate leave possible for a wide range of matters. Harvesting and ploughing were considered good reasons for leave as were returning to help look after children if the worker's wife was seriously ill. So was attendance at a funeral, and, occasionally, rest after a long spell of hard labour. On the reserves, the *raad* (local council) now functioned as the recruiting agent, and the company began to transport workers to and from the reserves.<sup>251</sup>

In its publication to celebrate the golden jubilee of Kleinzee mine, De Beers Consolidated Mines took the opportunity to laud the contribution of the Coloured worker to the recovery of mineral wealth. This community was said to have been "inextricably" linked to mining right from the start of diamond discoveries in Namaqualand. Jack Carstens, the publication pointed out, was in fact accompanied by a "Coloured helper" (presumably Percy van Reenen) when he left Port Nolloth on his "prospecting mission" into the sandy wastes of Namaqualand. Against all predictions, Carstens discovered and in 1925 registered "the first diamond to be found in Namaqualand", declared the golden jubilee celebration booklet.<sup>252</sup> These workers were initially relied upon to do the pick and shovel work until White Namaqualanders were recruited and given "job opportunities" because of the widespread poverty in the area. The progress made by them since was largely due to their "spirit of co-operation" and "desire to develop themselves", as well their resourcefulness to "steer the people to better things". This spirit of self-development, concluded the jubilee publication, can only lead to "a more promising future".<sup>253</sup>

In the 1960s, the National Party government took various steps to invest this negatively defined legal category of people with the trappings of a more positive 'identity'. But this nation in the making would be negatively impacted by social and economic exclusion and political isolation associated with segregation and apartheid policies. Obstacles were put in the way of these inhabitants "participating as equals in the society beyond their immediate communities, of having free access to the material and cultural resources of this society, and thus of assimilating the techniques, cultural norms and procedures of the dominant urban and industrial complex".<sup>254</sup> Under these circumstances, the emerging nation would continue to face an uphill battle and significant disadvantages and pressures.

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<sup>251</sup> Peter Carstens, *In the Company of Diamonds*, 2001, 115.

<sup>252</sup> De Beers Consolidated Mines, *Golden Jubilee 1926 – 1976*, 11.

<sup>253</sup> *Idem*, 1976.

<sup>254</sup> A. B. Emmett, *Steinkopf: A study of a community in decline*, 1987, 175.

## Kleinzee Workings

Structurally, the coastal belt forms a series of raised beaches covered with an overburden of sand concealing the diamondiferous deposits. Because diamond mining has a higher proportion of waste material to product than is the case in most mining operations, the emphasis has always been on the efficient and economic extraction of diamond-bearing ores in bulk. Today's open-pit mining methods are thus a long way from those of the hundreds of independent claim holders who worked the Kimberley Mine in the 1870's. The whole operation is now completely mechanised: hydraulic diggers and 35-tonne dump trucks have replaced the shovels and buckets of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>255</sup>



Figure 19 Daniel Cloete, Kleinzee Mine's Dragline Operator from the Concordia Reserve. The massive machine stripped tonnes of overburden at one scoop.

(Peter Carstens, *In the Company of Diamonds*, 2001)



Diamond mining in Namaqualand follow these modern mining methods involving removing the overburden of sand or calcrete to expose the diamond-bearing gravel on the buried ancient beach terraces and paleo-river channels. The sand overburden, up to 35 metres and deeper, is moved by giant low-bowl scrapers and bulldozers and piled in the background in worked-out areas. The diamond-bearing gravel is then loaded into dump trucks and taken to treatment plants where the diamonds are extracted. The final stage is to sweep the uneven bedrock by hand with small brushes. Using shovels and hand-brooms, 'bedrock sweepers' frequently find rich concentrations of gems in gullies and potholes which the machines cannot reach.<sup>256</sup>

It is doubtful whether the mining companies at Kleinzee and Alexander Bay would in the early years have measured up to some of the stringent regulations and requirements for a Prospecting Licence or a Mining Permit. Today, Guidelines for a Prospecting Work Programme stipulate, amongst others, that the following be furnished to the Department of Mineral Affairs: identification of interested and affected parties; a report on the environmental impacts; a plan for the rehabilitation of the mined area and the percentage holding of Black Economic Empowerment members must be indicated. Attention is also drawn to the provisions of section 38 of the National Heritage Resources Act (No. 25 / 1999) which might apply to the prospecting operation. If diamonds are found in payable quantities by the prospector, the Department of

<sup>255</sup> George G. Blakey, *Diamonds* (New York and London: Paddington Press Ltd, 1977), 142.

<sup>256</sup> De Beers Consolidated Mines, *Diamonds in the Sand*, n. d., n. p., 6-7.

Mineral Affairs then issues a mining permit if the following requirements are met: a scoping report, mining work programme, social & labour plan <sup>257</sup>, environmental management programme, as well as responsibility for rehabilitation of the mining area.

During diamond mining activity in April 2001, an intact human burial was accidentally uncovered on the Farm Somnaas, 20 km north of Hondeklip Bay in the Koingnaas Complex of De Beers. It was subsequently excavated by the Archaeology Contracts Office of the University of Cape Town. <sup>258</sup> The skeleton is that of an adult female, about 26 years old at death, radiocarbon dated to 1 250 +/- 70 BP. The grave was dug into the cobble beach just inshore of a small rocky bay on the western edge of Somnaas farm. Since the diamond bearing gravel located below the burial site was about to be mined, it was necessary to exhume the remains under a permit issued by the South African Heritage Resources Agency. Valuable new information gathered here provides insight into the burial practices and lifeways of ancient indigenous people in the region of Namaqualand. The dignified manner of handling human remains on mining sites provided for by the National Heritage Resources Act (No. 25 of 1999) is in stark contrast to earlier mining practices. For example, the remains of a skeleton excavated at an early Kleinzee mining site was referred to as that of the original IDB (Illegal Diamond Buying) operator, to the amusement of the general manager and bystanders.



*Figure 20 Giant scrapers and bulldozers removing the sand overburden.*

*(George G. Blakey, Diamonds, 1977)*

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<sup>257</sup> A Social and Labour Plan (SLP) indicates a proposal to make a substantial contribution to the economic empowerment of impoverished local communities. The employment policy of the mining company specifies which local communities will be favoured during recruitment. The SLP also gives commitments to employment equity, training, as well as promoting good relationships with the local communities. The mining company undertakes an environmental audit and establishes a communications forum for social upliftment. (Environmental Impact Report (2003) by SRK diamond mining company, Koekenaap, Western Cape Province).

<sup>258</sup> Genevieve Dewar, Judith Sealy and David Halkett, 'Human burials from Somnaas Farm, Namaqualand, South Africa', *The South African Archaeological Bulletin*, December 2020, Vol. 75, No. 213, pp. 111-119 (Accessed 18 November 2023).

The amended Precious Stones Act of 1927 radically changed the control and direction of diamond mining in Namaqualand. Kleinzee's nineteenth century freehold status, as noted above, exempted the farm from certain clauses in the new legislation – it fell under the proviso to Section 2 of Act No. 44 of 1927. As diamonds had been discovered by Jack Carstens on Kleinzee farm before the promulgation of the 1927 Act, the Government was not entitled to a lease share of the profits but only to the diamond mining tax, thus saving the company “many



Figure 21 Gravel processing plant at Kleinzee Mine

thousands, nay, millions of pounds”.

<sup>259</sup> Under that immunity, mining operations on the Kleinzee property by Cape Coast Exploration Ltd (succeeded by De Beers) extracted diamonds weighing 1 635 787 carats, valued at £14 060 164, during the thirty-year period that ended in 1956. <sup>260</sup> That year, those diamond deposits were exhausted and in 1958 special arrangements had to be made with the

Government before operations could be transferred to the adjoining

farm, Annex Kleinzee. <sup>261</sup> This farm was, however, affected by the provisions of the 1927 Act and the State was entitled to receive as lease consideration a percentage of the profits, plus taxation at the ruling rate for diamond mines. <sup>262</sup>

The main mining areas at De Beers Namaqualand Mines (before closure and sale in 2014) were as follows:-

The Koiingnaas Complex between Hondeklip Bay and Kleinzee; The Buffels Inland Complex on terraces of the Buffels River inland of Kleinzee. The Buffels Marine Complex on the raised beaches north of the mouth of the Buffels River.

There was, after 1956, enormous industrial expansion by De Beers of the alluvial diamond mining operations in Namaqualand when the payable ore on the Kleinzee property south of the Buffels River was exhausted. The company also extended its mining operations southwards on

<sup>259</sup> Jack Carstens, *A Fortune Through My Fingers*, 1962, reprint 2002, 102.

<sup>260</sup> Peter Carstens, *In the Company of Diamonds*, 2001, 129.

<sup>261</sup> The Divisional Council (Namaqualand) placed a fair value of sixpence (6d) per morgen on the Crown Land called “Annex Klein Zee”, while Mr Surveyor Alston valued the land at £35 which works out at a fraction over 3d per morgen. The expenses of survey amounted to £28-8-0, almost equal to the purchase price. In 1914, the three Grantees paid the sum of £68-12-6 sterling for the property. Under Condition vi, all rights to precious stones were expressly reserved to the Crown. (LDE 3681. File No. 5947).

<sup>262</sup> Jack Carstens, *A Fortune through my Fingers*, 2002, reprint, 102.

the coast as far afield as Koingnaas, as well as eastwards to Langhoogte, 40 km upstream on the Buffels River. The whole of its industrial complex was renamed De Beers Namaqualand Mines Limited, “as if to declare full control and dominion of the Namaqualand diamond mining industry”.<sup>263</sup> There were also huge changes in the make-up of the mining community, involving the size and diversity of the workforce, technological advances, and the improvement of most of the existing infrastructure. The era of discovery and prospecting by individuals and small syndicates - regarded by some people as one of glamour – had given way to large-scale commercial diamond production and company-town life.

At the mouth of the Buffels River two “worthless” Sandveld freehold farms called ‘Kleine Zee’ and ‘Annex Kleine Zee’ – the traditional coastal grazing land of the Komaggas community - became the site of the Kleinzee diamond mine. The mining town of Kleinzee was from its very inception modelled and determined by perceptions of race and dispossession. The foundations having been earlier laid by colonialism and segregation policies, there was complete separation between White and non-white workers when it came to leisure activities such as organised sport, swimming, dancing, concerts, socializing, etc.. Segregation was therefore discriminatory. The whole pattern of segregation on the diamond mines of Namaqualand – as in the rest of South Africa – was of course designed to maintain the existing class-caste hierarchy and supremacy.

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<sup>263</sup> Mining operations started at Kleinzee Farm (1928); Annex Kleinzee Farm (1956); Dreyer’s Pan Farm (1966); Langhoogte Farm (1967); Koingnaas Farm (1968); Tweepad Farm (1980).

## Chapter 4 THE ADVENT OF DIAMOND MINING IN NAMAQUALAND: THE STATE ALLUVIAL DIGGINGS

On a field trip to the Richtersveld in 1913, the social anthropologist, Agnes W. Tucker, saw large kitchen middens<sup>264</sup> which lined the shore and lower banks of the Orange River near the mouth, indicating that people had been living there from time immemorial. There too were old graves partly stripped of the sand cover by the fierce winds which periodically blow at the mouth.<sup>265</sup>

Like elsewhere along its course, the Orange or Gariep River valley acted as a magnet from the earliest times, drawing migrants to its banks. Its first occupants were hunter-gatherers, presumably ancestors of the Bushman. Excavated and dated remains relating to these hunter-gatherer settlements in Namaqualand are very ephemeral, though.<sup>266</sup> About 2 000 years ago they were joined by Khoi pastoralists known as the Nama who introduced domestic stock and pottery and dispersed east and west along the Orange River despite the aridity of the region. Along the lower reaches the Nama people eventually settled north and south of the river in culturally homogeneous areas which came to be known as Great Namaqualand and Little Namaqualand.<sup>267</sup>

Barely a decade and a half after Agnes Tucker's visit in 1913, the Minister of Mines & Industries, F. W. Beyers, in a dramatic announcement on 25 April 1927 stunned the House and South Africa with the news that precious stones in large quantities had been discovered at the Orange river mouth:<sup>268</sup>

Do hon. gentlemen know what has recently occurred? At the mouth of the Orange River, at Alexander Bay, between £150 000 and £160 000 in value of diamonds were found within seven weeks, with twenty people working in the trenches, in the course of prospecting. Now on what principle, I ask, these finds being on Crown lands, on what principle should the prospectors there pocket the whole lot? I say that it is not fair to the State. No Government will abuse its power. We do not want to interfere with the small man and the poor man prospecting and finding a diamond here and there. He is welcome to any reasonable find, but when we come to an extraordinary position like this, then I say that the State is entitled to its share.

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<sup>264</sup> Archaeologists have found that coastal shell middens and open sites along riverbeds are the most visible archaeological sites in Namaqualand.

<sup>265</sup> Agnes W. Tucker, "Richtersveld (sic), the land and its people"; public lecture delivered at Johannesburg on 31 March 1913, p. 8 (S. A. National Public Library).

<sup>266</sup> L. Webley, F. Archer and J. Brink have published radiocarbon dates for Kokerboomkloof (Die Toon) in the Richtersveld, of 3 840 +/- 60 BP (Pta – 5960) ... which confirms pre-herding (i.e., hunter-gatherer) settlement in the region. (L. Webley et al, 'Die Toon: a Late Holocene site in the Richtersveld National Park, northern Cape', *Koedoe*, 36 (2), 1993; Also, L. Webley, 'Archaeological evidence for pastoralist land-use and settlement in Namaqualand over the last 2000 years', *Journal of arid environments* 70 (2007), 629-640) ([www.elsevier.com/locate/jaridenv](http://www.elsevier.com/locate/jaridenv)).

<sup>267</sup> 'Prehistory of Gordonia' in M. Legassick, *Hidden Histories of Gordonia: Land dispossession and resistance in the Northern Cape, 1800 – 1990* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2016).

<sup>268</sup> H. A. Debates, Vol. 9, 2702.

At Alexander Bay, <sup>269</sup> the mineral prospecting drama had culminated in the discovery of amazingly rich deposits, signalling yet another important chapter in the mining history of Namaqualand. This sombre-looking spot at the mouth of the Orange River was subsequently to prove the very pick of the coastal tract. The surprising yields obtained would more than any other reason result in the government's action of establishing a mining enterprise on the traditional land of the Richtersveld community. The State would indeed take its share with the establishment in April 1928 of the State Alluvial Diggings, but not before the complex issue of discoverer's rights had been sorted out.

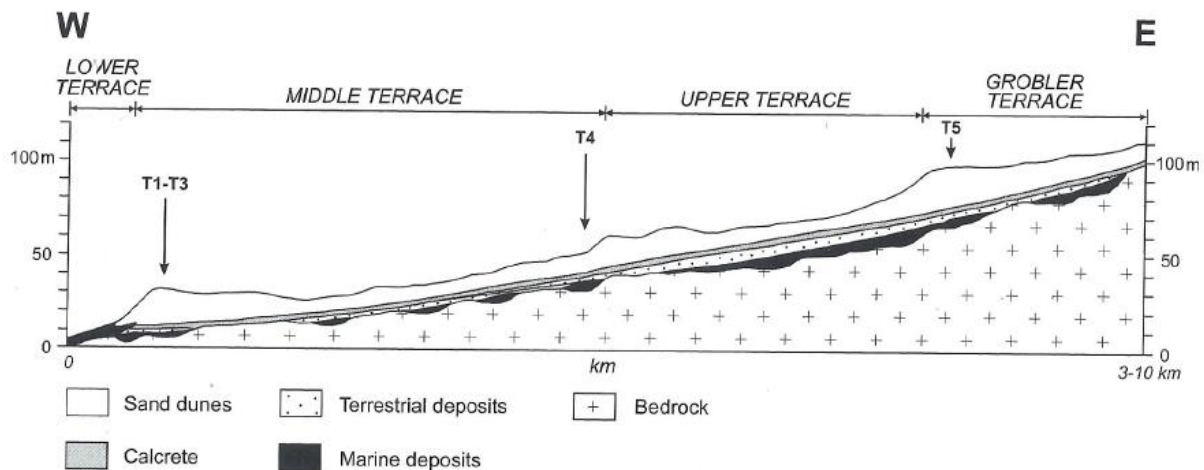


Figure 22 Schematic profile of the Alexander Bay Formation. (J. A. H. Marais et al, *The Geology of the Springbok Area*, 2001)

Establishing discoverer's rights proved no easy matter as the minister had been swamped with applications. After looking into the issue, the state finally decided to recognise six distinct geological deposits on the terraces above sea level. These were treated as the first discoveries in payable quantities in respect of which certificates were issued under Section 82 of Act No. 11 of 1899.

The Hans Merensky Association was given the Main Oyster Line, as well as the River Gravel Area; the Shelly and Pebbly Limestone Line went to Robert (Sonny) Kennedy; to Solomon Rabinowitz the Buchberg Area; and to the Gelgorcap Syndicate <sup>270</sup> the Operculum Beds. After some legal manoeuvring, the sixth deposit, the 'Extension of the Oyster Line', was also granted to Merensky who then went ahead and bought up all the other discoverer's rights, subject to the discretion and direction of the Government. <sup>271</sup> The instant this was known, it caused an uproar

<sup>269</sup> Alexander Bay or !Urubees in Nama. A small cove with a bleak open roadstead on the Atlantic coast, 4 km south of the mouth of the Orange River. It is named after Sir James Edward Alexander who in 1836 undertook a journey of discovery to the land of the Namaquas and Damaras. He was guided to the copper deposits in the Richtersveld by local resident, William Joseph.

<sup>270</sup> Gelgorcap -- the brothers Gelb, Gordon, and Caplan.

<sup>271</sup> MNW 811 MM 2796/25. Under Secretary for Mines & Industries to the Magistrate, Springbok, 26 September 1927; B. J. Rudd & V. U. T. Watson, *History of the Namaqualand diamond discoveries* (Johannesburg: privately compiled and issued by E. Oppenheimer, March 1956), 23-27; Olga Lehmann, *Look beyond the Wind: The Life of Dr Hans Merensky* (Cape Town: Howard Timmins, 1956), 12, 74-75;

in the House of Assembly where General Smuts was the first to strongly disagree with the Minister of Mines, claiming that a syndicate had now cornered the market, in conflict with the policy laid down in the Precious Stones Act (No. 44/1927).<sup>272</sup>

Be that as it may, the Government next wrestled with the problem of operating the coastal alluvial fields at Alexander Bay and came up with a comprehensive solution: the coast would become a state digging, except for discoverer's rights on six distinct geological deposits, all of which was controlled by the Hans Merensky Association, thereby eliminating very largely the chances of any litigation.



Figure 23 (L-R) Dr H. Merensky, Dr P. Wagner and Dr E. Reuning.

(Rudd & Watson, *History of the Namaqualand diamond discoveries*, 1956)

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T. V. Bulpin, *Discovering Southern Africa* (Cape Town: The Reader's Digest Association, 1980), 173; Peter Carstens, *In the Company of Diamonds*, 2001, 208.

<sup>272</sup> Olga Lehmann, *Look beyond the wind: The Life of Dr Hans Merensky* (Cape Town: Howard Timmins, 1956), 75.



Figure 24 The Gelb Area showing 20 discoverer's claims. The first Alexander Bay Diamonds were found here.

(Rudd & Watson, *History of the Namaqualand diamond discoveries*, 1956)

### **The State Mining Enterprise: The State Alluvial Diggings (S.A.D.)**

Although in terms of legislation the State itself had the right to undertake mining operations, this right has on only one occasion been exercised with the establishment of the State Alluvial Diggings. The S.A.D. was a wholly-owned state enterprise, in fact, the first and only venture into mining by the South African government.<sup>273</sup>

Starting a state diamond mine initially met with some spirited resistance. The honourable member for Namaqualand, Mr J. P. 'Koos' Mostert, pleading for more jobs at Alexander Bay, was accused by the opposition of wanting to make State diggers of his constituents, thereby converting them into hirelings of the Government.<sup>274</sup> Another member, Mr Jagger, warned that this was quite a new departure as the country had never yet gone in for State mining ... the taxpayers should know the extremely important deviation that was being made in policy. The State had already embarked on iron and steel manufacturing and was now going in for State diamond mining,<sup>275</sup> starting a fresh enterprise by setting up as a diamond digger. And Mr Blackwell MP, joining the debate, made it clear that he was quite frankly convinced that the departure in policy could be regarded as the dawn of a new era, the era of state socialism in South Africa and more particularly, state mining of which this was the first instalment.<sup>276</sup>

Despite the assurances from the Minister of Mines & Industries to the House that he had never suggested that there should be a State alluvial digging for the relief of poor people or for

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<sup>273</sup> South Africa, *Official Year Book of the RSA*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition, 1976.

<sup>274</sup> H. A. Debates, Vol. 10, 1537.

<sup>275</sup> H. A. Debates, Vol. 10, 1543.

<sup>276</sup> H. A. Debates, Vol. 10, 1545.

relieving unemployment, it turned out to be exactly that. By Proclamation No. 58 of 1928, and in terms of Act No. 44 of 1927, an area some 100 square miles (in extent 2 478 morgen) was as from 17 March proclaimed an alluvial digging for precious stones and a State Digging. This diggings on what was considered unalienated Crown Land, was later increased by Proclamation No. 1 of 1929, extending the land surface east and south from the boundary of the area previously proclaimed.<sup>277</sup>

Today the coastal stretch of alluvial diggings in the north-western corner of the Namaqualand Division stretches southwards from the Orange River for about 100 km to the southern boundary of the Port Nolloth Reserve. This tract of land, varying in width from approximately 9 km in the Port Nolloth area to 3 km at Alexander Bay, is under the control of the general manager of the State Alluvial Diggings, now Alexkor Ltd.<sup>278</sup>

Existing legislation was considered inadequate to provide for the proper control of this mining area, so the necessary powers were obtained in Act No. 44 of 1927. Regulations were promulgated on 27 April 1928 under Government Notice No. 720, a subsequent amendment dated 22 June 1928 being gazetted under Government Notice No. 1026.<sup>279</sup> His Excellency the Governor-General was pleased to make known the Schedule of Regulations for the State Alluvial Diggings:<sup>280</sup>

The control, direction, and management of a State Alluvial Digging shall be vested in the Government Mining Engineer who shall be assisted by a Committee of Management of three officials, one of whom shall be Chairman, and by a staff appointed for that purpose, and both the Committee of Management and the staff be appointed by the Minister.

With Regulations in place, the Government now turned its attention to those occupying the land in the immediate vicinity of the mine. In reply to a question put by Dr Steenkamp on 6 August 1929, the Minister of Mines & Industries confirmed that lessees and grazing licensees of Crown land within a radius of fifteen miles of the coast between the Orange and Groen Rivers had been served with notice to vacate. This was done "in the interests of the state". At Alexander Bay, steps were likewise being taken to remove all European as well as coloured persons from the 15-mile zone surrounding the proclaimed diggings, except that the Government had no

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<sup>277</sup> U. G. No. 33 of 1929, Pretoria. Reports of the Secretary for Mines, etc., 110.

<sup>278</sup> U. Keyser, *The occurrence of diamonds along the coast between the Orange River estuary and the Port Nolloth reserve*. Bulletin No. 54 (Pretoria: South African Department of Mines, Geological Survey, 1972), 2. Coastal Stretch Geological Investigation.

<sup>279</sup> U. G. No. 33 of 1929, Pretoria. Reports of the Secretary for Mines, etc., 110.

<sup>280</sup> Government Gazette No. 720, 27 April 1928, 149-150. Schedule of Regulations under Section 75 of the Precious Stones Act, 1927. See Figure 25 Annexure 2 for a full list.

power to interfere with persons occupying or residing upon the privately-owned farm Grootderm, situated only 7 km from Alexander Bay.<sup>281</sup>

### **The Hans Merensky Association (H. M. Association)**

Under the Precious Stones Act (No. 44/1927), only the Alexander Bay area was proclaimed a State alluvial digging in 1928, while the Merensky Syndicate was allowed to peg and work the discoverer's claim blocks acquired by them. Not only was the Syndicate limited under Section 115 of the Precious Stones Act, but the state also had an arrangement with them under which every diamond they recovered had to be accounted for.<sup>282</sup> All the other early discoverers of diamonds in the rest of Namaqualand received their discoverer's rights but were not permitted to work their claims because no other area was proclaimed an alluvial digging. On the Port Nolloth Reserve, claims operated by the following prospectors could therefore not be worked: Van Reenen's Workings, 4 km north of Port Nolloth<sup>283</sup>; Klass' Workings, 3 km east of Port Nolloth, and the original finds of Jack Carstens south of Port Nolloth.

The State Alluvial Diggings, having started operations on 1 May 1928, was now producing its own diamonds and at the same time controlled the H. M. Association until it went into voluntary liquidation on 31 October 1929. The H. M. Association, which had begun mining operations immediately on 17 March 1928, employed mainly white Namaqualanders in accordance with the state's regional political and economic policy. By the end of August 1929, all their claims had been worked out, yielding a total of 461 394 carats (worth more than £4 ½ million) during that 17 ½ month period.<sup>284</sup> Towards the end of 1928, the Committee of Management of the State Alluvial Diggings was already involved in negotiations with Dr Celliers of the H. M. Association in respect of taking over, at a reasonable price, its buildings, equipment, and plant.<sup>285</sup> Finally, in March 1930, the H.M.A. was liquidated, and its assets and liabilities taken over by the Anglo-American Corporation of South Africa. When the Government finally took over the H. M. Association's claims, Merensky sold his interests for £1, 026, 000, which represented his share. This sale of the mining property "put him into the ranks of the South African mining magnates".

<sup>286</sup>

More than once, feeling despondent and tired, Merensky found himself regretting that he had ever gone to Namaqualand to look for diamonds. He was inundated with letters begging for assistance, and countless requests for work, as well. "Some were genuine calls of distress;

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<sup>281</sup> H. A. Debates, Vol. 13, 19 July – 16 August 1929, 464-465. Farmers: Alexander Bay.

<sup>282</sup> H. A. Debates, Vol. 10, 11 May 1928, 4061. Minister of Mines and Industries.

<sup>283</sup> Van Reenen's Workings or Van Reenen's Prospect was the claim of Percy van Reenen, the man who led Jack Carstens to the site of the gravels of the first discovery. (See chapter 2). No. of Licence: 93. Date of issue of Licence: 28 January 1927. Name of Licence Holder: P. S. van Reenen. Address of Licence Holder: Springbok. Period: 4 months (MNW 903 mm 2796/25 (SAB), Pretoria. List of Prospecting Licences for Precious Stones current at 25 February 1927, Springbok).

<sup>284</sup> Idem, 36-38.

<sup>285</sup> MNW 951 mm 4232/28. Government Mining Engineer (Dr H. Pirow) to the Chairman, Committee of Management, State Alluvial Diggings, Alexander Bay, 13 December 1928.

<sup>286</sup> Olga Lehmann, *Look beyond the Wind*, 1956, 100.

others were threats and demands of every shape and kind”.<sup>287</sup> A case in point is the Coetzee brothers – Theunis and Jan of Rietfontein – who claimed £6 000 from Merensky, saying that when he hired them to work at Alexander Bay, he promised them each £3 000 if they made good finds.<sup>288</sup> Early in 1931, the case came up in the Supreme Court (Cape Province Division), but the Coetzees subsequently withdrew their claim. The matter was settled out of court and Merensky established a £2 000 educational trust fund for the education of the Coetzee children.<sup>289</sup> As expected, the case attracted a good deal of attention and this act of Merensky’s was interpreted by some as “the sign of a guilty conscience”.<sup>290</sup> To carry on his work, the (Hans) Merensky Foundation was established from which South Africa would benefit. Grants or loans were provided to individuals and institutions to carry out research in a variety of fields such as forestry, medicine, mining, and industrial chemistry. Bursaries would be made available for the education and training of both “European and non-European students”.<sup>291</sup>

### **The European Migrant Worker on the Alluvial Diggings of Namaqualand**

Members of parliament, such as Mr P. C. de Villiers, by then felt vindicated by government policy in Namaqualand. He had always been greatly in favour of a State digging because he felt that they would here possibly have a chance of turning the alluvial digging that was in some quarters regarded as an evil of state socialism, into a blessing to the poor whites in the country.<sup>292</sup> From the inception of the State Alluvial Diggings on 1 April 1928, it had been a definite principle that “*bona fide* Namaqualanders” shall be employed as pick-and-shovel diggers. To enable the surrounding districts to derive full benefit from the new state enterprise, it was therefore decided that only white labour from Namaqualand and the neighbouring Vanrhynsdorp district would be eligible for employment as diggers. Provision was also made that these employees be given, as far as possible, a training which would benefit them after they left the Diggings,<sup>293</sup> and the policy was adopted of purchasing locally as much of the requirements of the State Diggings as could be supplied.

Mining operations were started in May 1928, and at the end of that year, a staff of five and a labour force of 103, which included 80 European diggers, were in employment. By the end of the first year of operations, the Government Mining Engineer sent off a telegram asking to take on an extra twenty pick-and-shovel men to provide relief to that section of the Namaqualand population very severely affected by the drought:

A deputation from Van Rhynsdorp represented to the Acting Minister that, if such farmers or their sons were given only two months’ work on the State Diggings, they would earn enough to

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<sup>287</sup> Olga Lehmann, *Look beyond the Wind*, 1956, 73.

<sup>288</sup> *Idem*, 1956, 98.

<sup>289</sup> Law Cases: T. & J. Coetzee vs H Merensky, Supreme Court, Cape Province Division.

<sup>290</sup> Olga Lehmann, *Look beyond the Wind*, 1956, 99.

<sup>291</sup> *Idem*, 1956, 163.

<sup>292</sup> H. A. Debates, Vol. 10, 1588, 1 March 1928.

<sup>293</sup> *Die Delwer/The Digger*, 1938, 8. H. E. Barrett, Secretary for Mines, Voorwoord.

tide over families for the time being. The Acting Minister, therefore, desires you to take on a group of about twenty men for a period of two months and to replace them by twenty others at the end of such period. The Magistrates of Springbok and Van Rhynsdorp have been requested to compile lists of people who have been very badly hit by the drought, and I shall be glad if you will consult them in appointing these extra twenty men.<sup>294</sup>

The very next year on 29 January 1929, the Minister of Mines & Industries, F.W. Beyers,<sup>295</sup> gave the House a report on the number of employees at the fledgling open-cast diamond mine. One hundred and twenty-two persons were employed on the State Diggings, made up as follows: 113 Europeans; 8 Coloured; and 1 Native. The European complement consisted of 90 labourers, 13 supervisors, 3 office staff, 3 lorry drivers, 2 carpenters, 1 medical orderly, 1 motor mechanic. At the time, much was made of the magic figure of 7s 6d a day to which labourers strived. They received free food and quarters, and were supplied free of charge with work clothing, boots, and so on. Medical attention was free, and the workers enjoyed the available recreation facilities. After six months' service the labourers, provided they had done satisfactory work, were given an increased rate of pay to 10s per diem. After six months' satisfactory service in the isolated mining camp, labourers were furthermore allowed 14 days' "liberal" leave facilities on full pay.



*Figure 26 State Alluvial Diggers putting gravel through trommel sieves (classifiers) during the early 1930s. Under the watchful eye of the overseer (nickname "The Pole", left). (Pieter Coetzer, Baai van Diamante, 1997)*

The supervisors enjoyed the same benefits, were monthly paid, and their emoluments ranged from £22 10s per month to £35 per month, according to length of service and ability shown. The office staff, secretary, assistant secretary, typist, storekeeper and the lorry drivers got 17s 6d per day. The coloureds and native boy who did the menial work, were paid according to class of work, and while they did not get bonus incentives, had free food and lodging, and enjoyed some of the other (unspecified) facilities. The bonus scheme for all classes of employees (except non-whites) was based on the tonnage of gravel handled during any one month, and the bonus when

<sup>294</sup> MNW 951 mm 4232/28. Government Mining Engineer (Dr H. Pirow) to the Chairman of the Committee of Management, State Alluvial Diggings, Alexander Bay, 13 December 1928.

<sup>295</sup> H.A. Debates, Vol. 12, 31. State Alluvial Diggings: Number of Persons Employed, 29 Jan. 1929.

payable, was only granted to those employees who had rendered satisfactory service during that month. Over and above the monetary benefits from the bonus scheme, each labourer after two months' service was entitled to draw a bonus up to £5 per month. Practically all the labourers had up to then earned the £5 bonus, "for it must be said that the Namaqualanders are hard workers".<sup>296</sup> Within a decade of operations at the State Alluvial Diggings, its white labourers were regarded as "the best-paid workers in the Union of South Africa", starting at 6 shillings per day (1s 6d a day increase after the first year). Supervisors were appointed by the Secretary of Mines at a salary of £240 per annum, with an annual increase of £30 to a maximum of £360.

While geologists and other professionals speculated about the origin and source of Namaqualand's precious stones, poor white labourers meanwhile lay awake at night thinking deeply about the discoveries and speculating about its ownership. In their rooms and in the mess, workers on numerous occasions discussed the issue of the ownership of the diamonds: do these stones belong to the learned doctor (Merensky), the State or is the fabulous wealth from the arid ground not the birth right of the people (read Whites) of Namaqualand?<sup>297</sup> In this context, one *dominee* (pastor) upset Kleinzee management no end when he was alleged to have preached that diamonds were God's gift to Namaqualanders,<sup>298</sup> as if it were theirs to sell without interference from the State or any mining company. The name of the company was nowhere inscribed on the shiny stones. But to maintain morale among the labour force, the dominee was never, after this indiscretion denied entry to the compound. His insight was proved correct in that jobs at the State Alluvial Diggings and Kleinzee mine were created exclusively for poor White Namaqualanders, but off the mark on the point of allowing them to deal illegally in precious stones without State intervention.

In later years, apprenticeships became very popular among workers but unfortunately many of these European diggers were illiterate. The General Manager of the State Alluvial Diggings, replying to an enquiry regarding an injured worker's full names, had to draw attention to the fact that many of the injured diggers did not know their real names or their dates of birth, which they for example gave up as "during the great drought" or "the year of the rinderpest". On being employed, particulars supplied by the worker were entered on the wage register and this, by the nature of things, formed the main source of information on the workers.<sup>299</sup>

The mine at Alexander Bay was capable of absorbing only a limited number of men, and vacancies seldom occurred. When they did occur, it was State policy to have them as far as possible filled by the appointment of those first-generation White contract workers recruited mainly from the rural areas. But in a harsh economic climate, the diamond mining companies were simply inundated with applications for work and had several hundred names on their

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<sup>296</sup> H.A. Debates, Vol. 12, 31-32. State Alluvial Diggings: Number of Persons Employed, 29 Jan. 1929.

<sup>297</sup> *Die Huisgenoot*, 4 Desember 1953, 8. W. O. Kühne, 'Die Huisgenoot lig die "Doringdraadgordyn" om Alexanderbaai se Diamante'.

<sup>298</sup> The term 'Namaqualander' almost always implied 'white Namaqualanders' -- as if only by swallowing hard, most of them could bring themselves to refer to other fellow-inhabitants as 'Namaqualanders'.

<sup>299</sup> Pieter Coetzer, *Baai van Diamante*, 1997, 209. General Manager, J. S. van Zijl, to the Secretary for Mining, 1951.

waiting lists, so that it was inevitable that many of the applicants would be disappointed.<sup>300</sup> Desperate men for that reason joined “road parties” or “road worker gangs” repairing the gravel road between Port Nolloth and Alexander Bay. Apart from job creation, the road works was the workers’ passport to eventual employment on the State Alluvial Diggings.<sup>301</sup> The early years of the discovery of diamonds also coincided with local droughts and the Great Depression, a situation that did not bode well for race relations. When competition for jobs developed, the state guaranteed Whites jobs at better wages. Both the State Alluvial Diggings and Cape Coast Exploration Ltd at Kleinsee always attempted to run their mines on a shoestring budget, keeping all wages as low as possible, while the South African government continued to exert pressure on Cape Coast to increase wages and improve working conditions for labour, based on the model it had adopted at Alexander Bay. Cape Coast resented the proposal by the minister of mines “to establish a minimum wage of 7s. 6d. per day for white workers, rising to 10s. per day after six months, plus free food and quarters”. The company was only in compliance with the wishes of the Government to employ White men exclusively, though the work could quite easily have been done by natives at half the rate of pay.<sup>302</sup>

Local white pick-and-shovel diggers did not initially benefit a great deal from opportunities for employment and advancement as they were not given any training as artisans. The diamond mines, however, provided many with the chance to escape the consequences of landlessness or uneconomic farming. They were given the opportunity to pursue an interest in agriculture by enabling them to use their earnings to service Land Bank bonds over their land.<sup>303</sup> As farmers and others moved off drought-stricken land in search of jobs, those who remained were able “to increase the size of their landholdings to take advantage of economies of scale”.<sup>304</sup>

When they signed on, the White contract worker was employed under the same general conditions as other employees. They had to agree to devote all their time and energy to the service of the company, not to absent themselves from work or town without written consent, and to carry out all lawful instructions from management. Instant dismissal, without furnishing any reasons, was the price of non-compliance. They moreover agreed to submit to search or X-ray at any time, and those found in possession of diamonds were discharged on the spot. While there is no evidence on record that any worker died from exposure to these x-rays, this medical technology was still quite primitive in the 1930s and potentially lethal if used regularly and without due care. The company also accepted no responsibility for loss of personal effects, regardless of the cause.<sup>305</sup> Employees were required to work 48 hours per week at a fixed wage,

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<sup>300</sup> MNW 1030 MM 1605/30. Secretary for Mines & Industries, Cape Town, to W. Herridge, Esq., Pella, Namaqualand, 13 March 1930.

<sup>301</sup> Pieter Coetzer, *Baai van Diamante*, 1997, 45. “Arbeid: Padwerkers”.

<sup>302</sup> Peter Carstens, *In the Company of Diamonds: De Beers, Kleinsee, and the control of a town* (Athens, USA: Ohio University Press, 2001).

<sup>303</sup> Henry Stone, James Stone en medewerker Jasper Stone, *Die Stones van Namakwaland* (Pretoria: Binedell Uitgewers, Eerste Druk, 2018), 285-288.

<sup>304</sup> J. S. Sharp & M. E. West, ‘Land, labour and mobility in Namaqualand’, Paper No. 71 (Cape Town: SALDRU, 1984), 11.

<sup>305</sup> Peter Carstens, *In the Company of Diamonds*, 2001, 79.

plus benefits, services, and the use of amenities.<sup>306</sup> Recruitment of labour was therefore the order of the day and within a year the change was “a joy to see”. Monthly remittances arrived from the diggings for food and clothing,<sup>307</sup> but to leave behind families, relatives and friends and the community to live and work here, was certainly a sacrifice borne by all these workers. Despite the inconveniences and hardships, they felt there was much to be grateful for -- such as the renewal and reinforcement of bonds of fraternity which united one big family, the Afrikaner *volk* (people or nation).<sup>308</sup>

The day-to-day lives of diggers were far removed from those who occupied the company boardrooms where individuals take decisions on a collective basis for the workforce. Most white contract workers were employed in the mining area, doing the strenuous, back-breaking pick-and-shovel work. A typical alluvial mining face to be stripped contained a covering of sand, a layer of hard calcrete, followed by softer limestone and light gravel. Before dynamite was later introduced to blast the calcrete capping,<sup>309</sup> the picks, sledgehammers, and crowbars remained in use as important tools of the trade. Once the diamondiferous gravel was reached, large boulders had sometimes to be moved before workers reached bedrock – six to eight feet and more down.<sup>310</sup>

Hand loading of cocopans with diamond-bearing gravel and conglomerates was a demanding job, and especially unpleasant when the loading was done into the prevailing southwest winds in summer or the hot east winds of April and May. Except for lunch breaks and at the end of the shift or when accidents held up operations, loading continued regardless of the weather. The pick-and-shovel operation was done under the watchful eye of the overseer or foreman directing a gang of ten or twelve labourers. These foremen also had to keep all workers, especially bedrock cleaners, under surveillance to prevent the theft of diamonds mostly located in the crevices and potholes in the bedrock.

After the shift, the workers retreated into their own world in the compound. With few contacts with townspeople, their only interactions were with the compound manager, the guards, the doctor, and their fellow-workers. Their main link with the outside world was the *dominee* of the Nederduits Gereformeerde Kerk (N. G. K.), who visited every three or four months. After the grinding daily work routine, these isolated migrant workers were housed in barracks where their surroundings - apart from the changing seasons outside the mining camp - blotted out a normal workaday world seen in any town. Much worse, they were prevented from seeing their families and hearing the excited voices of children playing or flying kites.

In December 1929, A. J. Kotze, Member of the Namaqualand Divisional Council, felt driven to address an urgent request to Council to approach the government to assist White labourers at

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<sup>306</sup> U. G. No. 33 of 1929, Pretoria. Reports of the Secretary for Mines & Industries, 110.

<sup>307</sup> Jack Carstens, *A Fortune Through My Fingers* (Cape Town: Howard Timmins, 1962), 135.

<sup>308</sup> A. Dreyer, *Kerksoewenier van Namakwaland: geskiedkundige oorsig van die tagtigjarige bestaan van die plaaslike N. G. Gemeente* (Stellenbosch: Pro Ecclesia, 1930), 65-66. ‘Die Alluviale-Staatsdelwery Alexanderbaai: Afrikaners’.

<sup>309</sup> “A conglomerate of surficial gravel and sand cemented by calcium carbonate” (McGraw-Hill: *Dictionary of Geology & Mineralogy*, New York, 1997).

<sup>310</sup> Peter Carstens, *In the Company of Diamonds*, 2001, 81.

Kleinzee with obtaining a living wage. Forced through need and poverty to rely on manual labour, workers on the mine were making a living no better than one considered “fit and proper for a Hottentot”. It was high time that these matters be thoroughly investigated while “every treasure (was being ) carried away from our land and the cross of our poor white people (had) to be carried by the public, or the taxpayers rather”.<sup>311</sup> Since the complaint by Mr Kotze in his letter to the Divisional Council was considered too vague, the Mining Commissioner at Springbok himself decided to investigate. He found that labourers started at 5 shillings per day, increased to 6 shillings after three months’ satisfactory service (old hands got 7/- per day). Artisans were paid between 7/6 and 20/- per day while several supervisors earned up to £35 per month. Ordinary working hours were 8 ½ hours on weekdays, 5 ½ on Saturdays. Overtime was paid at the usual rate on weekdays and ‘time-and-a-half’ on Sundays.<sup>312</sup>

During the general election campaign of 1929, a predictable row erupted about the work conditions and wages paid to state diggers at Alexander Bay. Often the recipient of such criticism, the government was this time accused of making huge profits while paying the white workers only 7/6 per day. An investigation by a reporter of *Die Burger* thereupon found that actual remuneration amounted to no less than £20 per month. In addition, the workers received first-class accommodation which included electric light, hot and cold water for shaving and bathing, a full set of bedding, a coir mattress, a wardrobe and much more. The Department granted £25 per month for sports facilities and other recreational activities which boasted a football field, tennis courts, and swimming-bath.<sup>313</sup>

The shortage of skilled labour during and following World War II made management realise that unless family housing was provided, it would be increasingly difficult to attract sufficient skilled labour to the diggings. They therefore decided to adopt a policy of “housing for all married employees”. By 1948, there were already 60 white families accommodated in (modest but) comfortable modern houses (110 families in 1953).<sup>314</sup> But the allocation of housing especially in the Binnekamp (Inner Camp), remained a sensitive issue which aroused a great deal of jealousy and grumbling when a family received the good news that a house was made available. The need for housing kept growing, though. As early as the 1940s, workers’ families had already started squatting at Kortdoorn, just outside of the proclaimed mining area. By 1960, we find the families of twenty-eight mineworkers at this camp of wood-and-iron structures – all of them on the waiting-list for housing in Alexander Bay. On being issued with eviction orders, the residents of the makeshift camp approached the MP for Namaqualand, Gawie Maree. These White squatters were eventually moved to prefabricated housing at the aptly named Lankgewag settlement where temporary occupation was restricted to S. A. D. workers on the waiting-list for formal housing.

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<sup>311</sup> MNW 1016 Ref. mm 540/30. Kleinzee: Treatment of Workers, 1929. A. J. Kotze, Member of the Divisional Council, to Namaqualand Divisional Council, 28 December 1929.

<sup>312</sup> MNW 1016 Ref. mm 540/30. Reply: Mining Commissioner W. Norval, Springbok, 2 February 1930.

<sup>313</sup> MNW 982 Ref. mm 1511/29. *Die Burger*, 31 August 1929. “Restart of operations on hand”; “Highly satisfied Workers” “What the Government does for the State Alluvial diggers”.

<sup>314</sup> Alexanderbaai, *Alexanderbaai 25 jaar (1928 – 1953)*, 1953, 22.



Figure 27 Squatter camp of White workers' families at Kortdoorn outside Alexander Bay.

(Pieter Coetzer, *Baai van Diamante*, 1997)

For ordinary mine workers, those were carefree years of living cheaply with limited expenses. Everything was free or available at negligible cost: electricity and water, fruit and vegetables, meat and milk, furniture, laundry services, cutlery, and gardening tools. Family housing was rented for a small amount. In the dormitories, single men were extremely grateful for a roof over their heads ... not luxurious accommodation, but at no cost to the worker. The rooms were sparsely furnished with iron bedsteads, coir mattresses, blankets, and lockers for clothes and personal possessions. Separate buildings housed the kitchen, dining hall, showers and washbasins, and a reading room-cum-library. Workers ate cheaply and well at the mess. The extent of these benefits was only realised once they left Alexander Bay for life outside of the mine. Inside the hall, they were at all times expected to be properly dressed and to display refined table manners. On Sundays, workers were not allowed to sit at the table dressed in work clothes and mine boots. The doors were then locked, followed by a short reading from Scripture and prayer. Lights in the dormitories were switched off at 10 p.m. sharp to allow weary bodies to have a restful night and to ensure an early rise and maximum production in the mining pit.

In general, company policy was intolerant both of workers making demands or showing any hint of opposition to its policies. As far as can be established, there was in the early years significant industrial peace on the mine on the part of all workers – irrespective of race, colour or ethnicity. So, when the manager at Kleinzee mentioned in his report that there had been a minor confrontation with white workers, head office in Kimberley urgently asked for more details regarding what they thought must have been an uprising by the white Namaqualanders. To allay any fears, Manager Parkinson was at pains to explain the situation. At the end of June 1930, a certain number of workmen whose work had been satisfactory, received an increase of their daily wage from 6/- (shillings) to 6/6 (six shillings and six pennies), and a few to 7/6 per day. The morning after the list of the names of these employees was posted up, all the men upon arrival at the mining pit lined up and through their spokesman informed the pit superintendent that “none of them would go to work unless an assurance was given them at once that the daily wage of every man employed would be immediately increased to 7/6, and that food and provisions would be supplied free”. The pit superintendent duly instructed the spokesman to go to work at once and when he refused, he was summarily dismissed under clause 10 of his contract. When the sacked spokesman turned round to tell the others, he found that they had dropped the matter of a twelve-penny raise and free food and supplies and meekly decided to

return to work. One or two others identified as potential instigators, were immediately discharged together with the spokesman, and that was the end of the matter.<sup>315</sup>

The Ovambos at 1940s Kleinzee, by comparison, showed much more independence of spirit, taking the initiative to control their environment and personal lives thereby retaining some measure of autonomy within the system. These contract workers lived on their own, restricted to their compound barracks in much the same way as the white Namaqualand workers had been. But they were feistier and exercised more initiative than either the white or brown Namaqualanders. They quickly established their own rules, often in defiance of the company, and organised their own leisure, sporting, and religious activities. And when collective worker action was called for, they showed their ability to organise and resist.<sup>316</sup> But what the two groups of workers had in common, despite wide differences of culture, national character, and political approach, was the spirit and ideal of national liberation. The Afrikaner volk was biding its time to take full political control of the Union of South Africa. A range of major National Party publications issued in the early 1940s demonstrated the formative influence of national socialism on the nature of an insurgent Afrikaner nationalism. The Ovambos, on the other hand, would embark on a campaign of throwing off the bonds of South African colonial rule over the protectorate of South West Africa. The South West African Native Labour Association (SWANLA), the organisation recruiting and administering contract labour, has received much attention by scholars of Namibia as the primary source of worker exploitation that eventually led to the rise of the movement for national independence spearheaded by the South West African People's Organisation (SWAPO). The injustices inherent in the contract labour system became a rallying point for African workers who eventually in the 1950s organised and established SWAPO in Cape Town. This organisation thus began as a movement to protest the inhumane conditions of migrant labour and ended up transforming itself into a national liberation movement. Following a 23-year armed struggle, SWAPO won a United Nations-supervised election and became the government of an independent Republic of Namibia in March 1990.<sup>317</sup>

In general, the official philosophy of mine management was to keep the men fit, happy, and well fed. Reporting on the Christmas programme for 1931 at Kleinzee, manager Humphreys wrote:

“Sports on Christmas day in the Compound were very successful and were entered into most enthusiastically by the men – the most popular event being the ‘Bun & Treacle Race’! The Tug-of-War and Prize distribution took place in the afternoon”.<sup>318</sup>

The company had dug into its coffers and donated the princely sum of £5 for the prizes on this special day. At one o'clock, after the excitement and fun, the men were rounded up and provided with quite an excellent feast of roast fowl, plum pudding, etc., which they enormously enjoyed.

