

https://dspace.org/

Changing patterns of worker accommodation, Zebediela Citrus Estate, 1926-1953: the dynamics of external restraint and self-discipline

Van Niekerk, A.

1987-02-14T11:42:13Z
http://hdl.handle.net/10539/8117

Downloaded from a DSpace repository. https://dspace.org/

VAN NIEKERK,



UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND

HISTORY WORKSHOP

THE MAKING OF CLASS

9 - 14 February, 1987

AUTHOR: A.van Niekerk

TITLE: Changing Patterns of Worker Accomodation, Zebediela Citrus Estate, 1926-1953: The Dynamics of External Restraint and Self-dicipline.

AFRICANA LIBRARY

The following paper represents an extract from a forthcoming thesis. This dissertation examines the use of white women workers by the Zebediela Citrus Estate in the Northern Transvaal, in the years from 1926 to 1953. The process is situated against the changing background of the South African economy between the two World Wars. In particular, attention is focused on the transformation of the citrus industry. This sector grew from a marginal exporter in 1918, to a major agricultural earner of foreign exchange three decades later. Zebediela, established in 1918, reflected that growth. By mid-century it was the country's biggest citrus plantation.

The estate employed large numbers of women to grade and pack its oranges. It drew these workers primarily from white farms in the Northern Transvaal. A study of the structure of white Afrikaner households within the regional economy reveals the conditions which delivered these women to a process of semi-proletarianisation. They accepted work at Zebediela as seasonal migrants. The estate engaged them to do hard, physical work at low wages. An examination of conditions in the packhouse exposes the patterns of control to which management subjected these workers. In particular, it highlights the dynamics of gender and culture in the formation of class in the interwar period.

Although capitalism in South Africa developed in ways comparable to the experiences of other societies,[1] it showed an unique intersection of class and colour. In many ways the compounds which housed black workers symbolised that trajectory of development. Researchers suggested that these compounds provided the capitalist mine owners with a harsh and effective form of control over labour.[2]

---

[1] See, for example, Trapido, S. 'South Africa in a Comparative Study of Industrialisation', *Journal of Development Studies*, 3, 7, April 1971, pp.309-319.

[2] See, for example, Rex, J. 'The Compound, the Reserve and the Urban Location: The Essential Institutions of Southern African Labour Ex-

These institutions housed mainly black men. Other groups, like women, who also experienced control through the instrument of worker accommodation, are largely ignored in the literature. Deborah Gaitskell has, however, studied the use of 'Christian compounds' for black women. She argued that the concern about the moral protection of urbanising black women, which served as the explanation for the establishment of such hostels, stemmed from 'the need for social control..., and the desire to assuage the doubts of rural missionaries and conservative African parents...'.[3] The twenties also saw an increasing number of white women flocking to urban centres in search of employment. Politicians, clergymen and welfare organisations all emphasised the need to provide housing for this group of single women whose low wages rendered them particularly vulnerable. Their perception of the problem encouraged organisations like the S. A. V. F. (Suid Afrikaanse Vroue Federasie) to subsidise cheap, but suitable accommodation in hostels, where 'discipline, supervision and friendly companionship...[was] even more desirable in the case of girls than of boys.'[4] In their concern, these groups displayed a set of stereotypes of Afrikaners in particular, which portrayed women as unaffected, altruistic 'Boervrouens', always drawn from 'nice families'.[5] These stereotypes contrasted starkly with the fears expressed about single white women in the cities. At the core of this concern stood a belief

---

ploitation', *South African Labour Bulletin*, 1, 4, July 1974, pp.4-17. Van Onselen, C. *Chibaro* (Johannesburg 1976). Gordon, R. J. *Mines, Masters and Migrants* (Johannesburg 1977). Moroney, S. 'The Development of the Compound as a Mechanism of Worker Control, 1900-1912', *South African Labour Bulletin*, 4, 3, May 1978, pp.29-50.

[3] Gaitskell, D. '"Christian Compounds for Girls": Church Hostels for for African African Women in Johannesburg, 1907-1970', *Journal for Southern African Studies*, 6, 1, October 1979, p.45.

[4] *Social and Industrial Review*, III, 13, January 1927, p.29.

[5] Hofmeyr, I. 'Building A Nation from Words: Afrikaans Language, Literature and "Ethnic Identity", 1902-1924', paper presented at the University of the Witwatersrand (hereafter U.W.), History Workshop, 1984, p.34.

that women were more susceptible to moral degradation than their male counterparts.[6]

This paper seeks to redress the imbalance in the study of worker accommodation by studying the hostel established for white women at the Zebediela Citrus Estate. It focuses on issues of gender, age and culture in this institution. Here it will be argued that the hostel stood *in loco parentis*, seeking to safeguard the virtue of the young, white, rural women who came to Zebediela as orange packers and graders.

At Zebediela sleep, work and leisure combined under a single authority. Sociologist Erving Goffman identified this unity as a central characteristic of a 'total institution', which he defined as 'a place of residence and work where a large number of like-situated individuals, cut off from the wider society for an appreciable period of time, together lead an enclosed, formally administered round of life'.[7] Goffman provided useful insights, not only into institutional attempts to control people, but also into the ability of inmates to shape their environment through the construction of an 'underlife'. The concept of a 'total institution' should not obscure the peculiarities of the Zebediela hostel. Those can only be understood by looking at the particular objectives of the Estate. Goffman's institutions focused on people. Zebediela, however, produced oranges. This located the estate's interest less in people as such, than in the control of *labour*. In turn, this process must be placed in the context of a wider world, a world of fluctuating citrus prices, of the agricultural transformation of the Northern Transvaal, and of growing opportunities for the employment of unskilled women.[8] An examination of

---

[6] See Brink, E. 'Accommodating the Garment Workers. Organisational involvement, 1927-1945', paper presented at U.W., M.A. seminar, October 1985.

[7] Goffman, E. *Asylums. Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates* (Harmondsworth 1961), p.11.

[8] As Ignatieff argued in his study of the development of the

these conditions also throws some light on the particular forms of control to which Zebediela subjected the women workers. Above all it focuses on the crucial role that they played in shaping their own environment.

Firstly the problem of control at Zebediela was intimately related to recruitment of workers.[9] Since the estate was situated at a considerable distance from the nearest town, it depended on workers migrating from considerable distances. A report compiled at Zebediela in 1950, argued that one of the major problems at the estate remained the fact that 'the supply of local labour which can travel daily to and from its own homes is negligible, nor is there any large local centre from which labour could be drawn by by the provision of special bulk transport morning and evening...'[10] These migrants were primarily drawn from young women who lived on farms in the Northern Transvaal. These young people needed their parents' permission to work outside the home.[11] Provision of strictly controlled living conditions assuaged parents' anxieties about their young daughters leaving home to work. In this sense, the mutual desire for control of both estate management and parents affected recruitment.

---

penitentiary 'the appearance of a new style of authority within the walls obviously must be linked to changes in class relations and social tactics outside the walls.' Ignatieff, M. *A Just Measure of Pain. The Penitentiary in the Industrial Revolution, 1750-1850* (London 1978), p.xiii.

9 McNamara identified four functions of a gold mine hostel for black migrants: accommodation and feeding of the labour force, recreation of residents, control, as the preservation of law and order and work attendance, and finally communication and welfare. McNamara, J. K. 'Brothers and Work Mates', *in* Mayer, P. *Black Villagers in an Industrial Society* (Cape Town 1980), pp.309-311.

10 U.W., Church of the Province Archive (hereafter C.P.S.A.), Zebediela Collection (hereafter Z.C.), File Aba 1, 'Preliminary Survey at the Zebediela Estate' by the Bedaux Company, 4/5/1950. Bedaux was a management consultancy, called in to help rationalise all aspects of production at Zebediela.

11 Kessler-Harris referred to the use of boarding houses for young women, set up by textile millowners in nineteenth century America. She argued that these resulted from a recognition of 'the need to assuage community opposition to factories in general and to acknowledge the moral imperative that assigned women to the home.' Kessler-Harris, A. *Out to Work. A History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States* (Oxford 1982), p.33.

Once the estate had recruited its workers, it had to induce women to stay throughout the season. Citrus spoilt easily. This made a stable supply of dependable workers imperative. By providing a pleasant living environment, management hoped to minimise turnover. The hostel also, however, had to provide structures that fulfilled the demands of the packhouse by, for example, ensuring punctuality amongst workers. Changes in the form of accommodation and in the nature of discipline reflected management's persistent concern to stabilise labour.

An overly regimented daily life alienated the women though. In response dissatisfied workers gave 24 hours notice of their intention to resign. This was impossible, however, unless alternative employment existed elsewhere. In turn, the availability of job opportunities depended on economic transformations of the wider society. Hence that wider world conditioned the ability of the hostel to control workers. Indeed, by 1953 the growth of alternative opportunities for white women together with increases in output, produced a labour crisis that forced the estate to change from white women to black women in the packhouse.

I

When the estate started to export oranges in the mid-1920's, it engaged young white women, mostly drawn from the Northern Transvaal countryside, to grade and pack the fruit.[12] Huge marquee tents which stood quite close to the packhouse housed the first groups of women. There were eight of these tents. Each tent held 40 beds. The beds stood about a foot apart with an orange lug box wedged in between, which served as a bedside stand. Clothes hung on hangers against the side of the tent.[13] Black women swept

---

[12] Unfortunately the documentary and oral evidence relating to the first few years after 1926 is very sketchy.

[13] Mrs. E. Oosthuizen, interviewed at Potgietersrust, 1/4/1985 (1929-1936). The date given in brackets with every interviewee's name, refer to the period that the person worked at Zebediela.

the floor daily. This was regularly smeared with manure like many farmhouses at the time.[14] A fence encircled the group of tents.[15] Despite the primitiveness of this accommodation, 'was dit nie vir ons iets vreemd nie, want ons was gewoond om Nagmaaltye op die dorp in tente te bly'.[16]

In 1931 a severe storm wrecked most of the tents. The women then had to move to an old wilting shed near the packhouse. Here railway tracks separated the diningroom and kitchen from the 'shed', as it was known. Living conditions hardly changed under the new arrangement. Each of the four dormitories contained about 80 beds, with three additional ones for the 'headgirls'. 'Dit was nie 'n groot plek gewees nie, en dit was eintlik 'n bietjie beknop, want daar was baie meisies gewees.'[17] Physical discomfort resulted from a building that proved very hot in summer, while in winter the cement floor made it very cold.[18] In the thirties a greater number of women had to be provided for than had ever lived in the tents. In an attempt to utilise all the available space, hostel dwellers had to sleep on two-tiered beds, so-called 'hoenderstellasies'.[19] Two sets of these beds were pushed together, so that four women slept in very close proximity.[20] In 1938, following an attempt by the management to get a government subsidy for its provision of housing for low-paid workers, the

---

[14] Mrs. R. du Preez, interviewed at Krugersdorp, 11/6/1985 (1931-1936).