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<sup>315</sup> Peter Carstens, *In the Company of Diamonds*, 2001, 80.

<sup>316</sup> Idem, 94, 101-106.

<sup>317</sup> Allan D. Cooper, 'The Institutionalization of Contract Labour in Namibia', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 1, March 1999, 121.

<sup>318</sup> Peter Carstens, *In the Company of Diamonds*, 2001, 83.

In the 1990s, a few veterans of a bygone era at Kleinzee mine could still recall with some nostalgia the ‘Namaqualanders’ Sports Meeting’ of New Year’s Day, 1937, when one of the competitive events was cocopan loading. After the starting pistol, three-man teams competed to see which one could in the shortest time load one of six or seven cocopans with gravel. That these contract labourers took pride in their work was illustrated by their enthusiasm to re-enact for recreation the back-breaking work of the pit on New Year’s Day. Other skills from the workplace that were particularly prized among workers, aside from efficient cocopan loading, were the cultivation of physical stamina and team work required for meticulous bedrock sweeping; wielding a pick with precision; or the “art” of blacksmithing required when at the end of every shift picks had to be resharpened and tempered.<sup>319</sup>

Another form of entertainment for the White contract labour worker was the shopping day at the company retail store. Located near the centre of the town, the store served many functions. First and foremost, it was the community shopping centre where goods and non-essentials might be purchased. Secondly, the company store frequently served as a town gathering place where gossip was exchanged, news was disseminated, and the men sat in front to talk about the same things they had discussed the day before.<sup>320</sup> Workers also shopped via mail-order catalogues, a commercial medium well known at that time.<sup>321</sup> Shopping sprees and mail orders for the white diggers focused mainly on clothing. Blazers and individually designed badges were important items ordered from the Bond Badge and Blazer Company. The State Alluvial Diggings museum at Alexander Bay has an exhibit of digger culture that includes a mannequin dressed in a stylish blazer (with badge), said to depict a contract worker on a Sunday in the 1930s. In leisure hours, all diggers seemed to be preoccupied with personal adornment. On Sundays, many of the workers decked themselves out in smart clothing, a custom of extra personal care at weekends started among contract workers. For workers cut off from the outside world, it provided opportunity for self-expression according to individual fashion taste and sense of culture. There were also facilities for sport and the men’s amusement. And each Sunday they were of course permitted to go to the sea in the charge of two or three supervisors.<sup>322</sup>

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<sup>319</sup> Peter Carstens, *In the Company of Diamonds*, 2001, 84.

<sup>320</sup> See J. B. Allen, *The Company Town in the American West* (Oklahoma: Oklahoma University Press, 1966), 128.

<sup>321</sup> Mail-order houses in Cape Town, such as *Freinds*, or *The Wonder Shop (Die Wonder Winkel)*, were at the time extremely popular.

<sup>322</sup> Peter Carstens, *In the Company of Diamonds*, 2001.



*Figure 27 Sunday in the early 1930s on the State Alluvial Diggings.*

*John Michael de la Harpe (left), William "Punch" Coetzee, and the two Hearne brothers.*

### **The labour compound system**

In 1938, three types of camps could be distinguished at Alexander Bay. The Top Camp housed clerks, artisans, and supervisors; the Police Camp uniformed police and detectives; and the Diggers' Camp ordinary workers. The latter camp - in concept, layout, and the notion of worker isolation - eerily resembled the diamond mine compound system of 1880s Kimberley. The parallels and similarities are disturbing and bear brief description.

Kimberley, after the discovery of diamonds in the late 1860s, had a reputation for model compounds. It was commonly believed by mine owners and others that good accommodation, food, and healthcare for migrant African miners were mainly responsible for the stable workforce of De Beers diamond mines. The compounds, before 1903, were not the models of social welfare they were made out to be, but the birth of a model of labour control, the first of its kind in southern Africa and one that had "initially little to do with the welfare of African miners".

<sup>323</sup> In the records and literature of the time, the characters that come to life as inhabitants of the

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<sup>323</sup> Rob Turrell, 'Kimberley's Model Compounds', *The Journal of African History*, Vol. 25, No. 1, 1984, 64. (Accessed 10 January 2020).

compound are not embellished. The reader is provided with a picture of the kind of harshness that was prevalent in the industry throughout this period.

De Beers mines at Kimberley, nonetheless, claimed to be setting an example by treating the migrant workers in the compounds justly and reasonably. On the one hand, the mine owners wanted experienced labourers in their mines; on the other, they did not want an organised working class in their town. It was this challenge that was bridged by the closed compound system that not only facilitated control over the labour supply, but it also counteracted potential worker organisation directed against exploitation in the mine.<sup>324</sup> These workers were under 6 to 12-month contracts. The colonial era Masters and Servants laws served to criminalise any breaches of these employment contracts by workers - for example, through desertion. The labour contract had, nevertheless, always been a mixed blessing to the worker. Breaking a contract on the part of the labourer was a criminal offence, but it did offer some protection against excesses on the part of employers.

Through the compound system, the mine owners, in the first place, attempted to instill greater discipline, obtain economies of scale, and prevent diamond theft. The second advantage of compounded labour lay in the rigorous discipline and supervision that it was possible to impose on the workers by compound managers and guards, who at times usurped judicial functions and meted out punishments. In this system, wages would remain long depressed because of the readily available supply of labourers which the mine owners were able to regulate at will.<sup>325</sup> Aspects of the system of compounded labour developed in Kimberley were brought to the diamond mines of Namaqualand.

Isolation is no doubt an important factor in the explanation of the attitudes, values and worldview of people in the area, but there are other factors which have contributed to the character of the North-West. Although they have historically shared the same physical and cultural space, there was no worker solidarity between white labourer and brown labourer on the same diamond mine work site - despite a history of the North-West that has always shown a tendency towards integration. Most of the Boer population of late 19th century Cape hinterland towns and countryside held conservative and deeply insular views. These views, a legacy of the Cape's slave society and generations of isolation, were underpinned by a strong Calvinist tradition which informed the values, norms, and institutions of their society. Without regular schooling, far from the reach of the organised church, without easy access to newspapers or literature of any description and with only tenuous links to the market and the cash economy based in the Cape, they were effectively isolated from much of the development of social thought and intellectual currents in the modern world.<sup>326</sup>

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<sup>324</sup> Rob Turrell, 'Kimberley's Model Compounds', *The Journal of African History*, Vol. 25, No. 1, 1984, 64. (Accessed 10 January 2020). Rob Turrell, 'Kimberley's Model Compounds', *The Journal of African History*, Vol. 25, No. 1, 1984, 64. (Accessed 10 January 2020). Idem, 74.

<sup>325</sup> Ibid., 1984, 64.

<sup>326</sup> Milton Shlain, "The foundations of anti-semitism in South Africa: Images of the Jew c 1870-1930", PhD, University of Cape Town, 1990.



Figure 29 Power Station personnel, Alexander Bay (1930s) (Own Collection)

From the commencement of diamond mining in Namaqualand, the economic interests of poor whites deviated significantly from those of poor browns though both groups held identical relations to the means of production – the diamond mining industry. The economic interests of white and brown segments of the labouring classes diverged simply because of their differing relations to the ruling class. The prevailing ideology of white supremacy and the institutional framework which discriminated based on colour, militated against inter-racial solidarity and instead led to shared interests between landed and landless Afrikaners. The poor white naturally had a personal stake in

rendering support to those who were concerned to improve his competitive position vis-à-vis poor non-whites. Any class solidarity between the region's poor browns and poor whites would have thus threatened the very foundation of white supremacy and cheap non-white labour. Indeed, it was the failure to achieve any such solidarity that harmed the economic interests of both regarding stagnant wages, training, and socio-economic advancement.<sup>327</sup>

There are numerous instances showing that the government of the day was determined through policy initiatives to defend and protect the socio-political status quo and ensure that the ownership, control, management and exploitation of the Namaqualand diamond mines remained skewed in favour of the ruling class. Hardened diggers employed on the State Alluvial Diggings knew that Alexander Bay was their state enterprise, the only one of its kind in South Africa. Besides, they realised all too well the danger of a failed undertaking and the disastrous consequences of an unsuccessful operation bound up with their future.<sup>328</sup>

### Production and Revenue

From the start of operations on 15 May 1928, about 80 European diggers were employed at Alexander Bay to recover diamonds from beach-placer deposits immediately south of the Orange River mouth. The rest of the labour force was diverted to making a road to the diggings, put to work on completing an airfield, laying foundations for plant and buildings, and unloading materials and equipment from the steamship 'Ranza'. Until about 1950, mining and prospecting was confined to an area extending approximately 5 km south of the Orange River estuary, but after that date operations would gradually expand southwards. Since 1928 then, most of

<sup>327</sup> Michael Buraway, 'Race, Class and Colonialism', *Social and Economic Studies*, Vol. 23 No. 4, December 1974, 537. (Accessed 12/01/2020).

<sup>328</sup> Alexanderbaai, *Die Delwer/The Digger*, 1938, 34.

Alexander Bay's historical diamond production of over 95 per cent gem quality came from the northern portion of the open-cast diggings.<sup>329</sup>

Modern methods of mining and processing of the diamond-bearing gravel (as compared to the early pick-and-shovel operations) are described by the Global Diamond Resources company on its website:

The gravel is then removed by hydraulic excavator, loaded onto trucks, and transported to the recovery plant where it is then screened to remove all particles larger than 25 mm. The larger fraction is discarded while the smaller fraction is then processed by gravity separation (rotary pans) or centrifugal separation (DMS) to recover the particles with a relative density of larger than 2.9 as concentration.

Each recovery plant consists of screens and associated separators that employ water, agitation, gravity, and centrifugal force as a primary method to separate the heavier diamondiferous concentrate from the lighter tailings. The two methods employed are rotary pans and dense media separation (DMS). Both methods are well tried, the only difference being that pans are much cheaper to construct and operate; however, a DMS can be monitored electronically.

Electric sorting machines conduct final recovery from the concentrate. The machines utilize the luminescent properties of diamond when it is irradiated with x-rays. Photo multiplier tubes sense the luminescence and activate a trap door, which diverts the diamond to a safe box. This concentrate is then finally sorted by hand.



Figure 30 Heavy Media Separation plant (HMS), Alexander Bay. Early 1950s (Pieter Coetzer, *Baai van Diamante*, 1997)

Roughly one year after the commencement of mining at Alexander Bay, the minister of finance, N. C. Havenga, on 14 March 1929 introduced the Appropriation (Part) Bill in the South African Parliament. The minister was flushed with power, presenting a splendid budget. Within the space of a year the total production of diamonds at Alexander Bay had been approximately 600 000 carats, worth about six and a half million pounds sterling.<sup>330</sup> A few days later, during a lively debate on 18 March, W. A. Deane (Umvoti) exclaimed: "They are lucky in finding this £6 500 000 of diamonds in nine months. It is one of the world's romances, and the life of these State mines may go on for years". Reaping such a harvest from mining, this windfall of £6 ½ million in diamonds, made the budget a very glittering one. Deane was joined in his fulsome praise by G. A. Hay (Pretoria West) who expressed his belief that Providence had blessed them

<sup>329</sup> J. Rogers et al, *Cenozoic Geology and Mineral Deposits along the West Coast of South Africa and the Sperrgebiet*. Guidebook Geocongress '90, *Geological Society of South Africa*, PR1 (1990), 62.

<sup>330</sup> H.A. Debates, Vol. 12, 1312. (Minimum market price of 600 000 carats today @R8000 per carat: R4,8 billion).

with a wonderful production of diamonds ...“the Namaqualand riches pouring into our land”.<sup>331</sup> After the difficult years of deficits, at last there was light at the end of the tunnel, announced Mr C. R. Swart (Ladybrand), and the country was very pleased that, after the years of deficits, years of surpluses had now arrived. The fairy godmother had suddenly come “to visit us and given us diamonds”.

### **The State Alluvial Diggings: A self-contained community**

In the foreword to its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary publication, *Die Delwer/The Digger (1928 – 1938)*, the Secretary for Mines declared without fear of contradiction that “(i)n spite of the geographical isolation of the diggings and the need for enforcing strict regulations to safeguard the property of the State, the population of the diggings is a happy self-contained community under the able control of Mr C. J. Grobler, the General Manager, and his staff”.<sup>332</sup> The name “State Alluvial Diggings” had by then in the popular mind conjured up visions of enormous wealth lying ready for the taking. But in truth, the Diggings had from small beginnings and after many ups and downs, emerged as a “well-established self-contained mining proposition”. This state enterprise was not only, according to the Department of Mines & Industries, a marked commercial success, but was also in many ways “a model in the care it has bestowed on the protection of State assets and on the welfare of its workers.”<sup>333</sup>



*Figure 31 Power Station personnel, J. M. de la Harpe (left) and W. “Punch” Coetzee, May 1928. Erection phase of infrastructure, early mining camp, Alexander Bay. (Own Collection)*

The Camp Supervisor of Alexander Bay, Mr J. J. Smit, could hardly contain himself as he breathlessly described the tremendous progress made within only ten years in terms of accommodation and facilities. Back then, there were only a few state employees in their little tents where there was now ... after a decade ... a

well-organised state diggings with about hundred houses, diggers’ quarters and other buildings; a well-equipped hospital with its x-ray machine; a spacious 350-seat hall doubling as church and movie theatre; a library with about 3 000 books<sup>334</sup>; three billiard-rooms; four (cement-base)

<sup>331</sup> H.A. Debates, Vol. 12, Debate Appropriation (Part) Bill, 18 March 1929, 1312.

<sup>332</sup> Alexanderbaai, *Die Delwer/The Digger*, ‘n Jaarblad, 1938, 9. Health. H E Barrett, Secretary for Mines, Voorwoord.

<sup>333</sup> Idem, 13.

<sup>334</sup> Reading those books, workers escaped into a fictional world to get used to their new environment. It is highly unlikely that non-white workers were allowed access to this facility. Given the segregation policy in

tennis-courts; a squash-court; a sports field; kitchens fitted with 8 crude oil-fired ‘hotel range’ stoves; mess rooms seating 400; a bakery with kneading-machine; a laundry for the workers’ clothing; a butchery; bathrooms with hot and cold water; shower cubicles; a modern sewerage system. All under electric lighting to accommodate, and physically and spiritually take care of about five hundred employees.<sup>335</sup>



Figure 31 Alexander Bay State Hospital (left) and Hall doubling as bioscope and a venue for church services (1930s). (Own Collection)

Although Alexander Bay was located on a remote corner of the Union of South Africa, management went out of its way to provide all the conveniences of civilised life. The

community had meanwhile organised themselves into a well-managed little “State” spread over five areas, namely “married quarters” and “camps”. The General Manager, several of his married staff and other officials, were housed in comfortable well-built homes; then there was the barrack-style Police camp; the Staff Camp accommodating the rest of the staff, security officials, supervisors, artisans, clerks and trainees in well-built houses and rooms of brick-and-mortar or wood-and-iron; the so-called Middle Camp, the quarters of about sixty men; and finally, the Diggers’ Camp on the banks of the Orange (Gariep) where approximately 300 white labourers lived -- 30 young men (“the pride of any nation”) to each room.<sup>336</sup> Most of the employees were single (379 or 77 %) and were expected by the State to send money home to their families. If they failed to do so, the parents were entitled to complain to the company. In the event of this occurring, the amounts were deducted from the employee’s salary and duly forwarded to the family.<sup>337</sup> Despite the difficult years of low wages and labouring under harsh conditions, it was still the general practice or custom to send a portion of the hard-earned wages home to parents or families dependent on these remittances.

### Security on the Diggings

Towards the end of 1929, the Secretary for Mines & Industries could report that the areas comprising the proclaimed State Diggings had been securely fenced in and were guarded by a force of Police whose wages, subsistence, transport, rations, animal forage, and other incidental expenses were met by the Department.

Only certain supervisors appointed by the Committee of Management were permitted to handle diamonds – workers were not allowed to pick up a stone on pain of instant dismissal. All finds were immediately deposited by them in specially constructed metal containers which

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operation, the company-sponsored locale - with magazines and newspapers on display and books available on loan - would have been off-limits to them, except perhaps by special loan request.

<sup>335</sup> Alexanderbaai, *Die Delwer/The Digger*, ‘n Jaarblad, 1938, 30.

<sup>336</sup> Ibid., 1938, 30.

<sup>337</sup> P. W. Kotze, *Namakwaland: ‘n Sosiologiese Studie van ‘n Geïsoleerde Gemeenskap* (Kaapstad: Nasionale Pers, 1943), 135.

could only be opened by the members of the Committee who held the keys thereto.<sup>338</sup> To improve security measures further, the Chief Inspector of Machinery suggested electric lighting of the buildings ... not only to materially decrease the risk of fire ... those carbide lamps would serve a very good purpose by preventing the theft of gravel and by warding off persons approaching the diamond works unseen.<sup>339</sup> And, located in the Staff Camp watching over the state enterprise, was the diamond strongroom of concrete resembling a small temple, well-lit at night by four lamps, one on each corner of the building. At the centre of operations, the strongroom contained the offerings of precious stones.



Figure 32 The temple-like Diamond Strongroom, with Police living quarters in the background. Alexander Bay (1930s).

(Own Collection)

In mid-1929, production was temporarily halted for four months to allow for construction and installations in the mining camps. An x-ray apparatus was set up, and new labour contracts contained a clause authorising the State alluvial diggings to search all employees by this means if necessary. The new change-house system required all diggers to change under supervision into digger's uniform before work, and to change back to ordinary clothes (under supervision) after work.<sup>340</sup> To tackle the illicit traffic in diamonds, combat-style security measures resembling aspects of a battlefield were enforced by veterans of the Anglo-Boer War and the First World War. Miles of barbed-wire fencing, double barricades of entanglements, heavy police patrols, airplanes, floodlights, and searchlights ... all these things usually associated with warfare ... had been called into use by the Union Government to prevent any illicit leakage of

<sup>338</sup> U. G. No. 33 of 1929. Reports of the Secretary for Mines & Industries, Pretoria. Security on the diggings, 1929.

<sup>339</sup> MNW 951 mm 4232/28. Government Mining Engineer to the Chairman, Committee of Management, State Alluvial Diggings, Alexander Bay, 13 December 1928. Security measures.

<sup>340</sup> MNW 982 Ref. mm 1511/29. *The Star*, 17 September 1929. Diamond Production at Standstill 1929. 'Namaqualand today'; 'Reconstruction in both camps'.

precious stones from the state diggings.<sup>341</sup> Police maintained several pickets along the road leading from Port Nolloth to Alexander Bay: at The Cliffs, Holgat, Kortdoorn, as well as No. 1 and No. 2 security gates. Life at these pickets was lonely and monotonous, the personnel transferred only after a stretch of six months. The strictest security measures were enforced on the diamond fields to keep unauthorized persons out, and the very severity of the controls became a contest between security personnel and many inventive thieves who over the years used every possible stratagem to smuggle diamonds through the security screen. But the greatest threat to safeguarding the precious stones remained internal: staff and workers.

Figure 33 Self-effacing Detectives of the Diamond Branch, Alexander Bay (1950s)  
Pieter Coetzer, *Baai van Diamante*, 1997.



It may be helpful at this stage to include an assessment and a few remarks on the work that was being carried out at Alexander Bay. In 1938, Inspector G. S. Scott, on a tour of Kleinzee Mine, was able to spend a couple of hours with Major Bolton, the security chief at the State Diggings. Scott in his Report observed that although the diggings was run more as a labour camp than a commercial enterprise, everything was done to make the labourers comfortable and as contented as possible. A labourer coming to work for the first time was on entry stripped of all his personal belongings and, after medical examination, handed a complete outfit including even a pair of Sunday shoes. The clothes in which he arrived were stored for him until such time as he left, and he was not permitted to take anything out of the camp with him. He

received 7/6d per day – no deductions were made. He was housed comfortably, well fed, and his amusements were well catered for. The camp at Alexander Bay was well-fenced and guarded, on the inside by protection men and on the outside by police, and there was no contact between these two.

### **The State Alluvial Diggings declared a successful State venture**

A decade after its establishment, the need was felt for the publication of a journal to mark the anniversary of the State Alluvial Diggings. It was recognised that the project was largely due to the “initiative and courage of Dr Hans Pirow, the then Government Mining Engineer, whose constant care and supervision made the enterprise so successful”.<sup>342</sup> By 1938, *The Digger: A Journal* could declare the venture a success:

The State Alluvial Diggings undoubtedly represent an enterprise which is unique, both as regards its economic success and the fact that, in creating the Diggings, the Government for the first time exercised its rights to mine precious stones. Although the State shares to a very material extent the profits of the gold mines under the lease system, it has on no other occasion itself undertaken the mining and disposal of minerals.

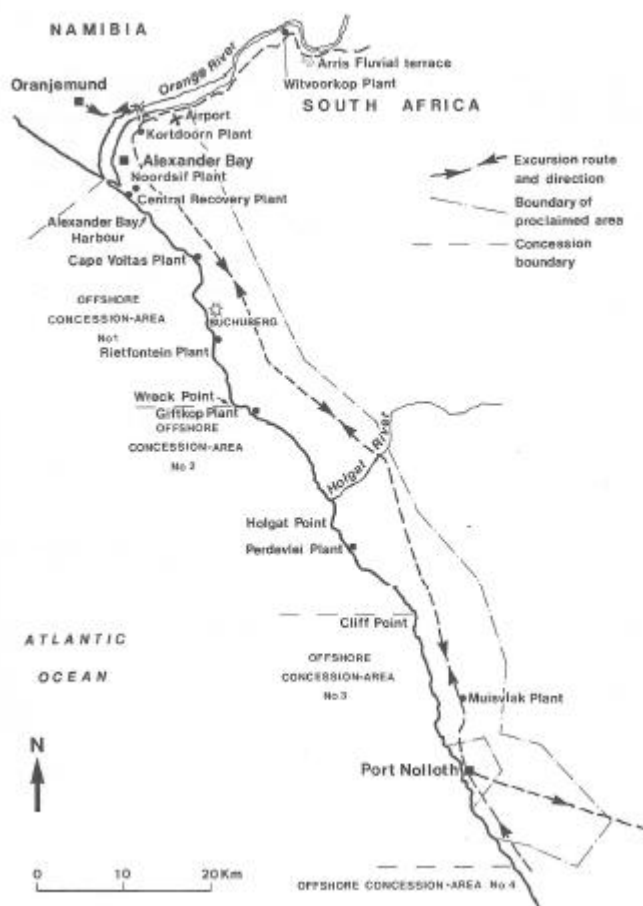
<sup>341</sup> MNW 982 Ref. mm 1511/29. *Rand Daily Mail*, 7 September 1929.

<sup>342</sup> Alexanderbaai, *Die Delwer/The Digger*, 1938, 8. H. E. Barrett, Secretary for Mines, Voorwoord.

In the comparatively short span of a quarter of a century, the State Alluvial Diggings, once regarded as a lonely outpost of the Mines Department, developed into “a thriving mining centre with many modern facilities and conveniences”. To the air traveller, in particular, the State Alluvial Diggings with its belt of green along the Orange River and its many neat new buildings, had the pleasing appearance of a friendly oasis in the arid Namaqualand landscape. Gone were the days when every official of the Department used to be terrified of the possibility of being transferred to Alexander Bay.<sup>343</sup> Officials and workers were now all justly proud of what they had achieved. In the years ahead, they realised, ever increasing demands would be made upon the competence and ability of management and workmen alike to maintain and even increase production in the face of mining conditions which were becoming increasingly tough.

The Union Exchequer benefitted enormously from the new “Aladdin’s cave on Crown Lands” as government airplanes transported diamonds worth many hundreds of thousands of pounds from Alexander Bay to Cape Town. Between 1938 and the year 1953 (the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the enterprise), there lay six years of war and devastation. But after years of uncertainty following the Second World War, there was a huge demand for diamonds on the world market -- which period of growth and development in no small measure benefitted the State Alluvial Diggings.<sup>344</sup>

Figure 34 State Alluvial Diggings Concession Areas, Onshore and Offshore (1990).



Only after 1953 was the potential of the 100 km coastal strip of state land south of Alexander Bay to Port Nolloth investigated. To facilitate the investigation, the coastal stretch was divided into twelve areas, namely Alexander Bay, Cape Voltas, Peacock Bay, Rietfontein, Giftkop, Holgat North, Holgat South, Perdevlei, The Cliffs, Langpan, Muisvlakte and Port Nolloth. The object of the investigation was to ascertain “the distribution and general features of the littoral deposits by means of

<sup>343</sup> Staats Alluviale Delwerwe, *Alexanderbaai 25 Jaar (1928 – 1953)*, 17. Message from the Secretary for Mines.

<sup>344</sup> Staats Alluviale Delwerwe, *Alexanderbaai 25 Jaar (1928 – 1953)*, 21.

drilling, and their diamond content by trenching and assaying".<sup>345</sup>

Until the diamond discoveries on the Namaqualand littoral when the attention of people turned to this coastline, Alexander Bay and its environs were "a domain of sea birds and now and then perhaps a wandering Trek Boer or Nomadic Hottentot".<sup>346</sup> Except, that now in 1928, a crowd of these itinerant "Hottentots" and a handful of travelling "Trekboers" materialized, as if from nowhere, at the gates of the State Alluvial Diggings, claiming occupational and use rights (if not ownership) over the Alexander Bay area. The question of the removal of these 'squatters' outside the fence of the diamond mine came up. They were described by the Secretary for Lands as ... "certain undesirable persons (whom the Police appeared unable to remove) squatting on Crown land outside the fence around the State Alluvial Diggings".<sup>347</sup>

As far as the Lands Department's information went, the only way in which the persons in question could be ejected from the Crown land was by taking civil action against them individually and suing them for trespassing. Quite apart from the expense of securing an Order of Court for their ejection, it did not appear that this would offer any satisfactory solution of the difficulty as there would be nothing to prevent other persons from trespassing in a similar manner; or even the same persons again trespassing on the ground when action would have to be instituted for their removal.

It was, after all, difficult for "various reasons" to altogether get rid of these Squatters on Crown Land, particularly those who had some "colour of right" (unintended pun) to be there. But, as was shown in a report from the Sub-Inspector in charge of No. 22 Diamond District, Springbok, the difficulty was realised, and the situation dealt with in a satisfactory manner. For now, the brown and white Squatters were restricted by the Diamond Guard from getting inside.<sup>348</sup>

With the establishment in April 1928 of the State Alluvial Diggings on the traditional land of the Richtersveld community, the State would indeed take its share of mining. Government policy would also turn the state alluvial diggings - regarded in some quarters as an evil of state socialism - into a blessing to the poor white Europeans in Namaqualand. The era of state socialism and state mining had arrived in South Africa, despite the assurances from the Minister of Mines & Industries to the House that he had never suggested that there should be a State alluvial digging for the relief of poor people or for relieving unemployment. Here the labour force was also racialized along lines of race, ethnicity and class specifically in regard to the preferred status of "poor whites" in the mining industry.

With Regulations to govern the state enterprise in place, the Government now turned its attention to those occupying the land in the immediate vicinity of the mine. Lessees and grazing

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<sup>345</sup> U. Keyser, *The occurrence of diamonds along the coast*, 1972, 2.

<sup>346</sup> *Mining & Industrial Magazine of Southern Africa*, Vol. IV, No. 2, 23 March 1927, 141.

<sup>347</sup> MNW 944 Ref. mm 3141/28. Secretary for Lands, Pretoria, to Secretary for Mines & Industries, Pretoria, dated 7 September 1928.

<sup>348</sup> MNW 944 Ref. mm 3141/28. Deputy Commissioner and Chief of the Diamond Detective Department, Kimberley, 20 September 1928. Report re Squatters on Crown Lands, Alexander Bay.

licensees of Crown land within a radius of fifteen miles of the coast between the Orange and Groen Rivers were served with notice to vacate. This was done “in the interests of the state”, and at Alexander Bay, steps were likewise taken to remove all European as well as coloured persons from the 15-mile zone surrounding the proclaimed diggings. Seven decades later, in 1998, the very crowd of itinerant “Hottentots” from the Richtersveld coloured reserve would lodge in the land Claims Court of the Republic of South Africa a claim for the land and mineral rights of the State Alluvial Diggings at Alexander Bay.

## Chapter 5 DIAMONDS AND THE GREAT DEPRESSION IN NAMAQUALAND (1929 - 1937) THE IRONY OF STARVING AMID MINERAL WEALTH

### Development trajectory of the South African economy

Late 19th and early 20th century South Africa experienced the processes of industrial expansion, capitalist production, and urbanisation. The country's growth path followed the typical development trajectory, with the dominant sector shifting from agriculture to minerals, to manufacturing and then services. In the process, the country adopted policies and built institutions not dissimilar to those in Australia and elsewhere in the industrialising world. In two very noticeable respects, however, South Africa was far from typical. Unusually coercive and discriminatory policies and institutions helped not only to ensure inequality but also shaped the growth path of the economy so that inequality continued to manifest over time.<sup>349</sup>

Whereas in Europe and North America inequality would lead to the rise of labour movements demanding democracy, the colonial response in South Africa followed a different course. Practices of segregation and racism would be codified in law as the state attempted to accommodate its organised white workers. These citizens enjoyed a 'civilised' standard of living through high earnings and protected employment while racial discrimination largely excluded Africans and other non-whites. These developments would leave South Africa with a social welfare system for white workers, even before the 1948 victory of the National Party.<sup>350</sup>

The character of this semi-welfare state was reflected in the industrial institutions that successive governments began to build in the 1920s and early 1930s. Wage-setting for white workers could not be left to the market alone, they argued, the incomes of poor white people needed to be supplemented by the state. Prior to the 1920s, the poor relied primarily on kin or the churches and limited State assistance through poor relief programmes. The appointment of a series of commissions of enquiry into economic matters was therefore concerned primarily with the incomes of white South Africans:

- (a) 1913 Economic Commission appointed
- (b) 1915 Commission examining Poor Relief
- (c) Cost of Living Commission (1918-1920)
- (d) Unemployment Commission (1920)
- (e) Economic and Wage Commission (1925-1926)
- (f) Commission on Old Age Pensions and National Insurance (1927-9)
- (g) Inter-departmental Committee on the Labour Resources of the Union (1930)
- (h) Unemployment Investigation Committee (1932)
- (i) Native Economic Commission (1932)
- (j) Industrial Legislation Commission (1934-5) examining the country's labour legislation.

The protection of jobs took various forms. Almost the first legislation enacted by the new Union of South Africa was the Mines and Works Act of 1911. With Jan Smuts as the first minister of mines, this Act legitimised the long-term mining practice of reserving skilled jobs for whites

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<sup>349</sup> N. Nattrass & J. Seekings, "The Economy and Poverty in the Twentieth Century in South Africa", *Centre for Social Science Research (CSSR) Working Paper No. 276*, University of Cape Town, July 2010.

Ben Scully, 'The Social Question in South Africa: From Settler Colonialism to Neoliberal-Era Democracy'. In: J. Breman, K. Harris, Kwan Lee, C. & Van der Linden, M. (eds), *The Social Question in the Twenty-First Century: A Global View*, University of California Press, 2019. (Downloaded 10 Jan. 2020).

<sup>350</sup> N. Nattrass & J. Seekings, "The Economy and Poverty in the Twentieth Century in South Africa", Working Paper No. 276, July 2010.

Ben Scully, 'The Social Question in South Africa: From Settler Colonialism to Neoliberal-Era Democracy', 2019.

and unskilled or semi-skilled jobs for blacks. Although the Act instituted basic protections for workers and workplace safety regulations, it was also the first legal implementation of a colour bar which allowed skilled jobs to be reserved. The juxtaposition of safety protections and legalised racial discrimination in the same law is illustrative of the way in which colonialism shaped South Africa's response to the workplace.<sup>351</sup> According to John M. Smalberger, the industrial colour bar had its origin in the early years of mining in the Kimberley diamond fields. Although we must go back to the days of slavery at the Cape to understand the racial ordering of society, it was in the new industrial society of 1870s Kimberley that new tools of labour control were introduced to govern the patterns of race relations.<sup>352</sup>

The resolve to maintain the newly-instituted colour bar would be put to the test. In 1922, the Revolt on the Witwatersrand took the form of a major general strike that quickly changed into a mass insurrection against the government. It was carried out under the slogan 'workers of the world, unite and fight for a white South Africa!'. The revolt was precipitated by an attempt on the part of the Chamber of Mines to reduce production costs by removing the conventional colour bar in the mining industry and employing more blacks at reduced wages. The exercise involved approximately 2000 white jobs and aroused fierce resistance from the mining unions. Bloodshed followed when the Union forces were called in. Over the course of a few days, the strike was crushed by artillery, machine guns, aeroplanes, and tanks ... at a cost of 150 - 220 killed, 500 - 600 wounded, 5000 arrested, and 18 sentenced to death, of which four were hanged.<sup>353</sup>

Two years after the Rand Revolt, South Africa passed its first comprehensive industrial relations legislation. The Industrial Conciliation Act of 1924 provided for the registration and regulation of trade unions and employers' associations, and for collective bargaining between unions and employers' associations. The law, however, only applied to white workers, meaning black workers' wages and work conditions continued to be the prerogative of employers. Any improvements in the conditions of black workers could thus be resisted in collective bargaining by white labour unions.

In the aftermath of the Rand Revolt, the most significant coalition of classes was the pact between the National (Afrikaner) Party and the (English-oriented) Labour Party forming the Pact government in 1924. With J. B. M. (Barry) Hertzog of the National Party as prime minister, Afrikaner nationalists were after the disastrous Anglo-Boer War now able through an electoral process to assume state power over a Union of South Africa. The coalition of Afrikaner and English was based on two pillars: a common opposition to industrial capitalism which increasingly threatened to replace white labour on the mines, and a common interest in upholding white supremacy. General Hertzog pointed out the threat to white supremacy and South Africa remaining 'a white man's country', and called for a *skeidsmuur* (literally, a dividing

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<sup>351</sup> Ben Scully, 'The Social Question in South Africa: From Settler Colonialism to Neoliberal-Era Democracy', 2019.

<sup>352</sup> John M. Smalberger, 'The role of the diamond-mining industry in the development of the pass-law system in South Africa', *The International Journal of Historical Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 3 (1976), 419. (Downloaded 31 October 2023).

<sup>353</sup> R. Ross, A. K. Mager and B. Nasson, *The Cambridge History of South Africa*, Vol. 2, 1885-1994 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 270.

wall) between ‘civilised’ and ‘uncivilised’ labour. The Pact Government was therefore quick to commit itself to a ‘Civilised Labour Policy’ as part of its segregationist programme. The ‘Civilised Labour Policy’ applied initially to government departments only, and was later extended to manufacturing, but not to mining, which industry even the Pact Government treated with great caution. ‘Civilised labour’ was circuitously defined as the labour rendered by persons whose standard of living conformed to the standard “generally recognised as tolerable from the usual European standpoint”. This entailed a certain inflated minimum standard of living and a ‘civilised’ or ‘living’ wage for ‘decent’ work by Whites. The Pact government thus brought an enormous shift in the landscape of welfare provision in South Africa, introducing programmes based on the State’s self-imposed responsibility for raising white people out of poverty, thereby establishing a clear racial hierarchy.<sup>354</sup>

### **General conditions of distress in Namaqualand**

During November 1929, Wall Street was to experience the seismic shocks that led to a global depression. The whole of South Africa, in common with most countries of the world, was to suffer an unprecedented economic and financial depression termed the Great Depression. But South Africa was a long way from the centres of the bad news, and mining continued at the required pace. The gravels were processed, the stones sorted and stored as if buyers were waiting in line. In very quick order, however, diamonds became the last item on the buyer’s shopping list, and a few months into 1930, there were no buyers at all:

Diamonds began to pile up in Kimberley until the safes and drawers overflowed ... Sorters went through the motions of separating and grading the stones every day, then mixed them up at night in order to give themselves something to do the next morning.<sup>355</sup>

The Great Depression made itself felt as acutely in Namaqualand as in other parts of the Union. Already plagued by general conditions of retrogression caused by prolonged drought, stock losses, and particularly the closure of the copper mines, the social stability of this vulnerable region of some 17 500 square miles - one half the size of the Province of Natal - was under threat.<sup>356</sup> The harsh socio-economic conditions had widespread consequences, reducing many inhabitants to poverty in towns such as O’okiep, Springbok and Port Nolloth where communities had for decades been very dependent on the copper mining industry. With resources stretched to the limit, many people were forced to leave to seek work elsewhere.<sup>357</sup> The Governor-General of the Union of South Africa, the Earl of Athlone, during a tour of Namaqualand in April 1926 described the prevailing conditions in the following stark terms:

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<sup>354</sup> Jeremy Seekings, ‘The Carnegie Commission and the Backlash against Welfare State-Building in South Africa, 1931-1937’, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 34 No. 3, September 2008, 518.

<sup>355</sup> Stefan Kanfer, *The Last Empire. De Beers, Diamonds, and the World* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1993), 9.

<sup>356</sup> The 1926 census gave the European population as 6 418, showing a very gradual increase during the past 22 years while the Non-European (Coloured) section had remained stationary at roughly 15 000. (LBD 1376 R1338/1, 1928).

<sup>357</sup> J. S. Sharp & M. E. West, “Controls and Constraints: Land, Labour and Mobility in Namaqualand”. Conference Paper 71, Second Carnegie Inquiry, Cape Town: SALDRU, 1984, 10.

Money is scarce, unemployment is rife, and I am distressed to learn that the copper mines, upon which so many of you have depended for your livelihood, have been compelled to close thereby rendering an already difficult position more serious still, with the result that many of the inhabitants are today suffering from actual want and privation.

It is my earnest and sincere hope that before long the world-wide financial and economic depression will lift; that the existing distress will be alleviated; that it will be possible for your valuable mines to re-open and to supply the employment you so sorely need; ...<sup>358</sup>

Against this general background of distress, the inhabitants of Namaqualand naturally expected that their district should be put in order with at least a portion of the wealth generated by diamond mining – an expectation which would over the years become a frequent appeal. Business conditions were very sluggish due to the small amount of cash circulating in the district. This was generally ascribed to the poor seasons which farmers experienced, but the restriction in the output of the copper mines (the larger of the mines closed) had a greater impact than the succession of bad seasons.<sup>359</sup> Except for the men employed at the Alexander Bay and Kleinsee mines, and whatever sector of the economy that remained intact, it was difficult to say how many economically active adult males were unemployed in the whole of the district – estimating how many were in employment would have been an easier task.<sup>360</sup>

The first casualties of war, famine, or communal distress are usually the vulnerable members of society: the children, the aged, people with disabilities and the poor who cannot, without assistance, fend for themselves. The immediacy and urgency of the situation in Namaqualand can be learned from a poignant letter of appeal to the Governor-General of the Union from Father Cornelius van't Westeinde, the priest-in-charge of the Roman Catholic mission at Rietpoort, 40 km west from the railhead at Bitterfontein. The Dutch missionary priest described in graphic detail the hunger, suffering and distress among the poor. Because of the failed harvest and a long list of paupers, he had earlier approached the magistrate at Springbok to bring the desperate situation to his attention. The magistrate, however, much regretted having no funds available to provide aid and relief.<sup>361</sup>

Turning next to His Excellency the Governor-General for assistance, Van't Westeinde attempted to give “a clear view of the situation”. Cases of poor parents who came day after day

... “to beg us the Priest and the Sisters to take their children to prevent them starving ... It would be a great pleasure to me to see that all these poor children and old aged and invalide people were adopted for the time being and that some clothes blankets and food would be giving towards them ... I am quite prepared to cooperate and to assist these poor and unfortunate people”.

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<sup>358</sup> GG 1423 Ref. 45/163. Governor-General's Tour of Namaqualand, April 1926.

<sup>359</sup> LBD 1376 R1338/1. Chief: Division Agricultural Economics & Markets to the Secretary for Agriculture, August 1928.

<sup>360</sup> LBD 1376 File No. R 1338. “Distress: Namaqualand”, 1 June 1928.

<sup>361</sup> GG 1423 Ref. 45/164. Letter from Reverend Father C. van't Westeinde to the Governor-General, 26 April 1932.

It should be appreciated if His Excellency would kindly remember the poor Namaqualanders, the missionary concluded.

Stung by the indirect criticism, the Office of the Magistrate at Springbok replied regarding the complaint.<sup>362</sup> The priest had, to be sure, called and mentioned some cases of hardship among the Coloured people which had come to his notice. The magistrate then and there wrote out and gave him an order authorising a trading store to supply this “reverend gentleman” with twelve bags of wheat to hand out at his own discretion to any needy cases. Still, this was not the end of his activities because in the afternoon of the same day the priest arrived at the magistrate’s office in a motor car, accompanied by two nuns from Matjeskloof Mission, which is near Springbok. These ladies presented the dreadful situation they were experiencing. Knowing the conditions to be bad enough, the magistrate issued them a requisition order for ten bags of dried foodstuff.

But this “gentleman was spreading his net still further”. The climax came as the magistrate was about to leave his office when the reverend produced a book for subscriptions to the new Roman Catholic Mission at Kamieskroon, stating that “it was essential that the Magistrate should head the subscription list”. In this request, he was, however, not so fortunate. It might be that his (the magistrate’s) refusal on that occasion was the cause of the priest’s short memory in other respects (the bags of poor relief previously supplied). A further point to add, was that the Afrikaans people in the Kamieskroon area were up in arms about the perceived encroachment of this priest. Many meetings of protest were held by way of showing him that his efforts in these parts were not welcome. Considering the above, the Magistrate invited the Department of Justice to draw its own conclusions as to the alleged unsympathetic attitude of the Office of the Resident Magistrate and Civil Commissioner of Namaqualand.

Some four years after the exchange with the Magistrate, grave poverty persisted in Namaqualand. Reverend Van’t Westeinde who had arrived there in 1899, was still appealing for donations to feed and clothe the poor of his area. He reported that 80 to 90 % of the Coloured population he ministered to was “underfed and sparsely clothed”, with many contracting tuberculosis after having had a cold. Some 300 hungry people were fed at his mission every day.

<sup>363</sup>

Almost half a century later, from a different time and place, the daughter of a former local minister of religion recalled the harsh conditions in Namaqualand during the Great Depression years. In a Supplement to *Die Burger* of 12 March 1977, Vivia Ferreira, prompted by recent news reports of brown squatters in Cape Town, wrote about her recollections of poor white children rescued by Coloured families of Namaqualand. Her late father, Dr W. P. Steenkamp, had been the local *dominee* of the Dutch Reformed Church in Springbok. During those difficult years, brown people (*bruinmense*) provided shelter for poor whites of the region and cared for them. Some of the white children were raised by these families.<sup>364</sup> In response, the clergyman and his

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<sup>362</sup> GG 1423 Ref. 45/164. Office of the Magistrate, Springbok to The Secretary for Justice, Cape Town, 10 May 1932.

<sup>363</sup> *The Southern Cross*, 17 June 1936.

<sup>364</sup> Bylae tot *Die Burger*, 12 Maart 1977. “Wit plakkers is so gered” deur Vivia Ferreira.

wife rescued many of the children from a bleak future, 63 of whom were sent to schools in the Boland. In this way, many were helped to become some of Namaqualand's best inhabitants.

In his Cape cart, 'Doctor' accompanied by his stableman, crisscrossed the area in scorching heat and over sandy tracks to visit the poor amongst the rocky ridges. Many of those destitute people sought help from people of colour who were well-paid by the copper mines. They were friendly and provided food and a roof over the heads of many of these unfortunate people.<sup>365</sup>

Years later, Vivia Ferreira still found it hard to think that those poor white children, neglected and hungry, had to depend on the charity of the coloured people. On average, these children spent two weeks in the minister's home, to be scrubbed clean and to learn to wear shoes, among other things. Some stumbled on wearing shoes for the first time. After the obligatory induction, they were sent by mail-car (*poskar*) on the journey to agricultural schools in the Boland or to the church's home for children (Kindersendinghuis) in Cape Town. At Vanrhynsdorp, the local magistrate issued free train tickets to those on route, saying: "Mrs Steenkamp, if nothing else, you're giving them an opportunity in life".

Figure 35 Poor White family in town during the Great Depression years. (Photograph: Carnegie Commission of Inquiry)



Wit dorpse wat in armoedige omstandighede skynsel van armoedige omstandighede.

Windhoek in 1915, the South African state appropriated South West Africa's diamond mining industry. Most of its assets were sold off to Anglo-American Limited, and in 1919 Ernest Oppenheimer negotiated for the sum of £3.5 million the transfer of the diamond industry from the Deutsche Diamanten Gesellschaft to his new enterprise, Consolidated Diamond Mines of

Namaqualand never forgot its benefactors. On their return after qualifying as medical doctors overseas, both father (Dr W. P. Steenkamp,<sup>366</sup> quoted frequently in this text) and son (Dr Willem P. Steenkamp) were welcomed back home. Their former pastor, Dr W. P. Steenkamp senior, then practising medicine in Cape Town, later entered politics, and served for several years as a Member of Parliament.<sup>367</sup>

#### Slump in the diamond market

Following the military occupation of South-West Africa and the fall of

<sup>365</sup> Bylae tot *Die Burger*, 12 Maart 1977. "Wit plakkers is so gered" deur Vivia Ferreira.

<sup>366</sup> Dr W. P. Steenkamp was also called the 'Prophet of Namaqualand'. While a divinity student at Stellenbosch University, he was arrested on suspicion of being a "Hertzog spy". He was not charged but released on parole. Arrested again in 1914, this time on a charge of high treason (Steenkamp reportedly said "he would regret it if Germany lost the 1914-1918 war"), he spent six months in prison. At age 44, Steenkamp together with his son, left to study medicine (an old ambition of his) in Kentucky, U.S.A. (Carel Birkby, *Thirstland Treks*, London: Faber & Faber, 1936, 58).

<sup>367</sup> Bylae tot *Die Burger*, 12 Maart 1977. "Wit plakkers is so gered" deur Vivia Ferreira.

South-West Africa (C.D.M.). This move accelerated the South African state's own intervention in the diamond industry at home.<sup>368</sup>

The Lichtenburg diamond field, 200km west of Johannesburg, was discovered in 1926. Production in the newly discovered field peaked at just over 2 million carats in 1927, which accounted for almost 75 % of South Africa's production. This presented a major threat of the diamond market being flooded.<sup>369</sup> The abnormally high production of diamonds initially led to a crisis that caused grave concern to the diamond trade. Intervention was therefore essential if the trade was not to be damaged. Under the leadership of Ernest Oppenheimer, whose lifelong ambition it was to organise and stabilise the diamond industry, an association of producers which included the S.A. government, was established. This association, The Diamond Syndicate, bought up the surplus production to prevent the collapse of the market. Soon these preventive measures resulted in the Syndicate accumulating £8 million of diamonds, but by November 1927, the Lichtenburg menace was successfully contained, and the diamond industry saved.<sup>370</sup>

But the confidence of the diamond trade was thoroughly shaken, not so much by the discovery of the rich Lichtenburg fields or the sensational finds in Namaqualand, as by the threat of uncontrolled exploitation of these fields. The efforts of the Diamond Syndicate and the Government's use of its powers were therefore directed towards "the reasonable exploitation of all diamond deposits, alluvial as well as mines, within the Union in accordance with the world's demand for diamonds".<sup>371</sup> Confidence in the intrinsic value of the diamond was, after all, the very foundation of the industry on which future prosperity could be built.

The surge of economic activity along the Namaqualand coast brought about by the discovery of diamonds in 1925, was not to last. The 1929 collapse of the stock market in the U.S.A. led to a steep decline in diamond sales, and by 1931 the bottom of the diamond market took a serious knock. The diggings at Kleinzee had to be shut down and placed under care and maintenance for five long years (see chapter 3). Except for a skeleton staff of senior officials, security officers, a few Coloured hands and a painter, it was a pathetic sight to see the rest of the miners move off.<sup>372</sup> Throughout the years of the depression, however, the State Alluvial Diggings at Alexander Bay alone managed to continue its vital role of maintaining production and keeping the regional economy alive with satisfactory production results.

While the diamond market was making efforts to extricate itself from this state of near chaos and slump, the tragic irony was that the Namaqualanders found themselves "starving in the midst of wealth". An article in the *Cape Argus* of 12 October 1931 reported the shut-down of the

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<sup>368</sup> Colin Newbury, *The Diamond Ring: Business, Politics, and Precious Stones in South Africa, 1867-1947* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989).

<sup>369</sup> M. de Wet et al, 'Overview of Diamond Resources in Africa', June 2016. *Episodes* Vol. 39, No. 2, 2016. (95776-194801-1-PB[1].pdf).

<sup>370</sup> Hedley A. Chilvers, *The Story of De Beers* (London: Cassell and Company Ltd, 1939), 189.

<sup>371</sup> *Mining & Industrial Magazine*, Vol. IV No.7, 1 June 1927, 339.

<sup>372</sup> J. Carstens, *A Fortune Through My Fingers*, 1962, 136.

copper mines and the resultant poverty and starvation under headings such as “Desperate men driven by hunger” and “Namaqualanders who Raid the Diamond Deposits”. Under these conditions of distress, one could understand the sense of disillusionment of folk who, because of depressed market conditions, were going hungry in the midst of fabulous wealth which lay beneath the very ground on which people starved.

### **Government Poor Relief Programmes**

The category ‘Poor whites’ had long been identified as a ‘problem’ in the late 19th century, but their conditions – and the causes of their poverty – were only more fully documented in the early 20th century by the Carnegie Commission (1929 - 1932). Huge numbers of bywoners (labour tenants) from uneconomical farms and other unskilled white workers from the rural areas were driven onto urban labour markets in which they were unable to compete with African workers. Their vulnerability was further deepened by landlessness and by those unable to work on grounds of age, infirmity, ill-health, or unemployment. But if too many of these unfortunate people sank into “apathetic indigency”, living with or even below the ‘non-European majority’, then white people - in the words of the Transvaal Indigency Commission of 1908 - could not maintain their position as a ‘dominant race’. These poor whites were therefore identified as a group at risk and targeted for rehabilitation and social control to maintain Hertzog’s ‘skeidsmuur’ which was designed to entrench the position of the dominant race.

During the Great Depression, which coincided with severe drought on the South African *platteland* or countryside, the state thus implemented big public works programmes to ward off large-scale unemployment among white working-age men. Racially discriminatory job reservation policies were implemented, and minimum-wages set to ensure that these men earned enough to support themselves and their dependants. In addition, the state provided direct financial assistance to those unable to work due to age, disability or gender and whose kin were unable to support them. At the same time, the discriminatory system of cheap labour was upheld by promoting the interests of the poor white worker at the expense of the non-white. Subsidised employment on public works was for that reason organised in such a way as to isolate him (white labourer) from the non-white labourers, thereby giving him a stake in the perpetuation of colour-class discrimination.

At the beginning of January 1929, prime minister Hertzog sent for the respective Secretaries of the departments of Labour, Agriculture, and Mines to discuss the ongoing distress in Namaqualand. After a great deal of discussion, it was decided that a larger number of workers should be employed upon relief works and that the rates of pay be increased to 7/6d per day for breadwinners, married men or single men supporting parents, and 4/6d for single men without responsibilities. The figure of 7/6d was no doubt considered high, but the prime minister felt that it could not well be reduced. The local magistrate was to use his discretion as this rate of pay would be confined to Namaqualanders normally engaged in agriculture, and whose earnings had stopped due to the conditions there.<sup>373</sup>

In reaction to government’s stated policy of increasing the number of workers on relief road works in Namaqualand, Headman J. Engelbrecht and Members of the Council (Raad) on 9

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<sup>373</sup> LBD 1376 Ref. R1338/1. Secretary for Agriculture, Pretoria to the Minister for Agriculture, 3 January 1929.

February 1929 addressed on behalf of the Steinkopf People a telegram to the Governor-General of the Union of South Africa. For the community, the issue in dispute was the “monopoly” of state relief works in favour of Europeans only. They complained that discriminatory practices had once again reared its head, notwithstanding the fact that the community “claim to be human beings as well, and ... live in the same country under the same conditions, and ... endure just as much, if not more, than the Europeans in Namaqualand, ... “. <sup>374</sup>

Following on the Telegram from Steinkopf, there were further “Petitions and Addresses” to the Governor-General on the question of discriminatory rates of pay. In a letter of explanation, the Acting Secretary for Labour therefore set out the import of the policy. The road works in Namaqualand operated based on 300 Europeans being paid 4/- per day and 300 Coloured men 2/6d per day, each gang working two weeks only out of four. The Hon. the Minister of Labour had agreed to provide funds for the employment of an increased number over a period of three months from the 1<sup>st</sup> of May 1932. This entailed 600 Coloured on full-time work at 1/6 per day and 600 Europeans to be employed for two weeks out of four at a wage of 4/- per day. Having explained the policy on differing rates of pay, <sup>375</sup> the Acting Secretary for Labour took the trouble to add that “in Namaqualand, as elsewhere, rates of wages are fixed in consultation with the Provincial authorities, care being taken that the rates are such as not to be an inducement for men to leave farming and other occupations for temporary relief works”. <sup>376</sup>

Six months after the start of poor relief work on the roads, ebullient and colourful Dr W. P. Steenkamp – Independent MP for Namaqualand – took up the case of poor white roadmenders. To start with, he reminded Mr Havenga, the Minister for Finance, that he (the minister) might not have been in such a happy financial position if he had not gotten so many millions out of Namaqualand. With state diamond mining operations in Namaqualand, South Africa now found itself in an excellent financial position, showing a magnificent surplus, and the Namaqualanders certainly had as much right to rejoice over that as the Government.

Occasionally employing a humorous turn of phrase, Dr Steenkamp hoped that the Government would soften its heart to the needs of the drought-stricken farmers of the region. Referring to relief work on the Van Rhynsdorp-Namaqualand gravel road, he assured Parliament that people were admittedly grateful “because if they had not been employed on relief works, they would have starved from hunger”. But it was indeed a sad sight to see workers who only a few years ago were independent farm owners, now employed on the roads. Men aged sixty to seventy years working like *bandiete* (convicts). <sup>377</sup> True, poor relief work on the roads kept body and soul together but it offered no prospects, and without prospects a man loses his self-esteem. Every day the wretched workers sat and watched, waiting for the fierce Namaqualand sun to set so that mercifully work may stop.

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<sup>374</sup> GG 1567 File no. 50 /1323 (SAB) Re: - Telegram Steinkopf Headman Engelbrecht on 9 February 1929.

<sup>375</sup> Despite a transparent attempt at obfuscation, this policy was based on the concept of racial economics which, on a proper calculation, discriminated against the non-white labourer.

<sup>376</sup> GG 229 Ref. 35/51/31 (SAB) Acting Secretary for Labour, Cape Town to The Secretary to the Prime Minister, Cape Town, dated 27 April 1932.

<sup>377</sup> H.A. Debates, vol. 13, Dr W.P. Steenkamp – Independent MP for Namaqualand – 30 July 1929, 221.

But ... what can a man do with 7s 6d if he has a wife and children? The result is that when pay-day comes, we hear 'Jan, no balance', 'Piet, no balance,' i.e., they have already received advances of all they are entitled to. This is humiliating and takes away self-respect.<sup>378</sup>

Next, Dr Steenkamp touched on the oft-repeated grievance, the absurdity that despite the fabulous wealth in diamonds as well as copper, beryl, tungsten, etc., the inhabitants were left with a sense of helplessness or powerlessness. "Namaqualand is the poorest, the most despised, the most neglected district and at the same time the richest in the Union" -- on the one hand enormous (potential) mineral wealth, on the other shocking poverty.<sup>379</sup> Steenkamp therefore urged the Government to start public works of a permanent nature in Namaqualand. Relief works, he admitted, had saved many farmers from certain ruin, but poor relief work robbed them of their self-respect and reduced them to navvies. It would be sensible to scrap all relief works and go in for permanent irrigation schemes such as the Olifants River Irrigation scheme between Clanwilliam Dam and Lutzville on the west coast. At the same time, it is suggested that the railway be extended from Bitterfontein to Garies. The poor people of Namaqualand should share in the riches of their own country and not lead a convict life like the men employed on the State Alluvial Diggings ... men who were tempted by the fabulous wealth they saw being recovered from the very soil below their feet on which they had spent their lives in ignorance.

The advent of the Union of South Africa in 1910, and especially the creation of the Union's Irrigation Department in 1912, signalled the beginning of large-scale state investment in water storage infrastructure and the start of the country's first dam construction programme on a national scale. The Union government also began to tackle increasing social problems such as white poverty by combining poor relief projects with irrigation and dam-building projects. The Buchberg irrigation scheme (1929-1934) on the Orange River in the Northern Cape was an example of socio-economic upliftment, which indigent white workers from Namaqualand and diggers from Alexander Bay and Kleinzee joined.<sup>380</sup>

Apart from deftly soliciting some funds for Namaqualand, Dr Steenkamp also instinctively knew how to appeal to the nationalist sentiments of members of parliament. Reminding the minister of finance of the "£7 million windfall" the country got out of Namaqualand in one year, he asked whether the Government could not give the Namaqualanders something in return. Is the shirt not nearer (to the skin) than the coat? Does charity not begin at home? What was the use of a rich Government and a poor people? he wanted to know.

I did not ask that the Namaqualand diamonds, or the money should be only spent on Namaqualand, but I asked for a part of it for Namaqualand. All I want is that Namaqualand should also get a few of the crumbs which fall from the master's table, but now nothing is given to Namaqualand ... If it is raining on the Free State let a few drops fall on Namaqualand as well.<sup>381</sup>

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<sup>378</sup> H.A. Debates, vol. 13, Dr W.P. Steenkamp – Independent MP for Namaqualand – 30 July 1929, 222.

<sup>379</sup> Ibid., 222.

<sup>380</sup> Wessel Visser, 'Water as agent for social change, 1900-1939: two case studies of developmental state approaches in establishing irrigation schemes', *Historia* Vol. 63 No. 2, 1 November 2018, 40-61. (Downloaded from National Library of South Africa website, 2023).

<sup>381</sup> H.A. Debates 19 July – 16 August 1929, 877.

Pulling the threads of his case together, Steenkamp directly addressed the Prime Minister, General Hertzog, and the hon. member for Standerton, General Smuts. He wanted the two gentlemen to understand that the people in Namaqualand looked up to them as the fathers of the people. One could not blame the Namaqualanders for doing so because during the Second War of Independence the Prime Minister went there as a general from the Free State, the reason many Namaqualanders went into rebellion (against the British). Thereafter, the hon. member for Standerton arrived, making more rebels. More than a thousand joined up. Many were killed and scores of them ruined. Taking these circumstances into consideration, a heartfelt appeal was at once directed to the two leaders of the people to think of the distress of Namaqualand and its inhabitants.<sup>382</sup>

In the early stages of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, pressures on the land were increasing, some White landowners and scores of their *bywoners* (labour tenants) finding the semi-arid Namaqualand farms too small to be viable. Vulnerable to drought and indebtedness, many of them were driven off the land and forced to seek work on the mines as unskilled wage-labour. This was one of the processes contributing to the Poor White problem in the region. Namaqualand *trekboers* (itinerant White stock farmers), along with people in the Coloured Reserves, were drawn into the process of wage-labour. But the *trekboers* found themselves at a disadvantage when forced into wage-labour because they lacked the requisite skills. This meant that many of them were unemployable, as prospective employers were “reluctant to hire them for what was seen as ‘kaffir work’ “. <sup>383</sup> No evidence has been found that they were at the time too proud to accept the jobs when offered.

It was only in the 1920s that a sympathetic government came to their aid when poor-white *trekboers* joined the ‘poor relief’ road-gangs or were placed in supervisory positions over reserve-dwellers and paid twice as much per day. By the 1940’s, when large-scale mining restarted, the notion that all of Namaqualand’s whites had a right to training, higher posts and ‘civilised’ pay had become entrenched. The position of the erstwhile Dutch or Boers - now Afrikaners and a people different from the ‘Basters’ - was secure.<sup>384</sup> There is, however, no evidence to support the view that the old copper mines of the 1850s and 1860s were willing “to offer the early Boer copper-riders better terms than their ‘Baster’ competitors”. But at the mines themselves there had all along been wage disparity in that those whites who were employable received better, more ‘civilised’ pay than most ‘non-whites’.<sup>385</sup>

### **Impact of the Great Depression on Namaqualand towns**

In Namaqualand, the socio-economic plight found expression in conditions of general distress, with starving natives raiding grocery stores, petitions being sent off to government from a weary citizenry, and resources generally stretched to the limit. An embattled magistrate at Springbok had to face disgruntled marchers and long lines of desperate people for poor relief rations. Just prior to the Governor General’s tour through drought-stricken, distressed

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<sup>382</sup> H.A. Debates 19 July – 16 August 1929, 875.

<sup>383</sup> J. S. Sharp & M. E. West, “Land, labour and mobility in Namaqualand”. Second Carnegie Inquiry conference paper 71, Cape Town: SALDRU, 1984.

<sup>384</sup> J. S. Sharp, “Community and Boundaries: An inquiry into the institution of citizenship in two Cape Coloured Reserves, South Africa”, PhD, Cambridge University, 1977, 55.

<sup>385</sup> *Ibid.*, 1977, 55.

Namaqualand at the beginning of May 1926, reports of raids by “mobs” of starving native women on grocery stores appeared in newspapers under headings such as “Starving Women in Namaqualand”; “Raids on Stores” and “Dr Steenkamp on the Situation”.<sup>386</sup>

The high price of copper had kept the industry going during the period of the First World War, but when by 1919 operations practically came to a standstill the industry became a vestige of its former self. At the height of the Depression, the journalist Carel Birkby, on an extended tour of Namaqualand in 1932, visited one of the “poor little rich towns”. Brown paupers were seen gathered on the town square of Springbok, the principal town of the district. A typical scene repeated every Thursday witnessed a horde of sad, depressed poor forming long lines waiting for their rations of “a miserable dole of food sufficient only to keep body and soul together”. Looking at the sunken cheeks and despairing eyes of people clad in rags, the journalist wondered “how long those eyes would keep their gentleness, how long it would be before they lost their resignation and become accusing.”<sup>387</sup> Nearby, the white men who each week walked as much as thirty miles for rations, had until then been quiet and law-abiding, although, it was true, there were one or two ugly scenes. In fact, only a day or so earlier, 150 farmers who had been unsuccessful getting either work or rations, threatened to raid a store. Police were called out, and only managed to restrain at gun point the starving men who gave warning they would return.<sup>388</sup>

About 10 km north of Springbok at Okiep, a group of hungry men was about to rush and loot a store. The situation was saved only by the storekeeper’s offer of free foodstuff – “a few loaves of bread, some tins of sardines, coffee”. And it was difficult amid the hunger and distress not to be moved by the sight of ten-year-old kids with thin clothes and voices, gathering and chewing peppercorns to feed the emaciated little bodies.<sup>389</sup> People were dying, the magistrate admitting that some deaths were directly due to starvation. Many more died indirectly through lack of food as an “underfed, underclad body cannot stand up to a chill blast of air; a common cold will kill the poor of this tragic land”.<sup>390</sup> In the Springbok area alone, with great hardship all around, estimated figures were given of 2 000 Whites (children and grown-ups) officially below the breadline while 7 500 “brown-skinned” folk were starving. The magistrate had little hope of being able to feed the poor for a year on his Government grant as week after week on Thursday afternoons the food queues continued to line up.

The lasting effects of the Great Depression would remain essentially unsolved, with large pockets of chronic poverty a reality. In 1943, the Reverend Gregorowski of the Anglican Church sent to the National Health Commission a memorandum on the enduring distress. An editorial in the *Cape Times* of 6 September 1944 discussing the memorandum, felt that Mr Gregorowski’s report demonstrated beyond question that Namaqualand had to be recognised as a permanently distressed area. There were many reasons for this, chief among them that the

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<sup>386</sup> GG 1423 Ref. 45 / 163. Tour of Governor-General through Namaqualand.

<sup>387</sup> Carel Birkby, *Thirstland Treks* (London: Faber & Faber, 1936), 145.

<sup>388</sup> *Ibid.*, 1936, 145.

<sup>389</sup> *Idem*, 1936, 147. Pepper Trees were as a greening project introduced to the area.

<sup>390</sup> *Idem*, 1936, 146-8.

coloured people of Namaqualand suffered under all the disabilities experienced by this community generally, with the added difficulty that ...

They cannot earn enough; they eat too little and drink too much; there are too few doctors, nurses, and hospitals; educational opportunities are inadequate, and housing is wretched.

Reverend Gregorowski suggested a comprehensive investigation by an inter-departmental committee which would examine all aspects of a complex problem – labour, housing, health, education, liquor, and the like. The problem had to be tackled from all fronts. Namaqualand was superficially more prosperous than ever before, the diamonds making it theoretically a wealthy region, but its people did not share in the mineral wealth of their land. If some of the wealth could be diverted to the benefit of the inhabitants, elementary human justice would be done. It was hoped that the government would give very careful attention to Mr Gregorowski's well-argued case for the treatment of the district as a permanently depressed area, the editorial concluded.<sup>391</sup>

### **Conditions at Port Nolloth during the Great Depression**

The town of Port Nolloth, sandwiched between the two diamond mining towns of Alexander Bay and Kleinsee, has variously been described by visitors as a welcoming "Port Jolly", or "a tough but curiously depressed fishing/resort town on the Atlantic". Hit by the vicissitudes of the mining industry and fishing, the town did not reflect the mineral wealth that had been found in the interior, and along the Namaqualand beaches, or the harvest from its sea.

These glaring tin shacks, rusting in sun and fog, these sandy streets (had) known many sudden changes of fortune since the old copper mines turned the little fishing outpost into a miniature railway depot and harbour.<sup>392</sup>

Port Nolloth's recorded history is therefore an uneven one of economic growth and downturns coinciding with the fortunes of the copper and diamond industry and fishing. The closure of the copper mines after the First World War proved almost fatal for the future of the town, which was losing much of its population and job opportunities. During this dark period, poverty was evident everywhere and husbands and fathers had to leave to look for work elsewhere – some never to return. The dominant industry in the town, the crayfish factory of John Ovenstone, was quite unable to counteract the depression and absorb those who were unemployed as South African crayfish canners had just then lost their French market.<sup>393</sup> Fortunately, the State Alluvial

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<sup>391</sup> *Cape Times* Editorial, 6 September 1944.

<sup>392</sup> L. G. Green, *Like diamond blazing: the story of the diamonds of South Africa and the men who sought and found and stole diamonds in strange places* (London: Robert Hale, 1967), 110.

<sup>393</sup> M. E. West, *Divided Community ... a study of social groups and racial attitudes in a South African town* (Cape Town: A. A. Balkema, 1971) 4.

Diggings and Kleinzee Mine provided employment that to some extent relieved the decline of the coastal region bearing the brunt of the economic slump.

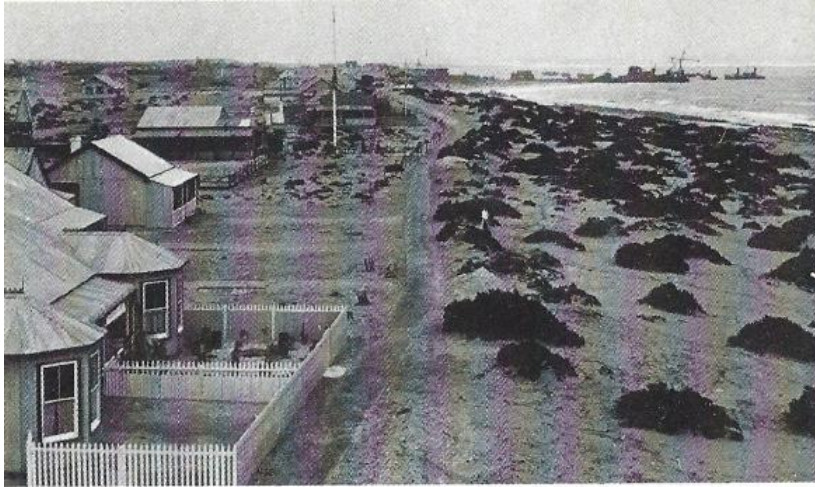


Figure 36 Port Nolloth from the lighthouse, looking south c. 1905.

(H. R. Moffatt Collection, South African National Public Library, Cape Town)

On a visit to Port Nolloth, Carel Birkby found the town “silent and miserable”, showing “resentment and brooding hostility against the government and all its

works”.<sup>394</sup> He was shocked to see white men living in drab shacks or *skerms* – “huts made of matting laid over frames of thorn-bush boughs” -- scattered amongst the sand hills. Driving up the arid coastal uplands with Port Nolloth fading in the sunset, the author stopped near a mat house in which a white family was living – “if living you can call the horror of their existence”. White women were “wearing sacks ... glad to be covered at all ...”, a sight enough to upset a sensitive soul.<sup>395</sup>

Port Nolloth in its misery had

... lost its faith in gods and governments. It sees all around the harrowing poverty that I have not the heart to describe in detail; and it thinks savagely of the stupendous fortune in diamonds that lies behind barbed wire, searchlights and police patrols only sixty-two miles away at Alexander Bay.<sup>396</sup>

In 1930, after the demise and departure of the old Cape Copper Company which controlled the town, Port Nolloth became a Village Management Board. The small harbour town had also become a pawn of the Department of Mining & Industries in its bid to stamp out illegal diamond dealing (IDB or Illegal Diamond Buying). In the process, basic issues such as health, sanitary conditions and the general welfare of the community were simply ignored or neglected while decisions on urgent local matters took second place to diamonds.

A report by the District Surgeon exposed the state of affairs: bad town planning, unsanitary conditions, overcrowding, poverty, and neglect. If anything was to be done, it had to be done at once, so in 1929 the Minister for Lands requested that the matter of the resurvey and layout of

<sup>394</sup> Carel Birkby, *Thirstland Treks*, 1936, 125.

<sup>395</sup> Idem, 1936, 118 – 127.

<sup>396</sup> Idem, 1936, 122.

the town be placed before the Hon. Minister of Mines, F. W. Beyers.<sup>397</sup> The Department of Lands had, however, to contend with strong resistance from the Government Mining Engineer, Dr Hans Pirow, who was of the firm view that conditions were so unsettled in Port Nolloth that he totally opposed any re-layout. As a concession, he agreed that only adequate sanitary arrangements be made because overcrowding appeared to be temporary. The matter was to be reconsidered in six months' time.

While the Department of Lands and the Department of Mining & Industries were still vacillating about the question of a resurvey and lay-out of the township, shacks were being indiscriminately erected on Crown land by unauthorised occupiers.<sup>398</sup> The department recommended that the South African Police be requested to take immediate steps to have the so-called "invaders" evicted and the informal structures removed. The numbers of these "invaders" varied from time to time, but there were about 20 or 30 – so police action to get rid of this remnant would be enough. If illegal squatters were promptly evicted, the number of undesirables in Port Nolloth was likely to be kept down to manageable levels.<sup>399</sup>

Nowhere in the official correspondence between government departments was this class of "undesirable" people squatting on Crown land openly identified as white diggers from the Transvaal and elsewhere - those who were left stranded in Port Nolloth after the initial rush there. To the Government Mining Engineer, Dr Pirow, all of them appeared to be 'coloureds'. There was initially much confusion about the origin and race of the 20-30 squatters who were being mistaken for 'coloureds' ... down-and-out, dishevelled, and scruffy, squatting in shacks together with other "brown" people. After some time, the Mining Engineer reluctantly owned them up as 'delwers', i.e., European diggers.

A Report signed by I. J. M. (Izak) van Niekerk, District Surgeon, described health conditions among the poor of Port Nolloth as in a bad state. When in the late 1920s the diamond rush started, people from all over South Africa flocked to the town, creating a scarcity of housing so that newcomers were forced to live in cars, tents and on the veld. Typhoid Fever had been sporadic and endemic since 1930, and now and then a life was lost:

For at least 75 % of the inhabitants there was (and is) no sanitation. The excreta and waste waters were (are) dumped into the sandy soil. ... The small dug-outs were found all about the cars, houses and in the streets. Then, however, money was not so scarce and decent food could be had.<sup>400</sup>

The situation in Port Nolloth was left to further deteriorate due to the scarcity of funds and effective control. Vaccination of typhoid fever contacts was carried out, but it seemed that because of a shortage of proper food and the absence of good nursing, preventive measures

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<sup>397</sup> MNW 978 Ref. mm 17/18. Secretary for Lands to Secretary for Mines & Industries (see Department of Lands file No. C 264 which deals with the proposed layout).

<sup>398</sup> MNW 978 Ref. mm 17/18. Secretary for Mining & Industries to Secretary for Lands, 24 August 1929.

<sup>399</sup> MNW 978 Ref. mm 17/18. Dept Mines & Industries to Secretary for Lands, 29 December 1930.

<sup>400</sup> MNW 978 Ref. mm 17/18. Report on Typhoid Fever Epidemic, Port Nolloth 1931 and 1932.

had no measurable effect. <sup>401</sup> The District Surgeon, in conclusion, recommended that Regulations be enforced by means of the local police. As far as possible, White and Coloured had to be separated, and if possible, moved to a location further from the village. He conceded that education of the public would be a most difficult exercise, but the residents of the town themselves had fortunately come forward in large numbers and supplied soup and milk to those in urgent need. <sup>402</sup>

Initially, it was understood that the objection on the part of the Department of Mines & Industries to the survey and lay-out of an extensive township was that it would attract new inhabitants to Port Nolloth. The Department was not at that time desirous of more residents so near Alexander Bay Diggings, about 52 miles due north of Port Nolloth. <sup>403</sup> The authorities simply allowed conditions to slide and deteriorate, all in the name of security measures around diamond deposits. <sup>404</sup> The financial budgets presented in Parliament and characterised as “glittering” or “fabulous”, can hardly be associated with these filthy conditions – all indicative of the limited reach of the bureaucratic mind about matters of community and development. The town was, in consequence, caught up in an inter-departmental muddle over vital issues around public health, town planning, sanitary conditions and preventable diseases such as typhoid fever and enteric fever – besides politics and race. The legitimate public needs of a community were subjected to the interests of the diamond mining industry which operated against a background of unreasonable fears and distrust about diamond theft.

### **Paupers of the Diamond Country**

It is a well-known fact that during the diamond rush to Namaqualand the poor farmers disposed of options on their farms for a mere song, and that speculators crisscrossed the district to obtain them. The irony of it all was that some of these farmers now pick-and-shovel diggers had once leased or owned the farms from which diamonds were being recovered:

Here are wastes of sand guarded by barbed wire, police patrols and searchlights; millions of pounds' worth of stones are being dug out of the ground by paupers -- and some of the paupers once owned the very ground from which others now gain wealth; ... <sup>405</sup>

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<sup>401</sup> MNW 978 Ref. mm 17/18. Report on Typhoid Fever Epidemic, Port Nolloth 1931 and 1932.

<sup>402</sup> *Idem*, 1931-2.

<sup>403</sup> MNW 978 Ref. mm 17/18. Secretary for Public Health, Pretoria to the Secretary for Mines & Industries, Pretoria, 30 July 1932.

<sup>404</sup> Ostensibly in the name of security, a few families of colour with small stock were in 1949 forced to move from Crown Land in the “Five Mile” area. The occupants served with eviction notices dated 17 May 1949 included: Caroline Henry, Jossop Philips, Petrus Rooi, Kous Cloete, J. de la Harpe and K. Wiehahn. These “Squatters” who religiously paid grazing fees per unit of stock, disposed of their handful of sheep and goats at give-away prices when the land was leased to a White grazer, one Dirk Mostert, by the Department of Lands. (1/SBK, Vol. 9/9).

<sup>405</sup> Carel Birkby, *Thirstland Treks*, London, 1936, 17.

It is said that South Africans generally, and Afrikaners in particular, have always had a desire to own a plot of land, however stony and unattractive, on which they will be buried when their lives have run its course. A Namaqualander, for that reason, loses social status if he sells an 'erfplaas', a farm which is his by inheritance, and "treks away so that there is no one to look after the little fenced cemetery with its weather-battered tombstones".<sup>406</sup> All those born and bred Namaqualanders regarded the land in the district as a sacred heritage not to be disposed of under any circumstances to strangers and outsiders. In the end though, this "sacred" land would fall into the hands of foreigners through the dictates of economic forces.

The discovery of diamonds in 1925 was indeed to change the old economic basis of land tenure despite the tradition and sentiment attached to it. Over time, these disruptive economic forces became evident across the district.<sup>407</sup> All along the west coast of Namaqualand, thousands of morgen of old family farms were bought up by mining companies and syndicates, resulting in large-scale alienation of land. In this way, some 246 White-occupied "farms" (rather occupied portions of farms of about 2 000 morgen each) fell into the hands of companies and syndicates.<sup>408</sup> After the sale of the farms, the instantly generated prosperity could not last and was soon lost; and shortly afterwards, the process of impoverishment set in.

The possession of motorcars, radios and the latest consumer goods was a matter of prestige and status and simply had to be acquired with the small fortune that came their way. What struck the members of the Carnegie Commission of Inquiry into Poverty as very strange was the fact that next to almost every one of those shanties a shiny big motorcar was housed in a ramshackle structure made of bits of corrugated iron and cardboard. Namaqualand had certainly fallen into the grip of the motor era when money was to be made from the sale of farms and illegal dealing in diamonds. By 1932, some of these vehicles were still knocking along the gravel tracks, while others could be seen jacked up and useless alongside mat houses and structures made of old petrol cans. Their owners had no money for mealie-meal let alone for petrol, although there was a time when Namaqualanders came by car to join the relief work camps of roadmenders. Now few were in a position or brave enough to do this.<sup>409</sup>

The large number of farmers who had previously lived off the land – some 509 849 morgen -- were after the disposal of their land, one by one forced to move out to rent or lease a piece to start afresh. Those prudent enough took this route but most of them who had the cash in hand hastily left whatever small farming operation they had still going and bought themselves ...

A tent, a gramophone and motor-car to lead a carefree life trekking around the district. When the cash had dried up, many of them even tried their hand at illegal diamond dealing, encouraged by the fact that

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<sup>406</sup> Willem Steenkamp, *Land of the Thirst King* (Cape Town: Howard Timmins, 1975), 66-67.

<sup>407</sup> P. W. Kotzé, *Namakwaland: 'n Sosiologiese Studie van 'n Geïsoleerde Gemeenskap* (Kaapstad: Nasionale Pers, 1943), 109.

<sup>408</sup> Idem, 122.

<sup>409</sup> Carel Birkby, *Thirstland Treks*, 1936, 126.

detectives viewed the hordes of fortune-seekers from elsewhere in the Union as prime suspects rather than doubting the *bona fides* of the old inhabitants of the district.<sup>410</sup>

Dr W. P. Steenkamp<sup>411</sup> was always one to unfailingly and persuasively present in the House of Assembly the case of his constituents. Also known as ‘the lion of Namaqualand’, fiery Steenkamp on 30 July 1929 weighed in with the following impassioned contribution to the debate. He appealed to and challenged the Government to come without further delay to the aid of Namaqualanders and open the diamond fields for prospecting and mining, and say ...

You are poor people of our country, and at least you have the right to live like white people, because this wealth was discovered in your area. As one of them was quoted as saying, ‘I have been walking all my life next to a donkey cart, but if I find a small stone I too can ride in a Ford car and stink of lavender’.

Referring to Alexander Bay and the state policy of preference for White labourers from Namaqualand, Steenkamp wanted to know why 800 people could not be employed on the State diggings.<sup>412</sup> Warming to the topic, he then touched on a sore point: would the Government not give its people a chance to share in the wealth which nature had put into their country in the form of diamonds? The group of workers employed by the Government in the State diggings earned 7s 6d a day cash, but when a man entered this mining camp, his condition was that of a man in goal:

When a man is in gaol, even when accused of murder, then he at least has the right once a month to a visit from his wife, children, and relations, but when a man was employed in the State diggings, he could never see one of his dear ones or receive them. And that - for 7s 6d a day - with the constant threat of being dismissed or being searched, as has happened to innocent people.<sup>413</sup>

It was in the 1920s, as Afrikaners were urbanizing at an increasing rate, that the *plaasroman* (farm novel) emerged as a genre of romantic and anti-modernist writing idealising the *platteland* (countryside) and shunning the city. This was tinged with a general nostalgia for an idyllic and unstratified rural past. Jochem van Bruggen stands out as an exemplar of this genre in which the Jewish/English trader was believed to possess all the cunning and business acumen, scheming and devoid of morals.

When news of the Kimberley diamond discovery broke in 1869, Jews joined the thousands of fortune seekers to start a new life at the diggings. And when exceptional economic opportunities presented themselves on the diamond fields in the early 1870s, Jewish merchant families were able to take advantage of close commercial ties across continents that were not as readily available to others. In the public imagination, however, their prominence in the industry was intimately tied to stereotypes about Jewish business acumen, untrustworthiness,

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<sup>410</sup> P.W. Kotzé, *Namakwaland: 'n Sosiologiese Studie*, 1943, 122.

<sup>411</sup> Dr Willem Petrus Steenkamp was M.P. for Namaqualand (1929 -1938), Calvinia (1938 -1943), and Senator (Cape Province) (1946 - 1948).

<sup>412</sup> H.A. Debates, vol. 13, 30 July 1929, 224-225.

<sup>413</sup> *Idem*, 223.

and greed, as well as conspiracy theories fuelled by late nineteenth-century anxieties over immigration and race.<sup>414</sup>

The over-representation of Jews in the growing diamond industry gave rise to anti-Semitic stereotypes. In South Africa, they were often blamed for much of the pervasive illicit diamond buying of stones stolen from the diggings by miners. IDB was indeed deeply tied into anti-Jewish tropes as it tapped into prevailing stereotypes about Jews. The media printed political cartoons that mocked Jewish affluence and respectability. One such newspaper caricature was ‘Max Hoggenheimer’, a musical comedy character, gross and rapacious. A staple of Victorian fiction, popular detective stories dramatized Illegal Diamond Buying (IDB), depicting Yiddish-speaking Jews as stock villains infiltrating high society undetected. Diamonds, in the long run, may have benefitted and empowered many Jews, but their prominence in the industry made their economic success suspect in the eyes of the public. This is not to say that the industry ever consisted exclusively of Jews, or that they were always successful in their endeavours, commented Saskia Coenen Snyder.<sup>415</sup>

In contrast, the ponderous poor white Boer was no match for the quick-witted urbanites. These themes blossomed in the 1930s as Afrikaners streamed to the cities and towns.<sup>416</sup> The case of “Die Onterfdes”<sup>417</sup> (the disinherited, or disowned poor) formed a major theme in Afrikaner literature and politics of the Great Depression years. One such victim of circumstances was Theuns “Blootvoet” Coetzee, a labourer-digger in the party of Messrs Gordon, Caplan and Loubser, who had himself found the first handful of diamonds at Alexander Bay during November 1926.<sup>418</sup> Years afterwards, in 1950, the adventurer and writer Sangiro<sup>419</sup> came across this middle-aged ‘Ampie’<sup>420</sup> and his pack-donkey on the heavy sandy tract near Grootderm farm on the Orange River. Driving a few goats and sheep, Coetzee was on his way to enquire about hiring some grazing in the Richtersveld, a reserve for “Hottentots and Bastards”. The writer found it very difficult to grasp the fact that Theuns “Blootvoet” (Barefoot) was one of the early discoverers of diamonds who had opened a fabulous treasure chest. Although Theuns (Theunis) and his brother Jan were at the time employed by Dr Merensky and the discovery thus rightly belonged to the latter’s syndicate, there were numerous opportunities “to help oneself” to a few stones, especially since the doctor was widely known to have had a sympathetic heart. But Theuns was one of the “stupid” workers who had no idea of how to help himself. Along with the rest of Namaqualand, he had looked forward to the proclamation of the coastal region as a public alluvial diggings. Instead, the government fenced off the area so that one would be risking

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<sup>414</sup> Saskia Coenen Snyder, ‘Introduction to Special Cluster: Jews and the Diamond Trade’ (*Shofar*, Vol. 38, No. 3, Winter 2020) (Downloaded 30 October 2024); Saskia Coenen Snyder, ‘A Brilliant Commodity: Diamonds and Jews in a Modern Setting’ (*The Journal of Gemmology*, Vol. 38 Issue 5, March 2023) (Book review).

<sup>415</sup> Idem.

<sup>416</sup> Milton Shlain, “The foundations of antisemitism in South Africa: Images of the Jew c 1870 - 1930”, PhD (History), University of Cape Town, 1990, 309-310.

<sup>417</sup> Sangiro (pseud. of A. A. Pienaar), “Die Onterfdes”, *Die Brandwag*, 30 May 1941.

<sup>418</sup> Cf Chapter 2, “The Discovery of the Namaqualand Diamond Field”.

<sup>419</sup> Sangiro (pseudonym of A. A. Pienaar), *En die Oranje vloei verby* (Johannesburg: Afrikaanse Pers Boekhandel, 1951), 70.

<sup>420</sup> ‘Ampie – Die Natuurkind’ (1942), title of a Jochem van Bruggen farm novel.

one's life looking for a stray sheep in the forbidden territory. The Coetzee brothers would, nonetheless, proceed and lodge a claim against Merensky for £6 000. The case, as we have seen, came up in the Supreme Court early in 1931, but the Coetzees withdrew their claim, and the matter was settled out of court.<sup>421</sup>

One group of poor 'disinherited' white folk who "helped themselves" to Crown land, was the roadworkers of Vioolsdrift. In the process, they did quite well for themselves although the land was under claim by the neighbouring reserve community of Steinkopf. This tract of land along the Orange River is a level patch hemmed in by a tumble of mountains where the river flows on its last stage towards the sea. In 1932, the settlement became the home of land-hungry poor whites. Weighed down by the hopelessness of life on State relief works which provided only one week's labour in each fortnight, at a pittance of only 3s 6d a day, one determined gang of roadmenders and their families seized sections of Crown Land at Vioolsdrift. After a protracted battle for recognition, the Government in the end relented and behaved generously. The ex-roadworkers were aided in every way: state engineers and irrigation experts were dispatched to assist them, and they received financial support to build up their communal agricultural settlement.<sup>422</sup>

### **The Great Depression: Impact on Namaqualand**

By 1932, the 'cradle of mineral development' in southern Africa was feeling the effects of the economic and financial depression. Namaqualand, after the brief diamond boom years of 1927 to 1930, now lapsed into economic sluggishness and stark conditions of impoverishment. For the rest, the dusty mining camps at Alexander Bay and Kleinzee would in time become small mining towns behind barbed wire fencing, cut off from the broader society and isolated after the adventurous early years. During a visit to the region, Dr E. G. Malherbe, a commissioner on the Carnegie Commission of Inquiry into Poverty, quite rightly pointed out the absurdity and irony of the situation on the ground:

While we, of course, realised that the whole of the diamond industry would be ruined if there were not the strictest control over the production of diamonds, we could not help sensing an element of tragic irony in the effects which the artificiality of the whole situation had had upon the original inhabitants. The destitute people of Namaqualand go hungry because no direct benefits are derived from the mineral wealth of diamonds.<sup>423</sup>

Closure of the copper mines meant that the copper district and the surrounding areas, a region steeped in mining history and tradition, had by the 1930's become the isolated community of which P. W. Kotzé<sup>424</sup> wrote. The advent of the diamond mining industry had a moderate effect only on employment in the district. Formerly wealthy peasants of the 19<sup>th</sup> century now saw their herds wasted by drought and the lack of local markets, and after a few

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<sup>421</sup> Law Case T. & J. Coetzee vs H. Merensky (Supreme Court, CP Division) 1931.

<sup>422</sup> Carel Birkby, *Thirstland Treks*, 1936, 246 – 250. 'Desert River Land Hunger & Stolen Land (Cannon Island)'. It is said that millionaire farmers count among their descendants.

<sup>423</sup> E. G. Malherbe, *Never a dull moment* (Cape Town: Timmins Publishers, 1981), 149.

<sup>424</sup> P. W. Kotzé, *Namakwaland: 'n Sosiologiese Studie*, 1943.

years, they were applying for government poor relief and for work in the road gangs where, as noted, the State paid different rates.<sup>425</sup>

At the inception of mining in 1928, the enormous yield for that year from the State Alluvial Diggings alone amounted to a staggering £7 649 748. Since then the output was artificially kept down at times through the partial closing down of the fields.<sup>426</sup> To this must be added the production value of the stones from the stop-start mining activities at Kleinzee Mine. Sir Ernest Oppenheimer, chairman of De Beers Consolidated Mines, in his report put the value of the total Namaqualand diamond production from 1928 up to 1930 at R25 million (1 230 000 carats).<sup>427</sup> But amid all this euphoria in Parliament, the true significance of this windfall had not in reality been spelt out for the people of Namaqualand. As a matter of policy, the proceeds of State diamonds in any financial year were paid into the revenue account of the Consolidated Revenue Fund.<sup>428</sup> The Union Exchequer thus benefitted enormously from the State Alluvial Diggings as well as from Kleinzee Mine, while many disgruntled Namaqualanders, led by Dr W. P. Steenkamp, demanded a share – at the same time introducing a new and hostile tone into the councils of the National Government of the Union of South Africa. Before the enormous contraction of the diamond trade at the height of the Great Depression, spokesmen for the government were still asserting that it was fortunate for the finances of the Union that these discoveries were made, and that the State was able to reap the full benefit from the amazing harvest of the Namaqualand littoral.

It was indefatigable Dr Steenkamp who once again reminded the House that notwithstanding the general dissatisfaction in Namaqualand, the people were by nature “order-loving“. So much so that when in February 1929 “three thousand people” descended on Port Nolloth - in the hope that their grievances would be attended to after the aborted Diggers’ Revolt the previous month - it was the influence of the Namaqualanders which prevented the Transvaalers of Lichtenburg from causing disturbances. The law-abiding Namaqualanders were resigned to rather suffer loss, although every week there was the sad sight of the aeroplanes<sup>429</sup> skimming the shoreline carrying away to Cape Town their treasures worth millions of pounds. The people only wanted to air their grievances, and “three thousand” came together from far distances; but there were “five hundred police with bayonets”, and those people “do not think that bayonets are made for

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<sup>425</sup> J. Sharp, “Rural development schemes and the struggle against impoverishment in the Namaqualand reserves”, University of Cape Town Press: S.A. Labour and Development Research Unit (SALDRU), 1984. Carnegie Conference paper number 69, Second Carnegie Inquiry into poverty and development in Southern Africa, UCT, April 1984.

<sup>426</sup> Paul H. Emden, *RANDLORDS* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1935), 278.

<sup>427</sup> Henri Eybers, *Hans Merensky, Towenaar-geoloog* (Tafelberg: Kaapstad & Johannesburg, 1971), 52-53.

<sup>428</sup> U.G. No. 33 of 1929, Pretoria. Reports of the Secretary for Mines, etc.

<sup>429</sup> On 19<sup>th</sup> June 1928, the first parcel of diamonds was dispatched from a makeshift airstrip on the Port Nolloth Salt Pan to Maitland Aerodrome in Ysterplaat, Cape Town. Since that date, production was steadily continued and the output forwarded regularly by air from Kortdoorn aerodrome at Alexander Bay. (Reports of the Secretary for Mines & Industries. U. G. No. 33 of 1929, Pretoria).

roasting meat, but for sticking into people's hearts". Despite that, the Namaqualanders did not move a finger to cause disorder or bloodshed during the protracted Diggers' Rebellion.<sup>430</sup>

The Great Depression also ushered in a spell of petitions, which in themselves were a true reflection of the real needs and concerns of the inhabitants of the region. As a general observation, petitions emanating from White Namaqualand were highly informative but designed to give the impression that they came from the broader citizenry. In short, a public relations exercise based on selective inclusivity, and with certain objectives in mind. In contrast, those from people of colour were unpretentious pleas from disheartened inhabitants expressing their deep-felt anxieties and distress.

There was the petition titled "The Cries of the Coloured Women of Namaqualand" (1931)<sup>431</sup> about alleviation of distress, food and provision of relief works, unfair rates of pay, harsh treatment, and the unsympathetic attitude of the magistrate - unheard of hardships during the reign of "our Queen Victoria, mother of both white and black". The following is a record of very raw emotions about harsh treatment meted out to non-whites ...

"The Cries of the Coloured Women of Namaqualand". To the Governor-General of South Africa. Your Royal Highness:

"We the abovementioned implore the Government to open works for our husbands, so that they can work and support their families, as it is not in our nature to beg for our living. This is also something which we have never done before, as the mines were then working. But now Your Royal Highness we are forced to go to the Resident Magistrate of Springbok to beg for food to keep our children and ourselves alive, and if we do get a little meal (5 lbs.) for a family of eight or seven which are to last 8 days".

"This Your Royal Highness we do not obtain in a civilised manner, but with dirty curses and unseemly words. The cruelty of the magistrate's clerks was witnessed by many white people. We were also told that they are not responsible to give us food, as we (Coloured) have no government, and there is none to be responsible for the Coloured race of Namaqualand. The remark was also made that poison would be put in the meal to kill the lot of us".

"So my Royal Highness we do not wish to beg for food, but we want work for husbands in order to make a living. Relieve (sic) work was also opened for 2/6 per day. [Seventy-five] 75 men to work for 14 days and then to withdraw for a month or six weeks. How can a man and his family live? Now he has to hunt for work and cannot find any, and he has no right to ask for work from the magistrate".

"Our Minister of Namaqualand Dr Steenkamp mentioned in his speech last year that he had asked Parliament to bring (the) railway from Bitterfontein to Orange River so that people might get work as more will be benefitted by our Railways, but this question of Dr Steenkamp has not succeeded".

"We therefore ask your Royal Highness to put us in the right way please and tell us to whom we must cry for help. In the times of our Queen Victoria mother of both white and black such hardships were never known and experienced. I am beware (sic) that there were also bad times during Her Majesty's reign, but in spite of that something was always done, and such cruelties were not heard or seen".

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<sup>430</sup> H.A. Debates, Vol. 13, 224, 30 July 1929.

<sup>431</sup> TES 7846 File No. 86/134. "The Cries of the Coloured Women of Namaqualand". To the Governor-General of South Africa (1931).

“Since this flag was pulled up it was only for a certain people (white). The young unmarried white man gets 4/-. Oh what a distinction Your Royal Highness. Our married Coloured men 2/6 per day and unmarried white sons 4/-. We are not allowed to make any complaints to the Authorities, if we do complain, we are told that we want to live as a Master and Mrs. It is not so Your Royal Highness. We only want to be treated like human beings and also have a fair deal in everything as there is only one God who has created both black and white. We were also told Your Royal Highness that if we think that the Government will help us, we therefore [are in error], as we all will be put in prison, and the treatment will be more severe than (we) are now treated. This remark was made by our Magistrate, as we came to ask for food”.

“If we give our children to the farmers as farm labourers, they are then treated Your Royal Highness as slaves and beat them more severe than they would their dogs”.

“We therefore beg Your Royal Highness to read or have it read in public “The grievances of the Coloured women of Namaqualand”.

Replying to the “Petition from the Coloured Women of Namaqualand”, the office of the magistrate in Springbok on 29 April 1932 made the following observations about conditions that led to a mob of “ungrateful, dissatisfied, abusive women” demanding food rations, or threatening to raid the stores.<sup>432</sup> On the closure of the copper mines the previous year, 1 500 Coloured men lost their jobs in the mines of O’okiep, Nababeep, and Concordia. This was brought to the notice of the various authorities who instituted Relief Works on roads and authorised the issue of supplies of food to the women and children. The women of O’okiep soon showed “an attitude of ingratitude”, and they became so abusive to the ladies who undertook to issue the rations, that at last they refused to have anything at all to do with them. A mob of women and unemployed men numbering about three or four hundred, thereupon presented themselves at the magistrate’s office and demanded food. This was supplied to them, but on subsequent visits they began to show dissatisfaction with the food provided.

On one occasion, they were given mealie meal in place of boer meal. Threats were made by the female Ringleaders that unless they were supplied with proper pauper rations consisting of boer meal, fat, sugar, and meat, they would raid the stores and take what they wanted. They added that they did not care whether they were sent to Gaol as they knew prisoners were at least “well fed”. On things starting to turn ugly, the magistrate addressed the Coloured women and let them understand that he must hear no more of this kind of talk. If they carried out their threat or persisted in inciting others, he would have them arrested and sent to prison on a spare diet which he was careful to explain, consisted of rice water. After this warning, there was no more talk of raiding the stores.