[15] This is clear from a photograph in my possession.

[16] '....none of it seemed strange to us, because we were used to staying in tents in town during Holy Communion.' Letter to A. van Niekerk from Mrs. A. Grobler, from Steynsrus, 4/3/1985 (1937-1939).

[17] 'It was not a big place, and it was actually a bit crowded since there were many girls.' Mrs. A. van Zyl, interviewed at Potgietersrust, 12/2/1985 (1938-1945).

[18] Mrs. R. du Preez, Krugersdorp, 11/6/1985 (1931-1936). While some women only worked for a single season, others returned regularly for years to work both seasons.

[19] '...chicken structures.' Mrs. E. Barnard, interviewed at Bulge River, 27/11/1984 (1937-1938).

[20] Letter to A. van Niekerk from Mrs. T. Venter, from Thabazimbi, 29/3/1985 (1938), and also photographs in my possession.

Department of Social Welfare investigated hostel accommodation at Zebediela.[21] This report described the shed as very clean and well organised, but raised the possibility that the unsatisfactory sleeping arrangements could give rise to the spread of infectious diseases. It quoted P. J. Quin, Zebediela's manager, as saying that the proposed hostel would provide more suitable accommodation.

Faced with these two-tiered beds, the majority of women apparently opted to sleep on the bottom bed. Some hated having to clamber up onto their bed 'soos 'n bok'.[22] Women with a fear of heights found it particularly harrowing.[23] The beds proved both inconvenient and tiring. 'Vir elke dingetjie wat jy wil he, moet jy afklim en in jou kassie gaan haal en maar weer opklim en daar sit'.[24] Coming back from an exhausting job in the packhouse 'was moeilik, jy moes opklim om bietjie te rus'.[25]

Despite the inconvenience of this arrangement and the growing number of women employed, a new Hostel was only built in 1938, at considerable expense, to house more than 500 women.[26] A study of the latter institution

---

[21] State Archives, Department of Social Welfare, VWN, Vol. 475, File SW 69/24, Report by the Secretary of Social Welfare, entitled 'African Realty Trust Limited. Zebediela Estates, Naboomspruit', 17/6/1938. This report followed the implementation by the Department of Social Welfare of a program whereby co-operative movements that provided hostel accommodation for low-paid workers received a subsidy. Zebediela did not qualify as it was not a co-operative. In this study, reference to the new, post-1938 Hostel will be indicated through the use of the upper case. The use of 'hostel' refer to accommodation in general, from 1926 to 1953.

[22] '...like a goat.' Mrs. K. Botha, interviewed at Boksburg, 12/9/1984 (1941).

[23] Mrs. A. Lotter, interviewed at Bulge River, 11/2/1985 (1938).

[24] 'For every little thing you wanted you had to get down to fetch it from your cupboard, and then get back on again and sit there.' Mrs. A. Lotter, Bulge River, 28/11/1984 (1938).

[25] '...was difficult because you had to clamber up to rest a while.' Letter to A. van Niekerk from Mrs. E. C. du Preez, from Laersdrift, 24/4/1985 (1939-1941).

[26] According to Quin the company made £15 000 available for the building of the Hostel. State Archives Department of Social Welfare, VWN, Vol.

will occupy the greatest part of this chapter, both because it revealed more about the relationship between policies of accommodation and labour control, and because the majority of workers interviewed for this study actually lived in the new Hostel at some point in their working lives.

The new Hostel attempted to improve the living conditions of workers. Possibly management perceived the need to do this in response to Zebediela's growing struggle to recruit enough packers and graders. An undated recruitment brochure described the Hostel in glowing terms: 'Huisvesting word verskaf in 'n pragtige moderne inrigting, gelee in swierige tuine en sportvelde. U persoonlike geriewe word ten volle verseker deur voldoende voorsiening van elektriese lig, warm en koue water, was- en strykkamers, lugtige slaaplokale, ruim badkamers, 'n pragtige kombuis en reuse eetsaal'.[27]

The Hostel consisted of 12 dormitories, each of which contained beds for 46 women and a 'headgirl'.[28] As in the shed, the beds remained stacked together in sets of four.[29] Next to every two-tiered bed were openings in which individual women hung their clothes. In addition, two women shared a small chest with a mirror.[30] Due to a lack of space most of their

---

475, File 69/24, Report by the Department of Social Welfare's Welfare Officer at Nylstroom on 'Onbevredigende behuising van Blanke Vroulike Werkers: Zebediela Estates, Potgietersrust', 15/12/1937.

[27] 'Accommodation is provided in a beautiful modern institution, situated amidst lovely gardens and sportfields. Your personal comforts are fully ensured by the provision of adequate electric lights, hot and cold water, washing and ironing facilities, airy sleeping quarters, spacious bathrooms, a beautiful kitchen, and a huge dining room.' U.W., C.P.S.A., Z.C., File Abj 1, Brochure describing conditions at the estate, undated.

[28] While a two-shift system operated in the packhouse the occupants of six rooms in one half of the Hostel worked together on a single shift, to prevent workers on the early shift from disturbing those who started work later in the morning. This became unnecessary when a single shift was instituted in the mid 1940's.

[29] Mrs. E. Johnson, interviewed at Alberton, 7/3/1985 (1939-1941), and photographs in my possession.

[30] Mrs. J. Bekker, interviewed at Bulge River, 28/11/1984 (1939-1945).

possessions remained in their suitcases though. 'Ons het nie veel gehad nie, maar die wat ons gehad het, kon jy amper nie uitpak nie.'[31] Over time, more space became available though. The dormitories ran empty as fewer women took work at Zebediela. Eventually one half of the Hostel was closed down. Only 24 women shared each of the remaining rooms. This change probably occured in 1946, although some confusion exists about the exact date.[32]

Women who lived in the hostel first underwent a formal process of admittance. In the first decade after 1926, more recruits than necessary occasionally arrived at the estate. Those who had not applied beforehand, were immediately sent home again. In the first few days of the season additional workers arrived daily. Black employees took their luggage from the Zebediela rail terminus to the living quarters. According to the matron, 'dan wys ons hulle plek aan waar hulle moes slaap, vat hulle maar deur die koshuis dat hulle kan sien wat hulle moes doen.'[33] Interviewees who worked at Zebediela in the forties usually recalled receiving instructions about all the rules on arrival. 'Al die reels en regulasies is dan eers aan ons verduidelik. Al die moets en moenies, en as mens so jonk is, dan draai jou kop behoorlik van alles wat jy moet onthou.'[34]

---

31 'We did not own much, but there was hardly space even for the little we did possess.' Mrs. C. G. Ferreira, interviewed at Johannesburg, 25/3/1985 (1939-1941).

32 Mrs. A. Hugo, interviewed at Zebediela, 2/4/1985 (1952). Miss B. Groenewald, interviewed at Naboomspruit, 3/4/1985 (1944-1952). Mrs. L. Smit, interviewed at Roedtan, 3/4/1985 (1950-1953). Mrs. B. Barendse, interviewed at Roodepoort, 11/6/1985 (1949-1963). *Serie Marais*, May 1950, pp.3-6, and also photographs in my possession.

33 '...then we showed them the place where they had to sleep, took them through the hostel so that they could see what they had to do.' Mrs. E. Lamont, interviewed in Potgietersrust, 12/2/1985 (1941-1953).

34 'First all the rules and regulations were explained to us, everything that was allowed and disallowed. When you are that young, your head would spin from all that you have to remember.' Letter to A. van Niekerk from Mrs. I. M. S. Ferreira, from Vanderbijlpark (1946-1947), undated.

A more complex issue concerned the assignment of people to specific rooms in the hostel. The majority of women remembered being directed to a sleeping place. 'Ons het daar gekom, en hulle het ons na kamers toe gevat, "dormitories", en gese hier moet jy nou wees, en daar moet jy wees.'[35] This division was possibly executed by the 'headgirls', women appointed to keep order in every dormitory or tent. 'Dit was die hoofmeisies - dis asof hulle geweet het, "Die klomp kom na my toe".'[36] Another remembered being brought together 'soos skape' (like sheep), before being led away by different supervisors.[37] Alphabetical order probably determined the distribution. This enabled relatives with the same surname to share a room. 'Ek en my suster en my niggie was bymekaar, en hulle het dit seker ook maar in aanmerking geneem.'[38] Others had friends who sought permission in order for them to share a room. 'As jy nou daar kom, dan se jou vriendin, "Kyk, ek het gevra dat jy by my bly".'[39] Possibly this arrangement took into consideration the role that family and peer groups played in imposing restraints on the behaviour of especially younger women. When people arrived in their rooms, they occupied the empty beds.[40]

---

[35] 'We arrived, and they took us to our rooms, dormitories, and told each where she had to be.' Mrs. M. Thorolt, interviewed at Westonaria, 26/2/1985 (1939).

[36] 'It was done by the headgirls - it was as if they knew, "This group comes to me".' Mrs. M. Thorolt, Westonaria, 26/2/1985 (1939). On the function of 'headgirls', see below p.42.

[37] Mrs. A. Derksen, interviewed at Pretoria, 27/8/1984 (1935-1939).

[38] 'My sister, my cousin and I were together, so they probably took that into consideration.' Mrs. A. Bodenstein, interviewed at Springs, 13/9/1984 (1938-1940).

[39] 'When you arrived, your friend said, "I asked for you to be put with your friend said, 'I asked for you to be put with me".' Mrs. E. Johnson, Alberton, 7/3/1985 (1939-1941).

[40] Again there is very little evidence available for the living arrangements in the tents, and the above informants referred more specifically to life in the shed and the Hostel.

By the mid forties the system of 'headgirls' no longer operated, and the number of women who shared a dormitory was reduced by half. This presumably increased freedom of choice in the matter of where to sleep, so that 'jy is nie eintlik ingedeel nie. Dan is hier 'n vriendin wat nou al hier was, dan se sy, "Hoor hier, kom slaap hier by ons"'.[41]

Most women had to accept these conditions. 'Jy pas maar aan. Jy wil dasi werkie he.'[42] Over weekends when those workers who lived relatively close to Zebediela left for home there was more space available, and circumstances in the dormitories improved.[43] When it came to undressing in a room full of people, some women made a screen by hanging their gowns between two beds.[44] Others had fewer inhibitions. 'Daar was 'n Rita. Sy trek haar net so kaal uit, dan staan sy teen haar bed, en sy poeier en trek haar aan. Net so kaal. Hulle was nie skaam die een vir die ander nie.'[45] The fact that the interviewee who related this thought this woman's behaviour unusual, had significance in itself. Living amongst friends helped to ease the situation. 'Al is die ander een se bed hier langs jou, was dit altyd maats wat nou-gebonde vriende was.'[46] Goffman nevertheless suggested such physical exposure represented a 'violation of the informational preserve regarding the self', and saw it as a way

---

[41] '...you were not actually assigned. If you had a friend that had already arrived, she would say, "Come and sleep with us".' Mrs. A. Hugo, Zebediela, 2/4/1985 (1952).