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<sup>432</sup> GG 229 Ref. 35/51/31, Office of the Magistrate (Springbok), 29 April 1932.



*Figure 37 Waiting for poor relief rations at the Magistrate's Offices, Springbok, during the Great Depression.*

(Phyllis Jowell & Adrienne Folb, *Into Kokerboom Country*, 2005)

The very next year the “Address from Members of the Wesleyan Coloured Mission at Lilyfontein” (1932)<sup>433</sup> was sent off. The cautious mission dwellers assured the authorities that they did not intend to “indulge in politics” – the usual guarded, hesitant approach -- but nonetheless highlighted the social and racial disparities and inequalities as regards state (old age) pensions, educational facilities, and schools.

The next “Petition of the Undersigned Inhabitants of Namaqualand” (1933), purporting to come from the general populace of the region, described the harsh economic and socio-political conditions prevailing in Namaqualand.

Addressed to the Hon. Speaker of Parliament, this document<sup>434</sup> listed and analysed the reasons for the economic distress in Namaqualand: failed grain harvests, the closure of the copper mines, hunger, and starvation during the ‘diamond era’, and the lack of productive jobs. The Petitioners therefore humbly prayed that a Parliamentary Committee be appointed to enquire into the desperate state of conditions in Namaqualand in order to lead them back to the economic stability of the ‘copper era’.

Less than twenty years before, the Petitioners explained, Namaqualand was a flourishing, self-supporting district whose economic stability - based on its mineral wealth, COPPER - was able to withstand the detrimental effects of failed grain harvests. But when in 1918/19 the local copper mines closed down, and the market for local produce consequently failed, the entire

<sup>433</sup> They asked, namely, for an increase in social pension considering the discriminatory amount paid out to Whites. The second pillar of the semi-social welfare state entailed social assistance programmes. The 1928 Old Age Pensions Act provided means-tested, non-contributory old age pensions for white and coloured people only. Africans were eventually given old age pensions in 1944.

<sup>434</sup> 1/SBK 9/5 Namaqualand. “The Petition of the undersigned inhabitants of Namaqualand” to The Honourable The Speaker of the House of Assembly, Parliament of the Union of South Africa, Cape Town, 31 January 1933.

economic fabric of the district was severely impacted. Without a railway to reach outside markets, the prosperity of fifty years' standing was suddenly turned into poverty and starvation.

Since the 'Diamond Era', the Whites and Coloured (sic) of the whole district were reduced to pauperism. To alleviate the situation, the Union Government had to spend the following amounts during five years alone: £10, 800 (pauper rations); £69, 500 (Labour Department road works); £1, 500 (wheat from the Land Bank); £35, 000 (Government Grants to the Divisional Council) – a total of £116, 800. Not one penny of this total sum was devoted to useful, permanently productive work. The roads made by the relief work gangs were quaintly described as “only temporary soil agitations”, and this “great waste of public funds” only resulted in “the wholesale degradation “ of the community. In less than a score of years, some were reduced from a “prosperous state” to a standard of living of “too little to live (on) and too much to die (from)”.

These conditions prevailed while their sons who had passed the Sixth Standard and Matric, had no other prospects than “a pick or shovel with which to prove their educational worth in a wayside gravel pit in diamondiferous Namaqualand”. It was therefore proposed that negotiations be entered into with local COPPER INTERESTS to rekindle the furnaces, as the production of copper alone could provide “a lasting remedy and lead destitute Namaqualand back to its former economic stability and independence”. This would “give its pauper sons a fair chance to find honest employment and to become self-supporting and useful members of our commonwealth”.

Paragraph 7 of this Petition stated that “unless worthier and more useful ways of relief are at once resorted to ... the whole population of Namaqualand will sink to such a low level as to make redemption impossible and turn our hope for a WHITE South Africa into a delusion in this land of human ebony”. On closer reflection, paragraph 7 said just this: that the exercise was designed to serve the interests of the “undersigned petitioners” (ivory) to the exclusion of the not so white fellow-inhabitants (ebony). This revealing objective, the “hope for a White South Africa”, would remain a recurrent theme throughout the depression years and beyond, supported by diamond revenues from Namaqualand.<sup>435</sup>

### **The Pact Government and socio-economic policies**

The phenomenon of poor whites, unskilled and unable to compete even with black farmers disadvantaged by limited access to capital and markets, brought awful clarity about the South African situation. Poor Whites comprised a substantial minority of the white population and lived in poverty in the countryside or migrated to the towns in a desperate search for work. For the Pact Government, this stark reality meant a policy of racial segregation as well as advancing white people through 'civilised labour policies', land settlement policies in the countryside, and welfare reform. In August 1924, Dr Stals, a National Party MP, explained - in a compelling political narrative - this perceived existential threat.<sup>436</sup> The 'poor white' problem, he said ...

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<sup>435</sup> 1/SBK 9/5 Namaqualand. “The Petition of the undersigned inhabitants of Namaqualand” to The Honourable The Speaker of the House of Assembly, Parliament of the Union of South Africa, Cape Town, 31 January 1933.

<sup>436</sup> “When we turn to the sources of anxiety which may affect the race attitudes of members of the white community in South Africa towards the native, the most obvious appears to be the great numerical preponderance of black over white” (I. D. Mac Crone, *Race Attitudes in South Africa. Historical, Experimental and Psychological Studies*, London: Oxford University Press, 1937), 308-309.

“... is a question which not only concerns the poor; it affects the whole white civilisation of this country. It confronts us with the question whether we, the descendants of the staunch old pioneers, will maintain their civilisation and hand it over to our children ... It may be asked whether there is poverty only in South Africa and whether other countries do not suffer from the same thing. There are poor people everywhere, but the circumstances in South Africa are unique ... In this country, there is a small number of whites against the natives, a few civilized people against uncivilized hordes, and for that reason it is so important that not a single white person should be allowed to go under ... There is no greater problem than this because the existence of the European civilisation in this country hinges on it”.<sup>437</sup>

The extreme concerns about poverty go back to the time of the Great Depression when the Dutch Reformed Church, academics and the Government were troubled by the large number of Whites -- uprooted from the land during the Anglo-Boer War, facing drought, pestilence, population growth, and the capitalisation and mechanization of agriculture -- were pouring into the cities and towns, ill-equipped for modern industrial society.<sup>438</sup> In the context of these challenges, a group of people from the church and nationalist academics set up, with support from the Carnegie Corporation in New York, the Carnegie Commission of Inquiry into the Poor White Problem in South Africa. The Commission, which began work in 1929, produced an extensive five-volume report in 1932.<sup>439</sup>

The Report of the Carnegie Commission saw poor whites – mainly confined to the Afrikaans-speaking section -- as both a ‘social problem’ and a problem of ‘moral failure’, and its recommended solution was a reversion to ‘constructive charity’ and self-help led by the Church, not a modernising welfare state.<sup>440</sup> The ‘finding’ that there had been at least 300 000 ‘poor whites’ in 1930 became a symbol of enduring Afrikaner oppression, used in nationalist mobilisation. In the Sociological Report,<sup>441</sup> the Reverend J. R. Albertyn and his co-authors referred approvingly to the work-houses established after 1834 in Britain, and observed that in South Africa, as elsewhere, the state did far too much for the poor. They at length praised the Dutch Reformed Church’s farm settlement at Kakamas in the northern Cape. The experience and principles gained at Kakamas should be fruitfully introduced in state agricultural settlements: strict initial selection of the poor, and the degree of material assistance should

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<sup>437</sup> N. Nattrass & J. Seekings, “The Economy and Poverty in the Twentieth Century in South Africa”, July 2010, 19-20.

<sup>438</sup> Francis Wilson and Mamphela Ramphela, *Uprooting Poverty: The South African challenge. Report for the Second Carnegie Inquiry into Poverty and Development in Southern Africa* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1989).

<sup>439</sup> Carnegie Commission of Inquiry, Part I: Economic Report; Part II: Psychological Report; Part III: Educational Report; Part IV: Health Report; Part V: Sociological Report (Stellenbosch: Pro Ecclesia Drukkery, 1932). During the mid-1980s, The Second Carnegie Inquiry into Poverty and Development in Southern Africa came to serve as a sort of tribunal at which scholars, community organisers and ordinary people could give testimony about the ravages of apartheid. This Inquiry’s relative immunity during the declared state of national emergency meant that it had been a highly cherished forum for open exchange, one that monitored the human cost of the system over decades.

<sup>440</sup> Jeremy Seekings, ‘The Carnegie Commission and the Backlash against Welfare State-Building in South Africa, 1931-1937’, September 2008, 536.

<sup>441</sup> Report of the Carnegie Commission, *Sociological Report: The Poor White and Society*, Part V (Stellenbosch: Pro Ecclesia Drukkery, 1932).

from the very beginning imbue the poor white with the conviction that the onus of improving his position rested on his own shoulders.<sup>442</sup>

Any doubt about the direction a nationalist government would take was dispelled in the general elections of 1948. The National Party's narrow election victory ensured a return to the policies of the Pact Government, and a rejection of the more inclusive vision given some consideration during the Second World War. The Botha Commission (1951) argued not only that inequality was necessary for the survival of 'European civilisation in Southern Africa', but also that this was in the interests of the 'Native'. In 1948, the National Party came to power on a programme to consolidate racial class interests and segregation. Apartheid policies were in part explained in terms of the rights of the minority and the explicit rejection of rights to equality and political participation for the majority. The economy would be built on the basis of Apartheid and the new National Party government introduced a swathe of racially discriminatory legislation and policies to underpin the race-based class/caste system.<sup>443</sup>

As was the case in the rest of South Africa, features of the apartheid landscape of Namaqualand had been constructed well before the advent of 'grand apartheid' in 1948. In the 1940s, racial segregation became increasingly important. Apart from these obstructions, the technically disenfranchised non-white workers on the diamond mines at Alexander Bay and Kleinsee had, along with others elsewhere, to contend with various pieces of industrial legislation which created racial barriers to entry to many skilled trades. This resulted in a racially rigid structure of the labour force. Employers could fall back on racial discrimination as a protective device: there were the Apprenticeship Act No. 26/1922;<sup>444</sup> the Industrial Conciliation Act No 11/1924 to protect White labour; the Basic Conditions of Employment Act, the Wage Act No 27/1925 which forced employers to give preference to hiring White workers, as well as the Mines and Works Amendment Act (1926) which reinforced the colour bar in the mining industry. These legislative constraints were very much in operation in the workplace, in addition to all the other development impediments existing in the arid, resource poor and isolated area of Namaqualand.

In 1997, the constant refrain from the inhabitants of Namaqualand during the Great Depression that their district should be put in order with at least a portion of the wealth generated by diamond mining, would form part of the Richtersveld people's communal

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<sup>442</sup> The Carnegie Commission of Inquiry, Part I: Economic Report (J. F. W. Grosskopf) Joint Findings and Recommendations (Stellenbosch: Pro Ecclesia Drukkery, 1932), xxxvii.

<sup>443</sup> N. Nattrass & J. Seekings "The Economy and Poverty in the Twentieth Century in South Africa", July 2010, 32.

<sup>444</sup> One barrier to non-white advancement – indirect but no less effective -- was the Apprenticeship Act of 1922. It set a minimum educational qualification of Standard Six for apprenticeship or attendance of industrial classes, which requirement most Africans would be unable to attain. (Charles H. Feinstein, *An Economic History of South Africa: conquest, discrimination, and development*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 77. In the Cape, most schools for coloured people did not go beyond that level, and many not even so far. The effect of the Act was to bar coloured people from the skilled trades which they had traditionally occupied. This was reinforced by employers' tacit acceptance that only white youths were to be apprenticed and trained. (F. Wilson and M. Ramphela, *Uprooting Poverty. The South African Challenge. Report for the Second Carnegie Inquiry into Poverty and Development in Southern Africa*, Cape Town & Johannesburg: David Philip, 1989), 196.

campaign for the restitution of their ancestral land and mineral rights lost after the annexation of the territory in December 1847.

## Chapter 6 THE RICHTERSVELD COMMUNITY LAND CLAIM

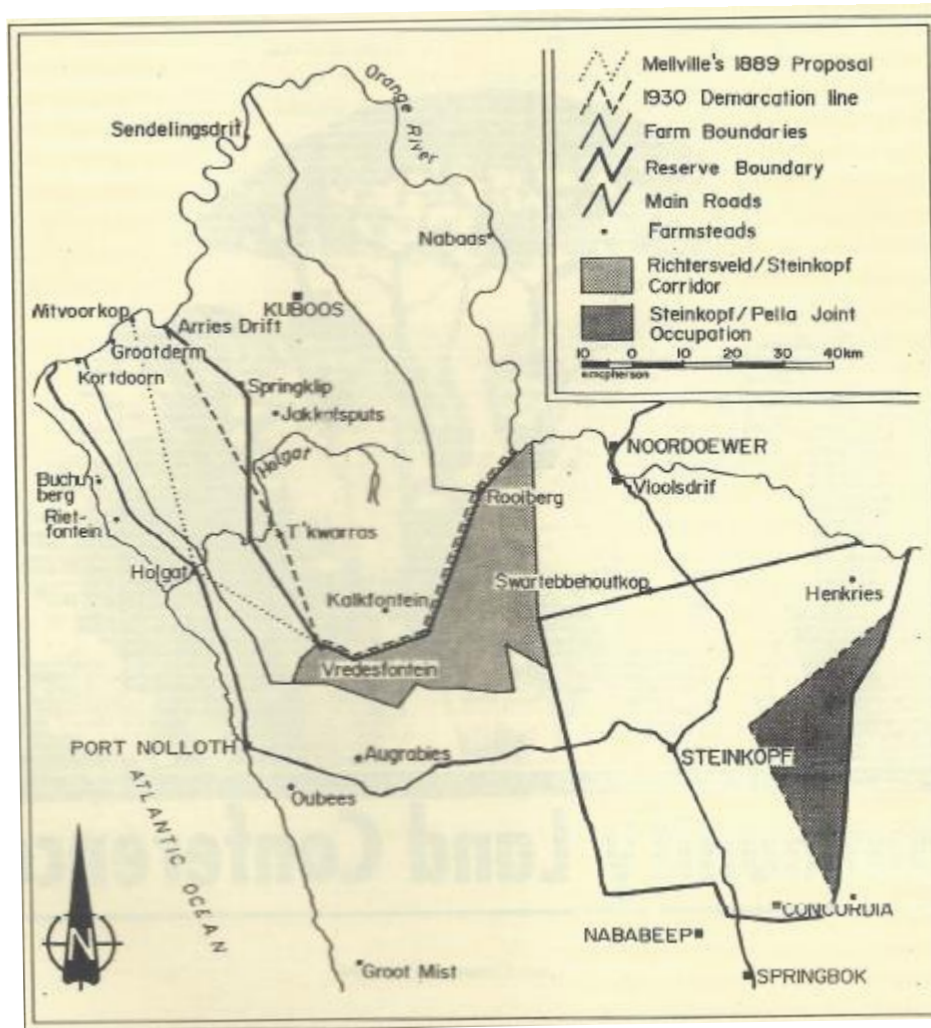


Figure 38 Richtersveld Coloured Reserve (Surplus People Project, *Land Claims in Namaqualand*, 1995)

### Richtersveld: the land and its people

When the British Crown after brief skirmishes with the Dutch colonial forces acquired sovereignty over the Cape in 1806, the territory was annexed under the Articles of Capitulation (10 & 18 January 1806). Article 6 provided that all bona fide private property of the burghers and other inhabitants shall remain free and untouched, while Article 8 provided that burghers and inhabitants shall preserve all their rights and privileges. It is thus clear from the Articles of Capitulation that the British Crown after conquest and cession of the Cape, recognised and respected indigenous land rights. Also, when Ordinance 50 was issued in 1828, this regulation required that indigenous property and land rights of Hottentots and Free Persons of Colour be respected, and the acquisition and possession thereof be protected. Ordinance 50 moreover declared that Hottentots and Free Persons of Colour residing within the Colony were entitled to every right, privilege and benefit of the Law.

After the annexation of Little Namaqualand (which included the territory of the Richtersveld) in 1847, the community – “living in the margin of history on the edge of the country” - was largely ignored by successive governments although these governments always recognised that the community had some kind of exclusive entitlement to the land. The Richtersveld was, however,

of no particular interest until the discovery of diamonds when the State resumed about half of their land area and established the State Alluvial Diggings in 1928. Seven decades later, in 1998, the lodgement of a community claim for restitution of their rights in land and minerals would severely test the validity of their claim for historical indigenous land rights acquired before 1847 and guaranteed under the Articles of Capitulation in 1806.

The communal reserve of Richtersveld<sup>445</sup> is located in Namaqualand, the north-western corner of the old Cape Colony. In the north it is bordered by the Orange River on its last 160 km sickle-shaped course to the sea.<sup>446</sup> A place of rugged mountains in the east and sandy coastal plains to the west, the whole area historically covered more than 700 000 morgen. Lying just within the limits of both winter and summer rains, it is believed that since the coming of the white man in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century it received neither, a situation the natives – Namas, San, and Basters - attributed to the antagonistic powers put into play by the newcomers.<sup>447</sup> Over centuries, the occupants of the land came to regard it as their own and until deep into the 1920s, the Richtersveld was still one of the most remote places in the Union. But when diamonds were discovered on the Namaqualand littoral near Port Nolloth in 1925, this isolated community would lose its grip on the territory.

In the 1940s, sociologist P. W. Kotze described the Richtersveld Reserve dweller as a type of non-white who could be classified as pygmies - seldom taller than 5 ft 4 inches - subsisting solely on edible wild plants (*veldkos*) and game. Money was an unknown article, and the natives preferred to be paid with a handful of sugar or a few dates. Nonetheless, in December 1997, these people portrayed as “shy and remote, paying no taxes, seldom coming into contact with the Government”, at last found their (true) voice. The crowd of itinerant “Hottentots” we found squatting (see chapter 4) at the gates of the State Alluvial Diggings in 1928, once again materialised – this time in the form of claimants for restitution of land and mineral rights. Emboldened and heartened by the advent of the first democratic government, they fired the first shot in 1997 in what would turn out to be a protracted legal battle for restitution of their historical rights in a narrow coastal tract of diamond-rich land. But where did this all start and what is the nature and content of their land claim?

### **Early attempts at reclaiming the land**

Ever since the colonial annexation in 1847 of Little Namaqualand<sup>448</sup> (which included the Richtersveld), attempts in one form or another have been made at reclaiming the historically occupied land area of the Richtersveld. In this context, it should be mentioned that in 1917 one

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<sup>445</sup> A communal reserve of harsh semi-desert conditions, it is named after the Rev. W. Richter, an inspector of the Rhenish Mission seminary at Barmen, Germany. (E Strassberger, *The Rhenish Mission Society in South Africa: 1830 – 1950* (Cape Town: Struik, 1969).

<sup>446</sup> The Orange River, the native name of which is the Gariep, is the most important natural feature on the map of South Africa. The only source of permanent water in Namaqualand, it rises on the borders of Lesotho and Kwazulu-Natal, traversing nearly the whole continent from east to west.

<sup>447</sup> Amusing aside by Agnes W. Tucker, “Richterveld (sic), the land and its people”; public lecture delivered at Johannesburg on 31 March 1913, 5. (S. A. National Public Library).

<sup>448</sup> In the land of the Namas (or Namaquas), a distinction was made between the two culturally homogenous areas of Great Namaqualand north of the Gariep (Orange) River in what was South-West Africa, and Little Namaqualand to the south of the river, forming part of the Cape Province.

Ryk Jasper Cloete, a Baster member of the Richtersveld people, instructed attorney Jack Frank of Springbok to take legal action to obtain a declaration of rights based on prescription.<sup>449</sup> An action was indeed instituted against the Government in the Supreme Court at Cape Town, claiming the whole of the 700 000 morgen of Richtersveld territory.<sup>450</sup> But soon afterwards, Cloete lost keenness for the case, and he finally withdrew his private action and paid costs.<sup>451</sup>

One other little-known subsequent attempt at lodging a claim – in this instance for traditional rights to the coastal strip containing the State Alluvial Diggings -- was made by the Bretz Tribe in 1937. In a handwritten letter, J. J. Domingo (the Acting Captain of the Bretz Tribe) wrote from Gladkop, P. O. Steinkopf, Namaqualand to the Native Affairs Department on 25 February 1937.<sup>452</sup> The writer, in poignant terms, revived the claim to historical ownership:

Herewith we coming to you as a tribe of the Richtersveld with our difficulties and our trouble in about our land in question ... Our Great Grant Mother was a female captain who ruled before Paul Linx the whole territory between Bathany in S.W. (SWA) [and] Rabaes or Rechtersveld [at the] Orange River mouth and Portnolloth. (T)his Great Grant Mother was called Die Breede or Vette corpulent [one] out of this the people made Bretz or Britz. She also had a sister who assisted her in ruling the Hottentots tribe.<sup>453</sup> (N)ow what we attend to is to bring this to your attention that we are the owners of Rechtersveld and we reclaim our rights as the owners ... now we beget [beg] and pray to you the Native Affairs Department to assist us in our trouble so as every body knows in the world that out of the Rechtersveld millions of pounds is been duck & out and carry away and we as the tribe belong to the country as our own property we did not received a cent for it and has got no right to our own property and had to go without it and starve. We have sent in a petition to the Prime Minister of the Union of South Africa for which we have not received a reply. The petition was write and sint in on the 21<sup>st</sup> of October 1936.

The untutored language usage notwithstanding, Domingo made out a claim for the Alexander Bay Diamond Field, capturing what lay at the heart of the matter: the loss of historical land and mineral rights. This tentative claim would eventually be vindicated at another time in another forum.

When in the late 1980s plans to privatise the state-owned diamond mine at Alexander Bay became public, the Richtersvelders were alarmed that their ancestral land was in danger of being sold to a private company. Legal opinion obtained by the community submitted that there was definite merit to issuing out summons on behalf of the Richtersveld people for a declaratory order recognising their residual interest in the area then under management of Alexkor Limited. In view of the imminent privatisation of Alexkor, this course of action had to be pursued urgently,

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<sup>449</sup> 1/ SBK 5/6/1 Communal Reserve Matters 1912-14. Magistrate D.C. Giddy, Springbok to The Secretary for Native Affairs, Pretoria, 30 August 1912.

<sup>450</sup> JUS 394 File no. 2/210/25 Secretary for Justice to Secretary for Lands, Pretoria, 11 April 1925.

<sup>451</sup> SK - G4 2/1 Bisset and Hofmeyr, Attorneys for the Richtersveld Community to the Revd. H. Kling, Steinkopf, 14 March, 1918. Re Cloete vs Union Government. Note: The community's historical land claim simply carried more legal weight than Cloete's private action based on prescription.

<sup>452</sup> NTS 9588 File No. 398/400. Typescript of this hand-written letter shortened and slightly adapted for meaning and sense. Spelling and punctuation largely retained.

<sup>453</sup> "That the status of women in Richtersveld is higher than in the other Reserves is borne out by the type of family groupings ....., and by the fact that a female *kaptein* once ruled the community." (W.P. Carstens, *The social structure of a Cape Coloured Reserve*, Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1966), 212.

“as their aboriginal entitlement may well not be enforceable against a private owner”.<sup>454</sup> With the support of two NGOs – the Legal Resources Centre (LRC) and Surplus People Project (SPP) – the community in 1997 sprang into action and lodged a claim for restitution of the narrow tract of diamond-rich land in extent about 85 000 ha (hereafter referred to as the subject land) between Alexander Bay and Port Nolloth. So, by 1997, the community was in the throes of a unique claim on land. Many members of the legal fraternity expected the claim to signal the beginning of a new jurisprudence on land rights in the Southern African region, based on the Aboriginal Title Doctrine. Aboriginal title – or native title as it is also called – is a right in land vesting in a community that occupied the land at the time of colonisation.<sup>455</sup>

South Africa’s land restitution process is rooted in a piece of legislation titled the Restitution of Land Rights Act No. 22 of 1994 (as amended).<sup>456</sup> Under this Act, a claim for restitution of land rights may be lodged on land dispossessed after 19 June 1913 because of past racially discriminatory laws or practices. The Richtersveld community, guided by the LRC, would attempt to show that the legitimacy of their land claim stemmed from the common law concept of aboriginal title, and their traditional connection to the land. Using case law developed in Australia and Canada, they would demonstrate that there are alternative bases for land law in South Africa. The inhabitants also claimed mineral rights on this tract of coastal land owned by Alexkor Limited, the State diamond miner.<sup>457</sup> A two-pronged legal attack to reclaim their lost land rights was therefore launched in both the Cape High Court and the Land Claims Court in 1997 and 1998, respectively. In the years that followed, the legal battle would be slugged out in four arenas - the Cape High Court, the Land Claims Court (LCC), the Supreme Court of Appeal (SCA), and finally in the Constitutional Court of South Africa (CC) in September 2003.

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<sup>454</sup> In re: Aboriginal claim by the inhabitants of the Richtersveld in respect of land under the control of Alexkor. Opinion: Hendrik Kotze, 4 June 1997.

<sup>455</sup> Legal Resources Centre (LRC) *Annual Report 2000-2001* (website accessed on 6 November 2002).

<sup>456</sup> The Land Claims Court of South Africa (‘the LCC’) was established in 1996 under the Restitution of Land Rights Act No. 22 of 1994, one of the first statutes of the new democratic government. “Anyone reading the restitution Act would have had no doubt that the LCC had been established to oversee the reversal of eighty years of state-orchestrated land dispossession” (Theunis Roux, ‘Pro-Poor Court, Anti-Poor Outcomes: Explaining the Performance of the South African Land Claims Court’, Abstract, 511, *SAJHR* 20, 2004).

<sup>457</sup> Presently, in South Africa, rights to mineral wealth are vested in the state as guardian, and not in citizens, communities, or corporations.



*Figure 39 Richtersveld Community Land Claimants and their legal team led by Advocate Wim Trengove SC (5<sup>th</sup> from Left). September 2000, Cape Town. (Own Collection)*

### **The Case for Restitution in the Land Claims Court in Cape Town**

During September and October 2000, the case for restitution of land rights was heard in the Land Claims Court of South Africa at Cape Town<sup>458</sup>, and decided on 22 March 2001 by Gildenhuys A J.<sup>459</sup> The small Richtersveld community was now pitted against the State and its diamond miner, Alexkor Limited. High-powered legal teams

squared up for one of the country's most significant land claim battles. The opening session of the land claims court started in Kuboes in the Richtersveld, and after one week was transferred to Cape Town. The community's legal team was headed by Wim Trengove SC, assisted by Geoff Budlender, the former director-general of the Department of Land Affairs, while advocates Jeremy Gauntlett SC and Roelof Hiemstra SC acted for the government. The judgement in the Land Claims Court would relate to a preliminary question, namely whether the community met the requirements in Section 2 (1) of the Restitution of Land Rights Act; in other words, whether it was a community dispossessed of a right in land after 19 June 1913 as a result of past racially discriminatory laws or practices.

Both defendants - Alexkor Ltd and the government of the Republic of South Africa - opposed the restitution claims, arguing that whatever rights the Richtersveld people had to the land were extinguished by the British colonial authority at the annexation of the territory in 1847 - that is, before the cut-off date for the submission of land claims set at 19 June 1913, and therefore could not claim restitution. The Land Claims Court was, moreover, not competent to inquire into the issue of aboriginal title, the defendants argued.

In their statement of claim, the plaintiffs asserted that the Richtersveld people held title to the subject land from time immemorial – in any case before annexation by the British Crown in 1847 -- and that such title was not at any time prior to 19 June 1913 lawfully extinguished or diminished. They also submitted that this title fell within the definition of 'right in land', as contained in the Restitution of Land Rights Act. In terms of the definition, 'right in land' includes "any right in land whether registered or unregistered and may include the interest of a labour tenant and sharecropper, a customary law interest, the interest of a beneficiary under a trust arrangement, and beneficial occupation for a continuous period of not less than 10 years prior to the dispossession in question; ...".<sup>460</sup>

<sup>458</sup> The Act established two institutions to drive the process: a Commission on Restitution of Land Rights (CRLR) established in 1995 tasked with driving the process, and a Land Claims Court (LCC). The LCC was established in 1996 as a specialist court to approve claims, grant restitution orders and adjudicate disputes. Appeals against its judgements can be made to the Supreme Court of Appeal (SCA), or in specific instances, to the Constitutional Court (CC).

<sup>459</sup> Case No. LCC 151/98.

<sup>460</sup> Section 1 of the Restitution Act, No. 22/1994 (as amended).

The community's right in land was therefore alleged to be (a) ownership; alternatively (b) a right based on aboriginal title allowing them the exclusive beneficial occupation and use of the subject land, or the right to use the subject land for certain specified purposes; alternatively (c) 'a right in land' over the subject land acquired through their beneficial occupation thereof for a period longer than 10 years prior to their eventual dispossession.<sup>461</sup>

The plaintiffs further alleged that they were dispossessed of their rights in land by legislative and executive State action after 19 June 1913 because of racially discriminatory laws and practices; and that they did not receive any compensation at all in respect of the dispossession when the State Alluvial Diggings was proclaimed in 1928; alternatively, that they did not receive just and equitable compensation. They therefore claimed restitution of their rights in land under the said Restitution Act.<sup>462</sup>

In the Land Claims Court, it was common cause among the litigants that the Richtersveld people were and had since time immemorial been a distinct aboriginal community. Their forebears had from the earliest times, and in any event since no later than early in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, enjoyed exclusive beneficial occupation and use of the Richtersveld; used the land for purposes of habitation, grazing, cultivation, and harvesting of natural resources ... and did so to the exclusion of others. Their leader, Captain Paul Links, governed them with the assistance of a Council (*Groot Raad*). The Kuboes mission station became the head station of the Richtersveld, and the missionaries played an influential role in the affairs of their indigenous flock, including pursuing their land claims.<sup>463</sup> This was the position on 23 December 1847 when the British Crown, through annexation, extended the northern boundary of the Cape Province from the Buffels River up to the Orange River. From that date the whole of Little Namaqualand (including the Richtersveld) became subject to British rule.

The customary rules of the Richtersveld people were not limited to their social and political structures or their occupation and use of the land. They also included rules relating to criminal and civil law such as a prohibition of adultery, assault and theft, the recognition of private property rights in respect of all movable property, an obligation to pay compensation for damage to private property, and rules of inheritance.

After the establishment of the first diamond diggings on the subject land in May 1928, the Richtersveld people were progressively denied access to this land for the purposes for which they had utilised the land in the past. In 1957 a fence was erected along the boundary between the Richtersveld Reserve and the Corridor farms bordering on the west, thereby preventing the people from using those portions of the subject land for seasonal grazing and the watering of stock.

At the trial in the Land Claims Court, several experts and lay witnesses testified on behalf of the applicants who numbered about 2 500 souls living in the four settlements of Kuboes, Lekkersing, Eksteenfontein and Sanddrift. Three anthropologists, Mr E. A. Boonzaier, Prof. W. P. Carstens and Ms S. M. Berzborn, as well as an archaeologist, Prof. A. B. Smith, gave evidence concerning the history of the communities, the land they and their forebears occupied, and

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<sup>461</sup> In the Land Claims Court of South Africa, Case No. LCC 151/98, p. 4.

<sup>462</sup> In the Land Claims Court of South Africa, Case No. LCC 151/98, para. 6, p. 4.

<sup>463</sup> An important source of information is a diary kept by Reverend J. F. Hein.

their traditional laws, customs and practices. Little of their expert evidence was disputed and no evidence was led on behalf of the respondents.

The Land Claims Court then set out to deal with, and decide the following legal issues:

- *Does the claimant community have rights in the subject land based on ownership?*

On 5 February 1930, the Minister of Lands issued a Certificate of Reservation under the Disposal of Crown Lands Act (Act 15 of 1887 (Cape of Good Hope), in respect of the Richtersveld Reserve land. The Certificate was drawn up in favour of the Minister of Native Affairs (the Trustee) and in behalf of the persons residing therein. It must be emphasised that in terms of this Certificate of Reservation, the Richtersveld Reserve did not include the land under claim (subject land) and the Corridor farms on the western and southern boundaries.

The question remained whether the first plaintiff (the community) had rights in the subject land based on ownership. The community claimed that at the time of annexation they -- under the law of the Cape Colony extended to the Richtersveld after annexation in 1847 -- acquired ownership of the Richtersveld (including the subject land) by *occupatio*. Their ownership was not, however, recognised by the Colonial Government of the time as the people were not considered to have a sufficient degree of civilization to warrant such recognition.<sup>464</sup> The British Colonial Government after annexation simply assumed sovereignty of, and full ownership over, the entire area of Little Namaqualand, including the Richtersveld which it viewed as being *terra nullius* or uninhabited.<sup>465</sup>

At the time of annexation in 1847, the law in force in the Cape Colony was that all land not granted under some form of tenure belonged to the Crown. That seemed to have been the law applicable to Namaqualand at the time of annexation, the Land Claims Court found. It was thus of the view that none of the “uncivilised” forebears of the plaintiffs living on “uninhabited”, “ungranted” land had rights of ownership in the subject land after the annexation in 1847.<sup>466</sup>

- *Aboriginal Title Doctrine*

The next legal issue was whether the community had rights in the subject land based on aboriginal title. In the article, “The State as Trustee of Land” (2000), T. W. Bennett and C. H. Powell declared that “Aboriginal title implies that, while a colonizer automatically acquired

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<sup>464</sup> “The British Government, according to the law applicable at the time, only recognised the rights of indigenous people occupying annexed territories if their usages and conceptions of rights and duties were reconcilable with the institutions and legal ideas of civil society”. (Case number 16466/97).

<sup>465</sup> British colonial authorities were of the view that if there was no recognisable legal system (which in effect recognised land rights) in a newly won territory, that territory was considered *res nullius* (an ownerless property which can be appropriated), and the land was considered Crown land. If, however, there was such a system in place, the native rights and laws were respected. (In re: Aboriginal claim by the inhabitants of the Richtersveld in respect of land under the control of Alexkor. Opinion: Hendrik Kotze, 4 June 1997).

<sup>466</sup> Para. 43, Case 16466/97.

dominium over all land in new colonies, native rights persisted as burdens on the state's radical title".

Aboriginal or native title is a right in land, one vesting in a community that occupied the land at the time of colonisation. Once such a title is established, the claimants may vindicate their land or, if it has been expropriated without adequate reimbursement, claim compensation.

The doctrine of aboriginal title was established and developed in various countries after court decisions in the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, although the doctrine has developed differently in different countries. In the landmark decision of *Mabo v Queensland*,<sup>467</sup> Judge Brennan summarized the common law of Australia with reference to Aboriginal land titles as follows:

Native title to land survived the Crown's acquisition of sovereignty and radical title. The rights and privileges conferred by native title were unaffected by the Crown's acquisition of radical title, but the acquisition of sovereignty exposed native title to extinguishment by a valid exercise of sovereign power inconsistent with the continued right to enjoy native title. ...Thus, native title has been extinguished by grants of estates of freehold or of leases but not necessarily by the grant of lesser interests (e.g., authorities to prospect for minerals).

In Australia, the Courts traditionally accepted the view that prior to the arrival of white settlers, there was no recognizable form of property rights. The land was accordingly regarded as *res nullius*, and as such Crown property, in terms of the "absence of law" or "barbarians" theory. A change of perspective in regard to what constitutes "culture" had meanwhile become more accommodating of aboriginal cultures with a consequent change in findings of fact. Such a change in perspective is best illustrated by the landmark decision in *Mabo vs Queensland* (1992). In this matter the Australian High Court accepted that the traditional view of Australia as being a barbarous place in which all law was absent was factually incorrect and amounted to racial discrimination. It accordingly held that where a property title capable of being recognised under common law was possessed by the occupants of a territory, such title was to be recognised as a burden on the Crown's 'radical title'.<sup>468</sup>

The Richtersveld people thus contended that this doctrine should also find application in South Africa and maintained that they had a right to indigenous title over the whole of the Richtersveld. This case in the Land Claims Court was, however, only concerned with the subject land. The issue of the recognition of the doctrine of aboriginal title in South Africa was, in any event, highly controversial since the recognition of this doctrine would call into question the validity of a great many title deeds. Rather than confronting this policy question head on, the Land Claims Court (LCC) in the Richtersveld case circumvented the question of the

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<sup>467</sup> *Mabo and Others v Queensland* (no. 2) (1992) 175 CLR1. Mabo Day (June 3) honours the legendary Indigenous activist, Eddie Mabo, and his contribution to the landmark High Court decision overturning the concept of *terra nullius*, paving the way for land rights and native title in Australia.

<sup>468</sup> In re: Aboriginal claim by the inhabitants of the Richtersveld in respect of land under the control of Alexkor. Opinion: Hendrik Kotze, 4 June 1997.

recognition of aboriginal title.<sup>469</sup> The Court therefore found that to the extent that any of the rights claimed by the plaintiffs was dependent on the realisation of aboriginal title, such rights were dubious, because it was uncertain whether the doctrine of indigenous title formed part of South African law. Based on this analysis, the Land Claims Court was of the view that it had not been given the power to develop the common law to include the realisation of aboriginal title under the so-called doctrine of aboriginal title. The realisation of such a title would be a remedy which “diverges from the remedy of restitution under the Restitution Act and would fall outside the jurisdiction of this Court”.<sup>470</sup> The Court thus regretted that its limited jurisdiction made it impossible to decide on the issue of the realisation of indigenous title, which was fully canvassed before it, and which would have to be canvassed again in another court, should the plaintiffs wish to pursue the claim.

- *Nomadic lifestyle of the Richtersveld Community*

In the past, more so than today, the Richtersveld people have been a herder group with a nomadic lifestyle which was not only an essential feature of their culture, but also an imperative of the semi-arid environment. Of importance though, was the community’s sense of legitimate access to the subject land which is apparent from documents from the late 19th and early 20th century. Examples are entries in the diary of Reverend J. F. Hein, where he records that the community protested that Captain Paul Links had in the 1840s let (*verpacht*) some of their best grazing land at the Gariiep River mouth (part of the subject land) to an English trader.

<sup>471</sup>

The anthropologist, Suzanne Berzborn, identified the places in or in the vicinity of the subject land which are in the baptismal register (*doopregister*) of the Kuboes church given as places of birth or baptism of the forebears of the Richtersveld community. The places are Arries, Grootderm, Orange River, Alexander Bay, Grondputs, Melkvei, Kouweras, Tuberas, Kauras, Slangveld, Bankfontein and Port Nolloth. She also identified places in or near the subject land which have or are reputed to have graves of forebears of the Richtersveld people. The places include Arries, Witvoorkop, Grootderm, Brandbos, Pagvlei, Kortdoorn, Dunvlei, the islands in the Orange River, the Orange River Mouth and Boegoeberg.<sup>472</sup>

On the basis of this testimony, the Court found that the first plaintiff was a community with rights in the subject land based on beneficial occupation for a continuous period of not less than ten years before each alleged dispossession. However, in law, they had no rights of

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<sup>469</sup> Theunis Roux, ‘Pro-Poor Court, Anti-Poor Outcomes: Explaining the Performance of the South African Land Claims Court’, *Abstract*, 511, *SAJHR* 20, 2004.

<sup>470</sup> Para. 53, Case 16466/97.

<sup>471</sup> *J. F. Hein’s Dagboek, 1844-1866*. Entry 20 April 1847 (Ref. P59/1, Dutch Reformed Church Archives/Western Cape Archives). An unpretentious chronicle of everyday life in the Richtersveld. It is a source of much regret that Part II of his diary originally in the possession of Reverend Kling of Steinkopf, has not yet been found.

<sup>472</sup> Para. 57, p. 30. Case 16466/97.

ownership over the subject land after the British annexation in 1847, and the Court had no jurisdiction to decide the issue of whether the community might be entitled to realise some rights under the doctrine of indigenous title.<sup>473</sup>

- *Past racially discriminatory laws or practices*

The court then focussed on what constituted a dispossession caused by past racially discriminatory laws or practices, as well as what constituted a racially discriminatory law or practice. According to the definition of ‘racially discriminatory laws’ in the Restitution Act, the term includes laws made by any sphere of Government as well as subordinate legislation, such as proclamations. The term ‘racially discriminatory’ practice is defined in the Restitution Act as follows: “racially discriminatory practices means racially discriminatory practices, acts or omissions, direct or indirect, by any department of state or administration in the national, provincial or local sphere of government; or any functionary or institution which exercised a public power or performed a public function in terms of any legislation”. The Land Claims Court concluded that “(t)here is nothing in the Precious Stones Act of 1927 or in the Precious Stones Act of 1964 or in any of the above proclamations or in any practice appertaining thereto, which is racially discriminatory”.<sup>474</sup> The sole purpose and functions of these acts and proclamations were the working and exploitation of the mineral resources irrespective of race or ethnicity.

The plaintiffs further submitted that the subject land was not unalienated Crown land, but that it belonged to the Richtersveld community. As owners, the community did not receive the benefits to which an owner of private land would have been entitled under the applicable precious stones legislation. Such benefits included four hundred mineral claims free of charge and other rights and protections. The Court maintained, however, that even if it was assumed that the subject land was not unalienated Crown land but belonged to the Richtersveld community, “the withholding of the benefits from the community was not caused by a racially discriminatory law or practice, but by the Government’s lack of recognition of their purported ownership of the subject land”.<sup>475</sup>

It might be argued that the failure to include the subject land and the Corridor farms in the Reserve under the Certificate of Reservation (1930)<sup>476</sup> was a racially motivated omission (an omission can be a racially discriminatory practice). The Court, however, did not find any evidence to establish this. It inferred that, in all probability, the subject land was not included in the Reserve in order to protect the exploitation of diamonds on the subject land, or in the belief that the Richtersveld people had no rights over the subject land. It was also pointed out by the Court that the certificate of reservation gave the Richtersveld people no proprietary rights in respect of the Reserve -- only occupation and use rights; nor did it recognise any existing rights which they might have had. The reservation was in favour of the then Minister of Native Affairs in

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<sup>473</sup> Para. 75, Case 16466/97.

<sup>474</sup> Case 16466/97, p. 50.

<sup>475</sup> Para. 98, Case 16466/97.

<sup>476</sup> See Figure 40 Annexure 3 for a copy of the Certificate of Reservation (1930).

behalf of the persons (“Hottentots” and “persons of colour”) residing in the reserve. That constituted the Minister a trustee, holding the land for the benefit of the residents. According to the legal thinking at the time, the residents had no enforceable legal rights in respect of the land or against the trustee, and the trustee was not subject to any legally enforceable duties.<sup>477</sup>

With effect from 1 May 1989, the Government of the Republic of South Africa had awarded to Alexkor Limited (the successor of the State Alluvial Diggings, 1928) prospecting and mining leases in terms of the Precious Stones Act of 1964. The Land Claims Court saw the Precious Stones Act as not racially discriminatory. In fact, the objectives of the Act as reflected in its long title is “[t]o provide for the regulation and control of prospecting and mining for and dealing in precious stones and for matters incidental thereto”. The mining leases were issued on the assumption that the subject land was unalienated Crown land. In the view of the Court, it had not been shown to the Court that the issuing of the leases was a racially discriminatory practice.<sup>478</sup>

The Land Claims Court accordingly ruled that any real rights the Richtersveld community may have held in respect of the subject property, such rights might be enforceable by a court of competent jurisdiction. This Court, being “a creature of statute”, could only restore those rights if the community were dispossessed of them by a racially discriminatory law or practice. The termination of any right which the Richtersveld community might have had in respect of the subject land, had not been shown to be the result of a racially discriminatory law or practice. Moreover, the Alexander Bay Development Corporation Act (1992) was racially neutral, established according to the preamble to the Act, with the object of “undertaking, encouraging and promoting mining, agriculture, commerce, industrial settlement and town development as well as any other economic and socio-economic development in the State Alluvial Diggings at Alexander Bay and in certain areas in the vicinity thereof”.

The Court further reasoned that the exclusion of the Richtersveld people from the subject land was in all likelihood justified in the minds of the Government officials who believed that the subject land was Crown land to which the Richtersveld people had no right. Advocate Wim Trengove for the plaintiffs, submitted that that belief was wrong. But the Court had already concluded that the assumption was correct under the laws prevailing at the time and that the Government’s failure to recognise and protect the rights of the Richtersveld people was linked to their race. They were considered a community which was too low in the scale of social organisation. Lord Sumner described that position in the case of *In Re Southern Rhodesia* as follows:<sup>479</sup>

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<sup>477</sup> “The office of trustee was seen as a function of Government, and not as an office subject to the private law responsibilities of trusteeship”. See Kerr, *The Customary Law of Immovable Property and of Succession*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., Grahamstown: Grocott & Sherry, 1990, at 68.

<sup>478</sup> Para. 103, Case 16466/97. T. W. Bennett & C. H. Powell, ‘The State as Trustee of Land’ (2000), Vol. 16, *S.A. Journal on Human Rights (SAJHR)*: “(I)n South Africa it has always been assumed that, when the state or one of its organs acts as trustee, it is not subject to any legally enforceable duties”.

<sup>479</sup> Privy Council *In Re Southern Rhodesia* (1919) AC 211 (PC) at 233-4.

Some tribes are so low in the scale of social organization that their usages and conceptions of rights and duties are not to be reconciled with the institutions or the legal ideas of civilized society. Such a gulf cannot be bridged. It would be idle to impute to such people some shadow of the rights known to our law and then transmute them into the substance of transferable rights of property as we know them.

The leading precedent on aboriginal land rights in the South African jurisdiction is that of *In re Southern Rhodesia*. In this matter a claim to Ndebele land rights was considered. The Court did not really enquire into the nature of the Ndebele people's legal system. Instead, it found, as a matter of fact, that the Ndebele system had been fatally inconsistent with that of the white settlers, and that it had been effectively replaced by another system. Though the claim was dismissed, the judgement gave recognition to the fact that "there are indigenous people whose legal conceptions, although differently developed, are hardly less precise than our own. When they have been studied and understood, they are no less enforceable than rights arising under English law ... " .<sup>480</sup>

Mr Trengove contended that the Cape Colonial Government, adopting Lord Sumner's approach, believed that the Richtersveld (including the subject land) was *res nullius* (land without ownership) which vested in the Crown as from the date of annexation in 1847. The indigenous laws and private rights of the Richtersveld people were thus believed to be insufficiently developed to justify recognition or protection. This perception was racially discriminatory, if not downright insulting, he added, yet the law applicable at the time caused the subject land to become Crown land.

The failure after 1913 to recognise and protect any of the plaintiffs' rights might be a 'practice' within the wide definition of 'racially discriminatory practice'. It was not, however, a conscious failure because the Government believed that the plaintiffs had no rights to be recognised and protected. That belief may well reflect the correct legal position the Court held.<sup>481</sup> And it could not, *nunc pro tunc* (retrospectively), find that the subject land was not Crown land just because the law which made it Crown land in 1847 was racially discriminatory. Such an approach would have disruptive consequences as regards many land titles held for a century or more. Furthermore, no evidence was submitted to the Court that any Government institution or official who failed to recognise and protect the first plaintiff's alleged rights after 1913, did so for racist reasons. On the probabilities, they did not do so because they believed the rights did not exist.<sup>482</sup>

It was conceded that the plaintiffs were physically prevented from continuing to inhabit the land, and in the view of the Court, that was an eviction; but it was not shown that the expulsion was brought about by a racially discriminatory law or practice. On the contrary, many people at settlements along the coast and along the riverbank close to the diamond diggings were required to move because of the security risk. There was nevertheless no evidence that

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<sup>480</sup> *In re: Aboriginal claim by the inhabitants of the Richtersveld in respect of land under the control of Alexkor*. Opinion: Hendrik Kotze, 4 June 1997.

<sup>481</sup> Para. 108, p. 56. Case 16466/97.

<sup>482</sup> Para. 110, Case 16466/97.

members of the community and *trekboere* (itinerant White pastoralists) had to move away from the diggings because of the racial group to which they belonged.

The Court accordingly found that there was ...