[42] 'You adapted because you wanted the work.' Mrs. A. Greyling, interviewed at Zebediela, 12/2/1985 (1930-1951).

[43] Mrs. J. Bekker, Bulge River, 28/11/1984 (1939-1945).

[44] Letter to A. van Niekerk from Mrs. J. Horn, from Vredefort, 26/6/1985 (1938-1941).

[45] 'There was someone called Rita. She would undress fully and then leant against her bed using talc and dressing herself. Totally naked. People were not shy were one another.' Mrs. S. Heystek, interviewed at Warmbaths, 4/4/1985 (1939-1961).

[46] 'Even if the other persons' beds were right next to yours, it was always close friends.' Mrs. A. van Zyl, Potgietersrust, 12/2/1985 (1937-1945).

in which institutions broke down the boundaries between the self and the environment.[47]

Amidst such communal living, the bed on which every woman slept in effect became the only individual space available to her, however close the beds were to each other. 'Dis jou privaatplekkie daar. Jou bed is joune.'[48] If anyone wanted to be alone, 'moes jy maar op jou bed bly'.[49] Here, as later in the bigger Hostel, women remained aware of a depressing lack of privacy. 'Met so 'n klomp mense in een kamer, het jy daardie gevoel gehad jy is opge-"coop".'[50] They had to accustom themselves to the irritating habits of others, like snoring at night. When she wanted to be alone, one interviewee often thought, 'Ag hene, as ek maar net my eie kamer gehad het soos by die huis'.[51]

Unfortunately, not all the women who shared a room were necessarily friends or even associated with each other. 'Jy sien gou-gou, kyk, met daardie een wil ek nie gesien wees nie.'[52] Interviewees advanced various reasons for these distinctions. In some cases it was supposedly a matter of hygiene: 'Hulle is vuil, en jy meng nie met hulle'.[53] In other in-

---

[47] Goffman, *Asylums*, p.31. This shows, however, how friendship networks militate against the imposition of the full rigor of a 'total institution'.

[48] 'It was your private place. Your bed was your very own.' Mrs. E. Johnson, Alberton, 7/3/1985 (1939-1941).

[49] '...you had to remain on your bed'. Mrs. E. Oosthuizen, Potgietersrust, 1/4/1985 (1929-1936).

[50] 'Having so many people in one room gave you a feeling of being cooped up.' Mrs. C. G. Ferreira, Johannesburg, 25/3/1985 (1939-1941).

[51] '...If only I had my own room like I do at home.' Mrs. A. Lotter, Bulge River, 11/2/1985 (1938).

[52] 'You soon recognised whom you did not want to be associated with.' Mrs. J. Bekker, Bulge River, 28/11/1984 (1939-1945). Also letters to A. van Niekerk from Mrs. C. M. Snyders, from Alma, 14/11/1985 (1928-1933), and Mrs. T. Venter, Thabazimbi, 29/3/1985 (1938). Mrs. C. G. Ferreira, Johannesburg, 25/3/1985 (1939-1941).

[53] 'They were dirty, so you did not keep their company.' Mrs. R. du Preez, Krugersdorp, 11/6/1985 (1931-1936).

stances age played a role, especially when older women 'wou partykeer oor ons jongeres 'n bietjie baas speel', but older women generally kept to themselves.[54] Their different upbringing and moral values made some women 'meer konserwatief, maar daar was...wat vir my wilder gelyk het".[55] Others were simply foul-mouthed, and 'as dit nie jou opvoeding was nie, het jy eenvoudig nie met hulle gemeng nie'.[56]

Differences based on social class also played a role. Poorer women were identified by 'die klere wat hulle partykeer aangetrek het, en hulle optrede'.[57] In contrast, other women seemed very snobbish.[58] One interviewee, for instance, recalled that her dormitory contained two clearly defined groups. The 'elite' slept on one side of the room, with herself and her friends, the 'proppe' (plugs), on the other side. 'Ons het ons nie aan hulle gesteur nie, en hulle nie aan ons nie.'[59]

Neither the cupboards nor the dormitory doors locked. This made it difficult for women to safeguard their few valuable possessions. In a few instances, as when a diamond engagement ring went missing, the S.A.P. was called in to investigate.[60] Workers therefore sent their money home

---

[54] '...occasionally wanted to order us younger ones around.' Mrs.B.Barendse, Roodepoort, 11/6/1985 (1949-1963).

[55] '...more conservative, but there were those who appeared to be of a wilder sort.' Mrs. E. Barnard, interviewed at Bulge River, 27/11/1984 (1937-1938).

[56] '...and if that was not how you were brought up, you simply did not mix with them.' Mrs. E. Oosthuizen, Potgietersrust, 1/4/1985 (1929-1936).

[57] '...the clothes they sometimes wore, and by their behaviour.' Mrs. A. Hugo, Zebediela, 2/4/1985 (1952). Also Mrs. B. Barendse, Roodepoort, 11/6/1985 (1949-1963).

[58] Mrs. C. G. Ferreira, Johannesburg, 25/3/1985 (1939-1941).

[59] 'We did not bother with each other.' Mrs. R. du Preez, Krugersdorp, 11/6/1985 (1931-1936).

[60] Mrs. E. Lamont, interviewed at Potgietersrust, 12/2/1985 (1941-1953), Mrs. A. Hugo, Zebediela, 2/4/1985 (1952), Mrs. B. Barendse, Roodepoort, 11/6/1985 (1949-1963).

as soon as they received it, or locked it in their suitcases, keeping the key on their person.[61] The matron also agreed to lock valuables in the safe in envelopes with the persons' names on it. These women then had to ask for their money whenever they needed it.[62] Garments also disappeared from the washing lines, so women watched their clothes while it dried.[63]

The Hostel also comprised of a sickbay, diningroom and bathrooms. At meal times the women sat at any of the tables, each of which seated 24 people.[64] At the beginning of the season everybody decided on a place to sit and then kept that seat for the following months. The estate employed black men to serve the food which the person at the head of the table then distributed. This arrangement favoured the person seated at the top of the table since 'die een wat eerste gryp kry natuurlik die beste en die meeste'.[65] This provided a potential source of tension. If the first person took too much, little food remained for the rest, and 'jy kan niks doen nie. Jy moet maar net omdraai en loop'.[66]

The Inspector of Factories investigated the quality of the food in 1939.[67] The report found that fresh, good food was served according to a

---

[61] Mrs. C. G. Ferreira, Johannesburg, 25/3/1985 (1939-1941), Mrs. A. Lotter, Bulge River, 11/2/1985 (1938), and Mrs. B. Barendse, Roodepoort, 11/6/1985 (1949-1963).

[62] Mrs. J. Bekker, Bulge River, 28/11/1984 (1939-1945).

[63] Mrs. A. Geyling, interviewed at Zebediela, 12/2/1985 (1930-1951), Mrs. C. G. Ferreira, Johannesburg, 25/3/1985 (1939-1941), Mrs. J. Bekker, Bulge River, 28/11/1984 (1939-1945).

[64] Mrs. E. Johnson, Alberton, 7/3/1985 (1939-1941), Mrs. E. Lamont, Potgietersrust, 12/2/1985 (1941-1953), Mrs. L. Smit, Roedtan, 3/4/1985 1950-1953).

[65] '...the person who grabbed first inevitably got the best and the most'. Mrs. A. Lotter, Bulge River, 11/2/1985 (1938).

[66] '...there was nothing you could do. You simply had to turn around and walk away.' Mrs. K. Botha, interviewed at Boksburg, 12/9/1984 (1941).

[67] State Archive, Department of Social Welfare, VWN, Vol. 295, File SW 47/13/44, Report by the Inspector of Factories on 'Klagte - Zebediela Estate', 28/6/1939. This investigation followed a complaint by an

balanced diet. The women had coffee and rusks each morning before the first shift. Breakfast consisted of porridge, bread, with cheese and jam. During one week, lunch consisted of a warm meal of meat and vegetables, and soup and bread were served for dinner.[68] The following week the menu changed around. Most interviewees agreed that despite its monotony and preparation in huge quantities, the food was good enough for the 1s. 6d. they had to pay for their daily board. Everybody received two oranges with their meals and unlimited portions of bread, with rations of butter and jam.[69] Altogether, 'dit was nie "five-star" kos nie, maar dit was olraait gewees'.[70]

Bathroom facilities always remained inadequate at Zebediela. Little evidence could be found about conditions in the tents, except that women had to queue to use the baths.[71] This feature of life continued in the shed. In addition, boarders had to cross the railway bridge to the bathrooms, which proved extremely inconvenient. The facilities, which consisted of six baths, six showers, and 20 washbasins, were insufficient for the needs of at least 300 women.[72] By the following year, more showers and washbasins had been installed, but remained inadequate. A Social

---

ex-worker about unwanted contact between white women and black men working at the estate.

[68] U.W., C.P.S.A., Z.C., 'Specimen Daily Menus - Women's Hostel: 1939 Navel Season', compiled by the Inspector of Factories.

[69] Mrs. A. Lotter, Bulge River, 11/2/1985 (1938), Mrs. E. Johnson, Alberton, 7/3/1985 (1939-1941).

[70] '...it was not five-star food, but it was allright.' Mrs. M. Thorolt, Westonaria, 26/2/1985 (1939), Mrs. K. Botha, Boksburg, 12/9/1984 (1941), Mrs. B. Barendse, Roodepoort, 11/6/1985 (1949-1963).

[71] Letter to A. van Niekerk from Mrs. G. H. Lombard, from Sheepmoor, 23/4/1985 (1931).

[72] State Archive, Department of Social Welfare, VWN, Vol. 475, File 69/24, Report by the Department of Social Welfare's Welfare Officer at Nylstroom on 'Onbevredigende behuising van Blanke Vroulike Werkers: Zebediela Estates, Potgietersrust', 15/12/1937.

Welfare report suggested that the new Hostel should be provided with flush toilets in the place of the latrines in use.[73]

The new Hostel had more and better conveniences, but at the times that most women wanted to bath or shower, like on Saturday nights or just after coming from work, they still had to queue.[74] After they had their bath, some women reserved it for a friend by throwing the latter's towel over the door.[75] Even here one's privacy was under threat since the walls of each toilet did not extend to the ceiling. Some younger women played pranks on others, and 'onwettiges klim daar op en trek die ketting terwyl jy daar sit. Dan skrik jy jou boeglam'.[76]

The bathrooms also served other functions after hours. Once the lights went out in the dormitory, women chatted, smoked, read, or wrote letters there.[77] In the bathrooms they enjoyed snacks sent from home and which they did not want to share.[78] One person even brought a primus stove with her to Zebediela, and used it to make coffee after dark.[79] The bathrooms thus provided an area for recreation and a measure of privacy.

---

[73] State Archive, Department of Social Welfare, VWN, Vol. 475, File SW 69/24, Report by the Secretary of Social Welfare, entitled 'African Realty Trust Limited. Zebediela Estates, Naboomspruit', 17/6/1938.

[74] Letter to A. van Niekerk from Mrs. E. C. du Preez, from Laersdrif, 25/4/1985 (1939-1941), Mrs. A. Hugo, Zebediela, 2/4/1985 (1952).

[75] Mrs. J. Horn, Vredefort, 3/3/1985 (1938-1941), Mrs. J. Bekker, Bulge River, 28/11/1984 (1939-1945), Mrs. B. Barendse, Roodepoort, 11/6/1985 (1949-1963).

[76] '...unruly youngsters climbed on the wall while you sat there, and pulled the chain. This gave you a big fright.' Mrs. E. Johnson, Alberton, 7/3/1985 (1939-1941).

[77] Mrs. C. G. Ferreira, Johannesburg, 25/3/1985 (1939-1941), Mrs. A. van Zyl, Potgietersrust, 12/2/1985 (1938-1945).

[78] Mrs. A. Greyling, Zebediela, 12/2/1985 (1930-1951).

[79] Mrs. C. G. Ferreira, Johannesburg, 25/3/1985 (1939-1941).

Workers had to do their own washing and ironing. This became especially cumbersome after the introduction of uniforms in 1931.[80] The estate only provided hot water, basins, and in later years, irons. Understandably, after a hard day's work, some thought it easier to hire local black women to do their washing and ironing.[81] These washerwomen collected the washing at the gate of the hostel and returned it the following morning for a small payment. 'Ek kan nie onthou wat ons hulle betaal het nie, maar dit was maar baie min.'[82] Occasionally a few women would club together to have their washing done.[83]

Not everybody followed this custom of hiring washerwomen, although their reasons for not doing so varied. Few could really afford the luxury. 'Ons het self gewas, dan spaar ons mos nog',[84] or, 'jy kan nie dit nog bekostig nie.'[85] Others expressed racial fears, like a concern about germs.[86] One was afraid that if her clothes was taken to the black village, 'netnou dra hulle dit daar, en dan moet ek dit dra.'[87] In the early years black women also did the ironing at the estate for a pittance. This provided a potential source of racial tension, for when white women who did their own ironing 'kom in die strykkamer, dan staan die ryk meisies

---

[80] Mrs. R. du Preez, Krugersdorp, 11/6/1985 (1931-1936); Mrs. C. M. Snyders, Alma, 14/11/1985 (1928-1933).

[81] Mrs. A. Grobler, Steynsrus, 4/3/1985 (1937-1939), Mrs. J. Bekker, Bulge River, 28/11/1984 (1939-1945), Mrs. L. Smit, Roedtan, 3/4/1985 (1950-1953).

[82] 'I cannot remember what we paid them, but it really was very little.' Mrs. A. Biddulph, interviewed at Naboomspruit, 3/4/1985 (1941-1943).

[83] Letter to A. van Niekerk from Mrs. H. Swanepoel, from Vaalwater, 4/3/1985 (1939), Mrs. M. Thorolt, Westonaria, 26/2/1985 (1939).

[84] 'We did our own washing to save more...' Mrs. E. Johnson, Alberton, 7/3/1985 (1939-1941).

[85] '...you cannot afford that as well.' Mrs. B. Barendse, Roodepoort, 11/6/1985 (1949-1963).

[86] Mrs. A. Derksen, Pretoria, 27/8/1984 (1935-1939).

[87] '...they may have worn it there, and then I would have had to wear it afterwards.' Mrs. A. Greyling, Zebediela, 12/2/1985 (1930-1951).

se meidjies daar en stryk, dan moet ons wag tot hulle klaar gestryk het'.[88]

At no time did the management provide a common room for the hostel dwellers.[89] Even when they had guests, women spent their free time sitting in the gardens or walking in the orchards.[90] The non-existence of such a social area within the Hostel reflected the absence of organised diversions for the women in their free time. The 1938 report referred to above, rationalised this state of affairs by pointing out that 'the manager states that the girls are so tired when they come off shift that they prefer to lie down.'[91] On the matter of sport facilities Mrs.Lamont said that 'daar was nie tyd vir soiets nie. Hulle was te besig gewees'.[92] Soon thereafter though, in the early forties, Zebediela boasted a netball team that played against teams from neighbouring districts.[93]

This change in management's perception on the role of organised recreation, also led to the establishment of a library. Initially women

---

[88] '...came into the washing rooms where the maids of the rich girls were doing their ironing, we had to wait until they finished.' Mrs. C. M. Snyders, Alma, 14/11/1985 (1928-1933).

[89] Mrs. A. van Zyl, Potgietersrust, 12/2/1985 (1938-1945), Mrs. E. Lamont, Potgietersrust, 12/2/1985 (1941-1953).

[90] Mrs. A. Bodenstein, interviewed at Springs, 13/9/1984 (1938-1940), Mrs. A. S. van Niekerk, interviewed at Pretoria, 2/10/1984 (1939-1941), Mrs. A. Hugo, Zebediela, 2/4/1985 (1952).

[91] State Archive, Department of Social Welfare, VWN, Vol. 475, File SW 69/24, Report by the Secretary of Social Welfare, entitled 'African Realty Trust Limited. Zebediela Estates, Naboomspruit', 17/6/1938.

[92] '...there was no time for anything of the sort. They were too busy.' Mrs. E. Lamont, Potgietersrust, 12/2/1985 (1941-1953). Mrs. E. Oosthuizen, Potgietersrust, 1/4/1985 (1929-1936), Mrs. H. Swanepoel, Vaalwater, 4/3/1985 (1939).

[93] During the slack period at the start of the 1940 Valencia season the manager saw to it that 'provision is being made to ensure that there will be no lack of entertainment...Two basketball fields and six tennikoit courts are being marked out.' U.W., C.P.S.A., Z.C., Memo from the manager to company headquarters, 14/8/1940. Mrs. S. Heystek, Warmbaths, 4/4/1985 (1939-1961), Mrs. B. Barendse, Roodepoort, 11/6/1985 (1949-1963).

had to bring their own reading material. This apparently consisted mostly of romantic fiction and magazines like *Huisgenoot* and *Brandwag*.[94] In 1939 the report of the Inspector of Factories on living conditions at Zebediela noted management's intention to organise a library. The estate would have covered 50 percent of the cost, but would not have selected the books, 'to avoid being accused of attempts to corrupt.'[95] By 1950 Zebediela boasted a big library with thousands of books.[96] If in fact these women continued to read mostly romantic fiction, as they appeared to have done,[97] management clearly succeeded in providing an innocuous pastime and keeping politics out of the Hostel's library.

II

Living in dormitories clearly involved a great deal of forced interpersonal contact. To regulate the existence of hostel dwellers under those conditions, management subjected the women workers to various measures of control. This process regimented everyday life according to a strictly adhered to routine, and set out rules that prescribed the conduct of inhabitants. Not only the simple mechanisms, but also the purpose of this set of prescriptions need to be examined. According to Goffman it can be explained in the context of an 'instrumental formal organization', which he described as 'a system of purposely coordinated activities designed to produce some over-all explicit ends'.[98] This im-

---

[94] Mrs. E. Oosthuizen, Potgietersrust, 1/4/1985 (1929-1936).

[95] State Archive, Department of Social Welfare, VWN, Vol. 295, File SW 47/13/44, Report by the Inspector of Factories on 'Klagte - Zebediela Estate', 28/6/1939.

[96] 'Nooientjies van Zebediela', *Serie Harais*, 31 May 1950, pp.3-6.

[97] Mrs. M. Thorolt, Westonaria, 26/2/1985 (1939), Mrs. A. van Zyl, Potgietersrust, 12/2/1985 (1938-1945), Mrs. A. Hugo, Zebediela, 2/4/1985 (1952).

[98] Goffman, *Asylums*, pp.161-162.

plied that the specific body of rules which regulated conduct in the hostel was the outcome of the objectives of the Estate at particular moments in time.

The schedule of the packhouse determined the timetable of the hostel.[99] At least until the Second World War in 1939, a two-shift system dictated the time that everybody woke up. Thus, for example, when the first shift started at 5 a.m., both in summer and winter, everybody had to have washed, drunk their coffee, and have reported to the packhouse by that time.[100] The location of the bathrooms a distance from the tents and, between 1931 and 1938, from the shed, rendered this routine particularly inconvenient. Some women 'het 'n bottel water gevat...om ons waslap in die oggend nat te maak, om die slaap uit jou oe te vee, want as ons oggendskof werk moet ons klokslag vyfuur in die pakhuis wees.'[101]

At least until the mid thirties the matron or a servant woke the sleeping women by putting on the light in the room.[102] After that date, they woke up to the sound of ''n onaardse ou fluit'.[103] The shifts also determined the time set for lunch and dinner, and the hour they supposedly retired to bed. This was usually between 9 p.m. and 11 p.m., depending

---

[99] E. P. Thompson argued that the need to measure time precisely arose from use of paid labour, and that the development of the factory system increased this emphasis because of the need to synchronise labour with machinery. Thompson, E. P. 'Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism', *Past and Present*, 38, December 1967, pp.56-97.

[100] Mrs. G. H. Lombard, Sheepmoor, 23/4/1985 (1931).

[101] '...took a bottle of water in which to wet their face-cloths in the mornings to wipe the sleep from their eyes, because when they worked the morning shift they had to be in the packhouse at exactly five o'clock'. Mrs. C. M. Snyders, Alma, 14/11/1985 (1928-1933).

[102] Mrs. E. Oosthuizen, Potgietersrust, 1/4/1985 (1928-1936). Mrs. R. du Preez, Krugersdorp, 11/6/1985 (1931-1936). Mrs. G. H. Lombard, Sheepmoor, 23/4/1985 (1931).