“no evidence that, in excluding members of the first plaintiff community from the subject land, the authorities deliberately failed to recognize any legal rights which the community may have had in respect of the subject land, or that the community members were excluded from the subject land for racist reasons. ... The only rights which the first plaintiff proved that it lost in respect of the subject land originated from its beneficial occupation of the subject land. Its dispossession of those rights was not shown to be the result of any racially discriminatory law or practice, within the meaning given to those terms in the Restitution Act”.<sup>483</sup>

The community was, in conclusion, adjudged to have failed to establish two essential elements of its restitution claim, namely that its dispossession was “of a kind that will support a claim for restitution, and that it resulted from a racially discriminatory law or practice”. In essence then, the community sought to undo the appropriation in 1847 of the subject land by the British colonial authorities, and not the restitution of rights in land lost through racially discriminatory laws or practices.<sup>484</sup>

Residents who had travelled a 1000 km to Cape Town to attend the judgement delivered on 22 March 2001 were stunned when Justice Antonie Gildenhuys disposed of the matter in a few sentences from a 66-page document. He told them that he had dismissed their claims, but that he had recommended that Land Affairs Minister Thoko Didiza consider feasible and alternative remedies. After the court had ruled against the Richtersveld community, expectations naturally turned to sadness, but residents vowed to appeal to a higher court.<sup>485</sup> Although, in his decision, the judge on several grounds found against the Richtersveld people’s claim for land, the community took heart from his comments regretting the limited jurisdiction of his Court to decide on the issue of indigenous title. This would now have to be argued in another court.

Meanwhile, the community had formed a Communal Property Association (CPA) in the hope of receiving the land back from the government.<sup>486</sup> Willem Louw, secretary of the association, said in an interview in Sanddrift in 2002 that the community did not see themselves as being isolated from other communities in the area, such as the one at Port Nolloth. Neither did they see themselves dishing out the revenue from their mineral rights to individual claimants. They envisaged building schools, houses, and infrastructure, and creating jobs. People were living in substandard conditions and the CPA wished to give them a better life in an organised way. The

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<sup>483</sup> Para. 114, Case 16466/97.

<sup>484</sup> Para. 115, Case 16466/97.

<sup>485</sup> *Cape Times*, 22 March 2001 (accessed 22/10/2002).

<sup>486</sup> As envisaged in the Communal Property Act (No. 28 of 1996), a CPA was set up on 10 June 2006 and registered as a legal body to take possession of the land to be awarded, as well as ensure that the community acts with one voice. (Floors Strauss, Richtersveld CPA, 2005).

Richtersveld Development Company (a company established under the auspices of the CPA) would launch agricultural projects. Each adult claimant was to receive two hundred shares in this hundred percent community-owned initiative. According to another CPA executive member, tourism had been identified as the most important economic activity after agriculture.

<sup>487</sup>

The last word on this remarkable claim for restitution by the Richtersveld people had yet to be heard. The Legal Resources Centre applied to the Supreme Court of Appeal in Bloemfontein for leave to appeal the Land Claims Court judgement. This was granted and the case was scheduled to be heard in 2002.

### **The Richtersveld claim appealed in the Supreme Court of Appeal (SCA) at Bloemfontein**

The matter between the Richtersveld Community & Others and Alexkor Limited (first respondent), Government of the RSA (second respondent), was heard on 17 and 18 February 2003.<sup>488</sup> This was an appeal, with the leave of the Court (SCA), against the dismissal of the Land Claims Court of the appellants' claim for restitution of a right in land in terms of Section 2(1) of the Restitution of Land Rights Act, No. 22 of 1994 ('the Act'). The judgement of the Land Claims Court (LCC) was reported as *Richtersveld Community and Others vs Alexkor Limited and Another* 2001 (3) SA 1293 (LCC).

By agreement between the parties, other issues arising from the Act such as whether the appellants had received some or other compensation for any dispossession, and the form of restitution, were to stand over for later adjudication in the Land Claims Court.<sup>489</sup> The Supreme Court of Appeal (SCA) now ruled that the Richtersvelders were entitled to restitution of their land and minerals. The five appeal court judges thus unanimously overruled the earlier finding by the Land Claims Court that the Richtersveld people did not have a legitimate claim to the 85 000 ha of land resumed by the State after the discovery there of remarkably rich deposits of precious stones. An elated community said that this ruling brought a "new joy" in their hearts and that every Richtersvelder could show their gratitude by placing roses on the graves of the stalwarts in the struggle for land rights, Paulus Phillips and Paul de Wet. The two men, descendants of Captain Paul (Swartbooi) Links who once ruled the land before the arrival of the State Alluvial Diggings in 1928, had dreamed of this day when the Richtersvelders would fully own the land again.

Counsel for the claimants led crucial evidence at the Court of Appeal which, in my view, was instrumental in swinging the outcome in favour of the Richtersveld community. When the British Crown after brief skirmishes with the Dutch colonial forces acquired sovereignty over the Cape in 1806, the territory was annexed under the Articles of Capitulation (10 & 18 January 1806). Article 6 provided that all bona fide private property of the burghers and other inhabitants

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<sup>487</sup> Legal Resources Centre (LRC) *Annual Report 2000-2001* (website accessed on 6 November 2002).

<sup>488</sup> Case No. 488/2001.

<sup>489</sup> LCC Judgement, para. 14-16. *Richtersveld Community and Others vs Alexkor Limited and Another* 2001 (3) SA 1293 (LCC).

shall remain free and untouched, while Article 8 provided that burghers and inhabitants shall preserve all their rights and privileges. The inhabitants of the Colony were furthermore to enjoy the same rights and privileges as had been granted to those in Cape Town. It is thus clear from the Articles of Capitulation that the British Crown after conquest and cession of the Cape, recognised and respected indigenous land rights.

Also, when Ordinance 50 was issued in 1828, this regulation required that indigenous land rights be respected. For example, Section 3 of Ordinance 50 provided that the property of Hottentots and Free Persons of Colour be respected and the acquisition and possession thereof be protected. Ordinance 50 moreover declared that Hottentots and Free Persons of Colour residing within the Colony were entitled to every right, privilege and benefit of the Law.

The acquisition of the Richtersveld by Proclamation when Namaqualand was annexed in December 1847, was thus the equivalent of an acquisition by conquest or cession with the same consequences as the acquisition in 1806 of the Cape Colony into which it was incorporated. The British colonial government did not therefore regard the Richtersveld as *terra nullius* when that territory was annexed.

The overjoyed members of the community were reminded of the implications of the judgement of the SCA by the legal representative of the community, Henk Smith of the Legal Resources Centre (LRC). He sounded a note of caution: the ruling of the SCA merely marked the end of the first phase of their legal battle to regain ownership and proper compensation for the narrow strip of diamond-rich land. The ruling did not confirm the community's right to the land, but merely that it had a legitimate claim to it. They still faced a long road ahead to reach a settlement and had to go back to the Land Claims Court for determination of the restitution package which may include restoration of ownership and financial compensation.<sup>490</sup>

The Land Claims Court (LCC) had earlier found that the appellants' forebears held a right in the subject land based on 'beneficial occupation for a continuous period of not less than 10 years', i.e. a right of occupation only, before the alleged dispossession in 1928. The LCC also held, as we have seen, that any rights the appellants' forebears might have held in the subject land were extinguished when the entire Richtersveld was annexed by the British Crown on 23 December 1847 to become part of the Cape Colony, and that the land became Crown land upon annexation.<sup>491</sup> This Court further ruled that to the extent that the appellant was later dispossessed of any rights in the subject land, such dispossession was not the result of "past racially discriminatory laws or practices" and consequently not of a kind that can form the basis for a claim for restitution under Section 2(1) of the Act.<sup>492</sup>

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<sup>490</sup> *The Cape Times*, "Victory for Richtersvelders in court battle over land", 25 March 2003.

<sup>491</sup> After consultations, the hereditary chiefs and community leaders of Pella, Steinkopf, and the Richtersveld agreed, on the advice of the Rhenish missionary, Reverend Ferdinand Brecher, and on condition that their rights were respected, to form part of the Cape Colony in 1847.

<sup>492</sup> *Richtersveld Community and Others vs Alexkor Limited and Another* 2001 (3) SA 1293 (LCC) (at para. 76-96).

It now became clear from the Supreme Court of Appeal judgement that the material findings of the Land Claims Court could not be supported, although its setting out of the underlying facts could generally not be faulted. In the view of the SCA, the undisputed facts of this case showed that the Richtersveld community, “living in the margin of history on the edge of the country”, was largely ignored by successive governments although these governments always recognised that the community had some kind of exclusive entitlement to the land. They were, as a result, left in undisturbed possession of the land which was never taken from them for settling colonists. This made the case unique.<sup>493</sup>

The land claim, dismissed by the Land Claims Court, was now upheld in a comprehensive judgement by the Supreme Court of Appeal. The principal findings of the SCA were that the Richtersveld Community had been in exclusive possession of the whole of the Richtersveld, including the subject land, prior to and after its annexation by the British Crown in 1847. It held that those rights to the land (including minerals and precious stones) were akin or similar to those held under common law ownership and that they constituted a ‘customary law interest’ as defined in the Restitution of Land Rights Act of 1994 (as amended). It further found that in the 1920s, when diamonds were discovered on the subject land, the rights of the Richtersveld Community were ignored by the state which acted on the premise that the land was Crown land and dispossessed them of their rights in a series of steps amounting to racial ‘practices’ as defined in the Act. This culminated in the grant of full ownership of the land to Alexkor Limited in 1992. Finally, these practices were now found to be racially discriminatory because they were based upon the false, although unexpressed premise, that the Richtersvelders had lost all rights in the land upon annexation because of the community’s race and lack of civilisation. The Supreme Court of Appeal accordingly set aside the orders of the Land Claims Court and replaced them with its own order. The Richtersveld community was, in terms of these findings, entitled to restitution of the subject land and mineral rights and the appeal therefore had to succeed.<sup>494</sup>

### **The Constitutional Court of South Africa Case CCT 19/03**

Barely a week after the Supreme Court of Appeal judgement, it was reported in the press that the state-owned diamond-mining company, Alexkor Limited, was considering taking the Supreme Court of Appeal judgement on the diamond-rich land around Alexander Bay to the Constitutional Court.

But there was not much scope for taking the judgement of the Supreme Court of Appeal to the Constitutional Court, said considered advice from senior counsel relayed to the State Attorney. In fact, much could be said for discussing a settlement with the Richtersveld community. The SCA’s finding was that the customary law rights of the Richtersveld people survived annexation – it was therefore not a constitutional matter open to further appeal and this had to be accepted. The finding that the rights of the Richtersveld people were ignored when diamonds were discovered in the 1920s, was similarly not a constitutional matter and had to be accepted

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<sup>493</sup> Para. 8 Judgement (SCA) Case No. 488/2001.

<sup>494</sup> Judgement (SCA) Case No. 488/2001, p. 6.

as correct.<sup>495</sup> Despite this legal opinion, Counsel for Alexkor Limited and the Department of Public Enterprises went ahead and drew up a detailed legal opinion on the prospects of success on the limited basis that, amongst others, the Supreme Court of Appeal erred in also including in its order the restitution of minerals and precious stones.

On 4 September 2003, lawyers for the state-owned diamond mine asked the Constitutional Court to overturn the Supreme Court of Appeal judgement that restored the ownership of the mine's land and minerals to the Richtersveld community. Counsel for Alexkor Limited, adv. Mbuyiseli Madlanga, argued that although the community was only removed from the land in the late 1920s when alluvial diamond mining began, it had already lost the right of ownership of the land and the diamonds on 23 December 1847 when the Cape Colony government annexed the area. The 1847 dispossession of land was therefore not the result of discriminatory law or practices, he argued. But Madlanga was hard-pressed by justices Arthur Chaskalson, Anton Ackermann, Richard Goldstone, and Albie Sachs to explain the constitutional grounds for his appeal or how the annexation could be construed as a constitutional issue as it predated the current South Africa Constitution by about 150 years.<sup>496</sup>

By mid-October, the Constitutional Court in a landmark judgement delivered by Chief Justice Pius Langa, ruled that the impoverished people of the Richtersveld were as rightful owners entitled to the return of the ancestral land and minerals (including diamonds) owned and mined by Alexkor.<sup>497</sup> The precedent-setting judgement handed down by the court in Johannesburg also recognised indigenous law, which is not written but handed down by generations, as an integral part of South African law.

It found that property rights held under indigenous law were as valid as property rights held under common law and that this included the rights to minerals and precious stones. In effect, the Constitutional Court ruling meant that the Richtersveld community of Namaqualand had a legitimate claim to their ancestral land (including its minerals and precious stones) from which they were forcibly removed after diamonds were discovered. The judgement also ended years of legal wrangling between Alexkor Limited and the Richtersvelders.

The following order was therefore made: the Orders of the Land Claims Court were set aside and replaced with an order in the following terms:

- (a) It is declared that, subject to the issues that stand over for later determination, the first plaintiff is entitled in terms of section 2 (1) of the Restitution of Land Rights Act 22 of 1994 to restitution of the right to ownership of the subject land (including its minerals and precious stones) and to the exclusive beneficial use and occupation thereof.<sup>498</sup>

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<sup>495</sup> Adv. R. C. Hiemstra SC to the State Attorney. Memorandum, 1 April 2003.

<sup>496</sup> *Cape Times*, 5 September 2003: "Alexkor in the Constitutional Court".

<sup>497</sup> *Cape Times*, 15 October 2003: "Constitutional Court says Richtersvelders own land, diamonds".

<sup>498</sup> Para. 103 The Constitutional Court of South Africa Case CCT 19/03 Richtersveld Land Claim Case.

### The restitution award and its aftermath

By May 2005, the last round in the legal battle between the State, the diamond miner Alexkor Limited, and the Richtersveld community had drawn to a close. The community was now back in the Land Claims Court after the Constitutional Court ruling in October 2003 that the community had a legitimate claim. Some four weeks were set aside for evidence to be presented by both sides to determine the value of the restitution award to the community.<sup>499</sup>

The end of the marathon Richtersveld land claim dispute was now in sight with news that agreement had been reached on a settlement with the state. This followed a series of meetings of members of the Richtersveld community, after which they gave their approval to a draft Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to be formalised within weeks and signed in Cape Town on 26 October (2005) by the Public Enterprises Minister and community representatives. When this Memorandum of Understanding (a legally non-binding framework for the final settlement agreement) was signed by minister Alec Erwin and Willem Diergaardt representing the Richtersveld community, about 2 700 claimants lit bonfires in the Richtersveld, according to newspaper reports. This agreement now only had to become an order of the Land Claims Court before the implementation thereof.



Figure 41 Richtersvelder Katrina Cloete (87), Melkvelei, Lekkering. Waiting on social justice (1989).

(Own Collection)

The valuations of the awards (on behalf of the community) were prepared by qualified independent experts which included a valuer, a mining engineer, a historian, an anthropologist, an environmental engineer/surveyor, and an agricultural economist. The Richtersveld community led evidence on the extreme hardship and emotional suffering that they and their forebears suffered as a result of the dispossession.<sup>500</sup>

The restitution package proposed by the community was intended to

<sup>499</sup> "Richtersveld land claim battle continues", *Engineering News*, 25 May 2005. (<https://www.engineeringnews.co.za>).

<sup>500</sup> *Solatium*: compensation; damages allowed for injury to the feelings. (V. G. Hiemstra & H. L. Gonin, *Trilingual Legal Dictionary*, Third Edition (Kenwyn: Juta en Kie, Bpk, 1992).

achieve restitution in a manner that promoted economic empowerment for the Richtersvelders and long-term sustainable economic development for the broader Namaqualand community and region.

The salient features of the settlement agreement eventually reached with the community, provided for:<sup>501</sup>

- the return of an 85 000 ha arid strip of diamondiferous land along the Namaqualand coast, including the town of Alexander Bay;
- nine Corridor West farms, the Corridor East farms to follow;
- Alexkor to convert old land-based mining rights into new order mining rights and transfer these and the permit to mine to the Richtersveld Communal Property Association (CPA). Alexkor Limited would retain its marine mining concessions;
- an extraordinary reparation payment of R190 million as compensation for diamonds extracted over three-quarters of a century;
- R45 million in lieu of rental of the properties used and occupied by Alexkor and its employees;
- an amount of R50 million as compensation for having been deprived of access to the land and mineral rights;
- agriculture and mariculture assets of Alexkor Limited transferred to the community; these assets included an oyster farm together with four farms along the lower Orange River;
- Alexkor Ltd and the Richtersveld community to enter into a Pooling and Sharing Joint Venture (PSJV) in terms of which they will jointly conduct land and sea mining operations;
- the joint mining venture also gave the community the option of taking up the Alexkor shareholding in the mining operations if at some point it instead chooses to find a private sector partner; it also had the first right of refusal to Alexkor's marine mining rights;
- outstanding and overdue environmental rehabilitation will be carried out by Alexkor Ltd at its own cost; a R200 million estimate for rehabilitation of diamond mining activity on the coast seemed like a reasonable figure;
- after ten troubled years of legal wrangling and negotiations, the "marriage" between the Richtersveld community and the state-owned diamond miner Alexkor was thus consummated with a total R400 million plus "gift" from government (itemized above), which included a lump sum development grant;

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<sup>501</sup> *Umhlaba Wethu* (June 2005); "Richtersveld court battle", October 2006, *Words & Deeds*; "Richtersvelders happy with land settlement", 19 October 2006 (IOL News, Sapa); "A. Erwin and Richtersveld community sign Memorandum of Understanding", 26 October 2006 ([www.gov.za](http://www.gov.za)); Commission on Restitution of Land Rights (CRLR) Annual Report 2007; "Richtersveld community reaps Alexkor riches," (*Mining Weekly* (Africa Edition), 7 December 2007. Iona Blair, "In the wake of Diamond Mining: A Critical Assessment of Environmental Governance and Corporate Social responsibility in the Namaqualand Coastal Region", MPhil, Department of Environmental and Geographical Sciences, University of Cape Town, 2011, 141.

- the impoverished Richtersveld community now stood to gain a 49 % stake in Alexkor Limited's Alexander Bay operations.

Justice was finally being served, enthused Piet Cloete, Richtersveld Development Company chairperson. The landmark agreement came as a result of a brave battle that the Richtersveld community had fought since first lodging a claim for the land in 1997. Besides, the settlement agreement avoided further court battles which could have pushed a possible resolution even further down the line, jeopardising Alexkor's already rickety financial position.<sup>502</sup> Overall, the 2006 settlement of the Richtersveld community land claim was reached with handsome awards made to the Richtersvelders.

Land handover ceremonies have become prominent events for celebrating the achievements of post-apartheid South Africa. Where rural land lost under apartheid or colonialism is restored, award ceremonies typically become the focal point for euphoric celebrations on the part of the claimant community (and government officials). But all too frequently, such ceremonies are followed by post-restitution blues as projects fail through a combination of poor management, a shortage of skills and leadership, and inadequate state support.

Nevertheless, the culmination of the 10-year land dispute came to a symbolic end in a ceremony held at Alexander Bay on 1 December<sup>503</sup> 2007 when Alec Erwin and Land Affairs Minister, Lulu Xingwana, handed over the title deeds to the land to the Richtersveld leaders. Always central to the community's victory was public interest law firm, the Legal Resources Centre. But, unfortunately, said Erwin, the LRC had pulled out of representing the community earlier that year after it asked for "clarification on certain 'vagaries' in the agreement, while its client was satisfied with the accord as it stood".<sup>504</sup>

### **The Richtersveld Deed of Settlement. Setting up for failure?**

Alarm bells had been ringing earlier on. Just when the final settlement agreement document (signed on 22 April 2007) was about to go before the Land Claims Court in Cape Town for ratification, a group of Richtersveld residents challenged the terms of the agreement. It emerged that the "Richtersveld Action Committee" representing a "fairly broad group of people" planned to oppose the settlement agreement, arguing that it should not be made an order of court as many of the aspects of the agreement had not been properly negotiated with the community at large. Legal teams thereupon had to spend the day behind closed doors thrashing out a compromise, adding a 13-page addendum.<sup>505</sup>

The State's approach to the land restitution claim further complicated matters. Alexkor Limited initially showed considerable reluctance to respect the Richtersvelders' entitlement to the coastal land and resources, which contributed to the weakness of the 'partnership' arrangement with the community. The relationship between Alexkor's management and community representatives was also reportedly "unbelievably bad" throughout the court case.

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<sup>502</sup> "Richtersveld community reaps Alexkor riches," *Mining Weekly* (Africa Edition), 7 December 2007.

<sup>503</sup> An auspicious date. Slaves were liberated in the Cape Colony on 1 December 1834.

<sup>504</sup> "Richtersveld community reaps Alexkor riches," *Mining Weekly* (Africa Edition), 7 December 2007.

<sup>505</sup> "New challenge may delay our Richtersveld Deal," *Mail & Guardian*, 20 September 2007.

<sup>506</sup> The company was averse to entering into a partnership with the Richtersveld Community, seeing their demand for restitution - including compensation and benefit-sharing - as significant obstacles to achieving profitability. This, the company argued, in a time when leading international corporations of the mining sector such as De Beers, were “streamlining” operations to cut costs and reduce their social and environmental liabilities.<sup>507</sup>

How the settlement deal was put together and worked added to the social turmoil. The community, assisted by LRC, formed their own legal entity known as the Richtersveld Sida !Hub Communal Property Association (CPA), which compiled and verified their own list of approximately 2 630 beneficiaries. The Deed of Settlement signed by the parties in 2007, directed that at least two trusts and a number of companies be established to manage and operate the various business operations of the CPA. The overall management of the compensation awarded (i.e., land and funding) and the implementation structure thereof was extremely complex, as more than 50 company directors were required in terms of the original statutes. As a result, the undercurrents between these business entities, poor understanding of the roles of the various entities, and limited communication between entities and the beneficiaries of the CPA, were elements impacting negatively on the operation and effectiveness of the CPA, creating a major source of conflict. The entities were:<sup>508</sup>

- Richtersveld Sida !Hub Community Property Association (CPA) (beneficiaries)
- Richtersveld Investment Trust (9 directors)
- Richtersveld Community Trust (8)
- Richtersveld Investment Holding Company (8)
- Richtersveld Self-Development Company (Pty) Limited (11)
- Four (4) Subsidiary Companies:
  - (i) Richtersveld Agricultural Holding Co. (Pty) Ltd (6)
  - (ii) Richtersveld Environmental Rehabilitation Co. (Pty) Ltd (6)
  - (iii) Richtersveld Property Holding Co. (Pty) Ltd (6)
  - (iv) Richtersveld Mining Co. (Pty) Ltd (6)

Although considerable thought, planning and preparation must have gone into the setting up of elaborate structures to facilitate the successful implementation of the settlement agreement, these proved to be significant obstacles to making the deal work. “The aim was plainly to use the extensive safeguards under the Companies Act (No. 61 of 1973) to enable the community to run its businesses while shielding its substantial assets from creditors in the event of things going awry”.<sup>509</sup>

On the other hand, the settlement agreed to between Alexkor Limited and the CPA was problematic, said Henk Smith, who had throughout been providing legal advice and support to

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<sup>506</sup> Henk Smith, pers. comm., Oct. 2010. In: Iona Blair, “In the wake of Diamond Mining: A Critical Assessment of Environmental Governance and Corporate Social responsibility in the Namaqualand Coastal Region”, MPhil, University of Cape Town, 2011.

<sup>507</sup> Idem, 2011, 82.

<sup>508</sup> Status Report 171122 Richtersveld (2017) to update the Portfolio Committee on the status of the Richtersveld Sida !Hub CPA.

<sup>509</sup> Application: Louw and 3 Others v The Richtersveld Agricultural Holdings Company (Pty) Ltd. Case No. 1189/2010. Date heard 16 September 2010, para 23. Majiedt A J P.

the community. He believed that the claimants were “bulldozed” into the agreement, against advice. The main problem was that Alexkor kept the upper hand, Smith explained. And this state company, a completely inefficient mining company, was the majority shareholder. The state could not and would not invest in it ... it needed a huge capital injection to mine properly. The LRC’s proposal was different, but due to pressure exerted by the politicians involved, the community were persuaded to accept the agreement and to refuse the assistance of the LRC for at least five years. The Legal Resources Centre did not want to hold a position different to the community’s on a settlement it regarded as “ill-advised and prejudicial” and indicated to the community that it would withdraw and wished it well. Though the Richtersvelders asked LRC “every day to come and save them”, there was nothing the public interest law firm would be able to do based on the agreement made between the community representatives, the company, and the government, Smith concluded.<sup>510</sup>

### **Squabbling and internal power struggles**

German social anthropologist, Susanne Berzborn, had as early as 2003 warned of the possibility of communal squabbling and internal power struggles. As in other areas of Namaqualand, there was at the time a resurgence of Nama ethnic identity with the potential of intra-community conflict around the allocation and delivery of benefits from the land claim award.<sup>511</sup> Many people in the Richtersveld identify as Nama and are very proud of their history, claiming to have been custodians of the language, culture, customs, and traditions during the years of colonialism and apartheid.<sup>512</sup> Much later, in 1949, as a consequence of forced resettlement under apartheid, another group of about six hundred Boschuis Bastards<sup>513</sup> were moved from Bushmanland with their livestock to southern Richtersveld where they settled, preferring in this instance not to integrate with the locals. Finally, in the early 1990s, a small group of Xhosa established themselves in the diamond mining town of Sanddrift in northern Richtersveld.<sup>514</sup>

In the new political environment of the 1990s, the decision for an inclusive Richtersveld land claimant community was considered of strategic importance. The adoption of an overarching ‘Coloured identity’ for the claimants remained ambiguous and incomplete, though. The Nama clearly rejected the coloured identity because it had never been an identity created or felt by

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<sup>510</sup> H. Smith, pers. comm., October 2010. In: Iona Blair, “In the wake of Diamond Mining: ...”, MPhil, UCT, 2011, 81-82.

<sup>511</sup> At the time, according to Willem Louw, a competing land claim by Nama descendants from the Richtersveld was in the process of being formulated and would soon find its way to the UN offices in Geneva. Public protest by the Nama Raad (Council) of the Richtersveld was also not excluded. (Pers. Communication, August 1997).

<sup>512</sup> Susanne Berzborn, ‘Identity politics in the Richtersveld Land Claim, South Africa’, *International Aridity, Change and Conflict in Africa* (ACACIA) Conference, Königswinter, Germany, 1-3 October 2003, 296.

<sup>513</sup> See LDE Vol. 4854 Ref. 22588 Namaqualand. Proposed acquisition of land for ‘Bosluis Bastards’ on behalf of Dutch Reformed Church. (1936 – 1948) Previous file for Bosluis: 175/27.

LDE Vol. 3378 Ref. 175/27 Namaqualand Lot 27 called Bosluis. S. Diamond, J. M. Cloete, M. de Wee and A. Basson Sale of Lease See 4 Act (sic) Number 26/91 (1913-1940) Opmerkings: 22588 Proposed purchase of land for settlement of Bosluis Bastards.

<sup>514</sup> Susanne Berzborn, ‘Identity politics in the Richtersveld Land Claim, South Africa’, Königswinter, Germany, 1-3 October 2003.

themselves, but an imposed one.<sup>515</sup> Adding to this, some of the Nama felt that Xhosa and Boschuis Baster should not get a share of the direct financial compensation because they did not “suffer any pain at that time as they were not living in the Richtersveld then”. Other Richtersvelders were again unhappy about these developments to reconfigure the claimant group and affirmed that all inhabitants were part of the community. In the end, during and after the Land Claims Court hearing in April/May 2005 to determine the quantum of the settlement award, conflict erupted between Nama and Baster, and especially between Nama and Xhosa.

For those who love intrigue and the complications of communal disharmony, the following may be considered as prescribed reading. Towards the end of 2011, due to a number of allegations against the CPA leadership and instability within the community, the Office of the Regional Land Claims Commission: Northern Cape intervened and commissioned a fact-finding report. This report highlighted a myriad of problems faced by the CPA relating to lack of governance, no report-back to the broader community, and lack of financial management and general business skills. To complicate matters, most of the structures established in terms of the Deed of Settlement to manage and protect the vast asset base of the CPA, were non-operational. The report, however, found that the CPA was in general compliant with the CPA Act.

Relationships and trust between the stakeholders – the CPA, Alexkor Limited, and the companies or entities under the CPA -- were found to be at an extremely low level. Naturally, these tensions cascaded to community level as numerous attempts were made to forcefully remove the CPA Committee. Some of the devious methods to oust the CPA Committee were alleged to have been encouraged by Alexkor Limited itself. Then there were ongoing hostilities linked to disputes within and between the various entities which should be reporting to the CPA but were clearly not. The Richtersveld Trust, for instance, refused to acknowledge the overarching authority of the CPA. The CPA Committee was in any case divided into “camps” and so was the community at large. Meanwhile, poverty and unemployment remained rife and the perception that only some were benefiting was causing more conflict and, in some instances, violence.<sup>516</sup>

Amid all this upheaval, the CPA was expected to manage a large, complex business empire. Efforts to broker an agreement between the dissenting parties invariably unravelled due to mistrust and miscommunication, causing more confusion and conflict in the community. Its members were adamant that they were “rich poor people” with millions in funds and assets tied up in the various entities.<sup>517</sup> Stirred into this witches’ broth, was ongoing litigation (and threats of litigation) between various members of the CPA, and the Department of Rural Development and Land Reform’s recommendation that a comprehensive forensic audit of all the Richtersveld CPA structures be undertaken by an independent audit company.

The Parliamentary Monitoring Group report of 22 November 2017 to the National Council of Provinces repeated the old chronic difficulties, and more. On this occasion, various stakeholders - members of the Richtersveld Community, the Richtersveld Contractors Forum

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<sup>515</sup> Susanne Berzborn, ‘Identity politics in the Richtersveld Land Claim, South Africa’, Königswinter, Germany, 1-3 October 2003, 298.

<sup>516</sup> *Status Report 171122 Richtersveld, 2017, to update the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on the current status of the Richtersveld Sida !Hub CPA.*

<sup>517</sup> *Idem, 2017.*

(RCF), the Department of Public Enterprises, Alexkor Ltd, National Treasury and the Department of Rural Development and Land Reform - in the presence of the minister of the last-named department, briefed the Parliamentary Committee on the implementation of the Deed of Settlement between the Richtersveld Community and Alexkor Limited. A crucial stakeholder, the Richtersveld Sida !Hub Communal Property Association (CPA), was conspicuous by its absence despite being invited to attend.<sup>518</sup>

The attendees raised concerns about the CPA not being properly constituted, the infighting which was crippling progress, the alleged embezzlement of R50 million, as well as the lack of co-ordination between stakeholders. Minister Gugile Nkwinti (Department of Rural Development and Land Reform) correctly pointed out that the issues were directly linked to the implementation of the settlement model. But meanwhile, there had been a big hype - despite the intractable problems being encountered - about the proposed payment of R45 million to the community.<sup>519</sup> People opened bank accounts just to be informed that it would not be paid out. At that stage, the communities were reported to be “tired of fighting” (a serious form of restitution fatigue?). It was therefore felt that competent officials were needed to step in and intervene as divisions were so bad that people were afraid to walk around for fear of violent attacks.<sup>520</sup> Predictably, the relationship between the CPA and Alexkor Limited had by then all but broken down, and while the violence had not got out of control yet, members of Alexkor mine management were receiving death threats.<sup>521</sup>

The last progress report that has come to hand concerns the implementation of the Richtersveld and Alexkor Deed of Settlement. Delivered on 27 February 2019 by the Department of Public Enterprises, it reported on the work of a task team led by the Northern Cape Provincial Government to oversee the handover of Alexander Bay town to the Richtersveld Communal Property Association (CPA). The team included officials from both the National and Provincial Co-operative Governance and Traditional Affairs departments; Public Works; Public Enterprises; the Namakwa District Council; Richtersveld Local Municipality; the Education department; Rural Development and Land Reform, as well as Alexkor Limited. The simmering tensions and conflict in the Richtersveld between members of the CPA remained unresolved as the factions were then still engaged in expensive litigation, ruling out any “handover” of the town by this horde of government functionaries. Upon this failed handover attempt, officialdom immediately saw the need for an “administrator” to negotiate matters, otherwise they (the officials) would certainly be back in a year “to tell the same story”.<sup>522</sup>

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<sup>518</sup> Parliamentary Monitoring Group report, 22 November 2017. National Council of Provinces: NCOP Public Enterprises & Communication.

<sup>519</sup> Direct payment of the R45 million windfall to the beneficiaries required an amendment to the Deed of Settlement. Nonetheless, opposing views and confusion on how the money was to be disbursed delayed payment.

<sup>520</sup> Parliamentary Monitoring Group report, 22 November 2017.

<sup>521</sup> *Trainspotter*: “Alexkor Meltdown – Northern Cape’s state-owned enterprise non-gift that keeps on taking”, 11 June 2018.

<sup>522</sup> Richtersveld Community & Alexkor Deed of Settlement progress report. NCOP Public Enterprises & Communication, 27 February 2019. Parliamentary Monitoring Group (PMG).

This progress report of 27 February 2019 on the Richtersveld-Alexkor Settlement was then neatly summed up by a Deputy Director-General of the Department of Public Enterprises. For some time, when dealing with the matter, his Department had naturally felt “the pain” of the Richtersveld community while in the meantime a lot of money was being misappropriated, he lamented. What they found was that funds from the investment trust were used for litigation ... the reality was that people were benefitting from the chaos.<sup>523</sup>

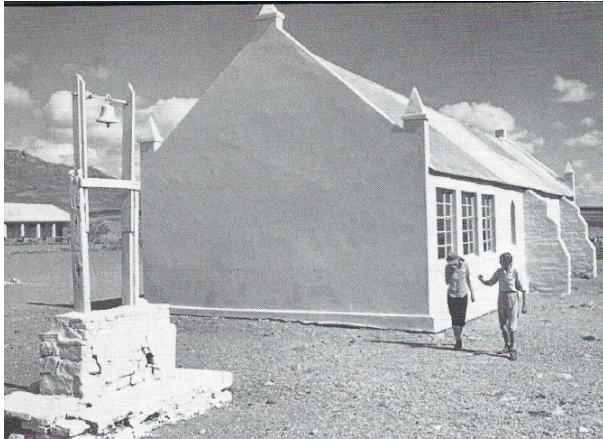


Figure 42 “Unfinished” Rhenish Mission Church at Kuboes finally completed (late 1890s) after a plea for funds. The church bell was salvaged from a ship which ran aground on the coast. (Fred C. Cornell, *The Glamour of Prospecting*, Reprint 1986)

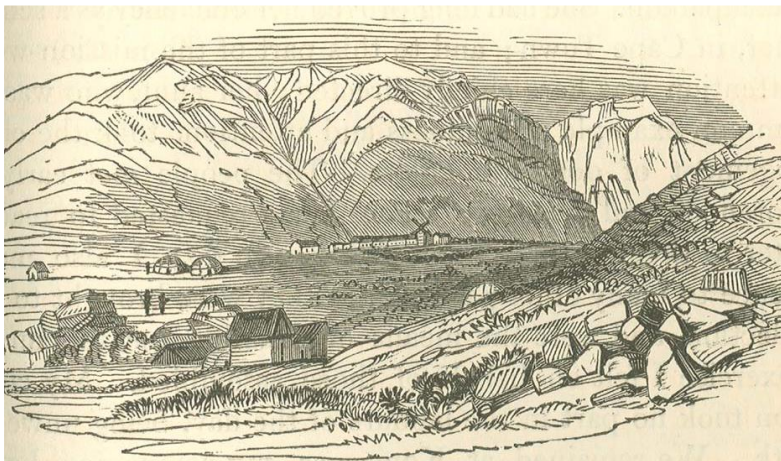


Figure 43 Komaggas Mission Station ca. 1840. (J. Backhouse, *A Narrative of a Visit to the Mauritius and South Africa*, 1844).

To date, the Richtersveld land claim is arguably the most well-known and successful claim for restitution of land rights in the country. The judgements in the Land Claims Court (LCC), Supreme Court of Appeal (SCA), and

Constitutional Court (CC) graphically illustrate the extent of the epic court battles waged to have a community’s land and mineral rights restored. By September 2010, however, there were five matters either pending or finalised in the High Court (Kimberley Division) concerning strife within the community. Regrettably, this resort to litigation not only drained valuable financial resources but also had a debilitating effect on efforts to create a sustainable future from the mineral resources and the land for the community, said one judgement. Most importantly, it created divisions in a community which had courageously fought for decades to recover what was rightfully theirs. The long struggle of the Richtersveld people for the restoration of their land and mineral rights is a remarkable tale of triumph over discrimination, he continued. And yet,

<sup>523</sup> Idem.

disturbingly, the restitution award appears to have descended into a situation of a community at war not only with itself, but with Alexkor Limited, the state diamond miner.<sup>524</sup>

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<sup>524</sup> Application: Louw and 3 Others v The Richtersveld Agricultural Holdings Company (Pty) Ltd. Case No. 1189/2010. Date heard 16 September 2010, para 23. Majiedt A J P.

## Chapter 7 The Diamond Fields of Namaqualand: Aspects of the political economy (1928-2022)

### Namaqualand's regional economy

In contemporary Namaqualand, economic activities are still primarily concerned with mining and stock farming. Before the discovery of diamonds in 1925, copper had for three quarters of a century been the most important mineral resource. But the lack of a well-developed infrastructure, skilled manpower and major investment, together with the distance from major urban markets, has always inhibited the establishment of an industrial base, other than those activities connected with mining and pastoral farming.

This restricted natural and human resource base relegated Namaqualand to a peripheral position within the South African economy.<sup>525</sup> In the mid-1980s, the region contributed less than 0.7 % to GNP, and about 90 % of this amount was produced by the mining sector. In terms of production, diamond and copper mining have over the past decades remained the dominant economic activities, bringing with it moderate industrial development and consequent urban expansion, particularly after the Second World War. By the 1950s, employment opportunities in mining and fishing resulted in a period of growth and low unemployment rates, bringing a modest prosperity for most. As has been the trend over the years, it also resulted in the influx of managerial and skilled personnel from outside the region.<sup>526</sup> It is against this background that the people of Namaqualand have managed to survive up to the present time, in spite of recent downscaling of mining operations and mine closures.

When large-scale mining started after the Second World War, Namaqualand's Whites on the mines reaped most of the benefits of employment, housing, training, and advancement, and many of them were also provided with the opportunity to escape the consequences of uneconomic farming on smaller pieces of land. The state's apartheid policy would firmly entrench the economic forces of job reservation locally and throughout the country.<sup>527</sup> The communities of Namaqualand were therefore from the earliest times affected by forces originating outside of their boundaries.

### Socio-economic investment in the region

The population of Namaqualand has always been small and scattered, and its population density per square mile extremely low. According to the official Census of 1951, the total population was 32 635, consisting of 21 018 (64.4 %) Coloureds; 8 500 (26.1 %) Whites; 3 115 (9.5 %) Africans; and 2 Asiatics. Just over half of the White and a quarter of the Coloured population lived in mining towns where the majority of the African population (recent migrant workers) were employed. Under half of the total Coloured population lived permanently in the

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<sup>525</sup> A.B. Emmett, *Steinkopf: A study of a community in decline*. Report S-164 (Pretoria: HSRC, 1987), 2.

<sup>526</sup> J. S. Sharp & M. E. West, "Land, labour and mobility in Namaqualand", Paper No. 71, Cape Town: SALDRU, 1984, 10-11.

<sup>527</sup> Daily wage in pence paid for the same work performed by different ethnic groups working at Kleinsee: Whites, 84d, in 1945; Ovambos, 8d, in 1946; Coloureds, 42d, in 1950. (Peter Carstens, *In the Company of Diamonds: De Beers, Kleinsee, and the Control of a Town*, Athens: Ohio University Press, 2001), 87. Also, Figure 53 Annexure 3, Income Ratios, Kleinsee (1932).

reserves of Concordia, Komaggas, Leliefontein, Pella, Richtersveld and Steinkopf, while the remaining quarter lived on White-owned farms, in the small villages or just outside the boundaries of the towns.

In present-day Namaqualand there is not much to show for the minerals that were over decades extracted from the earth. During the period of study (1928 -1950), most of this wealth left the State Alluvial Diggings for the South African Treasury to be distributed throughout the Union of South Africa; or the diamond revenues swelled the bank accounts of the owners and investors who had sunk capital in the Kleinzee mine of De Beers Consolidated Diamond Mines. This state of affairs has no doubt led to the relative underdevelopment of the area. What trickled down from central government via Treasury to the region was never commensurate with its contributions to the Gross Geographic Product.

The Treasury, custodian of public funds, diverted the diamond revenues from state mining at Alexander Bay to national projects as shown by the Motion set down for 12 February 1929 in the Order Paper of Parliament. Mr J. H. Conradie moved that ...

This House expresses its sincere appreciation of the announcement recently made by the Government that it intends to devote the revenue derived from State mining in Namaqualand, or a portion thereof, to one or more national irrigation schemes;<sup>528</sup> and expresses its conviction that in this direction the permanent welfare of the agricultural population is to be sought and desires the Government forthwith to take such effective steps as will speedily lead to the realization of its intentions.<sup>529</sup>

In the years after 1929, the State Alluvial Diggings (S.A.D.) became financially self-supporting and handed over “reasonable” contributions to the state.<sup>530</sup> The S.A.D., an extension of the department of mines and industries, was however run on departmental budgets, not through business plans designed for a typical commercial mine. The organisation of the mine was often referred to as the only “white socialist” organ of the old South Africa state, in that it not only provided stable employment but also organised their daily lives.

Managed strictly as state institution, the mining operation by 1989 showed a lack of profitability. This pre-empted a name change to Alexkor Limited (Alexander Bay Development Corporation) and a change in management style. Alexkor Ltd was now run as a public company, rather than a state department. The new Alexkor mission accordingly evolved during the early 1990s into a policy contributing towards “the socio-economic upliftment and empowerment of the people of the region” through The Alexkor Development Foundation (ADF) formed in 1994. Although not considered a strategic national asset, Alexkor had strategic significance for the Namaqualand region as one of the largest employers.

In the course of its fairly long history of close on a century, the Namaqualand diamond field has certainly proved to be productive with very satisfactory returns on the entrepreneurial initiatives of the owners of the mines. For a modest outlay of several thousands of pounds

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<sup>528</sup> For example, Buchberg Dam & Irrigation Works on the Orange River in the northern Cape.

<sup>529</sup> MNW 979 Ref. mm 1336/29. Revenue from State Mining, Namaqualand, 1929.

<sup>530</sup> The unpublished results of this state venture (from October 1928 to March 1930) showed that the Government made a huge profit from sales of diamonds. There was a net profit of £4.9 million for the expenditure of only £421, 466. (See MNW 953 mm 1500/301, and MNW 953 mm 1138/29 for the statement of accounts).

sterling, the Cape Coast Exploration Company Limited acquired the farm Kleinzee, as well as several others along a 300-km stretch of the Atlantic coast. At Alexander Bay, which likewise yielded a treasure trove of precious stones, the Union government in 1928 simply resumed (appropriated) the ancestral land of the Richtersveld community.

### **De Beers Namaqualand Mines (Kleinzee)**

The De Beers Group traces its roots to 1880 when British colonialist Cecil John Rhodes founded De Beers Mines in Kimberley. Half a century later, in 1929, the Oppenheimer family of South Africa took control of De Beers. The power and influence of the family would last for most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Today De Beers Investments operates several opencast and under-ground mines in Southern Africa and abroad (including Botswana, Namibia, and Canada), as well as offshore marine concessions along the Namaqualand and southern Namibia coasts. Its production of diamonds from kimberlite mines and alluvial workings accounts for up to 90 % of South Africa's total output.

Globally, the De Beers Group is a privately held multinational corporation that leads the world in diamond exploration, mining, and sea recovery ... as well as sorting, valuation, and marketing of the rough stones. It uses its dominant size to influence world market prices of rough diamonds. At the same time, the company has invested heavily in creating an image of luxury, scarcity, and eternity around diamonds. The group created an advertising jingle in the 1940s - 'diamonds are forever' - that has convinced men and women the world over, especially in the wealthier countries, to buy its diamond jewellery.<sup>531</sup>

At the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the Central Selling Organisation (CSO) – a De Beers subsidiary – was still controlling the sales and marketing of 80 to 85 % of the world's rough diamond production from its London offices. The worldwide annual production then amounted to approximately one hundred million carats. In comparison with other commodities, the diamond price is tremendously stable with an inflation adjusted price of 3% + per annum over 30 years. This compact form of wealth also has an extremely high transportability factor when one compares the weight of US\$1 million worth of gold to the equivalent weight and value of diamonds.<sup>532</sup>

From the CSO, the wholesale trade distributes the diamonds to buyers all over the world. The means by which this distribution is effected is a chain of diamond clubs and bourses situated in the world's major diamond trading centres in Amsterdam, Antwerp, London, New York, Tel Aviv, and Mumbai (Bombay). Buyers, sellers, and brokers congregate here to bargain over stones in the time-honoured fashion of the diamond trade, sealing their deal with the words *Mazel un b'rachah*, a Yiddish expression meaning 'Good luck and blessings'.<sup>533</sup> Nothing else is needed to

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<sup>531</sup> Institute for Public Policy Research: IPPR Briefing Paper No. 20, September 2003.

<sup>532</sup> [http://www.globaldiamond.com/page\\_10.htm](http://www.globaldiamond.com/page_10.htm) (Global Diamond Resources, Inc 2001) (accessed 11 January 2002).

<sup>533</sup> Barred by anti-semitism from the trades and professions, many Jewish families in Eastern Europe turned to moneylending and diamonds as a few of the avenues for advancement still open to them. When they emigrated to more favourable environments, they transplanted their skills. In many parts of the world today the diamond business is therefore largely Jewish-controlled. (A. J. Wannenburg (text) & Peter Johnson (photography), *Diamond People* (London: Norfolk House Publishers, 1990), 198.

create a binding contract. This reliance on trust can be traced to the history of the early modern diamond trade of the eighteenth century. It was conducted through cross-cultural networks despite differences in ethnicity and religion. Rather than basing trust on kinship or religion, international merchants in the early modern period developed the so-called merchants' style. This commercial practice required careful assessments of individual reputation and past performance, extensive business correspondence, credit-worthiness and bills of exchange. Most scholars agree that trust and reputation were paramount when entering into a business deal.<sup>534</sup>

Of course, disputes can and do arise; but when they do, they are settled within the clubs by a board of arbitrators. Rules and regulations are strict, as befits a trade that relies so much on mutual trust and serious violations can result in a member being removed from membership - thus effectively excluding the trader from the legitimate diamond trade.<sup>535</sup>

Since the late 1960s, De Beers had been expanding its presence in Namaqualand by building and increasing its capacity to extract precious stones. In 1989, the results of De Beers' three complexes in the area yielded 964,375 carats valued at an incredible US\$ 150 million or more.<sup>536</sup> While the company grew and extracted increasingly from the area, growing enormously wealthy, the level of poverty among the population in Namaqualand had been intensifying especially after the closure of the crayfish factories.

In September 1994, De Beers had sombre news to announce to its mineworkers at the Kleinzee- Koingnaas mine complex. The company newsletter, *Namaqualand Mines Chronicle*, reminded the workforce that the company had forewarned that it had always been De Beers practice to look no more than 10 years ahead in life of mine planning. Many people were caught on the wrong foot and expressed their disbelief when told that mining operations were about to end. The reality, according to management, was that the mine had only 10 or 12 years to go before it ceased operations, and the geology department did not expect to find any major new reserves that would significantly extend the life of mine.<sup>537</sup>

This was devastating news for a community that had few other resources to rely on. The mine was legendary for the quality of its diamonds and a fortune had been produced here, supporting the two towns of Kleinzee and Koingnaas, and other settlements. Management were plainly "not planning to run the mine down slowly", as might be expected, to give the residents time to adjust. Rather, they prepared to increase production dramatically from 600, 000 carats a year to one million carats a year for the next 12 years, to get as many diamonds out as quickly as

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<sup>534</sup> Tjil Vanneste, 'Unpaid Diamonds: Trust, Reputation, and the Merchants' Style in Eighteen-Century Europe' (*Shofar*, Vol. 38 (3), 2020-2021) (Accessed 9 November 2024).

<sup>535</sup> George G. Blakey, *The Diamond*, London, 1977, 153.

<sup>536</sup> Peter Carstens, *In the Company of Diamonds*, 2001, 130. Cf Figure 54, Annexure 5: Annual Productions, Kleinzee (1926 – 1955).

<sup>537</sup> <http://www.sparkle.plus.com/d-Ch16-defending.html> (Chapter 16, "Defending the Crown", p. 1). Excerpts from Stefan Kanfer, *The Last Empire: De Beers, Diamonds and the World* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1994) (Accessed 19 September 2002).

possible.<sup>538</sup> In what amounted to some kind of alternative view to that of the company, the author of “Defending the Crown” contended that ...

now that South Africa has a black government, a wary De Beers could plan to take out as many diamonds as possible from South Africa in as short a time space as feasible as it allegedly had done in Namibia – and then close the mines down over which it has the least control – namely the onshore mines. Their high tech, relatively low staffed, unpoliced and non-unionised boats were far more flexible and looked to provide all De Beers’ future needs. There was no doubt about the threat to De Beers embodied in the coming to power of the black majority in South Africa. The African National Congress (ANC) had said it would nationalise diamond and other mines when it took over. So, once the tide had started to change in the ANC’s favour, ...

By 2011, seventeen years after the initial announcement of mine closure, De Beers Consolidated Diamond Mines had changed its corporate decision and decided to sell off its assets. Angry inhabitants who formed part of a consortium to make an offer to purchase De Beers Namaqualand Mines, were on the warpath after hearing the news that a bid from an ‘outsider’ had been accepted.<sup>539</sup> This decision by De Beers was characterised as shocking and an opportunity squandered to help uplift the impoverished local community. They threatened to embark on a campaign of civil disobedience and legal action. A strongly worded press statement summed up the community’s view about the perceived betrayal. De Beers, according to them, had ignored the indigenous people despite the fact that the latter’s forefathers had brought in “billions of mining profits” while the communities remained impoverished. One upset leader voiced their feelings of disappointment, anger, and disgust by declaring that the decision by De Beers to sell up to an outsider would “forever bother their (De Beers’) conscience”.

The aggrieved and resentful communities had given voice to a long-held belief that they were exploited by mining companies who had not only dispossessed them of their ancestral land but carried away the profits for the benefit of others outside the boundaries of their district. The loss of their ancestral land ... first to Trekboers and then to De Beers Consolidated Diamond Mines ... had long engaged the communal mind of the neighbouring Komaggas Reserve about lodging a claim for restitution. The land struggles of the Namaqualand communities of the 1980s had suddenly brought focus and a sense of determination in this regard.

In late 2010, De Beers Consolidated Diamond Mines officially announced its intention to sell rather than close its Namaqualand Mines, and a bidding process was started. The shortlist consisted of six companies, out of which Trans Hex was eventually chosen. The acquisition by Trans Hex of De Beers Namaqualand Mines through the former’s subsidiary, Emerald Panther Investments 78, became effective in October 2014. Trans Hex also secured the marketing and management agreement with Emerald Panther, thus increasing its effective interest in Namaqualand Mines to 52 %. Significantly, an amendment to the sale agreement housed the South African State’s 20 % interest in Namaqualand Mines in a special purpose vehicle.<sup>540</sup>

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<sup>538</sup> <http://www.sparkle.plus.com/d-Ch16-defending.html> (Chapter 16, “Defending the Crown”, p. 1). Excerpts from Stefan Kanfer, *The Last Empire: De Beers, Diamonds and the World* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1994) (Accessed 19 September 2002).

<sup>539</sup> *Rapport*, 8 May 2011.

<sup>540</sup> *Mining.weekly.com*: “Trans Hex takes over Namaqua diamond mines from De Beers”, 29 October 2014.

### Socio-economic impact of mine closure

De Beers Consolidated Diamond Mines: Namaqualand Division (DBNM) in 1992 commissioned the Environmental Evaluation Unit (EEU) of the University of Cape Town to assess the social and economic impacts of future mine closure and to recommend measures to mitigate the negative impacts. Several investigations (7) were conducted as part of the master's degree programme in the Department of Environmental and Geographical Science. The investigation established that the majority of the mine workers to be retrenched were from the neighbouring communities of Komaggas and Steinkopf, and in some households more than one person worked for the mine. The impact of the proposed closure was projected to be extreme and far-reaching, and this anticipated grim scenario was compounded by the fact that apart from mining, there was little diversification in terms of industry in the region able to absorb a substantial number of people laid off. Job creation and stimulation of secondary industries within the Namaqualand region extended beyond the mine perimeter only to the extent that supplies, maintenance of machinery, and other goods and services were required.

On hearing the news of the proposed mine closure, an employee from the Namaqualand-born group at Kleinzee, expressed their state of mind in graphic images reminiscent of farm life:

“If the mine closes, it will be like an artery that has been cut. We will bleed to death in Namaqualand. People will have to migrate to the cities. Many of our people know only this area. I hope we get a good package if the mine closes”.<sup>541</sup>

The perception among rural communities supplying labour to the De Beers Mine<sup>542</sup> has long been that the company invested aid in the rest of the country and internationally, but not in communities living close to the mine. Areas of need which were pinpointed included education, health, water provision, sanitation, recreation, and the services of social workers.<sup>543</sup> It was therefore recommended by the researchers that employee attitudes towards the process of planning for the proposed closure be addressed. The cynicism expressed by employees and leaders of community organisations about the company's motivation for undertaking an investigation of the impact of mine closure was an area of concern. People stated that the company had in the past shown little interest in contributing to the development of the region and expressed doubt that this would change in the future.<sup>544</sup>

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<sup>541</sup> Melanie Gosling, “An assessment of the potential economic-socio (sic) impact of the future closure of DBNM's diamond mines in Namaqualand”, MPhil, Department of Environmental and Geographical Studies, University of Cape Town, 1992, 67.

<sup>542</sup> Komaggas supplied 89 %; Buffelsrivier 59 %; Hondeklipbaai 48 %; Steinkopf 43 %; Lekkersing 21 %.

<sup>543</sup> Melanie Gosling, “An assessment of the potential economic-socio (sic) impact of the future closure of DBNM's diamond mines in Namaqualand”, 1992, 111-112.

<sup>544</sup> Judy Beaumont, “Closure of De Beers Namaqualand Mines in 2002: A Socio-economic Impact Assessment”, MPhil., University of Cape Town, 1992, 19.

Figure 44 Award-winning multi-purpose hall donated to the community of Steinkopf by De Beers Namaqualand Mines. Abandoned today. (Own Collection)



A case in point is Komaggas, a rural reserve situated 45 km west of Kleinsee. In 1990 the town had a population of 2 650 people made up of approximately 450 households. With large-scale retrenchments from DBNM, many people were forced to depend on stock farming until they could find alternative employment. This put enormous pressure on the land which in turn led to an increase in overgrazing and land degradation.<sup>545</sup> The investigation also predicted that unemployment would lead to social decline

and attendant problems such as increased migratory labour, and threats to the stability of the family structure.

De Beers Namaqualand Mines (DBNM) contributed minimally towards development in the Namaqualand region, people believed. From an examination of DBNM internal memorandums dealing with expenditures on community development, it was possible to establish that between 1986 and 1989 the company spent between R40 000 and R60 000 per year on assorted items in the Namaqualand communities. There was no further expenditure in this area for 1990 and 1991. Using 1991 DBNM turnover figures, and assuming an annual expenditure on community work of R100 000, it can be calculated that the amount spent represents 0,02 % of the total annual turnover of DBNM. To place this in context: of a total of 10, 205 936 carats recovered overall in 1985, De Beers Namaqualand Mines Division contributed approximately 1 000 000 carats, or roughly 10 %. It can be seen, from this rough comparison, that expenditure on community development in Namaqualand was negligible.<sup>546</sup>

After closure and sale of its mines in 2014, the economic impact on the region was felt in the loss of business from DBNM and its employees that affected the overall economy of Namaqualand. Economic decline appeared in the loss of De Beers' contribution to the regional economy by way of salaries paid to employees, regional services council fees and central government company and personal income taxes. Seen against this background, the long-term objective should therefore be for the economy of Namaqualand to move away from such heavy dependence on a non-renewable resource. In the interim, it is important that mining should be emphasised as a means towards development, and not simply as an end in itself.<sup>547</sup>

### **De Beers' legacy for Namaqualand**

As a post-mining scenario loomed for De Beers Namaqualand Mines, the question of leaving a legacy came to the fore. A collaborative partnership between De Beers and Conservation South

<sup>545</sup> Judy Beaumont, "Closure of De Beers Namaqualand Mines in 2002: A Socio-economic Impact Assessment", MPhil., University of Cape Town, 1992, 58.

<sup>546</sup> Idem, 1992.

<sup>547</sup> Idem, 1992, 87.

Africa (CSA) was explored. A desktop study funded in 2010 by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), identified Namaqualand as one of four case studies in Africa. A joint venture would demonstrate that collaboration between a mining company and a non-governmental conservation organisation (NGO) could contribute to significant conservation outcomes. De Beers, the world's largest diamond mining and marketing company and owner of the largest diamond mine in Namaqualand, had by this time indeed made a significant contribution towards conservation planning in an internationally recognised biodiversity priority area, namely the Succulent Karoo hotspot which includes Namaqualand.<sup>548</sup>

Inspired by the Eden Project in Cornwall (UK) in which a post-mining landscape had been transformed into an eco-tourism attraction, Conservation South Africa (CSA) proposed a similarly ambitious programme of developing ecotourism and 'green industry' projects in Namaqualand under the banner of the Living Edge of Africa Project (LEAP). De Beers contracted CSA to develop the project further and its subsequent work led to a pre-feasibility report published in May 2009. The report suggested a number of projects focused on mariculture (seawater greenhouses), wind energy (turbines), environmental rehabilitation and land art.<sup>549</sup> A feasibility study was underway to be completed by March 2010. The vision of LEAP was to "recast the legacy of mining into a thriving economic hub and a model of sustainable development, creating low-carbon enterprises and jobs based on conservation and innovative technologies". Such economic hubs or enterprise nodes would create synergy around the use of seawater, freshwater, energy, nutrients, humidity, temperature differentials and tourism, or interpretive activities such as land art. Studies regarding the conversion of Koingnaas and Hondeklip Bay to 'green towns' were therefore to be fast-tracked.

Although De Beers initially indicated they were committed to leaving a positive legacy from a century of diamond mining in Namaqualand, according to reports the company has since reneged on key social and environmental responsibilities, seeing these instead as burdensome liabilities to be minimised or avoided. The company had also been seen to be reluctant to negotiate with local communities over resolving land claims and contributing positively to the development of post-mining socio-economic opportunities for communities adversely affected by mass retrenchments and mine closures.<sup>550</sup> And despite the excitement generated by the proposals in the pre-feasibility plan, the mining company in early 2011 also decided not to pursue the Living Edge of Africa Project, which was intended to generate substantial employment opportunities through an ambitious 'green' development project for the Namaqualand coast.<sup>551</sup> This change of heart was triggered, Conservation South Africa (CSA)

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<sup>548</sup> See Ralph Hamann, 'Partnerships are not forever: The limits of collaborative governance in diamond mining in Namaqualand'. In: Merle Sowman & Rachel Wynberg (eds), *Governance for Justice and Environmental Sustainability. Lessons across natural resource sectors in sub-Saharan Africa*, 2014 (London & New York: Routledge, 2014), 263.

<sup>549</sup> Land art. A landscape artist was hired to transform the unsightly mine dumps and areas excavated down to bedrock into pleasing land shapes and contours to attract tourists. The 7 000-tonne artwork titled "AM/PM Shadow Lines", comprises 14 rows of gravel piled 2 metres high, neatly aligned in a 100 metre-diameter circle. (*Sunday Times*, "Diamond in the dust for local art", 25 April 2010).

<sup>550</sup> Iona Blair, "In the wake of Diamond Mining: ...", UCT, MPhil., 2011, 115.

<sup>551</sup> *Ibid.*, 2011, 115.

maintained, by a change in corporate leadership, with Nicky Oppenheimer stepping down as chair of the board of De Beers, and also by changes in mine-level leadership.<sup>552</sup>

Conservation South Africa saw the sale of the mine as a convenient means for De Beers to avoid making the more committed investments in the social and physical environment envisaged in the LEAP document. For example, land uses proposed by the mining company included incongruent proposals such as the erection of a correctional services facility (i.e., a prison catering for up to a thousand inmates), and the storage of hazardous waste materials<sup>553</sup>. Iona Blair also suggests similar ulterior motives for the sale of the mine:

“What (the) mine sale might mean in practice is that De Beers will attempt to dispense with the social and environmental responsibilities they had initially agreed to take on, selling on instead to a smaller company without capacity to achieve high corporate responsibility standards”.<sup>554</sup>



Figure 45 First Office of Kleinzee Diamond Mine (1928) (Jack Carstens, *A Fortune Through My Fingers*, 1962)

### The State Alluvial Diggings (S.A.D.)

By 1953, forecasts were made about Namaqualand becoming the “Diamond Field of the future”. It is true that the surface of the diamond field had then only been scratched, even after twenty-five years of operations. In the late 1970s, the State Alluvial Diggings was still forging ahead despite predictions of depletion of the reserves. But the workers in general felt uncertain

<sup>552</sup> Ralph Hamann, ‘Partnerships are not forever: The limits of collaborative governance in diamond mining in Namaqualand’, 2014, 267.

<sup>553</sup> Ralph Hamann, ‘Partnerships are not forever: The limits of collaborative governance in diamond mining in Namaqualand’, 2014. Note: Namaqualand has a strange attraction as storage site of hazardous materials. Vaalputs, east of Springbok, is South Africa’s only nuclear waste site. There was also an aborted attempt in 1984 to store hazardous waste from Europe and the USA at Alexander Bay. Such a move was to have generated much-needed foreign currency for a country subject to international economic sanctions. (John Yeld, environmental reporter, *Cape Times*, 1984).

<sup>554</sup> Iona Blair, “In the wake of Diamond Mining: ...”, UCT, MPhil, 2011, 92.

about the future of the diggings and speculated that the mine would be active for only several more years. The day would come when mining operations would grind to a halt. With the political temperature in the country rising and heightening feelings of insecurity, an added worry in the late 1980s was the report that the Coloureds were poised to lay claim to the territory of Namaqualand, including the land at Alexander Bay.

The year 1989 nevertheless saw a state diggings that had been in continuous production for 63 years, its land and sea operations proving economically viable. Optimism now abounded about the continued existence of the mine for many years ahead. Alexander Bay also entered a new era in which the state-owned company would be removed from the guardianship of the government. The old State Alluvial Diggings (established in 1928) was taken over from the Government in 1989 and transformed by statute into the Alexander Bay Development Corporation (Alexkor). The Corporation would in turn be changed into a juristic entity, incorporated under the Alexkor Limited Act No. 116 of 1992 (as amended). Since November 1992, Alexkor Limited has been run as a public company with the State as sole shareholder. This commercialised state asset now had significant strategic importance for the Namaqualand region. Its core business was described as the mining of diamonds “on land, along rivers, on beaches and in the sea along the north-west coast of South Africa”.

When the newly elected African National Congress government took over in 1994, Alexkor had to make a host of adjustments, transitioning from the old to the new political order. The new regime’s administrative style required more direct control, and affirmative action was the order of the day. Two women were appointed to the board of directors and great sensitivity was to be displayed on the question of gender and racial equality. The old mining policy did not allow women on the mine, one recalls. The Alexkor Development Foundation (ADF) was set up in 1994 to spearhead the development of the community of Namaqualand. A great concern for the government in this regard was the dearth of coloureds and blacks in managerial positions.

From a state-owned mine that was focussed in the past on the alleviation of poverty among the Whites of Namaqualand, Alexkor Limited now strived to evolve into a company with the professed aim of social responsibility. The development arm, The Alexkor Development Foundation, aimed - according to its mission statement - to develop Namaqualand and its human resources, particularly its disadvantaged communities.<sup>555</sup> Thirty percent of the company’s annual after-tax income was to be contributed directly to the Alexkor Development Foundation (ADF).<sup>556</sup>

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<sup>555</sup> Alexkor Development Foundation Annual report 1995 (produced by Francois Odendaal Productions cc, Cape Town, 1995) (Alexkor Development Foundation, 4 Sten Centre, 17 Van Riebeeck Street, Springbok 8240).

<sup>556</sup> Cf “Alexkorontwikkelingstigting: Agtergrond (n.d.) c. 1994.



Figure 46 Signboard at the entrance to Alexander Bay town (November 2021).

What happened next is the stuff farce is made of. On 17 November 2011, the much-vaunted Alexkor Development Foundation (ADF), with a brand-new set of trustees, reported to the Mineral and Energy Committee of the National Assembly on its operations, governance structure and audited financial statements, from inception to date.<sup>557</sup> At the very start of proceedings, the Parliamentary Committee expressed its dismay at the fact that the delegations from Alexkor Development Foundation (ADF) and Namaqualand Development Agency (NAMDA) were not accompanied by their respective financial officers. The two bodies were as a result unable to provide audited financial statements.

The chairperson of ADF, Mr Joshua Losper, stepped up to the plate and reported that although neither ADF nor NAMDA was functioning since 2009, neither body had been dissolved and were legally operational. During discussion, delegation members from ADF and NAMDA explained to the parliamentary committee how ADF had been absorbed into NAMDA, and how NAMDA had then been transformed into a proprietary limited company to conduct business operations such as making investments and advancing loans to emerging small businesses.<sup>558</sup> It was immediately pointed out to them that the millions in public money managed this way constituted a gross violation of the Public Finance Management Act (PFMA). Furthermore, the said two entities were established in terms of the law, and the process followed to merge the ADF with NAMDA was outside of the law itself, and the trust deeds. NAMDA had, to crown it all, unilaterally and unlawfully breached the provision (in clause 16 of the ADF Trust Deed) that Alexkor Limited pay over a portion of after-tax profits to Alexkor Development Fund and reduced it from 30 % to 10 %. Anyway, Mr Losper could not or would not answer any further “difficult” questions put to him and loudly complained of a headache (or words to that effect), and that he was at a great disadvantage not having his lawyer(s) present while the parliamentary committee had legal counsel available and at the ready.

Alexkor Limited as run then was by the first quarter of 1999 considered to be inefficient. A few years back it was producing around 500 000 carats, but this was now down to under 200 000 carats due to low productivity and a theft rate that had reached endemic proportions. According to reliable estimates, between 20 to 30 per cent of the production landed in the pockets of diamond theft syndicates and Alexkor Limited’s own personnel. Little effort had been made to upgrade mineral resources to reserves, so the mine only had eighteen months of reserves with a cut-off grade of 10 carats/100 tonnes, according to projections by brokers BoE Securities in

<sup>557</sup> Alexkor Development Foundation ([pmg.org.za/committee-meeting/13785](http://pmg.org.za/committee-meeting/13785)) (accessed 4 November 2021).

<sup>558</sup> On 26 November 2009, BVZ Attorneys of Springbok reported that 29 loan debtors could not be traced. Loans were extended to entrepreneurs such as XYZ Construction, New Generation Development, Mayenzeke Magic Consultations, One Way Shopping Complex, and Sugar Daddy.

Johannesburg. Alexkor Limited, which had pledged to run a growing, profitable, and sustainable mining organisation that contributed to the developmental needs of the communities in which it operated, was in deep trouble. The government, in reaction to the situation, now planned in earnest to privatise the parastatal diamond producer. It intended selling its stake of 90 per cent in Alexkor, with 10 per cent remaining for the local community of Namaqualand. Alexkor, as a nationalised company, was loss-making, however. In the year ended June 1997 alone, losses of R28 million were sustained on diamond sales of R189 million.

To rescue the company from this potentially disastrous situation, Alexkor Limited put out management contract tenders for its mining operations. Against the odds, Petra Diamonds' consortium named Nabera won the contract. The secret may have been in the members of the consortium which included a company called Mmakau Mining, headed by a "formidable" lady named Bridget Radebe. Nabera Consortium included Mmakau Mining; UAH representing seventeen unions; DEC was the Disability Employment Concerns Trust; and Gariep Khoi Mining which involved the local community. In some quarters, it was felt that it would have been hard to put together a stronger political team and the commitment by Nabera to increase production instead of cutting it, was just what the politicians charged with privatising the State-owned diamond mining operations wanted to hear. Adonis Pouroulis, chairman of Nabera and chief executive of Petra Diamonds, agreed that the Nabera consortium had quite a task ahead of it, but was sufficiently confident to forecast that they "should be able to get production up to an annual rate of at least 250 000 carats within the next year." It was now up to the Nabera consortium to turn it into profit in the next two years and then be in pole position to win the bid when Alexkor Limited goes fully private thereafter. In the end, after many delays, setbacks and much turbulence on the mine, nothing came of this attempt at turning the mine around and privatising the state assets at Alexander Bay.

### **Scarlet Sky Investments: Set up & Primed**

By 2011, Alexkor Limited<sup>559</sup> was still endeavouring to be a "competitive, progressive and forward-looking organisation with a conscience". Its business operations were run from well-appointed offices at high rentals in Rosebank, Johannesburg ... 2 400 km away from the mine.

Circumstantial evidence suggests that with the appointment of Malusi Gigaba as South Africa's public enterprises minister in late 2010, the Gupta family<sup>560</sup> was then opening a new front in their state capture project, setting Alexkor Limited in a new direction. Their modus operandi would later be laid bare by the Judicial Commission of Inquiry into State Capture: exert influence by installing compliant officials in state bodies, add friendly board members and introduce plans which work to your advantage. Following the script to the letter, Gigaba in September 2012 appointed a new Alexkor board which signalled the start of a process characterised as "an orchestrated plan of state capture". During the same month, Gigaba also

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<sup>559</sup> Alexkor Limited, Reg. No. 1992/006368/06 Incorporated by Act No. 116 of 1992, is a schedule 2 public enterprise trading as Alexkor SOC Limited; controlled by the government of South Africa through the Minister of Public Enterprises.

<sup>560</sup> (Irregularly) naturalised South Africans of Indian origin, the Gupta family headed by Atul, Rajesh and Tony would become the subject of a sprawling state commission of investigation that probed years of theft of state resources.

appointed Rafique Bagus<sup>561</sup> chairman of Alexkor. And significantly, a month before, Mervyn Carstens had been employed as CEO of the Alexkor Ltd - Richtersveld Mining Co. and its Pooling & Sharing Joint Venture (PSJV).<sup>562</sup>

After the two Gupta-linked contacts, Messrs Bagus and Carstens, had been installed at its top table, the PSJV started shopping around for a new company to market and sell its diamonds. A tender was issued calling for bidders. On 6 November 2014, the shelf company Scarlet Sky 60 CC sent an expression of interest. The process to select the new marketing company would become beset with irregularities but despite red flags raised from day one, Scarlet Sky Investments was awarded the contract in March 2015. The Share Register showed its directors as Daniel Nathan (40 %) and Kuben Moodley (60 %) through their respective companies, Daniel Nathan Trading and Kimomode.<sup>563</sup> It is important to note that Scarlet Sky held no diamond trading licence, and that Kuben Moodley had no diamond industry background at all.<sup>564</sup>

### **The Zondo Commission of Inquiry into State Capture**

The Zondo Commission would lay bare just how brazen state capture was pulled off. Enter Gavin Craythorne, a marine diamond miner and one of several who operated as small-scale sea mining contractors for Alexkor Limited. Craythorne - an industry activist who felt the Alexander Bay marine contractors were being cheated - testified before the Zondo Commission in early January 2021 about their dealings with the parties involved, namely the Pooling & Sharing Joint Venture, Scarlet Sky and Daniel Nathan. Under agreement with the PSJV,<sup>565</sup> the contractors operated boats equipped with suction hoses to vacuum and mine the seabed. The gravel was then delivered to an onshore processing plant operated by the PSJV to extract the diamonds. The PSJV sorted the diamonds by weight, and the contractor was handed a receipt and the production forwarded to auction. The mining contractor received payment for his diamonds two weeks after the stones were sold.

Describing himself as a whistle-blower calling attention to the rot and capture of the state diamond miner, Craythorne detailed long-standing allegations of how the Gupta business empire operated to capture the Alexkor diamond marketing chain through Scarlet Sky

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<sup>561</sup> R. Bagus, sometime Deputy Director-General of the Department of Trade & Industry, and Special Adviser to Alec Erwin, Minister of State-Owned Enterprises (SOE). Chairman of both Alexkor Ltd board and the PSJV (Pooling & Sharing Joint Venture).

<sup>562</sup> Mervyn Carstens, ex-Trans Hex Mining land operations director up to 2012. Appointed to the PSJV in August 2012, reporting to R. Bagus. Richtersveld Mining Co.(RMC) is the mining arm of the community's Communal Property Association (CPA).

<sup>563</sup> Kubentheran (Kuben) Moodley, a politically connected businessman, was linked to former state president, Jacob Zuma, as well as to the Guptas. Moodley was also a former adviser to minister of mineral resources, Mosebenzi Zwane. Daniel Nathan's father Selwyn was linked to a Gupta company, Trillian, which in turn was linked to Scarlet Sky. P.S.: Kuben Moodley was arrested during 2021 "in connection with alleged money laundering of the proceeds from contracts improperly awarded by Transnet to Gupta-link (sic) Regiments and Trillian [companies] as well as alleged theft of funds from a Transnet pension fund".

<sup>564</sup> #GuptaLeaks: "A tale of two captures – Alexkor, Gupta Inc and 'WMC'". (Scorpio Amabhungane, *Mail & Guardian*, 13 December 2017).

<sup>565</sup> A joint venture between Alexkor Ltd (the state miner) and the Richtersveld Mining Co. (the community's mining arm).

Investments (SSI). In time, he and others such as George Nicolaai, another diamond miner operating in Alexander Bay, would pay a heavy price. Shut out of mining concessions, they were finally forced to sell their sea-going vessels.<sup>566</sup>

Scarlet Sky Investments 60 (Pty) Ltd of P.O. Box 333, Melrose Arch, Johannesburg was allowed to auction and systematically sell tens of millions of dollars' worth of diamonds at reduced prices to dealers across the world. Some of the stones were even sold to a company owned by one of Scarlet Sky's own shareholders, Daniel Nathan, which means he obtained undervalued diamonds he could later resell at market prices. Undervaluing the stones contributed to major losses for the state treasury and the small-scale miners who for several decades had been relying on the industry. Scarlet Sky Investments had discretion over the valuation of the diamonds and undersold them by as much as 47 %, according to the testimony of a key witness. The witness estimated that over a period of about five or so years diamonds valued at R783 million were sold for just R414 million.<sup>567</sup>

The purchase price of diamonds is typically determined by the four Cs – carat, colour, clarity and cut.<sup>568</sup> But the PSJV valued diamonds based only on carat (weight) and the number of stones the diver delivered. They did not keep record of the other factors that can add considerable value, nor did they allow the divers to conduct their own valuations. Such valuations are not always necessary before the diamonds leave the mining area if there are safeguards in place such as securing the chain of custody as the diamonds travel to the point of sale. This measure prevents high-quality diamonds from being manipulated and swapped along the way for lower-quality diamonds of the same weight.<sup>569</sup>

Under Scarlet Sky, none of these safeguards was in place according to Gavin Craythorne, and no broker's note (reflecting the prices fetched)<sup>570</sup> was furnished to the contractors. As auction host, Scarlet Sky was able to determine reserve (minimum) price and who bought the diamonds. Experts say under-valuation in the diamond industry is a common tactic, allowing purchasers to pay lower taxes and other fees in the country of origin, only to sell the diamonds abroad later at higher prices. In many cases, the institution or party that undervalues the

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<sup>566</sup> *Sunday Times*, Times Live, 7 January 2022.

<sup>567</sup> Investigation: "How Gupta allies gamed S.A.'s diamond trade" ([timeslive.co.za/Sunday-times-daily/news/2021-08-26-investgation-](https://timeslive.co.za/Sunday-times-daily/news/2021-08-26-investgation-/)) (dated 26 August 2021).

<sup>568</sup> Colours: white, pink, yellow, black, canary, champagne, blue, grey, green, brown and orange (rare).

<sup>569</sup> Investigation: "How Gupta allies gamed S.A.'s diamond trade" ([timeslive.co.za/Sunday-times-daily/news/2021-08-26-investgation-](https://timeslive.co.za/Sunday-times-daily/news/2021-08-26-investgation-/)) (dated 26 August 2021).

<sup>570</sup> Prices or mark-up of stones fetched on auction and declared in the Note, bear a fixed relationship to the prices paid to the contractor. The Broker's Note is handed to the contractor/seller. The Notes can be open to falsification by collusion between the buyer and the seller for a low declared value and less export duty. An easier and safer means of defrauding the Government is hardly conceivable. (Colin Newbury, *The Diamond Ring: Business, Politics and Precious Stones in South Africa, 1867-1947* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 277).

diamonds for the purchaser's benefit would receive a kickback (off the books) from the purchaser.<sup>571</sup>

Meanwhile, only 85 % of diamonds from Alexkor was sold at auction. Scarlet Sky was allowed to select 5 % of the highest-quality diamonds for "beneficiation", a process to improve the value of the gem through cutting and polishing. These (5 %) selected diamonds for "beneficiation" were bought from Scarlet Sky by another company Nathan owned, namely Daniel Nathan Trading, suggesting the stones could have been bought at undervalued prices and then sold off at market rates either in rough form or after cutting and polishing. The remaining 10 % of Alexkor's production was set aside for the State Diamond Trader, "a state-run agency set up to sell diamonds on the government's behalf". Mervyn Carstens was conveniently appointed as the State Diamond Trader's chairman in 2016 while still serving as CEO of the PSJV - thus effectively making him seller and buyer of Alexkor's diamonds.

Under increasing pressure and cornered by these revelations, Daniel Nathan made a last-minute attempt through a regulatory sleight of hand to legalise Scarlet Sky's irregular operations. To start with, Scarlet Sky never held a diamond trader's licence. So, in January 2019 Daniel Nathan Trading (a licensed diamond trader) said it was changing its name to Alexander Bay Diamond Company and asked that the name of the licence holder (Daniel Nathan Trading) be changed. The state regulator, S.A. Diamond & Precious Metals Regulator, duly approved the licence under the new name of Alexander Bay Diamond Company and even backdated it to March 2015 (when Scarlet Sky was awarded the contract). The company, Daniel Nathan Trading, was not at the same time deregistered or its name officially changed with the Companies & Intellectual Property Commission (CIPRO). Instead, Daniel Nathan wrote to CIPRO (a separate agency from the S.A. Metals Regulator) to request Scarlet Sky change its name to Alexander Bay Diamond Company, meaning the licence intended for Daniel Nathan Trading in fact went to the now-renamed Scarlet Sky, i.e., Alexander Bay Diamond Co.

Scarlet Sky's contract with the PSJV of Alexander Bay to market and sell its production ended in 2020, but its termination was subsequently challenged by Scarlet Sky. In the meantime, diamonds continued to be marketed and sold by Scarlet Sky Investments (SSI) on a monthly basis. The appointment of SSI was, however, questionable from a governance perspective, since it never held a diamond trading licence.

As things started unravelling, the state miner continued to hobble along. After years of mismanagement, allegations of state capture and infighting, Alexkor Limited was placed in administration in September 2019. The administrator's report to parliament during May 2020 depicted a company in critical decline. Lloyd McPatie, Alexkor's administrator, reported that the diamond mining company was trading recklessly and could not meet its financial obligations as years of mismanagement caught up with the miner. Briefing the Portfolio Committee on Public Enterprises on issues at the state-owned diamond miner, he said the Pooling & Sharing Joint Venture (PSJV) was also technically insolvent and could not trade itself out of its current financial situation. Alexkor, which owns 51 % of the mine and the Richtersveld Community the

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<sup>571</sup> Investigation: "How Gupta allies gamed S.A.'s diamond trade" [timeslive.co.za/Sunday-times-daily/news/2021-08-26-investgation-](https://timeslive.co.za/Sunday-times-daily/news/2021-08-26-investgation-/) (dated 26 August 2021).

balance, had simply been riddled with financial and technical mismanagement, as well as legal issues, since about 2010.<sup>572</sup>

### **The Zondo Commission Report & Prosecutions**

A decade after the company became a site of Gupta influence and corruption, the Judicial Commission of Inquiry into State Capture (Zondo Commission) in late April 2022 issued in its Report a lengthy list of recommendations to pursue wrongdoers at Alexkor Limited.<sup>573</sup> The state capture report found that Scarlet Sky Investments (SSI) received the contract without holding a licence to sell diamonds or having any record in the diamond industry and that the bid should have been disqualified from the outset. The tender committee adjudicating the bids ignored that. Instead, Scarlet Sky went on to procure R2 billion in diamonds from the joint venture, which probably constituted a criminal offence due to the lack of a trading licence. In addition, the commission heard testimony that Scarlet Sky underpaid the Alexkor-Richtersveld joint venture for diamonds, and that its selling prices for diamonds were substantially lower than average market prices.

The Commission recommended that law enforcement agencies investigate and confirm a host of allegations against Rafique Bagus, Duncan Korabie,<sup>574</sup> and Dr Roger Paul: whether they perpetrated fraud by misrepresenting Scarlet Sky's compliance with tender requirements; whether the three breached their fiduciary duties and be declared delinquent directors; whether they acted in contempt of court after the Western Cape High Court found in 2014 they were unlawfully appointed in the joint venture as directors of Alexkor's partner company, Richtersveld Mining Company.<sup>575</sup>

The commission also aimed to have law enforcement agencies investigate and prosecute all the directors of Scarlet Sky, along with its part-owner Daniel Nathan, for "wilfully furnishing false information" to the South African Diamond and Precious Metals Regulator (SADPMR). Other companies associated with Nathan should also be investigated for contravening the Diamond Act. Law enforcement agencies were also to investigate and prosecute Mervyn Carstens, CEO of the Alexkor-Richtersveld joint venture, together with Zarina Kellerman, chief legal officer of Alexkor, for fraud following their presentation to the board that a proper due diligence was performed prior to the award of the tender to Scarlet Sky. Both Carstens and Kellerman were in contact with Gupta-associated operators, the commission heard.

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<sup>572</sup> "Administrator says Alexkor, partner mismanaged and insolvent", 27 May 2020 by Marleni Arnoldi. (Miningweekly.com/article/administrator-says-alexkor-partner-is-mismanaged-and-insolvent-2020-05-27).

<sup>573</sup> "Zondo wants Alexkor directors, diamond dealers to be probed for fraud". (fin24, 29 April 2022) (Compiled by Helena Wasserman).

<sup>574</sup> Duncan Korabie, an attorney based in Wellington, Western Cape. Independent Richtersveld Mining Co. (RMC) director representing the Richtersveld community on the board of the Joint Venture (JV). Korabie was reported to be the first accused to indicate that he would take the Zondo Commission Report's adverse findings against him on review. ("Attorney says diamond deal findings against him are a 'complete failure of justice'", *Sunday Times*, 19 June 2022).

<sup>575</sup> "Zondo wants Alexkor directors, diamond dealers to be probed for fraud". (fin24, 29 April 2022) (Compiled by Helena Wasserman).

But what happened to the scandal-plagued Guptas who were for years mired in corruption scandals, often involving the alleged siphoning of vast amounts of government funds? The family's influence had been so extensive that it was invariably placed at the centre of "state capture" of the South African government. The Gupta family and entourage fled South Africa in 2016. Shortly afterwards, a second Gupta plane tried to leave with a box believed to have been full of diamonds. A former close associate of the Guptas told investigators that the family tried to capture Alexkor Limited to take their money out in diamonds. The Gupta family later claimed the items in the box were "nuts". Several years later, on 6 June 2022, the *Sunday Times* reported that the Gupta brothers, Atul and Rajesh, had been arrested on corruption charges in Dubai in the United Arab Emirates. Dubai police were coordinating the extradition of the pair to South Africa. The family also faced sanctions in both the UK and the USA.

The Zondo Commission has had to deal with evidence related to a dizzying range of state capture cases including the Alexkor matter and was beset by inevitable delays. Unanswered questions remain about the audacious plan to expand the Gupta state capture project to Namaqualand. There is an important lesson in all of this - not only about the machinations of high-level state capture, but in what it means for ordinary people in an impoverished corner of the country, the remote dusty Richtersveld. For Alexkor Limited, the roller coaster ride is far from over. No stranger to controversy and upheaval, the ailing company at the mouth of the Orange River is currently in the throes of a long and painful process of recovery undertaken by the government.

The anomaly is highlighted of a region that gave the Union of South Africa an economic windfall but despite this, no proportionate amount in diamond revenues was ploughed back. Diamond revenues were put into the Central Revenue Fund from where these were (and still are) allocated by the government to various budgets. In 1992, a post-mining scenario loomed for De Beers Namaqualand Mines at Kleinzee, but the company is reported to have reneged on its social and environmental commitments. In Alexander Bay, the well-known Gupta family had by 2011 opened a new front in their "state capture" project causing further turmoil for the state miner.

In present-day Namaqualand there is not much to show for the minerals that were over decades extracted from the earth, as mentioned. During the period of study (1928 -1950), most of this wealth left the State Alluvial Diggings for the South African Treasury to be distributed throughout the Union of South Africa; or the diamond revenues swelled the bank accounts of the owners and investors who had sunk capital in the Kleinzee mines of De Beers Consolidated Diamond Mines. This state of affairs has no doubt led to the relative underdevelopment of the area. What trickled down from central government via Treasury to the region was never commensurate with its contributions to the Gross Geographic Product.

While the companies grew and extracted increasingly from the area, growing wealthy, the level of poverty among the population in Namaqualand had been intensifying, particularly after crayfish factory closures. The aggrieved communities eventually gave voice to a long-held belief that they were exploited by mining companies who had not only dispossessed them of their ancestral land but carried away the profits for the benefit of others outside the boundaries of their district.

## **Chapter 8 The closed diamond mining towns of Alexander Bay and Kleinzee: some psycho-social aspects**

It has long been realised that wherever the aggressive forces of the mining industry have been unleashed, this every so often comes at great cost to both nature and humans. If the physical environment suffers from the destructive forces of mining, the question remains of how the workers involved in the industry are affected. Much has been written on the physical dangers and the health hazards of mining operations in general. However, the alluvial diamond mines at Alexander Bay and Kleinzee, using strip-mining methods of gravel recovery, have since the start of operations in 1928 recorded a low injury rate and few physical health hazards. But what effect did the “culture” of company-town life and work have on individual workers and their families? To answer that question, some aspects relating to the health and well-being of the Namaqualand diamond mine worker will be examined.

Doctors working for De Beers Consolidated Mines Ltd, Namaqualand Mining Division, had in the past frequently remarked on the number of psycho-social problems they encountered, in particular at the town of Koingnaas but also at Kleinzee. In the mid-1980s, a study for De Beers was conducted by the psychiatrist, Dr Aubrey M. Michalowski, on the mental health of white mine workers living with their families in the closed communities of Oranjemund, Kleinzee and Koingnaas. The open diamond mining town of Cullinan, near Pretoria, was used as a control for the study. Subjects for the study were confined to Whites, as management felt that the other population groups had “their own mental and social problems for political, tribal and other reasons”.<sup>576</sup> That this study had been done on the White population only, was a source of regret for the psychiatrist. He distinctly indicated that he would have wished to have an overall picture of how all the inhabitants felt. As regards the Coloured population group, the reason put forward by the company spokespersons was that they had their “own” socio-political problems. De Beers prided itself on being a non-racial, non-sectarian company, and the people of colour working for De Beers were generally better off than other people of their category. They earned the same salaries and enjoyed the same standard of housing as the white employees, but had by law, to send their children to separate schools and live in their own part of town. These were considered factors that affected their psycho-social wellbeing, but according to the company, calling for a separate investigation.<sup>577</sup> Dr Michalowski, nonetheless, hoped that his investigation would help “with the better selection of future employees to eliminate those at risk and thereby reduce the cost to the company of constantly having to recruit new employees”.

### **The closed diamond mining company town**

The recruitment of suitable workers and staff to fill positions in remote mining towns always poses a challenge, so company job advertisements are designed to address this. The following advertisement (*Sunday Times Business Times*, 24 November 2002) invited prospective “adventurous” employees to the “daisy-filled fields of Namaqualand” where the “rolling waves of the Atlantic” were calling. Every De Beers operation offered superb facilities, it claimed, starting from state-of-the-art technology in a superior work environment right through to home

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<sup>576</sup> Aubrey M. Michalowski, “The Effects of Living in Isolated Communities on the South African Diamond Mining Industry”, PhD, Faculty of Medicine, Stellenbosch University, 1987, 6.

<sup>577</sup> Idem, 1987, 256.

from home comforts, and excellent recreational facilities. Prospective applicants were urged to opt for the thrill and adventure of working and living on a remote diamond mine. The advertisement then delivered the punch lines for those undecided job applicants. De Beers Namaqualand Mines, situated along a 250 km long stretch of the Atlantic Coast, was most famed for adventure to be found at their coastal operations. And to create a sense of security and permanency, company town life was depicted as a place where one could ...

Experience the sense of community and relaxed pace of village life ... If peace of mind and being at one with nature coupled with ... exceptional quality of air and alternative cultures and traditions speak to you, then consider making the move.

This should, in conclusion, certainly convince any applicant to pack up and “migrate to the coast and let the fresh air and sea breeze reinvigorate you”.

The diamond mining towns of Alexander Bay and Kleinsee are near archetypal company towns located on the semi-desert coast of Namaqualand. From the start of mining operations in 1928, all the several hundred or so inhabitants of the two mining communities were employed by, or had some connection with, the state mine or the formidable De Beers company. The companies not only owned, controlled, and operated the towns and mining areas, but owned and controlled most of the contiguous coastal strip of stock-farming land extending south from the Orange River mouth, past Port Nolloth and Kleinsee, for almost 500 km. They also controlled and restricted the movement of all their employees.

The companies fenced in their towns which are generally regarded as ‘closed’ communities and restrict access at the entrances to protect their properties and their workers from the influence of all non-essential persons from outside. Security on diamond mines has, of course, always been plagued with additional problems associated with diamond theft so that strict measures of control and surveillance are considered necessary. The ensuing notion of ‘closedness’ must also be seen in the context of control of the workers’ links with, and access to, the outside world. These towns therefore develop their own kinds of social formations which have restrictive features much in common with monasteries, convents, prisons, asylums, military bases, expatriate communities, and native reserves.

In closed towns, the company is the employer, the landlord, and the administrator responsible for providing most community facilities such as housing, a hospital, shops, schools, and sporting facilities. The services and amenities are directly or indirectly associated with the company. As such, the company will always be in line for any criticism from disgruntled employees and this can present a situation where the personal difficulties and psychopathology of the inhabitants can be readily projected on to the company – “everything is the company’s fault” and dissatisfaction is much more easily expressed.<sup>578</sup>

Once appropriate (affordable) labour is recruited, decisions have then to be made as to the most effective ways of controlling it, and of keeping workers contented while in service. The mining company also, as a matter of course, develops schemes for gaining total knowledge of every aspect of its property. This strategy of gaining control over people’s lives includes the weeding out from the workforce of all those employees who had “undesirable” work habits, retaining only those who met the company’s standards. Employees and workers are aware of

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<sup>578</sup> A. M. Michalowski, “The Effects of Living in Isolated Communities on the South African Diamond Mining Industry”, PhD, 1987, 59.

this from the manner in which they are differentiated and ordered by their companies according to occupation, ethnic affiliation, and other social criteria.<sup>579</sup>

Over time, most mining companies - particularly those in remote areas - accumulate much power and influence about matters such as town planning, housing, and social services. In the town itself, as noted, the company's control is reinforced by its ownership of all the properties and infrastructure, even the store that dominates the business life of the town. Everything associated with the settlement – the accommodation, education, health and recreation – is subordinated to the business enterprise and the will of its owners. In the long run, this relationship has hidden snags for worker-tenants reliant on company housing, in that it can give rise to a sense of insecurity of tenure. A correlation has been found between the payment of low rents (or no rent) on the one hand, and on the other, low wages, compulsory overtime work, and compound or dormitory-style worker accommodation.<sup>580</sup>

There are diverse types of employment but there is only one company. This structure therefore has many of the negative aspects of a feudal-type system. The “feudal” relationship is further strengthened by the fact that ownership and responsibility for the houses is in the hands of the company who provides the units at a nominal rent, while electricity and water are provided free to the tenant and foodstuffs are subsidised to metropolitan prices. Even housing designs are uniform, as is the interior furnishing, and there is no private home ownership by the employee. There are no rates and taxes to collect or services to maintain as local government functions are handled by the company. This loss of responsibility extends to community level in that all community concerns become the responsibility of the company.

### **Preoccupation with control and safety measures**

There has always been on the part of the mining company an almost unnatural preoccupation with safety measures to safeguard its assets. Right from the early years of Namaqualand diamond mining camps, the ordeal of the workforce started at the point of entry and exit where all except management had to submit to certain rites of passage. From the 1930s, all employees except senior staff, had to have their persons and their belongings searched before leaving the town. Body searches and mass x-raying of workers and their luggage were carried out until the 1970s when the practice was finally abandoned with the introduction of electronic scanning and surveillance. But X-raying was for a long time a standard procedure for detecting diamonds hidden in body orifices or swallowed.

The workers who were practically in bondage – the diggers, labourers, artisans, clerks, power station and hospital workers – were contractually bound for a period of duty of up to six or twelve months. On leaving, a thorough search awaited them at the gate, right from babies to the Sunday school teacher. When at last discharged, the adults and children were pronounced “clean” after having gone through the x-ray apparatus, a procedure considered infallible by all.

<sup>581</sup> After the 1970s, main checkpoints were situated at precisely the same places, but the

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<sup>579</sup> Peter Carstens, *In the Company of Diamonds*, 2001, 3-4.

<sup>580</sup> Idem, 2001.

<sup>581</sup> *Die Huisgenoot*, 4 Desember 1953. “Die Huisgenoot lig die ‘Doringdraadgordyn’ om Alexanderbaai se Diamante” deur W. O. Kühne. “On leaving Kleinsee, the family, even young children, were on each occasion put through the x-ray process” (John Cloete, personal communication, Steinkopf, 9 November 2021).

movement of people in and out of the town was controlled by an elaborate computerized system managed by security guards. The fact that there was now more ease of movement did not mean that the labour force had free mobility. The mining concerns are situated on private land; entry and exit are strictly controlled, and they do not permit those not in their employ to remain or live on their property.<sup>582</sup>

Figure 47 Entry and Exit point, Kleinzee. (Peter Carstens, *In the Company of Diamonds*, 2001)



It was inevitable that feelings of ‘fenced-in-ness’ developed with the increase in security measures associated with checkpoints, x-raying, and barbed-wire fences. There were several fences or boundaries marking off the town, the mining area, the workers’ compound, married and single quarters and the recovery plant processing diamond-bearing gravels. But to most employees, the fence that imposed the greatest restriction was the company’s barbed wire

boundary fence spanned around the whole property because it prevented contact with the outside world. In fact, the gate as the only point of departure and entry for the town resembled “a border-crossing point between two countries”. In 1940s Kleinzee and Alexander Bay, with the increasing development in security measures, the popular song ‘Don’t Fence Me In’ was adopted by the white employees as a theme song to express their feelings. The catchy tune was sung with joyful abandon at dances and parties, no doubt making their “misery” in this instance more bearable.

Diamonds have always had an attraction for those who would like to get rich quickly, so the owners of the mines found it necessary from the start of operations to employ security officers. The security staff together with the South African Police played a major part in the protection of the company’s assets. Policemen patrolled the ‘Wheel’, as the boundary patrol at Alexander Bay was called,<sup>583</sup> and internal security officers assisted in the prevention and investigation of diamond theft. This near obsession with security created an atmosphere of hyper vigilance and suspicion and from time to time there were cases of summary dismissal of employees because of their suspected involvement with illegal diamond buying. At other times, rumours regarding an association with suspected persons was deemed sufficient reason to sack the worker. Writing of incidents such as these, Jack Carstens tells of the state of nervous tension such events generated in everyone during those early years:

Every time I left Kleinzee (before our house was completed) to join my wife in Port Nolloth at weekends, I was terrified that some evil wisher would plant a few gems in my car and then tip the wink to the police. Nothing could be simpler, and there were plenty of ugly characters around capable of such tricks if it suited their purpose.<sup>584</sup>

<sup>582</sup> J. S. Sharp & M. E. West, “Land, labour and mobility in Namaqualand”, Paper No. 71, Cape Town: SALDRU, 1984, 12.

<sup>583</sup> Pieter Coetzer, *Baai van Diamante: Die Geskiedenis van Alexanderbaai, 1926 tot 1989* (Bloemfontein: Instituut vir Eietydse Geskiedenis, Universiteit Vrystaat, 1997), 1 & 171.

<sup>584</sup> Jack Carstens, *A Fortune Through My Fingers* (Cape Town: Howard Timmins, 1962).