[103] '...an unearthly old whistle'. Mrs. A. Grobler, Steynsrus, 4/3/1985 (1937-1939). Mrs. J. Bekker, Bulge River, 28/11/1984 (1939-1945). Miss B. Groenewald, Naboomspruit, 3/4/1985 (1944-1952).

on the late shift.[104] By that time of the evening many felt that 'jy het so hard gewerk deur die dag, dat jy nie omgegee het dat die ligte af is nie'.[105] The way in which some used the bathrooms as a recreational area after the lights went out, indicated that not everyone was so tractable. If everybody consented a person with a gramophone occasionally played records in the dark, like 'Home, Sweet Home'. 'Dan moet jy ons sien. Ons huil, maar ons geniet dit. Ons huil lekker.'[106]

Partly the hostel rules tried to enforce punctuality.[107] 'Hulle etenstye was presies gewees. As daai klok lui, dan moet jy kom eet. Daar was nie een wat nie ag gegee het daarop nie...'[108] Tardiness resulted in a reprimand from the matron.[109] This emphasis on punctuality allowed the whole rhythm of everyday life to be subsumed to the demands of the workplace. For the same reason, other directives attempted to control the movements of workers, securing an adequate workforce for the Packhouse.[110]

---

[104] Miss D.de W. Riekert, interviewed at Zebediela, 14/6/1984 (1930-1979). State Archive, Department of Social Welfare, VWN, Vol. 295, File SW 47/13/44, Report by the Inspector of Factories on 'Klagte - Zebediela Estate', 28/6/1939.

[105] '...you worked so hard during the day that you did not care that the lights were out.' Mrs. A. van Zyl, Potgietersrust, 12/2/1985 (1938-1945).

[106] 'Then you should have seen us. We cried, but we enjoyed it. We delighted in crying.' Mrs. R. du Preez, Krugersdorp, 11/6/1985 (1931-1936).

[107] Mrs. L. Smit, Roedtan, 3/4/1985 (1950-1953), Mrs. B. Barendse, Roodepoort, 11/6/1985 (1949-1963). It may be significant that both these interviewees worked at Zebediela at a time when the Estate suffered from a severe problem in recruiting adequate numbers of workers.

[108] 'Their meal times were exact. When that bell rang, you had to go and eat. There was not a person who did not act upon it..." Mrs. J. Bekker, Bulge River, 28/11/1984 (1939-1945).

[109] Mrs. A. Greyling, Zebediela, 12/2/1985 (1930-1951).

[110] As this chapter attempts to show, however, the management had at its disposal an effective set of tools with which to control these women workers, which related to age, gender and culture (see below), and therefore needed relatively few, well-defined rules in the hostel.

At the same time most interviewees remembered the atmosphere in the hostel as being very easygoing. 'Dit was vir my baie aangenaam in die koshuis. Daar was nie so baie reels nie.'[111] They interpreted this as a recognition of themselves as responsible adults working for a living. 'Jy het jou dissipline gehad daar in die koshuis self, dat jy dit mag doen, en die ander ding nie mag doen nie. Verder het hulle seker gereken almal werk daar vir 'n salaris, en dis almal grootmense.'[112] Others agreed that, "jy is nie *heeltemal* soos 'n kind behandel nie."[113] 'Jy moes jou maar net gedra en so aan.'[114]

The explicit rules were firmly enforced though. 'Somtyds het dit vir ons gevoel asof dit 'n bietjie te streng was.'[115] There is little documentary evidence available on the formal rules of the establishment before 1935. We do know that 'daar was 'n tyd wat die ouers baie tee was - selfs hier in Potgietersrust in die vroee jare - toe die plek 'n bietjie van 'n reputasie gehad het'.[116] When P. J. Quin became Estate Manager in 1935, however, he instituted ''n hele ommeswaai...Party het gese dat ons probeer het om 'n Sondagskool daar te stig'.[117] In 1936 the discipline, not only

---

[111] 'I found the hostel very pleasant. There were not too many rules.' Letter to A. van Niekerk from Mrs. M. M. le Roux, from Leslie, 16/4/1985 (1948-1952).

[112] 'There was discipline in the hostel itself, that certain things were allowed and others not. Beyond that they probably reasoned that everybody was there to work for a salary and that they were all adults.' Mrs. A. Bodenstein, Springs, 13/9/1984 (1938-1940).

[113] '...you were not treated *entirely* like a child.' Mrs. E. Barnard, Bulge River, 27/11/1984 (1937-1938).

[114] 'You only had to behave yourself, and so on.' Mrs. E. Johnson, Alberton, 7/3/1985 (1939-1941).

[115] 'Sometimes it felt as if it was a bit too strict.' Miss L. Byrne, interviewed at Zebediela, 14/6/1984 (1939-1979).

[116] '...there was a time in the early days when parents were very reluctant - even here in Potgietersrust - when the place had a bit of a reputation'. Mr. A. van Blerk, Potgietersrust, 12/6/1984. The latter started at Zebediela as a statistical clerk in 1935 and became Estate Secretary in 1940, a position he occupied until his retirement in 1975.

[117] '...a complete turnabout...Some said we were attempting to establish

in the packhouse but also in the 'mens' mess' and the 'girls' hostel' became the responsibility of the Packhouse Manager. He had to ensure that 'for the sake of the good name of the Estate and all respectable employees, strict discipline to be enforced in the Girls' Hostel'.[118] In a similar vein, the Social Welfare report of 1938 argued that strict rules, like having the hostel gates locked at night, was part of the 'reasonable precaution...taken for the safe- and well-being of the female workers, strict supervision being carried out with regard to the morals of the residents'.[119]

A notice, probably drawn up for the inhabitants of the new Hostel, outlined all 'huishoudelike reels en wenke aan kosgangers'. It set out the times and procedures whereby women could leave the hostel. Everybody needed the matron's permission to leave the grounds, and had to be back by 6 p.m..[120] 'Wanneer jy uitgaan moes jy afteken, en die mense wat jou

---

a Sunday school.' Mr. A. van Blerk, Potgietersrust, 12/6/1984 (1935-1975). Many parents would more readily have allowed their daughters to work in an environment that recreated the discipline of the home.

[118] U.W., C.P.S.A., Z.C., File Abj 5, Memo from the manager to the manager Wits.Archive, Z.C., File Abj5, of the packhouse on 'Packhouse Discipline', 21/8/1936. This was part of a wider attempt to rationalise the operation of the packhouse. It is interesting to note the categorisation of the male workers as 'men', while the female workers remained 'girls'. If one consider the young age of these women, this was an assumption partly based on fact. But there is no reason to believe that the male seasonal workers that the estate employed to work in the orchards were necessarily much older. In addition this premise allowed management to formulate prescriptions that deprived these women of some of their adult competency. See below, footnote 120. At the same time, most interviewees also referred to themselves as 'girls'. See, for instance, footnotes 123 and 145.
Five years later the Packhouse Manager and his wife, the matron, left Zebediela after he allegedly had an affair with one of the women workers. Mrs. E. Johnson, Alberton, 7/3/1985 (1939-1941). Mrs. A. Derksen, Pretoria, 27/8/1984 (1935-1939). Telephone conversation with Mrs.E.Barnard, Bulge River, 28/11/1984 (1937-1938).

[119] State Archive, Department of Social Welfare, VWN, Vol. 475, File SW 69/24, Report by the Secretary of Social Welfare, entitled 'African Realty Trust Limited. Zebediela Estates, Naboomspruit', 17/6/1938.

[120] U.W., C.P.S.A., Z.C., File Abj 5, Notice entitled 'Huishoudelike Reels en Wenke aan Kosgangers' - 'Household Rules and Tips to Residents', undated. This again raises the issue of age. While it is important to remain sociologically sensitive to the fact that these

vat, moet ook teken dat jy uitgaan.'[121] The rules allowed a woman to leave the estate in the company of a man only if both signed the register, and if the party consisted of at least four people. The local hotel remained out of bounds for women workers. The manager implored the hostel dwellers to behave in a manner that 'sal strek tot die goeie naam van die inrigting en van elke indiwiduele inwoner'.[122] When the matron wanted to impart this kind of information to the hostel inhabitants, she called them together in the diningroom. 'Kort-kort het hulle nou so 'n konferensie gehad, as iets nie goed was nie, die meisies gebruik te veel papier in die "levies", dit is so en dat is so, en hulle moet nie so maak nie, hulle vra mooi hulle moet so maak.'[123] Management's exhortations usually recognised that it was dealing mostly with young women on the threshold of sexual maturity. The notice board, for instance, displayed 'streng reels omtrent die onthaal van jongmans'.[124]

At various points in this paper the age of the workers was related to the restraints imposed on them at Zebediela. Similarly, the role of culture and gender need to be examined.[125] Culture not only narrowly re-

---

were young people, Bozzoli, while examining the ideology that set up compounds for black workers, and echoing others like Goffman and van Onselen, noted that 'the use of the compound system required and bred the idea of the black man as a child, irresponsible and uncontrollable'. She argues that the fact that compounds constituted class instruments of total control had serious implications for the tendency of these 'total institutions' to divest people of adulthood. Bozzoli, B. *The Political Nature of a Ruling Class* (London 1981), p.72.

[121] 'When you went out you had to sign out, and the people with whom you went also had to sign that you were going.' Mrs. E. Barnard, Bulge River, 27/11/1984 (1937-1938).

[122] '...will reflect the good name of the institution and each individual inhabitant.' U.W., C.P.S.A., Z.C., 'Huishoudelike Reels en Wenke aan Kosgangers'.

[123] 'Every now and then if something was not right, like the girls were using too much toilet paper, or something should not have been done, they had a conference; they asked politely that it should be done differently.' Mrs. E. Johnson, Alberton, 7/3/1985 (1939-1941).

[124] '...strict rules about the entertainment of young men'. *Sarie Marais*, 31 May 1950, pp.3-6.

[125] In her study on the formation of ethnicity, Hofmeyr discussed the

ferred to a system of values. Goffman also examined the 'presenting culture' with which inmates entered an institution, referring to a way of life and a round of activities taken for granted.[126] The estate constantly incorporated this 'presenting culture' into its structures of control. Moreover, the compliance of the women themselves was often a function of the extent to which their 'culture' permitted them to slot into that system. Some of the elements in these workers' 'presenting culture', which influenced their adaptation at the Estate and the efficacy of control over them, need to be drawn out.

The majority of women in the hostel probably did not find menial jobs, like washing their own clothes and making their own bed, demeaning. At home, they often had to perform exactly those kinds of 'women's work', and they 'het al die huiswerk gedoen, vloere skoongemaak, wasgoed gewas en al die tipe van dinge'.[127] Similarly, the average rural Afrikaner family was a big one, living in a modest house.[128] One interviewee recalled that she overheard a conversation between her parents because 'ons huis het nie 'n plafon in gehad nie, en ek hoor my oorlede pa en ma praat met mekaar'.[129] This could partly have explained the ability of many to

---

kinds of 'networks' of subordination in which Afrikaner women found themselves enmeshed in the inter-war period. Within those relationships, 'friction was diffused through ideological mechanisms of "familie" (kinship), "huisgesin" (household) and church'. Hofmeyr, 'Building a Nation from Words', p.9.

[126] Goffman, *Asylums*, p.23.

[127] '...did all the housework, cleaned floors, washed washing and all those sorts of things'. Mrs. A. Bodenstein, Springs, 13/9/1984 (1938-1940). Mrs. C. M. Snyders, Alma, 14/11/1985 (1928-1933). Miss de W. Riekert, Zebediela, 14/6/1984 (1930-1979).

[128] In his his study of two communities in the Waterberg district of the Northern Transvaal, Potgieter found that as late as 1953, the average family size was still 6.4 children per family. Potgieter, J. F. 'n Sosiografiese Studie van Enkele Afgesonderde Gemeenskappe in die Distrikte Marico en Waterberg', D.Phil, University of Pretoria, 1957, p.106.

[129] '...our house did not have a ceiling so that I heard my late father and mother talking to each other.' Mrs. J. Bekker, Bulge River, 28/11/1984 (1939-1945).

adapt easily to living in such close proximity to others.[130] For many, the emphasis on maintaining good discipline mirrored their own upbringing. 'As jy dissipline geleer is in die huis, het jy dit nie nodig nie',[131] or, 'ek kan nie kla oor die dissipline nie, want ons het streng groot geword.'[132] 'Dissipline was streng, maar dit het nie gehinder nie want ons ouers was baie streng.'[133]

In each case other factors may have influenced these attitudes, like the age and degree of independence of the workers. Since the majority of women were very young, even 16 or 17 years old, some agreed that 'met so 'n klomp jong mense moet hulle seker hulle reels he, want jy kan nie hulle sommer net laat gaan nie, dat elkeen doen wat hy wil nie'.[134] Although there is little evidence for this, older or married women may have felt differently about a regime that denied them some measure of adult independence. Married women whose husbands worked permanently at Zebediela left work to go to their own homes, and for them, 'as jy by die gradeerkamer uitstap, kan jy maak wat jy wil. Daar is niemand wat vir jou se jy moet daardie tyd terug, of so nie'.[135] According to Mrs. E. Lamont, matron in the forties, women that came from the cities did not

---

[130] Potgieter found that many of the families he studied in the Waterberg lived in very crowded conditions, and 'van privaatheid is daar in so 'n huis dan geen sprake nie.' '...there is no question of privacy in such a house.' Potgieter, 'Enkele Afgesonderde Gemeenskappe', p.166.

[131] 'If you were taught discipline in the home, you didn't need it...' Mrs. J. Bekker, Bulge River, 28/11/1984 (1939-1945).

[132] '...I couldn't complain about the discipline because we had a strict upbringing.' Mrs. E. C. du Preez, Laersdrif, 25/4/1985 (1939-1941).

[133] 'Discipline was strict, but it did not bother us because our parents were very strict.' Letter to A. van Niekerk from Mrs. T. Venter, from Thabazimbi, 24/6/1985 (1939).

[134] '...with so many young people they probably had to have rules, because you couldn't just leave them to do what anyone wanted.' Mrs. C. G. Ferreira, Johannesburg, 25/3/1985 (1939-1941).

[135] '...when you left the grading room you were free to do as you like. No-one told you that you had to be back at that time, or so.' Mrs. A. Hugo, Zebediela, 2/4/1985 (1952).

last very long at the estate, because 'hulle was nie aan daardie lewe gewoond nie.'[135]

At Zebediela the issue of politics highlighted the influence that their socialisation had on these women's responses to the rules imposed on them. The political polarisation of Afrikaners that followed the breakaway of the Purified National Party from the United Party in 1933, caused unwanted friction between women from politically diverse backgrounds. This constituted a potentially serious problem for the management, especially within the close confines of a hostel. The parents of some supported the United Party,[137] while others voted for the National Party.[138]

Amongst many of the women 'was daar soms baie kwaai gesprekke oor wie se party reg was...'[139] Another remembered that 'ons het politiek gepraat. In 1938 was daar 'n oplewing by die Afrikanernasie ... Strydom het hard geveg vir sy volk.'[140] Strydom in fact demanded an investigation into alleged contact between black men and white women at Zebediela in 1939. This led the Inspector Factories to conclude that 'allegations about natives and white women were made and bitterness stirred up for political

---

[135] '...they were not used to that life.' Mrs. E. Lamont, Potgietersrust, 12/2/1985 (1941-1953).

[137] Mrs. A. S. van Niekerk, Pretoria, 2/10/1984 (1939-1941). Mrs. A. Biddulph, Naboomspruit, 3/4/1985 (1941-1943).

[138] See Mrs. A. Greyling, Zebediela, 12/2/1985 (1930-1951). One woman whose boyfriend volunteered to join the army in the Second World War, had her father say to her, 'As jy met hom wil gaan trou - ons partye is nie dieselfde nie, en ek is daarteen - dan moet jy maar jou goedjies vat, en dan kom jy nooit weer terug na my toe nie'. 'If you want to marry him - our parties are not the same, and I am against it - then you have to take your stuff and never return home again.' Mrs. A. Lotter, Bulge River, 11/2/1985 (1938).

[139] '...heated discussions took place at times on who supported the right party...' Mrs. A. Grobler, Steynsrus, 4/3/1985 (1937-1939).

[140] '...we discussed politics. 1938 saw a revival amongst the Afrikaner nation ... Strydom fought hard for his "volk".' Letter to A. van Niekerk from Mrs. H. Swanepoel, from Vaalwater, 30/10/1985 (1939). J. G. Strydom was M.P. for the Waterberg district in the Northern Transvaal from the twenties onwards. The later Prime Minister was in fact known as 'The Lion of the North'.

reasons since government officials recruited the women, Niggers and Jew-baiting being favourite political armaments'.[141]

The Second World War affected the Estate even more adversely. Van Blerk, the Estate Secretary, noted in 1942 that between 70 percent and 90 percent of the women were not 'sympathetically inclined towards the Government's war policy.'[142] One woman even declared that she regretted the return of peace in 1945, because 'ek wou gehad het die Duitsers moes wen'.[143] Under the circumstances, some women may have declined work at the estate while it packed fruit for the British export market. Conflict between workers and management could also have affected productivity. Zebediela had two weapons against this danger. Some interviewees alleged that for the duration of the war, management forbade them to discuss politics. 'Aan die begin van die oorlog is 'n groot vergadering gehou waar die meisies vriendelik versoek is om nie aktief deel te neem aan die politiek van die tyd nie, en hulle nie moes laat beinvloed daardeur nie.'[144]

For many women, this ruling was hardly necessary. They saw politics as 'dinge wat mans oor gesels het, maar nooit vroumense nie'.[145] Another 'het grootgeword dat politiek is vir die man en nie vir die vrou nie.

---

[141] State Archive, Department of Social Welfare, VWN, Vol. 295, File SW 47/13/44, Report by the Inspector of Factories on 'Klagte - Zebediela Estate', 28/6/1939. At this time, the Reunited South African Party was in power under the leadership of General Hertzog.

[142] U.W., C.P.S.A., Z.C., File Abj 4, Report by the Estate Secretary on 'Potgietersrust District Defence Liaison Committee Meeting 23/10/1942.'

[143] '...I wanted the Germans to win.' Mrs. S. Heystek, Warmbaths, 4/4/1985 (1939-1961).

[144] 'At the beginning of the war they held a large meeting where the girls requested in a friendly way not to take actively part in the politics of the day, nor to allow themselves to be influenced by it.' Letter to A. van Niekerk from Mrs. H. C. Kukkuk, from Heilbron, 8/3/1985, about her mother, Mrs. S. Hough (1940-1972).

[145] '...things that men discussed, but never women'. Mrs. E. Oosthuizen, Potgietersrust, 1/4/1985 (1929-1936).

Die man is hoof van die huis en hy gaan stem en praat politiek, en nie die vrou nie'.[146] The influence of socialisation therefore made some women cooperate voluntarily in the imposition of control.

The estate administration tried to encourage this attitude by emphasising values espoused by both its own officials and by workers. Management hoped to achieve this by stressing its paternalistic interest in the women, by trying to provide explanations for the infliction of certain restraints which workers accepted, and finally by attempting to incorporate personal values that centred around concepts of Christian morality into hostel life.[147]

In an interview van Blerk mentioned a 'verantwoordelikheidsgevoel' ('feeling of responsibility') on the part of management towards the women in its care.[148] This clearly went far beyond simple considerations of physical welfare. One report noted in 1938, for instance, that 'any male employee who takes a girl out for a joyride is instantly dismissed'.[149] This accorded management a parental role. Indeed, van Blerk added that 'die hele Zebediela was soos 'n groot familie.'[150] The title of 'koshuismoeder' (hostel mother) embodied the role of the matron as a

---

[146] '...was brought up to believe that politics were for men and not for women. The man was head of the household and he voted and talked about politics, and not the woman.' Mrs. M. Thorolt, Westonaria, 26/2/1985 (1939).

[147] Again there is more evidence available for the period after the mid thirties.

[148] Mr. A. van Blerk, Potgietersrust, 12/6/1984 (1935-1975). When one young woman was dismissed for disobeying the rules, van Blerk wrote to her grandmother to whom she was sent back, that 'in hierdie omstandighede kan ons natuurlik nie verantwoordelikheid onderneem nie.' '...under these circumstances we naturally cannot undertake responsibility.' U.W., C.P.S.A., Z.C., File Abj 1, Letter from van Blerk to Mrs. G. A. M. Nothnagel of Middelburg, 6/4/1949.

[149] State Archive, Department of Social Welfare, VWN, Vol. 475, File SW 69/24, Report by the Secretary of Social Welfare, entitled 'African Realty Trust Limited. Zebediela Estates, Naboomspruit', 17/6/1938.

[150] '...the whole Zebediela was like a big family'. Mr. A. van Blerk, Potgietersrust, 12/6/1984 (1935-1975).

surrogate mother. 'Dit was hard vir die koshuisvader en koshuismoeder om hulle in toom te hou', so they were 'baie streng : as jy 'n fout gemaak het, het jy dit gekry met die mond'.[151] Again interviewees showed an ambiguous response. It would have been very difficult for management to sustain these paternal roles if many women did not accept the relationship. One person believed that 'hulle het jou nie soos 'n kind behandel nie', but then went on to say that the matron 'het hulle altyd reggehelp soos 'n moeder'.[152] This ambiguity placed many workers neatly between being 'girls' and women, a position that management could use to its advantage.

The outside fence constituted one of the few physical measures with which to control the movement of workers before 1938. The windows of the new Hostel were never burglar-proofed either. Other than the windows, however, the building only had a few entrances that led to the outside. The matron locked each of these gates at a specific time every evening.[153] Management explained these precautions by referring to the safety of the inhabitants. 'Hulle het gese hier is te veel swartes. Hulle is bang hulle kom by die hekke, die deure in.'[154] This attitude obviously drew on the racist ideology of society at large. Hence societal notions of 'swart gevaar' enabled the estate's administrators to enhance control over the movements of these workers. Similarly management

---

[151] 'It was difficult for the hostel father and mother to control them', so they were 'very strict : if you made a mistake, you got the sharp ends of their tongues.' Mrs. A. Lotter, Bulga River, 11/2/1985 (1938).