Even today, when one enquires from former diggers about life on the mine, they say that after all the years they still lived “under the cloud of the system” that dictated that the topic of diamonds was not discussed at all. Even children in these mining communities were cautioned by their parents to introduce imaginary “pearls” rather than “diamonds” in their games (however innocent these were) because the workers knew that the slightest suspicion could cost them their jobs.<sup>585</sup>

Where, one may ask, was the source and location of this power over the workers? To start with, management at the mine made every effort through messages, directives, and company literature to extend its influence and power. So everyone employed by the company was at the mercy of the authority exercised by management on behalf of the political heads in Pretoria (State Alluvial Diggings) or the directors at head office in Kimberley (De Beers). The nature of the hierarchical structures in company towns made this possible. Regardless of class or rank, even senior staff could be fired on the strength of a telegram from head office. The mine manager was vested with authority from head office, followed by his senior officials who occupied the next level in the hierarchy. Below them were regular staff such as the compound manager, the medical orderly, the storeman, the office clerk, and the supervisors, and foremen. Then came the artisans, followed by the labouring class of contract workers who occupied the lowest position in the hierarchy.<sup>586</sup>

Leadership positions on the mines were invariably filled with appointees recruited from outside of Namaqualand. Given their apparent reluctance in some cases to relocate to remote mining towns, it is doubtful that all senior staff and artisans recruited from the major urban centres had the personal commitment to regard the closed company towns, surrounded by culturally different communities, as home. Academic studies of these towns tend to point to the difficulties of such a restricted life notwithstanding the superb facilities and a superior work environment offered in newspaper advertisements to attract suitable applicants. The strains of adapting to this strange environment and its people may suggest why some members of management (and by extension the mine owners and shareholders) appeared not to have had their heart in the far-off, underdeveloped region of Namaqualand.

From the start of operations, the State Alluvial Diggings and Kleinzee Mine soon gained control of the Namaqualand diamond industry, and during the years that followed maintained dominion over it. In those years, mine management was differentiated along ethnic lines. The mine at Kleinzee extended the control of the English in the magisterial district of Namaqualand (it was difficult for an Afrikaner to rise in the company’s hierarchy). Senior Kleinzee staff shared the distinction of military service in the First World War (one security chief served in the British Army during the Anglo-Boer War). This colonial military identity was important to determine rank in the early 1930s. The reverse was the case at the State Alluvial Diggings where the Afrikaner could rise in the hierarchy with much less difficulty. Cornelius Grobler, the first general manager of the State Alluvial Diggings, had a brother serving in the Union cabinet as Minister of Lands. His successor of the 1940s openly declared after his retirement from the state diggings that he supported the National Party. These opposing political and cultural affiliations would, by the nature of things, keep alive the ethnic rift between English and Afrikaner. On a broader level though, the two company towns would for the next several decades - because of their pre-eminent position - wield enormous influence over the region.

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<sup>585</sup> Pieter Coetzer, *Baai van Diamante: ...*, 1997, 140. “Sekuriteit & Diamante”.

<sup>586</sup> Peter Carstens, *In the Company of Diamonds*, 2001, 63.

They controlled the destiny of many Namaqualanders and others who became more and more dependent on the mines for their livelihood.

The power wielded by management was even reflected in a contribution to the company publication where a worker, using the alphabet in a playful attempt at describing life on the alluvial diamond diggings, could not resist referring (rather self-consciously) in a count-down rhyme to the real pillars of digger society:

'A' for Alexander Bay, the model diggers' state; every breath of air is one more step towards a stretch of leave.

'C' stands for Cornelius the Great [Cornelius Grobler, general manager] who together with his crowning glory, his wife, are faithful servants of the volk, and true spokespersons for diggers' interests.

'Y' is the iron hand (Ysterhand) of the State.<sup>587</sup>

Mining-town culture certainly had some complex effects on people's lives. It is therefore difficult to understand why many employees seemed to remain loyal to the company, even when they felt disgruntled and antagonistic toward their immediate bosses or to the town itself.<sup>588</sup> This contradiction may in part be explained by the employees' dependence on the mine and the company's representation of itself as generous, accident-free, and clean. This projected self-image of the company often led to an attitude of 'obligated loyalty' on the part of the workers. At the same time, employees found themselves in an 'incomplete community' in which residents were never really able to determine the direction of their future in the company-owned and controlled town, leaving a psycho-social vacuum hard to fill. On death, dismissal or retirement they or their families simply had to vacate the house to make place for the next job-seeker.

### **Race Relations and Segregation**

The concern here is with a system operating on the mines that, in the main, was always determined by external political and social forces. The business of mining thus derived much of its power from these outside realities. In the end, this worked to the detriment of all sections of Namaqualand society.

From rough mining camps in the late 1920s, the towns of Alexander Bay and Kleinsee rapidly evolved into workplaces of segregation. But to what extent can the social institutions of the two mines be said to have mirrored those of South African society in general? The State Alluvial Diggings and De Beers Mine had their White, Coloured, and between them, an initial small number of Black workers ... as well as conventions that with regard to racial segregation and discrimination, were comparable to those in the rest of South Africa. The entire system of social differentiation and stratification was modelled on that of the wider society. There were numerous instances showing that the government of the day was determined through legislation and policy initiatives to defend and protect the socio-political status quo. The workplace on the diamond mines was thus, in essence, a microcosm of Namaqualand society where the descendants of Dutch frontiersmen and others of European descent brought attitudes and values already prevalent elsewhere in the Union. Social mixing of the races was

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<sup>587</sup> Alexanderbaai, *Die Delwer/The Digger*, 1938. "Alexanderbaai se Alfabet". Translated from the Afrikaans.

<sup>588</sup> Peter Carstens, *In the Company of Diamonds*, 2001, 9.

directly or indirectly discouraged or even frowned upon, the degree of such prejudice depending on the prevailing attitudes of management to allow such expression.

Though uniformity of architecture tended to induce a feeling of unity, the two company towns have never been homogeneous racially, and in terms of class. Even less pretentious structures such as worker compounds were of inferior design to meet the requirements of the “lower” class of non-white mine workers who were assumed to be inclined to abuse anything better. The Urban Areas Act promulgated in 1923, extended residential segregation to any industrial area, including the Cape alluvial diggings. These divisions along lines of race were all too apparent, mostly underscored by company control that led to mutually impenetrable social groups. In view of the policy of segregation applied over years, it is fair to state that imposed residential segregation was important as a conscious company policy. This much is clear from the deliberate social planning of the human ecology of the towns of Alexander Bay and Kleinsee. And overall, there was a clear-cut dichotomy between white and non-white in a hierarchy determined by race.

Sport has always played an important part in the social life of most residents, particularly with the expansion of mining operations after the Second World War. This was a way of seeing the surrounding countryside, making friends from other towns, and taking part in healthy exercise. It came as a shock for other townsfolk to hear of the distances Namaqualand teams had to travel to play a game of sport, especially in the 1930s when the gravel roads were very bad and vehicles that much slower.<sup>589</sup> Sports teams travelled by bus (or lorry, depending on race) to wherever sports meetings were arranged.

The white staff and diggers created a busy social life for themselves, organising functions at home and away. A highlight of the social year in Kleinsee had for several care-free years been a fancy-dress ball where exuberant partygoers masqueraded in costume. The first New Year’s Eve dance organised by the Recreation Club, was held in 1947 and continued to be high on the social calendar until the late 1960s when interest waned (probably because of the increasingly sober political realities). Members felt they would rather dress formally to see the New Year in. Dances then were regular events originally held like big parties where the handful of people knew everyone else well. This friendly aspect would in later years disappear because of the much bigger mining population.<sup>590</sup>

As an organised and controlled sport, football had always been immensely popular among non-whites, but company transport was not always freely available to them. On leaving Alexander Bay mine, the coloured first and second football teams with the grand name of “Olympians”, first had to go through a thorough body search and x-ray examination before being let out security Gate No. 2 ...

Outside a big open diesel lorry without railings [around the flat-bed] was waiting for us. Singing along heartily, the players embarked on the 106 km long journey to Port Nolloth. On arrival there, we first had to fully load our truck with bags of cement. Only then were we free to continue which was for us a much-prized excursion.<sup>591</sup>

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<sup>589</sup> De Beers Consolidated Mines, *Golden Jubilee 1926-1976*. SPORT, 28.

<sup>590</sup> Idem, 1926-1976, SPORT, 25.

<sup>591</sup> F. du Pokoy, *Riemvasmaak* (Voortrekkerhoogte: Benedic Boeke, 1995), 16-17.



Figure 48 Makeshift First Eleven of the State Alluvial Diggings, Alexander Bay (late 1930s). (Own Collection)

Neglected and half forgotten, these mineworkers were left to their own devices to organise with meagre resources whatever they could in the circumstances. They kept themselves busy despite the lack of adequate recreational facilities, by playing *klawerjas* (a popular old-time card game) and dominoes after meals, going to football practice or playing musical instruments. The South African government, for one, insisted that the men recruited could not be employed as the equals of the white workers. In Alexander Bay, because of

negative perceptions, coloured contract workers continued during those years to be quartered in overcrowded, all-male barracks called hostels, segregated from the rest of the town. They were “herded together, twenty beds to a stable-like room”. Two upright cement slabs mounted against the wall with a smaller one on top, served as a wardrobe without a door. The rooms had no ceiling and when the southerly wind blew, grey clouds of dust cascaded onto the beds.<sup>592</sup> Despite the harsh living conditions, workers were able to make some sort of livelihood.

If asked what facet of life irked him no end, then Freddy du Pokoy who worked at Alexander Bay during the 1950s, would without hesitation have said the instruction *ad nauseam* to address whites as “baas”. On admission, it was right away impressed upon the worker that the compulsory form of address to be used by non-whites towards Whites was “baas”:<sup>593</sup>

I had attained a junior certificate before going to Alexander Bay, yet I had to work under a White who could barely sign his own name and address him at all times as “baas”. Deep down I resented this.<sup>594</sup>

In a modern economy, education and training are often seen as the principal means for ensuring social mobility and equality of opportunity. Given the lack of control over capital by the labourers, education must constitute an important avenue for achieving equivalence of status with other dominant groups. No effort was, however, made until very late (half a century later) to extend the benefits of basic education and artisan training to non-white workers at both Alexander Bay and Kleinsee. In this manner, the process of advancement was inhibited for decades, leaving the workers trapped in a migrant-worker complex.

### **Coping with life in the mining town: the general worker**

How did the workers in general cope with the social and psychological stressors of living in this type of closed community? The consequences of living in this type of community need to be

<sup>592</sup> Idem, 1995, 12.

<sup>593</sup> “Baas”, the Afrikaans equivalent of “boss, master, person in charge, manager, head, chief”.

<sup>594</sup> F. du Pokoy, *Riemvasmaak*, 1995, 20.

carefully considered. There was little escape (to act as a safety valve) to the nearest town from the barbed-wire encampment and the everyday, controlled existence. But no matter how much individuals might be affected by general feelings of isolation and a sense of being hemmed in, most people would invariably express feelings of loyalty, however vague, they believe they owe to the mining company. This might explain in part the lack of solidarity which prevented white, brown, and black workers from approaching or confronting, on an organised basis, the company about important and vital issues.

For those workers who found life on the mine boring, the southwest winds blowing most of the year would have done little to uplift their spirits. And, as if to add to their woes, residents had to obtain special managerial permission to leave town. Visitors were never really welcome and were seldom granted permits to visit kith or kin. In short, despite the stresses brought on by isolation the company kept the keys to the only recognised gateway that allowed a way out of this restrictive world. All contract workers signed a six-month contract which, among others, stipulated that they remain for the full period to qualify for leave or the equivalent in cash. Somehow, scores of workers did not stay for the full six months, thereby forfeiting their leave privileges. There must have been many reasons for leaving, but some men simply could not stand the confinement and lack of freedom. Others left to look for better-paying jobs and better working conditions, while some went home to resource-stressed areas or often to no more than a small portion of a drought-stricken farm.<sup>595</sup>



Workers' Quarters (Compound)

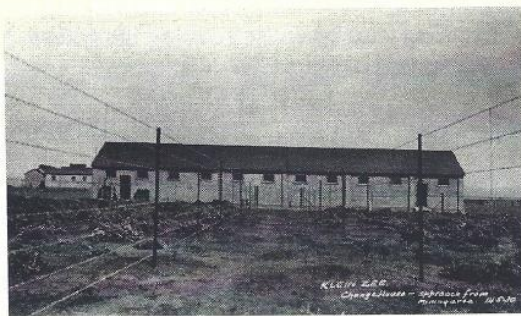


Figure 49 Change House for White diggers with barbed-wire corridor leading to the mining area (1930)

(Peter Carstens, *In the Company of Diamonds*, 2001)

During the general election campaign of 1929, and the parliamentary session that same year, questions were raised about work conditions, treatment of workers and worker's clothing issued on the State Alluvial Diggings. Aside from feelings of being 'closed in', workers felt that the security fencing affected their dignity. A telling indicator of low self-esteem among this (supposedly) happy band of white diggers was their wry reference to the company-issued work boots as "donkeys" and worker numbers as "bandiet-nommers" (convict numbers),<sup>596</sup> all illustrative of the drudgery of manual labour in a highly regimented work environment. Officialdom reproached poor whites for not readily taking these menial jobs, but at the same time advocated racial segregation in the workplace so that work crews would be all white and be paid a 'white man's wage'. This arrangement assisted in changing the stigma white manual workers attached to working alongside Blacks in low-paid jobs. These crews of diggers doing manual labour in the mining trenches could be

<sup>595</sup> Peter Carstens, *In the Company of Diamonds*, 2001, 78-79.

<sup>596</sup> Pieter Coetzer, *Baai van Diamante*, 1998, 40.

abusive, hurling insults at each other and turning on non-white workers, or even on their own.

From the official parliamentary Opposition's benches, conditions on the S.A.D. mine were compared to a "convict's life". As a form of damage control of all the negative publicity surrounding the treatment of White workers, the Cape Town-based daily *Die Burger* decided in August 1929 to investigate and publish a short in-depth article on conditions there. After the reporter had called on the offices of the Secretary for Mines and Industries, Mr Van Zyl Ham, he felt compelled to give an account of the "true facts" as he saw them.<sup>597</sup> At the time of the visit, the Secretary had a set of worker's clothes ready in his office for the reporter to judge for himself. The standard set of work clothing issued by the State Alluvial Diggings consisted of ordinary trousers, shirt and jacket of first-class khaki material the reporter declared fit for any well-to-do farmer. A set of *Meridian* underwear, decent quality woollen socks and a pair of sturdy boots was complemented by a neatly finished leather belt and a hat that would do justice to any sophisticated city-dweller. The newsman was finally convinced that, all things considered, any farmer's son or picnic maker would be proud of the worker's outfit. All this uproar about "convict clothing" puzzled him. There was nothing sinister about the letters "S.D." ("State Digging", not "State Donkey" as alleged) affixed to the jacket and the trousers. The straightforward explanation from officials was that state property had to be marked as such and branding this as "convict wear" was considered far-fetched in the extreme.<sup>598</sup>

A site visit to Alexander Bay mining town was revealing. As regards food, the newspaper investigation found that the diggers enjoyed well-balanced nutritional fare from a menu specially designed by the Department of National Health. They were, unfortunately, not allowed to leave the mining camp or receive visits from outsiders - in contrast to normal prison policy that extended family and individual visits as a privilege to inmates, one might add. But these restrictions on freedom of movement made sense, according to the report, as workers would otherwise then be free to move about like "a flock of birds", endangering mine security and the State's diamonds. The mining camp was about six miles long and two miles wide and within the limits demarcated by barbed wire fencing, they could of course move about freely. It was also found that the complaint that close relatives and family of sick workers were under no circumstances allowed to visit them, was unfounded. A recent case of a young man contracting pneumonia proved otherwise ... his parents were at once sent for by telegram.

Notwithstanding the objective findings by *Die Burger* in 1929, about a decade later the perception of doing time in a state prison (surrounded by sand) persisted. The editors of *Die Delwer/The Digger* (1938), published on the tenth anniversary of the mine, lamented the disappointing standard of contributions and called for more humorous articles in both Afrikaans and English, reflecting everyday life on the mine. One anonymous contributor could only come up with a rather grim "Ten Plagues of Alexander Bay", reminiscent of the plagues that were sent to torment the stubborn Pharaoh of ancient Egypt. The perceived punitive intent of the state mine included the following:

1. Free human beings are transformed into convicts.

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<sup>597</sup> MNW 982 ref. mm 1511/29. *Die Burger*, 31 Augustus 1929. "Hervatting van werk op hande"; "Werkers hoogs tevrede"; "Wat die Regering vir die Staatsdelwers doen".

<sup>598</sup> *Ibid.*, 1929.

2. Kept in check by an army of detectives, security officers and bosses.
3. Barbed wire fencing and searchlights.
4. Rigid segregation of men and women.
5. The plague of jealousy, suspicion, secrecy, and currying favour.
6. The practice of compulsory church services, prayer meetings and Christian societies.
7. The stubborn storeman refusing to issue another woolen jersey from his carefully controlled government stock.
8. Confined to a hospital bed at the slightest sign of feeling indisposed.
9. The advent of the x-ray machine rendering extinct the smuggler carrying away the stones by swallowing them (the “maagsmokkelaar”).
10. Festering boils on neck and legs.

To bring some kind of relief and normalcy to conditions in the State mining camp, supervisors and artisans without their families were allowed, by special favour of the General Manager, to visit the Married Quarters to take part in a game of tennis, squash, and the occasional party. These outings (under supervision) offered a welcome break in a homely atmosphere away from the monotony of mining camp life. Over the festive season and New Year, occasions and visits of this nature increased in tempo. What is more, four plays in *both* English and Afrikaans, were staged with enormous success. The proceeds were donated to charitable organisations, such as the two hospitals in the towns of Springbok and Garies. It should be said that during the first two years of the existence of the Married Quarters, the women from this section of the town were never allowed near the Diggers’ Camp (no reflection on anyone’s moral character ). Later, Management somehow relented, the ban was lifted, and the women could from then onwards attend regular church services, bioscope shows, sports and other events in the Camp. There was no need for them again to watch sports events, peering through the barbed-wire fence like mischievous children.<sup>599</sup> In the same publication, “Convict No. 13” wrote that after restrictive measures had been relaxed, there was now always a good attendance at Sunday church services – believe it or not. No doubt, the charm of the ladies in the choir was part of the attraction for the poor “convicts” who suddenly turned religious, No. 13 drily suggested.

On Christmas Day, no expense was spared to make the feast as pleasant as possible for the workers separated from their homes and families. The dining-halls were decorated with colourful trimmings, and a lavish dinner prepared and served on tables adorned with flowers, Xmas-crackers, and paper serviettes.<sup>600</sup> During the year, the workers had to be satisfied with the supply of grape juice, tomato juice and ginger beer as no liquor was allowed in the mining camp. At the Christmas meal, however, management made an exception by providing each digger with eight ounces of wine or a bottle of beer. This generous concession would signal the start of

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<sup>599</sup> Alexanderbaai, *Die Delwer/The Digger*, 1938. Sosiale Aspek.

<sup>600</sup> Idem, 1938, 33-34.

some good cheer and lively fun as workers chatted animatedly, teased one another, and tried to pinch each other's drinks ... until they all felt like one big family of mischievous boys.<sup>601</sup>

At these festivities, staff members and all the ladies from the Married Quarters (accompanied by their husbands) usually joined the diggers for the special Christmas meal. This gesture on the part of the visitors from the Married Quarters created an atmosphere of almost perfect bliss which at other times was sadly missing in the mining camp. It was something to behold, the chivalrous behaviour and good manners displayed by the Afrikaner boys who together with hardy old diggers, good-humouredly and half-inebriated and silly, outdid each other vying for the attentions of the ladies.<sup>602</sup>

In this remote mining community at the mouth of the Orange River, the health and wellbeing of employees had from the start of operations received the attention of management, we are reminded. As soon as accommodation became available, a resident medical officer was appointed to replace the visiting doctor from Port Nolloth. A hospital was built and equipped on modern lines with a small operating theatre, which was able to accommodate all cases of illness and casualties. Cases which required the attention of a specialist were sent to Provincial Hospitals as far away as Cape Town.<sup>603</sup> Female company being virtually non-existent in the early years, diggers no wonder contrived and "faked" illness in the hope of landing in hospital in the care of the nursing staff. Or, given the scarcity of female company, attempts would be made to rectify matters, and ardent courtships were conducted by correspondence through the penfriend columns of "non-political" magazines such as *Landbouweekblad (Farmer's Weekly)* and *Brandwag*.

The European Namaqualand digger was known for his love of dancing, we are told, but dance partners were sorely missed in the sparsely furnished dormitories. So, in the absence of female partners, the workers would rescue the situation and, like the Kimberley diggers in the 1870s, before women arrived, dance with each other. Some of the workers played musical instruments ... guitars, concertinas, mouthorgans, banjos, and ukuleles. The beds in the dormitory were moved to one side to make way for the dancers. The 'men' wearing their khaki work clothes, and the 'women' dressed in their best private clothing,<sup>604</sup> would dance the evening away until lights out and to bed at 10 p.m. sharp.

In the early years, there were barely a handful of children with families lucky enough to have them on the mine. These children would play a significant role in cheering up a lonely, desolate life -- although workers in the dormitories, bored to death, were known to have horsed around and frolicked like children. Despite the enormous sense of pleasure and joy children can bring, in 1944 they gave management at Alexander Bay no end of trouble by acting out their (and their parents') negative impulses engendered in this highly restricted environment. There were complaints about them smashing the windscreen of a tractor on the golf course, inserting sand

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<sup>601</sup> Alexanderbaai, *Die Delwer/The Digger*, 1938.

<sup>602</sup> Idem, 1938.

<sup>603</sup> Alexanderbaai, *Die Delwer/The Digger*, 1938, 9. Health. H. E. Barrett, Secretary for Mines, Voorwoord. Also, Pieter Coetzer, *Baai van Diamante*, 1998, 127. *Gesondheid van die Werkers*.

<sup>604</sup> Pieter Coetzer, *Baai van Diamante*, 1998, 174. "Dans"; Peter Carstens, *In the Company of Diamonds*, 2001, 82.

into the radiator of a lorry or deriving pleasure from damaging green watermelons and fruit. Or throwing stones and shooting at workers with pellet guns.<sup>605</sup> Regardless of these unsocial incidents, for years at Christmas time a tree was put up and decorated, presents handed out and events organised to amuse the children.

Turning to the workers' accommodation. To create a pleasant environment at the dormitories, the general manager's wife encouraged neatness by handing the prize of a lovely cake to the best-kept room. A substantial sum of money was also spent by management to encourage workers to start small flower gardens. But at this windswept outpost on the Orange River, their efforts at gardening showed few signs of growth and life<sup>606</sup>, perhaps indicative of a vaguely detectable underlying melancholic mood and sense of loss among the workers. Under these circumstances, it is natural then that the younger digger community reached out to father and mother figures in the persons of General Manager Cornelius Grobler and his wife.<sup>607</sup> According to the diggers, the history of the mining community would be incomplete without mentioning the couple, so they poured out their hearts in the tenth anniversary publication:

“We can never thank the Lord enough at this place for the god-fearing man and woman at the head of the establishment. Through their humility they inspire us also to be humble and obedient to our bosses. Their friendliness and (genuine) interest in our welfare is a ray of light piercing the dark cloud of melancholy and longing constantly hanging over us. When we become despondent and discouraged and want to give up, their perseverance and tolerance of our flaws move us to stand firm and fight with all our strength when ‘barbed-wire fever’ threatens to overwhelm us. They (the Groblers) are the Voortrekkers of lonely remote Alexander Bay. Who can blame us then for wanting them to be in charge and lead us until (they reach) a ripe old age? And if they are called to eternal rest one day, may their legacy continue to encourage and motivate us. Excelsior! [Higher!].<sup>608</sup>

#### **Spatial and social segregation within a closed mining town: mental health**

There is a link between mental health and the accommodation provided for single men by the companies. The single worker does not feel “at home” in the community, as married people in general tend to keep to themselves. Companies also set apart the single men's accommodation from the remainder of the town, creating the perception that a barrier exists between the two components of the mine community. The unmarried worker naturally forms his own associations with his fellow ‘single men’ and establishes a pattern of life within the restrictions of the facilities provided. He has few outlets for his emotions and romantic liaisons and the marriage market is practically non-existent. Married people may also unconsciously contribute to the problems of single men through stereotyping them, causing the latter to become “anxious about their own adequacy, normality and maturity, when marriage is unduly delayed”. As recently as the 1980s, single workers on the South African diamond mines were still found to be housed in barracks or hostel type accommodation in a separate part of the town which isolated them from the married section. The single people lived there “almost as a separate community” in accommodation which tended to be characterised by physical segregation which did little to encourage any

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<sup>605</sup> Idem, 1998, 201. “Kinders”.

<sup>606</sup> Alexanderbaai, *Die Delwer/The Digger*, 1938, 32.

<sup>607</sup> Mrs Grobler also presided at diggers' political meetings and doubled up as leader during informal religious activities.

<sup>608</sup> Alexanderbaai, *Die Delwer/The Digger*, 1938, 34. Translated from the Afrikaans.

communication outside the quarters.<sup>609</sup> To relieve the psycho-social stressors, some men resort to liquor with potentially serious health consequences if left unattended. The use of alcohol can become a recreational activity in and of itself, and not a function of other healthy activities.<sup>610</sup>

It was claimed for the (White) diggers that they were “a perfectly happy community, the only drawback being that they (were) separated from their wives and families”.<sup>611</sup> As if to compensate, the availability of free food and medical treatment was ironically emphasised throughout by management. The impact of migrant labour and the effect of absent fathers in family life have since been extensively studied and reported on. Proof that the workers were treated well was reported by Dr Hans Pirow, the state mining engineer, who on a visit to Alexander Bay in 1929, was assured by the workers that from their side there were no complaints whatsoever. At the time there were 140 workers, 20 supervisors and 9 members of management. When asked about any complaints, a single one was heard from a gristly digger who piped up and answered that he lacked only one thing – the company of his dear old wife.

The early years of diamond mining development brings home the stark reality of these incomplete communities. Government Gazette No. 720 of 27 April 1928 decreed under regulation No. 9 that “No person shall enter upon, and no women or children shall be permitted to reside upon or enter any State Alluvial Digging except under the authority of a permit issued by the Committee of Management”. Few women were admitted, and no woman was employed in any capacity by Kleinsee mine until the 1940s. Alexander Bay followed a few years later with a single female appointment of radiographer. Wives and children of selected staff were to be sure allowed in during the early 1930s. But right from the start of the S.A.D in 1928, the State was clear on the position of women on the mine and permits of this nature were sparingly given.<sup>612</sup> Hence, it was two years later indeed a special concession and privilege that a few families were allowed on the diggings. From the perspective of management, it was initially regarded as not desirable to allow women on the diggings on account of the “inevitable complications and difficulties” the presence of families would pose to the control and protection of state assets, i.e. diamonds. After much pleading and cajoling, approval was finally granted to erect two houses for occupation by the General Manager and the Assistant Manager, one-and-a-quarter mile from the mining camp. This concession led to the eventual development of the Married Quarters of twelve comfortable houses, giving the appearance of an embryonic modern mining town.<sup>613</sup>

In celebration of its first decade of mining operations at Alexander Bay, *Die Delwer/The Digger* contained snippets of news from the Married Quarters. Mrs Grobler, wife of the General Manager, shared some of her first impressions on arrival there. On the morning of 24 May 1930, they reached a solitary house on a hill at the bank of the Great River. Finding herself to be the first and only woman among two hundred men aroused a rush of feelings and emotions! The scene seemed lonely, bare, and deserted. Strangely, everything in this stark landscape

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<sup>609</sup> A. M. Michalowski, “The Effects of Living in Isolated Communities on the South African Diamond Mining Industry”, PhD, Stellenbosch University, 1987, 41.

<sup>610</sup> *Idem*, 1987, 51.

<sup>611</sup> *Rand Daily Mail*, 7 September 1929 (MNW 982 MM 1511/29).

<sup>612</sup> U.G. No. 33 of 1929, Pretoria. Report of the Secretary for Mines etc., 11.

<sup>613</sup> Alexanderbaai, *Die Delwer/The Digger*, 1938, 36.

appeared dull and bleak, the washed-out blue colour of its air and grey-white sand. The thought instinctively went through her mind: how long will we be able to endure this kind of life? <sup>614</sup>

### **Mental health in isolated mining towns**

It is the women who are most affected by having to migrate to these remote mining towns. Elevated levels of poor mental health, among married women, has been attributed to their restricted life chances (compared with married men) in these towns. Women have been found to show adverse reactions even prior to moving and are generally affected living away from relatives and close friends. To help reduce the time required to adapt - and address the incidence of loneliness, mood disturbances, alienation or 'home sickness', and excessive takings of sedatives among women - planners and behavioural scientists can do well to provide services and facilities. These would include suitable housing, education facilities, medical and counselling services, shopping and recreation centres. Voluntary neighbourhood associations, and induction into the rules and organisational setup of the mining town, go a long way towards helping them to settle down. Simply providing the physical spaces in the built environment may be adequate, but this could in the long run come at the cost of much unhappiness and worker turnover. <sup>615</sup>

While remote mining sites are tough to the inhabitants, they often frighten womenfolk more because of the unfamiliar hazards and terrain, extremes in climate and the scourge of pests. These stressful situations can produce feelings of anxiety, depression, anger, and frustration. In these towns there are often no professional mental health services available such as psychologists, welfare officers and marriage counsellors. The absence of older people who could act as 'listeners' for young married women is sorely felt. Gossip in a small mining community can sometimes prevent the sharing of marital difficulties with other women. Also, young mothers are often bored and frustrated, and the children become another source of tension:

The need to 'go home to Mum' with problems or 'to Dad to talk with', is great in any young family. When parents are so far away, young families feel deprived and react negatively, tensions increase, existing psychological problems compound, and neuroses of some sort become evident. Unfortunately, it is the small children who generally bear the brunt of these negative reactions. <sup>616</sup>

There is also an unnatural age distribution, the most dramatic and negative characteristic of remote mining towns being the absence of older people. There are no grandparents, few middle-aged persons and there are often few or no adolescents. The population may be mainly made up of pre-school and primary school children and their parents, their ages ranging from 0-10 and 20-35 years, respectively. "The large gaps in age distribution contribute significantly to dissatisfaction with life generally and lead to frustration, depression, stress and anxiety specifically". <sup>617</sup>

The effects of the absence of older members of the extended family are keenly felt since ...

Children need grandparents and young, inexperienced parents need parental or substitute parental advice and affection. The community needs the wisdom and stability that older people bring. A place

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<sup>614</sup> Alexanderbaai, *Die Delwer/The Digger*, 1938, 37.

<sup>615</sup> A. M. Michalowski, "The Effects of Living in Isolated Communities on the South African Diamond Mining Industry", Stellenbosch University, 1987, 48.

<sup>616</sup> Idem, 1987, 39.

<sup>617</sup> Idem, 1987, 36-7.

for older people should be found in the community, even if it is in the private enterprise section of the town, and people who have worked for the company for a long time, should be allowed to retire in that town.<sup>618</sup>

The presence of old age and young children can also help people to grasp the meaning of life marked by time. If the generations are separated, the rites of passage are disturbed. The rhythm of life marked by birth, childhood, youth, maturity, old age and death may as a result be closed off. Overlapping of generations, young and old, can certainly become a source of energy for a meaningful human existence on remote and isolated company mining towns.

A De Beers (Namaqualand Mines) Epidemiological Survey<sup>619</sup> was the first to detect a number of patients with psychosomatic symptoms such as depression or neuroses, particularly in women. Among unemployed women, boredom has a lot to do with problems of this kind. A rather cheerless picture was given of women living in the 1980s mining town of Koingnaas, about 65 km south of Kleinsee. The so-called 'Koingnaas syndrome' presented with 'naarheid in die kop', ' 'n gevoelte op die hart' and ' 'n swakheid op die maag'.<sup>620</sup> There were a disproportionately large number of neurotic women who were bored, lonely, and finding living conditions difficult. They complained of a lack of social and recreational outlets. There were no job opportunities, and they wanted to leave as soon as possible but usually could not because in these towns their husbands had much higher paid jobs than would be available elsewhere.

Residents complained of the harsh, unattractive terrain and climatic conditions, and of the huge distance from the cities and large towns. There were also no job opportunities for the adolescents and limited educational facilities at senior high school level in the region. They also complained of the company's unsympathetic attitude and expressed dissatisfaction with the way the company was running the town. In stark contrast to the high levels of frustration expressed here, company literature would, for example, present De Beers Consolidated Mines Ltd as a most respectable, generous mining house. The alluvial diggings at Alexander Bay was not far behind in promotional literature where the State was painted as a most reliable father-like figure that provided material benefits if the worker submit and obey the rules and regulations.

Of significance is the fact that people in incomplete communities are placed at high risk of falling victim to depression and anxiety. In this context, the medical officer at Alexander Bay, Dr B. Gauché (1974-5), confirmed Dr Michalowski's observation that in the mining town women generally were afflicted more by depression than men.<sup>621</sup> These threats to mental health appeared to have been a feature of modern mining town life in both Alexander Bay and Kleinsee, especially after the 1960s, when demands were increasingly made on families already weighed down by rising political tensions and other psycho-social stressors in South Africa.

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<sup>618</sup> A. M. Michalowski, "The Effects of Living in Isolated Communities on the South African Diamond Mining Industry", Stellenbosch University, 1987, 261.

<sup>619</sup> A survey to understand the occurrence and distribution of mental and behavioural disorders across a given sample of people, and to develop more effective treatments. Only a small percentage of the population would be affected by mental disorders.

<sup>620</sup> Dizziness, chest pains coupled with an unsettled stomach.

<sup>621</sup> Pieter Coetzer, *Baai van Diamante*, 1998, 138.

### Impact of company town life on the residents

Although company towns tend to be portrayed as if they are totally closed communities, even the two diamond mining towns cannot, despite their barbed-wire fences and being under the full control of the companies, be treated as if they were closed socio-economic systems. There are differing degrees of ‘closedness’ that indicate the extent to which people are confined behind the barbed-wire fencing that encloses the town. In this regard, attention should be drawn to some of the connections employees maintain with the outside world. Over the years, most unskilled and semi-skilled workers had been migrant workers. Having signed a contract and been inducted into the rules, regulations and conventions of company town life, the worker was assigned barrack-style all-male accommodation that reinforced the feeling of impermanence and tenure uncertainty. On termination of his contract, the worker ceased being a formal member of the company-controlled community and had to relocate as soon as possible. In this way, the transient nature of mining towns made long term planning for the worker and his family difficult. And until fairly recently, no worker – regardless of occupation – had ever been able to become permanent residents of the two diamond mining towns. It was therefore always essential for most employees to retain some social affiliation in their home communities and keep the lines of communication open.

On South African mines, most people generally regard their stay as temporary, i.e. they are permanently transient. Communities associated with these mine projects of limited duration thus show high rates of population turnover, although it should be noted that turnover in Namaqualand was not as high. The impermanent nature of the mining population can also give rise to several social, industrial, and economic problems. A sense of impermanence of residence can result in a lack of motivation to settle down and create a home. The Namaqualand diamond miner knew from the start that the private, closed town was not for settling down permanently. A lack of social cohesion has been found in towns where residents regard their stay a temporary one - just long enough to accumulate the cash they have set themselves to save. Rapid turnover of employees also affects involvement with civic affairs so that attachment to the town and to fellow townspeople tends to be superficial.<sup>622</sup>

An added complication in an isolated mining community are the workers who see themselves as “different” in a social or cultural context from the other inhabitants. They may feel estranged from this mining community and culture as they do not share the same social norms and values, leaving them isolated, frustrated, and powerless to shape events or control their destinies.<sup>623</sup> This appeared to be the case in white-controlled Alexander Bay where several Coloured workers were described as “not of the best calibre”, and often accused of drunkenness and irresponsibility.<sup>624</sup>

During the 1980s, many white artisans on the West Coast diamond mines were local Namaqualanders used to a rural type of village community and social structure. They now found themselves living in a small, industrialised town – a socio-cultural shock, particularly to the wives who were accustomed to the rhythms of life in a rural community. These same employees from

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<sup>622</sup> A. M. Michalowski, “The Effects of Living in Isolated Communities on the South African Diamond Mining Industry”, Stellenbosch University, 1987, 34.

<sup>623</sup> Idem, 1987, 32.

<sup>624</sup> Cf the negative perceptions in references to Coloured workers in Pieter Coetzer, *Baai van Diamante* (1998); or the difficulties to adapt in Fred Du Pokoy, *Riemvasmaak* (1995).

surrounding areas may later find themselves in a higher social class than their kin who remained behind. This upward mobility in status and class structure with new roles to fill and heightened expectations, can prove to be stressful. When these new roles and attendant statuses conflict with those of their families and communities of origin, the family ties are frequently weakened, and a sense of isolation heightened in the newly promoted.<sup>625</sup>

The lack of community participation in local government, especially during the early years of mining, cannot be overemphasised. The inhabitants of these diamond mining towns had no decision-making responsibility within the community. All the decisions were made by the company's town manager or its equivalent. Other than club leadership, the community had no voice as such. The result can be a lack of a sense of community or of belonging, an absence of civic-mindedness and civic pride, and lack of enthusiasm to become involved in programmes designed by the paternalistic company who wanted to instill some of the desirable civic qualities. Lack of community participation in local government may extend to non-participation in organisations set up locally. Setting up an instant company community where everything is available, and all the material needs of the community provided for, does not allow for group generated initiatives. Organisations and groups are provided with facilities and amenities by the company, but these programmes are sometimes met with apathy and seldom get off the ground.

<sup>626</sup>

Where workers have neither voice nor vote in the affairs of their own community, many employees ... unconcerned with "voice or vote"... may become lax both socially and politically in a paternalist atmosphere in which the company sponsored social clubs, reading rooms, football matches and innumerable other benefits. This may particularly be so where the mine owner hired the policeman, the schoolteacher and the preacher, as well as the company Father Christmas who emerged every Christmas bearing company-bought gifts for company children (as was the case in the State Alluvial Diggings).<sup>627</sup>

During the early 1990s, several former workers when asked to describe life on the alluvial diamond mines, answered that it was uncomplicated and peaceful – the best years of their lives. The residents of many company towns develop a peculiarly loyal attachment to their communities even though the company itself was not always the object of great affection. But there was something about the closeness of town life which in many cases developed a long-lasting community spirit. White residents of Alexander Bay, for example, still looked back with longing to "those days" and to possible reunions and socials held in the many areas to which they had scattered. The historian who researched their diamond mining history commented quite confidently:

One does not need psychologists to analyse the people of Namaqualand and Alexander Bay. They are virtually all uncomplicated, unaffected people with their feet (firmly) on the ground.<sup>628</sup>

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<sup>625</sup> A. M. Michalowski, "The Effects of Living in Isolated Communities on the South African Diamond Mining Industry", PhD, 1987, 32-33.

<sup>626</sup> Idem, 1987, 39.

<sup>627</sup> Cf J. D. Porteous, 'The Nature of the Company Town', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, No. 51 (November 1970), 132.

<sup>628</sup> Pieter Coetzer, *Baai van Diamante*, 1998, 106. "Aard van die Mense van die Baai".

This might have been the case in the romantic early days of diamond mining camps of modest size and workers from quiet rural areas, still very much hardy folk impressed by all the luxuries and amenities. The very comprehensive study by Dr Michalowski of the psychological effects of living in a closed company town presented a different and concerning picture: ... “twenty-eight percent of the white residents are heavy drinkers, consuming twice as much alcohol as the general white population; ... thirty percent are depressed (more than double the rate of the general population); and ... about twenty percent of the white people are clinically disturbed”.<sup>629</sup> Granted, this is a perspective gleaned by a psychiatrist from his findings which might be disputed by those very “clinically disturbed” people themselves. It has however been established that company-town life in a highly regulated environment with artificial barriers against the outside world, does have unfortunate social and psychological consequences that leave workers vulnerable and uncertain once they leave – first-class services, superb amenities, and high rates of pay notwithstanding.

### **The closed mine compound and labour migrancy**

The first closed compound was constructed in 1885 on the Kimberley diamond fields. The originators of the compound system liked to argue that it was the only means of preventing the large-scale theft of diamonds, but R. V. Turrell in his study of the Kimberley Diamond Fields (1871-1890),<sup>630</sup> has shown that compounds also functioned to discipline and regulate a preindustrial work force.

The shocking level of surveillance and control employed in those closed compounds has led several historians to find the inspiration for the compound system in the prison structure. The mine owners were, however, dealing with volunteers, not prisoners. The prison-compound analogy aside, migrant workers were simply forced by economic need to subject themselves to often lengthy periods of employment. There has therefore never been a shortage of workers from the Namaqualand reserves, towns and rural which served as a constant pool of nearby labour. Perhaps most troubling for the migrant worker was his (or her) isolation from the structures of support provided by the extended family and the rural community. In a mining camp society without families or community, and hence lacking the social controls of kinship and community, workers had to construct their world of security and fellowship with its own “indices of hierarchy, respectability, self-worth and a place in the order of industrial life”.<sup>631</sup> Management are by the nature of things cut off from the lived experience of the majority and are often unable to detect any undercurrents on the part of miners living in anonymous, men-only “warehouses” ... in enforced separation from their families living in the rural areas.

At one level, there is nothing particularly unusual about South Africa’s history (conquest, slavery, capital-labour conflict), nor is it the only country where one group has used its control

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<sup>629</sup> A. M. Michalowski, “The Effects of Living in Isolated Communities on the South African Diamond Mining Industry”, PhD, Stellenbosch University, 1987.

<sup>630</sup> R. V. Turrell, *Capital and Labour on the Kimberley Diamond Fields, 1871-1890* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

<sup>631</sup> Patrick Harries, *Work, culture, and identity: migrant labourers in Mozambique and South Africa, c 1860-1910*, 1994, 64.

over the state to raise barriers against other groups. Or cornered the lion's share of public resources. But there is one feature of the country's industrial history that is unique:

Nowhere else in the world has an industrial economy employed for so long such a high proportion of oscillating migrants (coming from both inside and outside the country) in its labour force. The consequences of this labour system have been ... profound.<sup>632</sup>

The system is all too easy to ignore when one does not have to endure it or listen to the voices telling of the grief it causes.<sup>633</sup> One perceptive observer travelling through the 'homelands' or 'native reserves' from which these migrant labourers came, was left with the distinct impression that "a thin veneer of modernity disguised an immensity of pain". Years ago, in 1970, Anthony Barker found words to express the agony he had witnessed while working as a medical doctor in a remote rural part of Natal from where the mines drew their 'supplies of labour'. He described the impact of the migratory labour system and warned of its long-term consequences:

"Economic or even social analysis of migratory labour will fail to reveal the full picture of its cost. To learn this, you must listen to the lonely wife, the anxious mother, the insecure child ... It is at the family level that most pain is felt ..."

"For your migrant is concerned with nobody but himself; his own survival is the only survival that he can influence by any act that he performs. He may be well fed; doubtless he is. He may be well cared for; doubtless he is. He may have the companionship of others like himself. Yet the food he eats cannot fill the bellies of his children, nor the blanket he sleeps under warm any but himself. His care, his love, his family loyalty cannot reach out to his wife nor caress his children, ..."<sup>634</sup>

For most children of male migrants, family life is associated with being a member of a woman-headed household where the absence of their fathers is part of their conception of reality. This may influence the children's lives, ultimately resulting in problematic father-child relationships and fractured or unstable families. One 16-year-old girl, separated from her father, described her feelings this way:

I don't know my father well. Since I can remember he has always been working in the mine ... coming home only now and then. I always have so many things that I would like to tell him, but it is difficult to talk to this man I do not know so well.<sup>635</sup>

Migrant workers are not in all cases men, as many women leave their families to ensure the economic survival of the household. Absenteeism in these instances are most alarming as it affects the mother-child unit as the most basic family structure. The crucial emotional and social support which acts as a buffer against the (hostile) world is absent. Recalling separation from the mother in early childhood, one child left behind said:

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<sup>632</sup> F. Wilson and M. Ramphele, *Uprooting Poverty. The South African Challenge. Report for the Second Carnegie Inquiry into Poverty and Development in Southern Africa* (Cape Town & Johannesburg: David Philip, 1989), 197.

<sup>633</sup> Idem, 1989, 199.

<sup>634</sup> Anthony Barker, 'Community of the Careless', *South African Outlook*, April 1970, 51-5.

<sup>635</sup> Ria Smit, 'The impact of labour migration on African families in South Africa: yesterday and today', *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, Vol. 32 (4), 2001, 542.

When my mother left home to go and work for the madam ... I was afraid that she would never come back ... It made my heart sad that she wasn't there to hold my hand.<sup>636</sup>

It is not only the child who is affected by mother-child separation -- for the female migrant worker the well-being of her child is of great concern, and it makes her sad to leave the child behind. Fathers again talk of the pain of seeing their children growing up as strangers. Because of work-related absence, fathers are unable to be involved as a participatory role model and play an effective part in the socialisation of their children. It is thus apparent from the preceding discussion that labour migration may have a negative impact on both the husband-wife and parent-child relationships.<sup>637</sup>

### **Demands made by labour tenancy on the individual, the family and the community**

To deal with exploitative social and labour conditions, struggling migrant workers create for themselves a sense of personal autonomy from within which they may act and take charge of their own lives. This autonomy is built upon the positive assertion of their human value which stands in contrast to their identity as mere labour units in the political economy of the mine.<sup>638</sup>

There is evidence from personal interviews that in work situations where Whites predominated, the Namaqualand diamond mine worker of colour felt increased levels of tension. This can be traced to the system of segregation and domination they experienced on all levels of South African society. The tension rarely manifested as physical aggression in the form of open fighting because of the real threat of instant dismissal. The early workers were in any case unable to obtain liquor and get drunk, which could afterwards be cited as an extenuating or aggravating factor. Otherwise, their internalised controls reinforced by socialisation, tradition and law were typically too strong to permit open conflict so that fights or open disagreements between a coloured and a white worker were virtually unknown on the Namaqualand diamond mines.<sup>639</sup> This researcher is certainly not aware of any academic articles or company sanctioned reports assessing inter-race tensions associated with employment in diamond mine settings in Namaqualand.

The colonial experience of indigenous people in the Native Reserves of Canada has certain similarities and parallels with the Coloured Rural Reserves in Namaqualand from where the bulk of diamond mine workers of colour were recruited. While working away from home, Native Canadian migratory mineworkers experienced and showed outward signs of stress worrying about their wives and children, and about the fidelity of wives during their absences. Several

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<sup>636</sup> Ria Smit, 'The impact of labour migration on African families in South Africa: yesterday and today', *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, Vol. 32 (4), 2001, 542-3.

<sup>637</sup> Idem, 2001, 544.

<sup>638</sup> Cf David B. Coplan, 'Eloquent knowledge: Lesotho Migrants' Songs and the Anthropology of Experience', *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 14 No. 3, August 1987, 424. (644950 Lesotho Migrants' Songs, 1987) (Accessed 15 January 2020).

<sup>639</sup> Cf Charles W. Hobart, 'Industrial Employment of Rural Indigenes: the case of Canada', *Human Organization*, Vol. 41, No. 1 (Spring 1982), 56. (Accessed 19 January 2020).

studies have shown that worrying about the health and well-being of the wife is reported by between 54 % and 87 % of absent husbands, and similar worries about their children are reported by between 60 % and 84 % of absent native fathers. Dramatic evidence about concerns relating to the fidelity of absent wives comes from a study of worker adjustment during the first year of their involvement in a rotation employment programme. The employment on a remote mining site in Canada was seasonal, lasting from mid-November to the end of April. While absent from home at the work site, some of the men appeared to be brooding about the behaviour of their wives.<sup>640</sup> Their counterparts from Steinkopf Reserve dreaded the enforced six-month period lying “high and dry” (drô lê) in the mining camp, but there are (obviously) no published reports of gloomy migrant workers on the Namaqualand diamond mines “brooding” about the real or imagined conduct of their wives or girlfriends at home.<sup>641</sup>

In cases where they relocate with their families to a work site that is distant from their home communities, those Canadian workers do experience different types of stresses compared to single labour migrancy, studies have found. The main advantage of such a move is that the worker has his family with him. He is not prone to homesickness or does not worry about the well-being of wife and children, or what his wife may be doing or not doing. Instead, he is confronted with two other difficulties. First, that his family may have considerable difficulty adjusting to the new community and the school, particularly if it is a predominantly ‘White men’s town,’ in sharp contrast to the native community from which they came. Under these circumstances, the wife and the children may suffer such difficulty in adapting that he considers quitting the job and moving his family back to the home settlement.<sup>642</sup>

Izaak Cloete, coloured shoemaker and general leatherworker at Kleinzee (1937 – 1965), was as a gesture of goodwill given the opportunity to bring his wife and children for the school holidays to the mining town.<sup>643</sup> The family was then normally accommodated in the old labour hostel. On one occasion during 1957, Cloete’s 12-year-old son, John, came to blows with a White youngster. Both boys - Afrikaans-speaking members of the Dutch Reformed Church with Afrikaans- sounding surnames - claimed to be ‘Afrikaners’. The argument turned rather ugly when the white boy was deemed to have assumed a “superior” attitude disputing the other boy’s claim.<sup>644</sup>

Participation in industrial employment of this type might also have adverse effects on at least three aspects of community life. Labour migrancy prevents full participation in community activities in the place of origin, while leadership responsibilities in the community are left to those at home. Most concerning of all, there is no interpersonal interaction between those left

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<sup>640</sup> Cf Charles W. Hobart, ‘Industrial Employment of Rural Indigenes: the case of Canada’, Human Organization, Vol. 41, No. 1 (Spring 1982), 56. (Accessed 19 January 2020). .