[152] '...they did not treat you like a child', but '...always helped them like a mother.' Mrs. S. Heystek, Warmbaths, 4/4/1985 (1939-1961). See above, footnotes 118 and 120.

[153] State Archive, Department of Social Welfare, VWN, Vol. 475, File SW 69/24, Report by the Secretary of Social Welfare, entitled 'African Realty Trust Limited. Zebediela Estates, Naboomspruit', 17/6/1938. Mrs. A. Biddulph, Naboomspruit, 3/4/1985 (1941-1943). Mrs. A. Hugo, Zebediela, 2/4/1985 (1952).

[154] 'They said there were too many blacks around. They feared that they might come in at the gates, at the doors.' Mrs. S. Heystek, Warmbaths, 4/4/1985 (1939-1961).

rationalised the rule that forced every woman to sign out when she left the hostel: it was necessary because 'as jou mense na jou kom soek, kan hulle jou kry'.[155] Or 'so laat hulle kon weet, as iets gebeur, dis waarheen die mense gegaan het, en hulle jou kon kontak.'[156] Partly this concern about the whereabouts of women were simply practical. The fact that many workers accepted these rationalisations as legitimate, had several implications though. Management's explanations were based on the premise that these measures attempted to keep certain people out of the Hostel. It ignored the fact that the same operations also kept the women inside. This raised no questions about the morals of the Hostel dwellers.[157] On the contrary, women may have accepted the restraints for the given reasons precisely because these could not have been questioned 'legitimately'. Management therefore predicated its control on the moral and cultural mores with which these women identified themselves. Even so, a few young women did ignore such constraints on their behaviour. Hence an interviewee who became 'headgirl' in the hostel, saw the signing-out rule as justified because of those women 'wat kerels het, ... wat nie weet om terug te kom van die kerels af', and those 'wat weggeloop het'.[158] After the matron locked the gates she checked the dormitories to see if anyone was absent. The same ex-'headgirl' remarked that 'hekke word toegesluit in die aand dat jy nie kan rondloop nie'.[159]

---

[155] '...if your people came looking for you, they were able to find you.' Mrs. A. van Zyl, Potgietersrust, 12/2/1985 (1938-1945).

[156] '...so that they knew if anything happened that this was where these people went, and they were able to contact you.' Mrs. C. G.Ferreira, Johannesburg, 25/3/1985 (1939-1941).

[157] The English copy of the Inspector of Factories' report, 28/6/1939, stated that some women 'resent discipline'. But the Afrikaans copy said that some 'beledig voel oor die dissipline' 'feel insulted about the discipline'. State Archive, Department of Social Welfare, VWN, Vol. 295, File SW 47/13/44, Report by the Inspector of Factories on 'Klagte - Zebediela Estate', 28/6/1939.

[158] '...who did not know they had to return from their boyfriends', '...who ran away'. Mrs. A. Greyling, Zebediela, 12/2/1985 (1930-1951).

[159] '...gates were locked at night so that no-one could run around'. Mrs. A. Greyling, Zebediela, 12/2/1985 (1930-1951).

Many interviewees dealt with these 'deviants' by denying their existence. To have done otherwise would have stigmatised Zebediela and have made it more difficult for them to continue working there. These denials, however, contained a note of ambiguity. 'Ons was seker 'n goeie geslag mesies wat daar gewerk het, want daar was nooit probleme waarvan ek weet nie.'[160] Another insisted that 'aan die dele wat lelik is, het ek nooit deelgeneem nie - ek weet nie daarvan nie'.[161]

Thus some women believed that 'daardie tyd se meisies was almal eintlik goed opgevoed. Ons was eintlik almal Christelike mense, dat jy nie iets verkeerd wou doen nie'.[162] Despite the intrusion of the 'good old days' myth, the acceptance of discipline in such a case, related to certain ill-defined norms based on Christianity. Management involved the churches at Zebediela, both in recruitment done through church organisations and in the way that parents saw the 'Christelikheid' at the estate as an inducement to giving their daughters permission to work there. The interviewee quoted above indicated that this parental perception may have been well-founded, as the way in which some women defined themselves as Christians imposed real constraints on their behaviour. This could partly have explained van Blerk's statement that recruitment through church organisations delivered people 'wat die moeite werd was'.[163]

---

[160] '...we must have been a good generation of girls because there was never any trouble that I knew of'. Mrs. A. van Zyl, Potgietersrust, 12/2/1985 (1938-1945).

[161] '...I never took part in the ugly side - I know nothing about it'. Mrs. A. Greyling, Zebediela, 12/2/1985 (1930-1951).

[162] '...in those days the girls were well brought up. Because we were all Christian people, you did not want to do anything wrong'. Mrs. A. van Zyl, Potgietersrust, 12/2/1985 (1938-1945).

[163] '...who were worth the trouble'. Mr. A. van Blerk, Potgietersrust, 12/6/1984 (1935-1975). In 1932 the Carnegie Commission noted that 'many of the finest qualities to be found amongst the (white) poorer classes of South African society - obedience to law, reverence for religion, respectable family life, good nature and attachment to ancestry...(could) in large measure be attributed to the influence which the Church has exercised over them in the past'. Quoted *in*

No regular religious services took place while workers were housed in the tents or in the shed (1926-1938). 'Ons het kerk gehad, maar dit was maar 'n bietjie skraal gewees.'[164] As late as 1938 the Nylstroom Welfare Officer reported that 'very little, if any, interest is taken in the girls by the various religious denominations, although they would be welcomed by the company'.[165] Matters changed with the occupation of the new Hostel. 'Een of ander eerwaarde het gereeld dienste kom hou op Zebediela.'[166] By 1950 the official journal of the Dutch Reformed Church, *Die Voorligter*, could reassure parents that 'die hele beleid wat gevolg word, is om dogters wat uit Christelike huise kom, daar te laat tuis voel'.[167] As part of this policy the estate allowed ministers from the three Afrikaans churches to hold services every Sunday. The services took place in the diningroom and the matron encouraged everybody to attend. 'As jy daar is, verwag hulle tenminste jy moet diens toe gaan.'[168]

Management also operated a system of incentives and punishments to encourage workers to comply with the rules. The effectiveness of this attempt depended on the motives of these work-seekers and the options open to them. These daughters of Northern Transvaal farmers left home to work because of their need for a cash income. This implied that for them the

---

Davies, R. *Capital, State and White Labour in South Africa, 1900-1960* (Sussex 1979), p.206.

[164] 'We did have church, but not very often.' Mrs. A. Bodenstein, Springs, 13/9/1984 (1938-1940). Mrs. C. M. Snyders, Alma, 14/11/1985 (1928-1933). Mrs. E. Oosthuizen, Potgietersrust, 1/4/1985 (1929-1936). Mrs. A. Derksen, Pretoria, 27/8/1984 (1935-1939).

[165] State Archive, Department of Social Welfare, VWN, Vol. 475, File SW 69/24, Report by the Secretary of Social Welfare, entitled 'African Realty Trust Limited. Zebediela Estates, Naboomspruit', 17/6/1938.

[166] 'One or other reverend regularly held services at Zebediela.' Mrs. M. M. le Roux, Leslie, 16/4/1985 (1948-1952). Mrs. J. Bekker, Bulge River, 28/11/1984 (1939-1945).

[167] '...the policy that is followed, is designed to make daughters from Christian families feel at home.' *Die Voorligter*, May 1950, pp.16-21.

[168] 'If you were present they expected that you should attend the service.' Mrs. A. Hugo, Zebediela, 2/4/1985 (1952). Mrs. A. Biddulph, Naboomspruit, 3/4/1985 (1941-1943).

main reward for adhering to the rules throughout this period remained the opportunity to stay at Zebediela and earn money.

The estate also offered other lower-level rewards though. Since the majority of young women came from farms, the entertainment and social contact that Zebediela provided constituted relatively big attractions. This included, in particular, the dances held on Saturday nights.[168] These informal dances occasionally boasted the presence of members of the management.[170] They always attended the big dances though, like the 'one millionth case' dance.[171] An orchestra was brought from Pretoria for these events.[172] At the more casual gatherings local men, and sometimes women, provided the music. At one stage a resident orchestra apparently existed, somewhat wishfully called the 'Naughty Naughties'.[173] In the forties when management organised other entertainment on Saturday nights, dances sometimes took place on Wednesday nights.[174]

For a variety of reasons, some women preferred not to dance. Very often this had to do with the social distance that some women perceived between themselves and those who appeared to be better off. 'Ons het natuurlik nie gaan dans nie. Ons het gevoel daardie dames is te deftig

---

[168] In 1940 the manager stated that he intended to continue the 'customary informal dance on Saturday nights'. U.W., C.P.S.A., Z.C., Memo from the manager on the 1940 Valencia season, 14/8/1940.

[170] Mrs. E. Barnard, Bulge River, 27/11/1984 (1937-1938). Mrs. A. Greyling, Zebediela, 12/2/1985 (1930-1951). In a 'total institution', according to Goffman, institutionalised practices such as the annual party where staff and inmates mixed socially, established a degree of joint commitment to institutional development and some sympathetic identification between the two groups. Goffman, *Asylums*, pp.90-94.

[171] Mrs. E. Lamont, Potgietersrust, 12/2/1985 (1941-1953).

[172] Mrs. E. Johnson, Alberton, 7/3/1985 (1939-1941).

[173] Mrs. J. Horn, Vredefort, 3/3/1985 (1938-1941).

[174] An undated photograph in my possession shows large numbers of women dancing with each other, presumably because of a shortage of men.

aangetrek.'[175] Although her sisters 'het lateraan begin leer', another could not dance because 'ons was nooit op danse en goed gewees nie'.[176]

Occasionally the hostel dwellers held concerts or saw plays performed by travelling drama groups.[177] In the late thirties the estate began to show regular weekly films. In 1940 two films were put on every week, presumably on Wednesdays and Saturdays. Before the end of the Second World War management reduced this to a single presentation every week, ostensibly because this 'was te veel, die breuk in die middel van die week vir baie dames, want hulle werk hard'.[178] By the end of the forties 'bioscope' alternated with dances on Saturday nights. The popular films of the day arrived from Johannesburg. These films were distributed by African Film Productions, a subsidiary company in the Schlesinger Corporation. Unfortunately no list remained of the films showed. An interviewee recalled though that 'wat ons baie van gehou het was Tarzan prente wat hulle vir ons gewys het. Hulle het vir ons goeie prente ook gewys...wat vir ons daardie tyd vreeslike vermaak was'.[179] 'Dis die eerste plek waar ek Errol Flynn gesien het. Ek het doodverlief geraak op hom.'[180]

---

[175] 'We, of course, did not dance. We felt that those women were dressed too smartly.' Mrs. R. du Preez, Krugersdorp, 11/6/1985 (1931-1936).