<sup>641</sup> See J. F. van Wyk, *Klipfontein bring Herinneringe* (Steinkopf: Steinkopf Bronnesentrum, 2015), 81.

<sup>642</sup> Charles W. Hobart, ‘Industrial Employment of Rural Indigenes: the case of Canada’, 1982, 57.

<sup>643</sup> John Cloete, pers. comm., Steinkopf, 9 November 2021.

<sup>644</sup> Afrikaner: “South African native of West European descent, especially an Afrikaans-speaking descendant of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century Dutch, German and French settlers who colonised the Cape Province”. (D. R. Beeton and Helen Dorner, *A Dictionary of English Usage in Southern Africa*, Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1975).

behind and absent migrants, which leads to issues in community life being discussed and strategies and solutions devised, without participation by those away. The loss of community members leaving is felt, especially those better trained and more energetic members. Each of these aspects of community life would therefore be put at risk by widespread migrant labour outmigration.<sup>645</sup>

After 1913, the communal reserve of Leliefontein in Namaqualand was, along with the other reserves, undergoing change from a relatively self-sufficient community to one dependent on outside resources. This was deeply felt, especially by the older generation who did not possess the education and optimism of the younger people. Among those left behind there was a sense of sadness and defeat. Except at holidays, Leliefontein was empty of the young people who formed the bulk of the migrant labour exodus. Their absence was experienced as a drain on the vitality and identity of home life, although many of the remaining inhabitants depended on the money sent home to ensure survival. On the other hand, most of those migrants who were away expressed a desire to return, even to retire, twenty or thirty years hence - even though the reserve could offer little security in the way of jobs and economic resources.<sup>646</sup>

The demands made by labour migrancy on the family remaining behind were quite worrying. Both wives and children at home on the Canadian Reserve experienced distinct kinds of stress. More than a third of wives report worrying about the welfare of their husbands while they are away at work. Another commonly reported reaction was loneliness. Wives may experience other less subjective difficulties as well, such as when men do not send remittances so the family can be fed.<sup>647</sup> As with Native Canadian families, this oversight does not appear to have been very common among the conservative, patriarchal community of Namaqualand where the mine manager could be approached to fix the problem. The closeness of extended family ties and, in most places, the continuing strength of the sharing ethic as well as government social grants, ensured that comparatively few experienced a degree of privation because of migratory employment.

On the Native Reserves of Canada, a minority of workers' wives reported specific troubles experienced during their husbands' absences. Several studies indicate that about 10 % reported difficulties handling their children while their husbands were away, and about the same percentage said they experienced unwanted attention from other men.<sup>648</sup> Like their mothers, children suffered both subjective and objective losses. Subjective losses included children missing their fathers while they are away, but objective losses were restricted to sons lacking guidance on life skills when the migrancy schedule required the absence of their fathers for prolonged periods of time.

Nearer home, the experience of the Ovambo people of South-West Africa (now Namibia) under the migrant labour system was bound to find powerful expression in the work of two of southern Africa's leading artists, John Muadfangejo and Ben Ulenga. Remembering childhood experiences, the Namibian poet Ben Ulenga (who spent ten years as a political detainee in a

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<sup>645</sup> Charles W. Hobart, 'Industrial Employment of Rural Indigenes: the case of Canada', 1982.

<sup>646</sup> M. J. Price, "Leliefontein: Structure and Decline of a Coloured Mission Community, 1870 – 1913", B.A. (Hons), History, University of Cape Town, 1976, 79.

<sup>647</sup> Cf Charles W. Hobart, 'Industrial Employment of Rural Indigenes: the case of Canada', 1982, 57.

<sup>648</sup> *Ibid.*, 1982, 57.

South African prison on Robben Island just off Cape Town) focussed on the emotional scars inflicted by the migrant labour system. In his poem titled “Fathers”, he recalls his troubled emotions, and even resentment, at the absences and returns of his father. Fathers, Uenga writes, had become strangers to their own children, always talking about diamonds, trains, money and mines ... things the hungry children had never seen.<sup>649</sup>

Compatriot John Muadfangejo (1944-1987) trained as a teacher and studied art. In his 1982 linocut, “They Are Meeting Again at Home”, the artist portrays the routine emotional cruelty which arises from the structural violence at the heart of the migrant labour system. The artwork shows the homecoming of a migrant labourer and the meeting with his partner. There is tenderness in the embrace between two people separated by economic compulsion, but also emotional coolness or even reproach. The reunion is temporary though, tinged with sadness, and will soon be followed by the renewed pain of departure.<sup>650</sup>

In 1992, researchers investigating the effects of the proposed mine closure at Kleinzee, also produced conclusions based on personal observation and informal surveys during field trips. Of importance to the workers about to be retrenched were the material benefits, physical security and interpersonal relationships built up rather than the overall impact on personal and social wellbeing of living in a closed company town.<sup>651</sup> The daunting prospect of mine closure and migration to other towns had concentrated the minds of the mineworkers. Members of the mining community conceded there were disadvantages in living in so remote an area but agreed that the advantages outweighed the disadvantages. Because of the isolation of the mining town, the atmosphere of a small rural village prevailed. Added to these benefits were excellent recreational facilities, free accommodation and services, as well as cheaper shopping facilities. With mine closure, these benefits would be lost, and expenditure would increase.<sup>652</sup>

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<sup>649</sup> Laurie Flynn, *Studded with Diamonds and Paved with Gold: Miners, Mining Companies, and Human Rights in Southern Africa* (London: Bloomsbury, 1992), 88-9.

<sup>650</sup> Laurie Flynn, *Studded with Diamonds and Paved with Gold: Miners, Mining Companies, and Human Rights in Southern Africa* (London: Bloomsbury, 1992), 87-8.

<sup>651</sup> The unfortunate social and other consequences brought about by strict security measures are offset by a decent salary and being “well cared for”. One accepts and easily forgets. (Anthony von Zeil (87), consultant geologist, De Beers Namaqualand Mines, Kleinzee (1957-1972). Personal communication, Cape Town, 20 March 2023.

<sup>652</sup> Melanie Gosling, “An assessment of the potential economic-socio (sic) impact of the future closure of DBNM’s diamond mines in Namaqualand”, MPhil, Department of Environmental and Geographical Studies, University of Cape Town, 1992, 66.



*Figure 50 Workers of the State Alluvial Diggings, Alexander Bay, in front of their living quarters (mid-1930s) (Own Collection)*

The quality of life also related to the secure and intimate lifestyle that is often a part of living in a small community. People informally spoke of the freedom that they and their children experienced because of the absence of crime in the towns. There was also the assurance of a support system associated with the intimacy of interpersonal relationships. This lifestyle contrasted with the social pressures and potential isolation of newcomers living in a large centre which posed threats to the family structure.<sup>653</sup>

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<sup>653</sup> Judy Beaumont, "Closure of De Beers Namaqualand Mines in 2002: A Socio-economic Impact Assessment", University of Cape Town, 1992, 68.

## **Chapter 9 The Namaqualand Diamond Field: Legacy of a century of diamond mining.**

### **Conclusion**

Mining shaped the political economy of the region of Namaqualand, and diamond mining has indeed had (and continues to have) a major impact on the local economy and society, illustrative of the fact that Namaqualand's wealth and potential lie beneath the ground.

The concern is here with a mining industry that, in the main, was always determined by external political and social forces. Diamond mining in Namaqualand has since its commencement in 1928 sustained the racial hierarchies of colonialism, segregation and apartheid - in line with the colonial dream of mineral wealth which in the end was to mostly benefit a section of society.

It is the inevitable fate of the region that eventually there will be scaling down and closure of the land-based diamond mining industry. There is little diversification in terms of industry able to absorb a substantial number of workers laid off. Mining companies should therefore, at the outset, always draw up a Mine Closure Plan. Going forward, the critical question is whether the mining industry can play as crucial a role as it did in the evolution of the local economy. Only time will tell whether the industry in Namaqualand can embark on another growth trajectory.

### **The Diamond Mining Companies: Alexkor Limited and De Beers Namaqualand Mines**

The dominant economic industry of the coastal region and prime source of wage employment has since 1928 been the two miners. Decades of large-scale mining operations have had long-term impacts on local communities, entrenching - among others - a wage labour system of migrants. De Beers Namaqualand Mines, like Alexkor Limited, has played a paternalistic role in the communities dependent on it. Partly because of this dependance, both employees and affected communities have had difficulty in comprehending a Namaqualand without the two companies. In 1992, for example, the majority of affected parties did not believe that the Kleinzee mine would close in ten years' time.<sup>654</sup>

But what, we may ask, are the corporate social responsibilities of the companies towards the workers and the surrounding community? The church-based Bench Marks Foundation has crafted social responsibility targets which reads like a critique on a century of diamond mining in Namaqualand. The following are certain of the ideals held up by the Bench Marks Foundation to ensure industrial peace and community prosperity in Namaqualand:<sup>655</sup>

\* Socio-economic dimension: the company does not terminate its operations without assessing the long-term environmental, social, cultural, and economic sustainability impacts.

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<sup>654</sup> Andrew G. MacKenzie, "A Socio-Economic Impact Assessment of the Future Closure of a Diamond Mine in Namaqualand, South Africa: Planning for mine closure a decade in advance", MPhil, Department of Environmental and Geographic Science, University of Cape Town, 1992.

<sup>655</sup> Bench Marks, "Corporate Social Responsibility" (Johannesburg: Bench Marks Foundation, 2009).

\* Human rights: the company adopts a comprehensive and verifiable human rights policy which includes an explicit commitment to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights<sup>656</sup> and the International Labour Organisation's standards.

\* Indigenous Local Communities: the company is committed to respecting fully the rights of indigenous peoples and strives to contribute to their long-term environmental, social, cultural, and economic sustainability (see the Richtersveld Community Land Claim).

\* Labour Relations: the company's policies include genuine respect for employees' right to freedom of association, labour organisation, and free collective bargaining; non-discrimination in employment; no violation of the rights of children. The company values all its employees in terms of their social, intellectual, economic, and personal contribution to every sector of its operations.

\* Human Resource Management: the company has in place effective and appropriate policies regarding equality of opportunity for women.

\* Corporate Governance and Ethics: the company is committed to transparency in all its accounting and financial reporting statements.

\* Economic Dimension: natural resources (e.g., minerals) which become an asset to the company, are stated as a debt to the community.

\* Labour Relations: the company does not discriminate based on gender, racial and ethnic origin, culture, religion, age, disability, sexual orientation, nationality, citizenship, or political opinion. The company pays a living wage, with equal remuneration for work of equal value.

The commendable efforts of the Bench Marks Foundation, measured against practice and the reality on the ground, have at the best of times to be treated with caution. Today, one can think of possible interventions by the South African Revenue Services, community activists, politicians, illiterate locals and self-interested traditional leaders, amongst others.

To be fair, one needs to give an industry spokesman an opportunity to explain matters from their side – from none other than Mr Nicholas (Nicky) Oppenheimer, chairman of De Beers Consolidated Mines.<sup>657</sup>

Natural resources are morally neutral, Oppenheimer asserts. They can be a source of greed – and all that implies – or a source for good. The choice, as it has always been, is ours. How that choice is made today will be the key to determining how Africa will look in the next decades and whether its people, and not merely its powerful elites, can enjoy the prosperity that is their rightful inheritance. That choice ultimately rests with African governments, but as resource

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<sup>656</sup> South Africa played a prominent role in the establishment of the United Nations in 1945. The country's post-war prime minister, Jan Smuts, was involved in drawing up the preamble to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, but the country balked at ratifying and signing the document in December 1948.

<sup>657</sup> Nicky Oppenheimer, 'Diamonds, Development, and Democracy', *World Policy Journal*, Vol. 25, No. 3 (Fall, 2008), 211-217 (Accessed 10 January 2020).

competition in the global economy increases, it is also one in which outside investors, and particularly resource companies, have a critical role to play.

Oppenheimer reminds us that his grandfather, Sir Ernest Oppenheimer, who became chairman of De Beers in the 1920s, was ahead of his time when he declared that any company he was involved in had to make money but had to do so in a manner which would make a permanent contribution to the regions and countries where it operated. Mining companies – particularly those prepared to make long-term commitments – need, at the very least, clarity, certainty, and transparency in the rules and laws under which they operate, and the administration of those laws. If investment is to be truly secure, the investor must become a partner with the host government in driving development, both on the macro scale through tax and royalty revenues, and at the micro level through positive engagement with the needs of the local community.

There is no doubt that the most vital contribution that mining companies doing business in Africa can make to a country's economy will be through tax, royalties, and partnership dividends that flow to the central treasury of these nations. This will be the main driver of national economic development. The realisation that natural resources can and should be the wellspring - not of conflict, poverty, and disaster - but of economic health and a secure, independent route out of poverty was spreading through Africa, Oppenheimer concluded.

### **The heavy cost of mining to South Africa**

On 16 August 2012, the country was shaken to its core when thirty-four mineworkers were shot dead and seventy-eight more injured by police during unprotected strike action in Marikana in the country's North West Province. The Marikana tragedy cannot, however, be compared with the 1928-9 Diggers' Revolt in Namaqualand which was resolved without serious violence. The 1922 Revolt on the Witwatersrand was then still fresh in people's minds. But like the white mineworkers' strike of 1922, workers at Marikana were mowed down when police opened fire with live ammunition. Placed in the context of South Africa's long history of racial and economic exclusion, the events at Marikana brought to the fore, in all its stark reality, the many challenges the country is struggling with on its long road to creating a just society for all. In essence, though, it signalled a breakdown in the post-apartheid social contract between the state, labour, and capital.<sup>658</sup>

After the remarkable growth and development of South Africa's mining industry over the last century and a half, the once mighty economic force is now "but a shadow of its former self". To illustrate: during the 1930s when gold and diamonds dominated the industry and exports, mining was directly accountable for roughly 25 % of South Africa's GDP. In 2013, the mining sector contributed just 8 % to GDP.<sup>659</sup> While the South African mining industry still finds itself at a crossroads, prospects are all but bleak. The country is still a leading player among mining economies, boasting the fifth largest mining sector in the world in terms of GDP value. Its extensive mineral resources include the world's largest deposits of platinum, chromium,

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<sup>658</sup> Suren Pillay, 'The Marikana Massacre: South Africa's Post-Apartheid Dissensus', *Economic & Political Weekly*, Vol. 48, No. 50, 14 December 2019. (<https://www.jstor.org/stable/24479043>) (Accessed 11-01-2020).

<sup>659</sup> Jade Davenport, *Digging Deep: a history of mining in South Africa, 1852-2002* (Johannesburg & Cape Town: Jonathan Ball Publishers, 2013), 460.

manganese, and vanadium. Thus, while sectors such as gold, uranium, diamonds, iron ore and coal may slip into decline, minerals in other mining sectors will help to offset the losses.<sup>660</sup>

### The impact of diamond mining on the communities: The Richtersveld Land Claim

Restoring land rights to communities or persons who were dispossessed under racially discriminatory laws and practices can rightly be regarded as one of the most tangible expressions of redressing the wrongs of the past. In his 1995 master's thesis in History, the Richtersvelder, Willem J. Louw, characterised the Namas of the area as a marginalised community with a bleak future. Reduced to impoverishment by the loss of the diamond-rich coastal tract of land, the hoped-for restitution of their land and mineral rights would, in his view, enable the descendants of the Nama people themselves to “make a constructive contribution to their socio-economic upliftment”. Louw expected that the restitution award to the Richtersveld community would vastly empower them.<sup>661</sup> Factional disputes are unfortunately quite common among land claimant communities, and if historical fault lines are not taken note of, long-festering rifts and cleavages may once again appear. These rifts are often exacerbated by the legacies of colonialism and apartheid.



Figure 50 Andries (84) and Katrina (87) Cloete, with son Klaas.

Melkvei, Lekkersing, in the southern Richtersveld (1990). Potential beneficiaries of a land claim award. (Own Collection)

The unhappy saga involving inter-communal conflict that erupted in the Richtersveld after the restitution award, could fill another volume. This can perhaps be seen as a reversal and betrayal of the hopes and expectations of the Richtersveld community. Melkvei is an arid, dusty stock-post about 5 km west of Lekkersing village, in the southern part of the territory. The site of an old Bushman werf, the immediate area was strewn with remnants of their material culture. Broken ostrich egg-shell flasks and shards of clay pots, perforated beads and other fragments lay exposed on the wind-eroded dune ridge. Here, in 1989, an old couple, the Cloetes, was interviewed about the Richtersveld land claim issue.

When asked why the community did not earlier assert their rightful claims to the land at Alexander Bay, Katrina Cloete replied: “Ons was wet-bang as gevolg van ons onkunde” (In our ignorance, we were afraid of the authorities and their laws). People were found to be afraid of

<sup>660</sup> Idem, 2013, 465.

<sup>661</sup> W. J. Louw, “Grondonteiening en Diamantontginning in die Richtersveld 1890-1930”, M.A., University of the Western Cape, 1995, 87.

speaking up; they knew their rights but were not confident enough to express them when confronting authority. At the time, Andries (84) and Katrina (87) Cloete, tempered by age, appeared to be resigned to the drought-stricken conditions and the resultant impoverished circumstances. Other researchers have also found that fear was a recurrent theme: fear of losing their land; fear of losing power; fear of payment of rates and taxes; of not having access to knowledge; and fear of the power of outsiders.<sup>662</sup> This once again encapsulates the tragic theme running through Namaqualand's history: an overriding sense amongst the older residents of colour of the historic dispossession of their land and minerals following the annexation of the territory in December 1847.

### **The legacies of a century of diamond mining in Namaqualand**

Namaqualand is made up of complex and fragile ecosystems with unique biological diversity and high levels of endemism. The floristically diverse lowlands, the coastal tract, comprises of two major vegetation types of succulent and non-succulent shrubs from a variety of families. This Strandveld forms a narrow strip that extends inland of the beach and coastal dunes up to 10 km or more.<sup>663</sup>

The greatest threat to Lowland Namaqualand ecosystems is from surface mining which has over the years transformed discontinuous areas along some 400 km of coastline. Much of the above ground vegetation and the associated soil processes have been destroyed.<sup>664</sup> Diamond mining has been ongoing in Namaqualand since 1928 when little was known or required in terms of environmental management. It was generally accepted that the very nature of surface mining necessitated alienation and radical disturbance of land; and, until quite recently, mining activities were believed to cause little impact because of the arid nature of the land. The semi-desert biome was in fact regarded as "dangerous, unwanted wasteland". Thus, so much of what we see today is a legacy of decades of mining when there was little appreciation of the biodiversity of the land and no standards for rehabilitation.<sup>665</sup>

The unrehabilitated mined-out areas resemble moonscapes which, if left untreated, will probably take hundreds of years to recover. Ecological restoration on the Namaqualand coastline has only been piloted in the last 40 years or so. By 2011, the performance of the two mining companies at Alexander Bay and Kleinsee still indicated "weak commitment to fulfilling environmental rehabilitation responsibilities". With the state's own diamond mining company performing poorly in post-mining environmental rehabilitation, private companies were de facto allowed to avoid meeting even the legally required minimum. Merely changing the visual and aesthetic appearance of mined sites is a very narrow conception of environmental integrity.

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<sup>662</sup> P. Wisborg, "It is our land': Human rights and land tenure reform in Namaqualand, South Africa", doctoral dissertation, Aas: Norwegian University of Life Sciences, 2006.

<sup>663</sup> J. P. H. Acocks, 'Veld Types of South Africa', *Memoirs of the Botanical Survey of South Africa*, No. 40, Pretoria, 1975.

<sup>664</sup> Iona Blair, "In the wake of Diamond Mining: ...," 2011, 59.

<sup>665</sup> W. F. M. Talkenburg, "An investigation of the environmental impact of surface diamond mining along the arid west coast of South Africa", MSc, University of Cape Town, 1982.



Figure 52 Overburden Dump at Koingnaas (De Beers Namaqualand Mines). (Google Earth)

### Postscript: The story of the finding of the first stone on the Namaqualand coast

Today the story of the finding of the first stone south of Port Nolloth has faded, with few traces left in local folklore. Over the years, there has been the odd unsubstantiated claim for the credit of ‘first discoverer’ of precious stones in Namaqualand. Written and oral sources, without exception, regard Jack Carstens as officially the man to have first discovered a diamond in Namaqualand. But in his book, Carstens himself is quite careful to qualify this claim by pointing out that his was the first “officially reported discovery” made on *the Namaqualand coast* (emphasis supplied).

On the night of the discovery in August 1925, ...

“I showed my father the stone, convinced that I was showing him the first diamond ever to be found on the Namaqualand coast”.<sup>666</sup> His statement is further underlined when under the guidance of the Claims Inspector, John Barry, he registered at Springbok ...

“the first diamond ever to be found on the Namaqualand coast of South Africa”.<sup>667</sup>

In 2001, decades after the discovery, Carstens’ son, Peter, would confidently assert that his father ... “was the first discoverer of diamonds in Namaqualand – near Port Nolloth, in August 1925; and the following year he made a second discovery, at Kleinzee”.<sup>668</sup>

What is true is that officially reported discoveries of diamonds in Namaqualand were made some sixteen years prior to Jack Carstens’ find in 1925. At the time of the first reported discoveries towards the end of 1909 (described in the introductory chapter to this thesis), Carstens (born 1890) was a student attending Wynberg High School in Cape Town. He is certainly rightly credited with the discovery of the littoral deposits on the Port Nolloth Reserve in August 1925, and at Kleinzee in November 1926, that led to the commercial exploitation of the diamond reserves in Namaqualand.

<sup>666</sup> Jack Carstens, *A Fortune Through My Fingers*, 2002, 56.

<sup>667</sup> Idem, 2002, 58.

<sup>668</sup> Peter Carstens, *In the Company of Diamonds*, 2001. Preface and Acknowledgements, xiii.

With famous geologist Dr Merensky congratulating him personally on being the “first discoverer” (and his father concurring), Jack was clear in his mind that ...

“The fact is ... the first gem ever to be brought to light was discovered in 1925 – by me near O’beep -- ...“

This is the closest Jack Carstens came to an absolute claim of first discoverer of diamonds in Namaqualand, and he left enough ambiguity about the broader regional context of the find – a stance he maintained throughout.



Figure 53 Jack Carstens (left) and Dr Hans Merensky. (Rudd & Watson, *History of Namaqualand diamond discoveries*, 1956)

As was shown in chapter 1 (The Diamond Coast of Namaqualand), there were several early prospectors such as Albert Durrheim, Sors Klass, L. Nankin, Christian Paulsen and Alfred Preuss whose finds of precious stones towards the end of 1909 were officially registered and recorded with the Civil Commissioner & Resident Magistrate at Springbok – some sixteen years prior to Carstens’ discovery.

Christian Paulsen’s discovery of precious stones on the Orange River during October 1909 had indeed set off a mini rush by prospectors. A telegram from the Reuters correspondent at Port Nolloth on 3 November 1909 about the diamond finds on the banks of the Orange River by “a farmer” named Paulsen, announced that five diamond syndicates had been formed at Springbokfontein. All the prospecting parties were working on Crown land on the banks of the Orange River in the Richtersveld where - according to reports - over 500 claims had been pegged.<sup>669</sup> The Reuters correspondent who sent off the report was none other than William Carstens of Port Nolloth – well known shopkeeper-pro prospector and the first port of call for numerous prospectors, geologists, and mineralogists. The archival records are replete with references to the shopkeeper-pro prospector, William Carstens. Even Alfred Preuss, the discoverer of a few small stones during July or August 1909, made a solemn declaration about the find, giving his forwarding address as care of William Carstens, Port Nolloth.

Jack Carstens was instrumental in the advent of diamond mining in Namaqualand and was afterwards lionized by the press for the part he played, creating an irresistible narrative and a legend that has persisted up till today. Why father and son who both without a doubt had prior knowledge of the earlier finds in 1909, did not reveal this in numerous interviews with the press and other publications, has still to be explained.

Both William Carstens and his son Jack also readily acknowledged the part played by Percy van Reenen in the first discovery of diamonds on the Namaqualand littoral, albeit as a marginal figure and not a man in his own right. Van Reenen, like Zacharias Lewala in South-West Africa, would both serve their usefulness. About the time before the start of the First World War, Van

<sup>669</sup> S G 3/2/1/45 Ref. MDC 986. S.A. News 4—XI—09.

Reenen brought some gravel to Carstens senior, and just over a decade later led Jack Carstens to the site. This was confirmed to me in 1984 in a conversation with Freddy Griffiths of Port Nolloth,<sup>670</sup> a contemporary of Van Reenen and himself a former labourer for Carstens during the first find on the commonage.

Like others of his class, Van Reenen had to contend with conditions of colonialism, segregation, and apartheid. By the early 1950s Van Reenen, having lost one eye and sickly with lumbago brought on by heavy dews while sleeping rough, found himself in a makeshift shelter against a coastal sand dune on the outskirts of Port Nolloth. Impoverished and perhaps overcome with nostalgia and lamenting like Carstens a lost fortune, he would visit his old prospecting claim, Van Reenen's Prospect, 2½ miles north of Port Nolloth.<sup>671</sup> He would only become a footnote of the historical landscape of his native Namaqualand.

Diamond is crystallized carbon in exceptionally pure form. It is paradoxical though that the most precious mineral in the world is formed by the most common material known. "It not only exists in vast quantities in the bowls of the earth, but plants and trees of every kind contain it in an inconceivable quantity."<sup>672</sup> Which brings us to the oft-repeated maxim that a country's wealth is not measured by the resources that lie beneath its soil but rather by the resourcefulness of its people: "that the key element is not the resource itself but rather how that resource is exploited".<sup>673</sup>

The saga of the discovery of the first stone on the Namaqualand littoral in 1925, and the fate which befell both Jack Carstens and Percy Van Reenen, are perhaps illustrative of the common nature of the experiences faced by ordinary prospectors, miners and members of any society caught up in the discovery and exploitation of mineral wealth. One can say that diamond mining, like the precious stones recovered from the earth, refracts life from endless facets. On another more mundane level, it can perhaps be seen as a metaphor for the fortunes and misfortunes of the region of Namaqualand and its wealth of diamonds and other minerals.

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<sup>670</sup> In the same communication, Freddy Griffiths - elderly and still agitated by Van Reenen's apparent betrayal - spoke with dismay of this *fokken* Percy pointing out the diamond-bearing gravels to the "White people". His reaction is understandable because his father, William G. Griffiths, was reported to have held mining concessions in southern South-West Africa in 1908. (AG Vol. 1862, Ref. 18792. Alleged Concessions to Diamond Mine. Great Namaqualand (1908) (KAB) Griffiths, W. G.)

<sup>671</sup> Documentation, including a sketch of the claim named Van Reenen's Prospect, is filed in the Western Cape Archives & Repository. Name of Licence Holder: P. S. van Reenen, No. of Licence 93, issued 28 January 1927, Springbok.

<sup>672</sup> Quoted in George G. Blakey, *The Diamond* (New York & London: Paddington Press Ltd, 1977), 49.

<sup>673</sup> Speech of Nicky Oppenheimer, Chairman of De Beers, addressing the Commonwealth Business Forum, Johannesburg, 2001.

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1 / WOC Worcester 1798—1973 Inventory 2/7 Computer List

1 / STB Stellenbosch 1683—1981 Inventory 2/2 Computer List

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Agreement entered into and concluded by and between His Honor Merensky of Johannesburg of the one part hereafter styled the purchaser and Julius Gordon, Jacob Baptiste Gapeau, Lanice Johannes Loupser, <sup>and Julius Gordon</sup> all of Springsbok Namaguanam acting for and on behalf of a certain prospecting syndicate (hereafter styled the sellers) of the other part

The sellers hereby sell to the purchaser who hereby purchases from them all the seller rights title interest claim and demand whatsoever in and to all <sup>the</sup> areas or claims pegged under the following licenses to prospect for precious stones issued by the Game Commissioner of Namaguanam

No	Area	Date	Name	Ref. to License	No
123645	123645	1/10/26	Edward Stern	123645	
123657	123657	1/10/26	Edward Stern	123657	
123658	123658	1/10/26	Edward Stern	123658	
123659	123659	1/10/26	J. B. Gapeau	123659	
123660	123660	1/10/26	J. B. Gapeau	123660	
123661	123661	1/10/26	J. B. Gapeau	123661	
123662	123662	1/10/26	J. B. Gapeau	123662	
123663	123663	1/10/26	J. B. Gapeau	123663	
123664	123664	1/10/26	J. B. Gapeau	123664	
123665	123665	1/10/26	J. B. Gapeau	123665	
123666	123666	1/10/26	J. B. Gapeau	123666	
123667	123667	1/10/26	J. B. Gapeau	123667	
123668	123668	1/10/26	J. B. Gapeau	123668	
123669	123669	1/10/26	J. B. Gapeau	123669	
123670	123670	1/10/26	J. B. Gapeau	123670	
123671	123671	1/10/26	J. B. Gapeau	123671	
123672	123672	1/10/26	J. B. Gapeau	123672	
123673	123673	1/10/26	J. B. Gapeau	123673	
123674	123674	1/10/26	J. B. Gapeau	123674	
123675	123675	1/10/26	J. B. Gapeau	123675	
123676	123676	1/10/26	J. B. Gapeau	123676	
123677	123677	1/10/26	J. B. Gapeau	123677	
123678	123678	1/10/26	J. B. Gapeau	123678	
123679	123679	1/10/26	J. B. Gapeau	123679	
123680	123680	1/10/26	J. B. Gapeau	123680	
123681	123681	1/10/26	J. B. Gapeau	123681	
123682	123682	1/10/26	J. B. Gapeau	123682	
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123684	123684	1/10/26	J. B. Gapeau	123684	
123685	123685	1/10/26	J. B. Gapeau	123685	
123686	123686	1/10/26	J. B. Gapeau	123686	
123687	123687	1/10/26	J. B. Gapeau	123687	
123688	123688	1/10/26	J. B. Gapeau	123688	
123689	123689	1/10/26	J. B. Gapeau	123689	
123690	123690	1/10/26	J. B. Gapeau	123690	
123691	123691	1/10/26	J. B. Gapeau	123691	
123692	123692	1/10/26	J. B. Gapeau	123692	
123693	123693	1/10/26	J. B. Gapeau	123693	
123694	123694	1/10/26	J. B. Gapeau	123694	
123695	123695	1/10/26	J. B. Gapeau	123695	
123696	123696	1/10/26	J. B. Gapeau	123696	
123697	123697	1/10/26	J. B. Gapeau	123697	
123698	123698	1/10/26	J. B. Gapeau	123698	
123699	123699	1/10/26	J. B. Gapeau	123699	
123700	123700	1/10/26	J. B. Gapeau	123700	

The seller further sell to the purchaser who purchases all proceeds of registered stones, also all plant and accessories including wagons and donkeys.

The purchase price to be paid for the foregoing by purchaser to seller shall be the sum of seventeen thousand five hundred pounds (£17,500) Sterling whereof One thousand pounds shall be paid against signature of this agreement and the balance of £16,500 shall be paid by the 31<sup>st</sup> January 1927 by purchaser to the credit of account of J. C. Caplan with the National bank of S. A. Ltd Strand Street Cape Town.

The seller warrant that all the foregoing Licences have been duly pegged (but the areas of some are less than 1000 yards in diameter) and that there are no disputes pending with regard to any area to date.

Thus agreed and signed at the camp near Ulesanaa Bay District Namaqualand the fourth day of January 1927

Hans Merensky  
 Julius Gordon  
 J. C. Caplan  
 J. Gordon

(Rudd & Watson, History of the Namaqualand Diamond Discoveries, 1956)

Figure 11 Annexure 1 Agreement of Sale dated 4 January 1927: Merensky – Gordon/Caplan Agreement p. 2

**Figure 25 Annexure 2 Schedule of Regulations promulgated on 27 April 1928 under Government Notice No. 720, State Alluvial Diggings:**

1. The control, direction, and management of a State Alluvial Digging shall be vested in the Government Mining Engineer who shall be assisted by a Committee of Management of three officials, one of whom shall be Chairman, and by a staff appointed for that purpose, and both the Committee of Management and the staff be appointed by the Minister.
2. Such other employees as may be required for carrying out the work of mining, digging, or quarrying, or other operations incidental to the recovery of precious stones shall be paid out a daily rate of wages to be fixed by the Minister and to be shown in their contracts of service, and may be engaged or discharged from time to time by the Government Mining Engineer or his deputy.
3. In addition to the pay referred to in regulation No. 2, such bonus as may be decided on by the Government Mining Engineer in consultation with the Public Service Commission based on the amount of work performed, may be granted to employees mentioned in regulation No. 2.
4. Such proportion of the bonus referred to in regulation No. 3 as the Government Mining Engineer may from time to time determine, shall be withheld for the purpose of forming a fund for the benefit of employees who may leave or be discharged from employment on the State Alluvial Diggings.
5. The fund referred to in regulation No. 4 shall be administered by the Treasury.
6. Hours and conditions of work shall be such as may be laid down by the Government Mining Engineer and notified by him by notice posted at the Mines Department office on the diggings and in writing to the employees. The hours and conditions of work may be revised by the Government Mining Engineer from time to time.
7. The regulations issued under the Mines & Works Act, 1911, and the Special Regulations for Alluvial Diamond Diggings contained in Government Notice No. 443 dated the 23<sup>rd</sup> of October 1917, as amended by Government Notice No. 1130 dated the 30<sup>th</sup> of June 1920, as far as they are applicable, shall have force and effect in every State Alluvial Digging.
8. All diamonds recovered on any State Alluvial Digging shall be the exclusive property of the State and shall be disposed of as the Minister of Mines & Industries may direct.
9. No person shall enter upon, and no women or children shall be permitted to reside upon or enter any State Alluvial Digging except under the authority of a permit issued by the Committee of Management.
10. No person shall bring or be caused or permitted to bring or have in his possession on any State Alluvial Digging any intoxicating liquor except with the written permission of the Committee of Management.
11. No person shall bring or be caused or permitted to bring or have in his possession on any State Alluvial Digging any firearms, ammunition, or explosives except with the written permission of the Committee of Management.
12. Any person contravening any of these regulations shall be guilty of an offence and liable on conviction to a fine not exceeding £100.

Figure 40 Annexure 3 Richtersveld Certificate of Reservation (1930)

①

"B"

CERTIFICATE OF RESERVATION.

In terms of Section 6 of Act 15 of 1887 of the Cape of Good Hope, and under and by virtue of Executive Council Minute No. 2054, dated 17th July, 1926, I hereby certify that the piece of land named "THE RICHTERSVELD", measuring approximately Three Hundred and Fifty Thousand morgen (350,000 mor.) situate in the Division of Namaqualand, Cape Province, the boundaries of which are described in the subjoined Schedule and which said piece of land is represented in the diagram hereunto annexed, framed principally from a survey made by Surveyor J.H.C. Krapohl, dated August - November, 1925, is hereby reserved in favour of the Minister of Native Affairs for the Union of South Africa, for the use of the Hottentots and Bastards who are residing therein and of such other coloured people as the Governor-General may decide, subject to the following conditions:-

- I. That all roads and thoroughfares being or existing on the land hereby reserved, whether or not described in the plan or diagram of the same, shall remain free and uninterrupted unless the same be closed or altered by competent authority. The right is reserved to the Governor-General to prescribe at any time, without payment of compensation, such new roads or trekkpaths as the Governor-General may deem necessary in the interests of the Richtersveld, or in the interests of neighbouring areas.
- II. That the Governor-General shall at all times have the right to construct or to authorize any Company or individual to construct roads, railways, tramlines, boreholes, dams, reservoirs, canals, aqueducts, pipelines and drains, and to conduct or authorize the conducting of water therefrom and thereover, and to conduct telegraphs and telephones over the said land, for the benefit of the public or any person or Company, whether resident within or beyond the limits of the land hereby reserved, and to take materials for these purposes; also to establish and/or to proclaim con-

III. That the Governor-General shall have the right of resuming, for public purposes, the whole or a portion of the land hereby reserved, without payment of any compensation except for improvements of a substantial and permanent nature effected or made on the land so resumed, as may be determined by the Governor-General.

ation except  
of the afore-  
and portion ONLY  
subject to  
of this

IV. That all rights to every mineral of whatever nature and to any oil in or on the land hereby reserved are expressly reserved to the Crown, together with the right of access to any mines or works undertaken for mining or prospecting purposes by any person duly authorised in that behalf. The land is subject to such further rights as the public or the Government now may, or may hereafter, have or be entitled to obtain under or by virtue of any law relating to the prospecting, digging, mining or exploitation of any mineral of whatever nature and any oil in or on the land hereby reserved, which rights shall not be impaired or in any way affected

ment of the area hereby reserved and to make such rules and regulations governing the occupation of the land by Hottentots, Bastards and other coloured persons as he may deem expedient.

That the land shall be subject to all rights and servitudes which now affect, or at any time hereafter may be found to affect, the title of the land reserved, or which may be binding on the Government in respect of the said land as at the date hereof.

THUS DONE AND SIGNED by *the Minister of Lands*  
*Cape Town* on the *Fifth* day  
*February* 19*70*.

*[Handwritten Signature]*

SCHEDULE.

THE RICHTERSVELD:

NAMAQUALAND DIVISION.

An area in extent about 350,000 morgen (1,150 square miles) comprised with the following boundaries:- Commencing from an old beacon situated on a low kopje near the left bank of the Orange River, about 10 miles above Zendlings Drift; thence in a south-easterly direction in a straight line to a beacon on the summit of the mountain range forming the Richtersveld Barrier; thence continuing in a south-easterly direction and following generally the summit of the Richtersveld Barrier to an old beacon at the southern terminal of the Richtersveld Barrier, immediately above the spring known as Stinkfontein, thence in an easterly direction in a straight line to an old beacon situated on a low hill known as Rooiberg, distant about six

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 ALIEN VOR INFERRENDEN UITGEREIK

## Income ratios Kleinzee, 1932

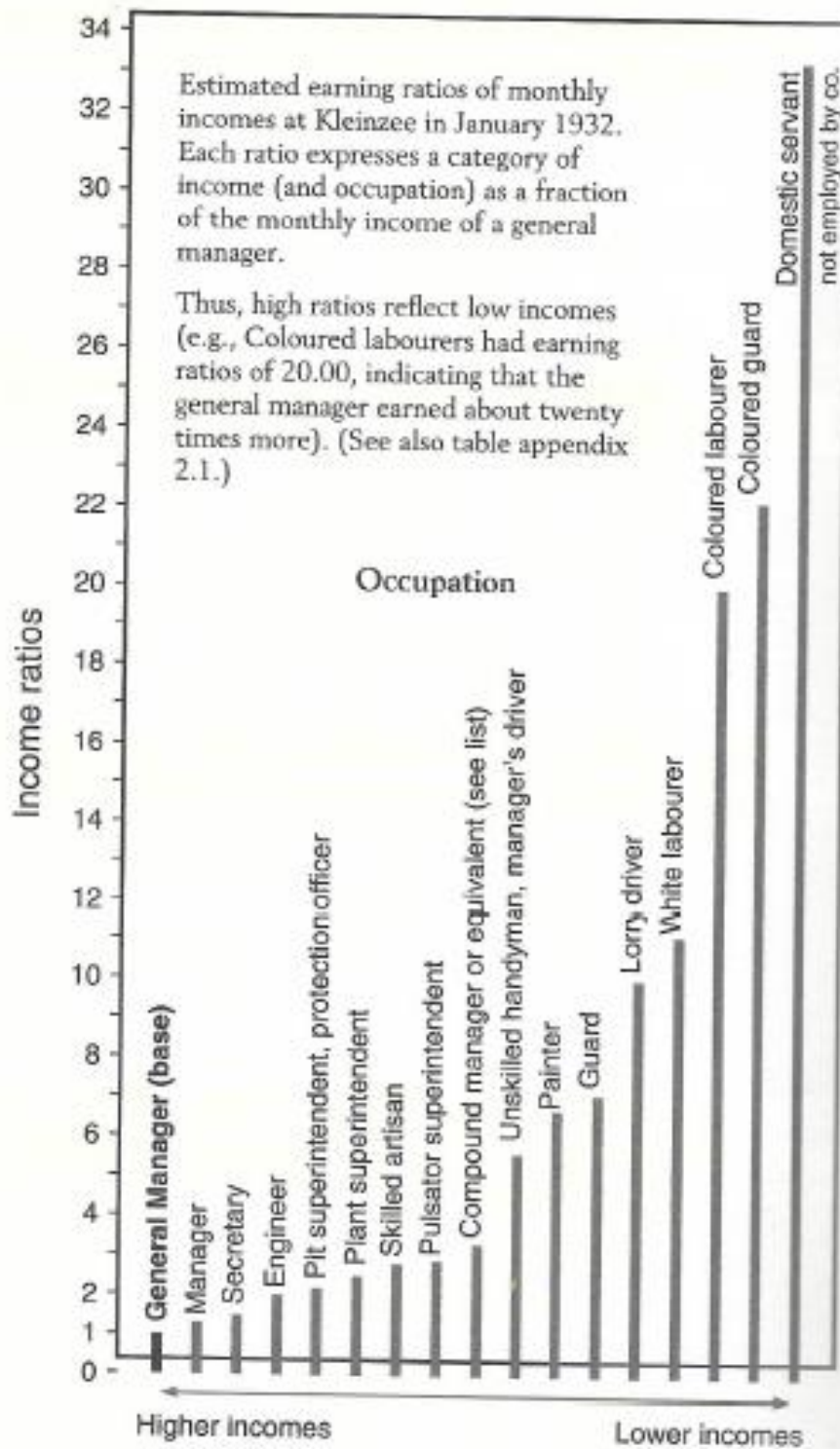


Figure 53 Annexure 4 Income Ratios, Kleinzee 1932 (Peter Carstens, *In the Company of Diamonds*, 2001)

Figure 54 Annexure 5 Annual Productions, Kleinsee (1926 - 1955) (Rudd & Watson, History of the Namaqualand Diamond Discoveries)

ANNUAL PRODUCTIONS - KLEINSEE.					
Year	Carats Re-covered	Yield per 100 lds.	Cost per Carat	Value per Carat	Value of Production £
1926	222	-			
1927	38,815	-			338,600
1929	16,919	-			
1930	31,034	-			
1931	88,112	-			
1932	-	-			
1933	-	-			
1934	60,709	-		150/-	455,611
1935	-	-			
1936	42,636	-		150/-	319,766
1937	32,868	-		150/-	246,510
1938	107,363	33.1	16/7	114/10	616,308
1939	37,914	30.1		148/4	275,890
1940	40,679	1.0		149/11	304,900
1941	104	3.7		89/7	468
1942	294	-		90/-	1,322
1943	73,462	116.7	9/7	127/6	468,479
1944	158,687	62.5	11/-	141/8	1,124,105
1945	156,149	28.9	12/6	122/6	956,409
1946	73,302	19.8	30/7	183/2	671,345
1947	119,969	29.9	20/1	181/-	1,085,719
1948	136,498	37.5	17/3	185/10	1,268,203
1949	101,099	27.1	27/2	185/2	935,974
1950	34,336	8.9	81/10	240/6	412,896
1951	30,728	7.8	96/9	297/5	456,925
1952	25,644	6.4	108/4	299/5	363,894
1953	70,559	17.3	44/3	287/10	1,015,485
1954	73,900	18.4	40/1	318/5	1,176,642
1955	58,785	-	-	320/-	930,000 Approx.
TOTALS	3,610,787			170/2	£13,700,164
1956 (Target)	25,000	-	-	-	£360,000



*Dragline removing overburden, Kleinzee*

**The following are the ideals held up by the Bench Marks Foundation to ensure industrial peace and community prosperity.**<sup>674</sup>

\* Socio-economic dimension: the company seeks to develop long-term business relationships in local communities and does not terminate its operations without assessing the long-term environmental, social, cultural, and economic sustainability impacts.

\* Human rights: the company adopts a comprehensive and verifiable human rights policy which includes an explicit commitment to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights<sup>675</sup> and the International Labour Organisation's standards. An active human rights committee is established with a designated person who reports to the Board of Directors.

\* Indigenous Local Communities: the company is committed to respecting fully the rights of indigenous peoples and strives to contribute to their long-term environmental, social, cultural, and economic sustainability.

\* Labour Relations: the company has a global standard governing its employment practices and industrial relations, which includes genuine respect for employees' right to freedom of association, labour organisation, and free collective bargaining; non-discrimination in employment; no violation of the rights of children. The company values all its employees in terms of their social, intellectual, economic, and personal contribution to every sector of its operations.

\* Human Resource Management: women in the workforce are valued as a vital group of employees who have a significant contribution to make. The company has in place effective and appropriate policies about equality of opportunity for women.

\* Minority Groups: people from 'minority groups' are to receive training and promotional opportunities without discrimination.

\* The company's workforce reflects at all levels the racial/ethnic origin and cultural composition of the local population.

\* Corporate Governance and Ethics: the company's governance structure is based on ethical values including inclusivity, integrity, honesty, justice, and transparency. The company is committed to transparency in all its accounting and financial reporting statements and communications with investors/stakeholders.

\* Corporate Social Responsibility Practice: the company's vision and corporate values were prepared in consultation with stakeholders.

\* Community Health: the company provides care for the physical health (but also respecting any traditional medicine/practices) and mental wellbeing (e.g., counselling and intervention programmes) of the surrounding communities.

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<sup>674</sup> Bench Marks, "Corporate Social Responsibility" (Johannesburg: Bench Marks Foundation, 2009).

<sup>675</sup> South Africa played a prominent role in the establishment of the United Nations in 1945. The country's post-war prime minister, Jan Smuts, was involved in drawing up the preamble to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, but the country balked at ratifying and signing the document in December 1948.

\* Sustainable development (environment dimension): the company has sound practices and procedures to protect the environment and reduce its impact in each stage of production.

\* Social dimension (sustainable development): the company reports in oral and written form in the local language on its community impact, in a manner that is accessible to local communities. The company establishes a consultative structure which meets on a regular basis with community representatives to discuss the company's business goals in relation to community needs as well as social and environmental concerns.

\* Economic Dimension: natural resources (e.g., minerals) which become an asset to the company, are stated as a debt to the community. The company communicates its business plans in a way that the local and/or indigenous community can understand.

\* Labour Relations: the company does not discriminate because of gender, racial and ethnic origin, culture, religion, age, disability, sexual orientation, nationality, citizenship, or political opinion. The company pays a living wage, with equal remuneration for work of equal value.

**The Tenth De Beers “Report to Society”, 2015 (accessed 4 March 2021)**, may be regarded as a retort to the findings of the Bench Mark Foundation that De Beers Namaqualand Mines (as well as Alexkor Limited) did not measure up to expectations and ideals. Summarised in point-form for ease of reference and comparison, the Report highlights the disjuncture between the company's claims issued for public consumption and some of the objective conditions on its mines. It nevertheless throws light on the company's claims of corporate social responsibility, as well as the post-sale Kleinzee Mine scenario:

1. The company is humbled to play a role in connecting millions of people around the world to the “diamond dream”.
2. “Our operations and leadership position across the diamond pipeline (enables) us to create development opportunities in the communities where we live and work, ...”.
3. Communities and countries are to maximise enduring value from their finite natural resources for long-term socio-economic development.
4. In challenging economic times, priorities such as the value returned to stakeholders' investment, do not take a back seat.
5. “The success of our activities will ultimately be measured by the economic and social development that endures beyond the life of the mine”.
6. Diamond revenues play a vital role even in the larger economy of South Africa. The positive impact of diamonds is keenly felt by the communities where the miner operates.
7. Shaping a lasting, positive legacy. “Around our operations, we look to enable and support strong communities that benefit from our activities today, while building a sustainable future for tomorrow”.
8. “We fully share communities' aspirations to secure the greatest possible long-term value from our activities. We work hard to understand the needs and concerns of communities through consistent engagement and co-operation”. The needs and concerns are addressed by delivering a wide range of socio-economic development programmes (SED).