[176] '...later learnt how', '...we never attended things like dances'. Mrs. E. Johnson, Alberton, 7/3/1985 (1939-1941).

[177] *Serie Marais* , 31 May 1950, pp.3-6. Mrs. S. Heystek, Warmbaths, 4/4/1985 (1939-1963). Mrs. A. Greyling, Zebediela, 12/2/1985 (1930-1951).

[178] '...break in the middle of the week was too much for many women who worked hard'. Mr. A. van Blerk, Potgietersrust, 12/6/1984 (1935-1975).

[179] '...we enjoyed the Tarzan movies that they showed us very much. They also showed us good films...which at the time, we found very entertaining'. Mrs. A. van Zyl, Potgietersrust, 12/2/1985 (1938-1945).

[180] 'It was there that I saw Errol Flynn for the first time. I fell madly in love with him.' Mrs. M. Thorolt, Westonaria, 26/2/1985 (1939). Management was clearly aware of the social control value of films. In 1950, for example, 'Wild West' films were deemed unsuitable for the black workforce. These films were said to display white actors in violent roles, and it was felt that 'the influence of propaganda

In addition to this entertainment the hostel provided both a chance to be part of a close-knit community of women and opportunities to meet men.[181] Young men who worked at the estate or who came from nearby towns, frequented the dances. The matron allowed these male visitors in the hostel on Wednesday evenings, where they just visited or played games (of the organised variety!) with their female friends. On Sundays couples went for walks in the orchards or sat down to chat in the gardens, the so-called 'kombersparade'.[182] Parental injunctions restrained some of the younger women from joining in these pleasures though. 'My mammie het vir my gese ek moet saam met niemand gaan nie, tensy dit my broers is of familie wat ek ken.'[183]

These social events made Zebediela an attractive place to live, and in fact 'positive rewards seem necessary if long-range, sustained, personal effort is to be obtained'. Nevertheless, 'fear of penalisation seems adequate to prevent the individual from performing certain acts'.[184] In the hostel only two forms of punishment existed for

---

such as this is not conducive to conditions of social stability such as we are attempting to build up at Zebediela'. U.W., C.P.S.A., Z.C., File Abh 3.2, Notice on behalf of the Estate Secretary on 'Native Bioscope', 20/4/1950. Couzens studied a similar use of films, where the Chamber of Mines financed a scheme in the mid twenties so that 'clean, wholesome pictures were being shown regularly in each of the great compounds', in an attempt to 'moralise leisure time'. Couzens, T. 'Moralizing Leisure Time: The Transatlantic Connection and Black Johannesburg, 1918-1936', *in* Marks, S. and Rathbone, S. (Eds.) *Industrialisation and Social Change in South Africa* (London 1982), p.321.

[181] An interviewee explained that the hostel, where all the doors of dormitories led to an inner courtyard, created ''n heerlike warm soort van gemeentetjie'. '...a wonderfully warm little congregation'. Mrs. C. G. Ferreira, Johannesburg, 25/3/1985 (1939-1941).

[182] '...blanket parade'. Mrs. A. Bodenstein, Springs, 13/9/1984 (1938-1940).

[183] 'My mother told me not to go out with anybody except my brothers or relatives known to me.' Mrs. M. Thorolt, Westonaria, 26/2/1985 (1939). Another interviewee commented that 'daar het lelike dinge ook maar plaasgevind'. '...ugly things also took place'. Mrs. A. Lotter, Bulge River, 11/2/1985 (1938). Unfortunately she did not say what these 'ugly things' were, perhaps out of modesty or loyalty.

[184] Goffman, *Asylums*, p.164.

offenders, verbal abuse and dismissal. The matron reprimanded wrong-doers. 'Ek kan nie onthou dat hulle jou kon straf nie. Hulle sou seker met jou geraas het.'[185] 'Dan praat hulle mooi met haar, en se, "Hier laat ons nie slordigheid toe nie". Dit het definitief gehelp.'[186]

Such reprimands worked because it contained the threat of dismissal. A number of transgressions carried the penalty of discharge without notice. 'Meisies wat hulle nie in die kamer goed gedra het nie, is teruggestuur na hulle huise.'[187] 'Ons het een huis toe gestuur omdat sy so deur die vensters geklim het, buite gaan rondloop het.'[188] 'As jy met ander dinge nie gehoor het nie soos uitgegaan het sonder om af te teken, of dalk weggeslip het, dan sou hulle jou defnitief huistoe gestuur het.'[189] Unmarried women who became pregnant were also sent home.[190] In a few instances pregnant women did work there as the estate increasingly took in married women from the late thirties on.

---

[185] 'I cannot recall that they were able to punish you. They would probably have scolded you.' Mrs. A. Grobler, Steynsrus, 4/3/1985 (1937-1939).

[186] 'They had a friendly word with her, and told her that, "Here we do not allow slovenliness." It certainly helped.' Mrs. J. Bekker, Bulge River, 28/11/1984 (1939-1945).

[187] 'Girls who misbehaved in the dormitories were sent back to their homes.' Mrs. A. Grobler, Steynsrus, 4/3/1985 (1937-1939). Note the use of the phrase 'sent back', rather than the harsher 'dismissed'.

[188] 'We sent one home because she climbed through the windows to run around outside.' Mrs. E. Lamont, Potgietersrust, 12/2/1985 (1941-1953).

[189] 'If you did not take notice on other matters by for instance leaving without signing out, or perhaps by slipping away, they would definitely have sent you home.' Mrs. J. Bekker, Bulge River, 28/11/1984 (1939-1945). Mrs. A. Grobler, Steynsrus, 4/3/1985 (1937-1939). Mrs. A. Biddulph, Naboomspruit, 3/4/1985 (1941-1943). Mrs. M. M. le Roux, Leslie, 16/4/1985 (1948-1952). Mrs. A. Hugo, Zebediela, 2/4/1985 (1952).

[190] Mrs. M. Thorolt, Westonaria, 26/2/1985 (1939). Mrs. C. G. Ferreira, Johannesburg, 25/3/1985 (1939-1941). Mrs. B. Barendse, Roodepoort, 11/6/1985 (1949-1963).

By the time management had built its new Hostel in 1938, it also faced a growing shortage of labour. This affected the function of dismissal as a threat. In 1949 for instance, management sacked a woman 'daar sy nie die Hostel reels wou gehoorsaam nie'.[191] Over time circumstances may nevertheless have forced administrators to extend the tolerance level beyond which management dismissed workers. This explanation would have accounted for the recollection of an interviewee that 'dit ons uit die staanspoor op die hart gedruk is dat indien ons enige van die reels sou oortree, ons summier afgedank kon word', yet without remembering a single occasion on which this actually happened.[192] This could have indicated how efficacious this threat actually was in keeping everybody in line. In the absence of conclusive evidence this can only remain a tentative suggestion though.

Issues of discipline and punishment focuses attention on the role of staff members in the structure of control in the hostel.[193] I. W. Schlesinger who, until his death in 1949, remained chairman of the company that established and owned Zebediela, only visited the property once or twice a year. On these occasions workers only saw him in the packhouse. Similarly, P. J. Quin, the Estate Manager, had little to do with the daily functioning of the hostel, although the matron reported recalcitrants to him for dismissal. In 1938 the Packhouse Manager assumed the role of 'koshuisvader' when he and his wife moved into the hostel which, manage-

---

[191] '...because she refused to obey the Hostel rules'. U.W., C.P.S.A., Z.C., File Abj 1, Letter from the Estate Secretary to Mrs. G. A. M. Nothnagel of Middelburg, 6/4/1949, about the dismissal of her granddaughter.

[192] '...it was pressed upon us from the start that if we transgressed any of the rules we would be summarily dismissed'. Mrs. J. Horn, Vredefort, 3/3/1985 (1938-1941). Also letter to A. van Niekerk from Mrs. A. Erasmus from Thabazimbi, 28/2/1985 (1939-1940).

[193] The main interest remains the woman workers rather than the staff, mostly because little work has been done on the attitudes and proclivities of the latter.

ment argued, 'should improve supervision of the Packhouse appreciably'.[194] His wife, the matron, dealt mostly with hostel matters though.

Interviewees often joked in ironic terms about the people who filled these positions. Schlesinger became ''n ou kort Joodjie'.[195] Another asked 'kan ou Schlesinger nie so, of kon ou Schlesinger nie dit nie'.[196] Although they hardly saw Quin, they joked about being his 'favourite'.[197] They called Piet Burger, Packhouse Manager until 1941, 'Baas Piet'.[198]

Three staff groupings had direct contact with the women, with the matron as the most important figure.[199] Her job involved constant availability to the women in her care. She inspected their rooms daily, or 'sy het sommer ingestap, en geprast met alger hier en daar'.[200] At the start of the season she moved women from rooms in which they were unhappy.[201] The matron played an intermediary role between the 'headgirls' and the manager. When the system of 'headgirls' was abolished

---

[194] U.W., C.P.S.A., Z.C., File Aa 2, Manager's Report for Week Ended 18th March 1938.

[195] '...a short little Jew'. Mrs. A. Bodenstein, Springs, 13/9/1984 (1938-1940).

[196] '...can't old Schlesinger do this, or can't old Schlesinger do that'. Mrs. R. du Preez, Krugersdorp, 11/6/1985 (1931-1936).

[197] Mrs. E. Johnson, Alberton, 7/3/1985 (1939-1941).

[198] Mrs. E. Johnson, Alberton, 7/3/1985 (1939-1941).

[199] A certain Mrs. Lamont, sister-in-law of Mrs. E. Lamont, may have been the first matron of the hostel. She later became matron of the hostel at Letaba, Zebediela's sister estate. Mrs. Burger arrived in the early thirties, to be replaced by Mrs. E. Lamont in 1941, who remained matron until black women replaced white workers in 1953.

[200] '...she just walked in and talked to everybody'. Mrs. J. Bekker, Bulge River, 28/11/1984 (1939-1940).

[201] Mrs. A. Biddulph, Naboomspruit, 3/4/1985 (1941-1943).

at the end of the Second World War she assumed even greater contact with the women in the dormitories.[202]

According to an undated notice, probably drawn up before the occupation of the new Hostel, a 'komitee gekies deur die inwoners self, tesame met die matrone en die bestuurder van die landgoed', managed the institution.[203] One interviewee who served on this committee insisted that Quin actually appointed them to 'kyk wie doen reg en wie doen verkeerd'.[204] She also asserted that the committee did not only consist of 'headgirls'. Quite likely the boarders did have some say in the election of members.[205] The 1938 Social Welfare report stated that 'the hostel is under the control of a House Committee elected by the workers themselves, the matron being the Chair'.[206] None of the other interviewees even referred to this committee, which indicated that it did not have an overtly significant role. At some stage in the early forties management abolished the committee, arguing that 'die bykomende las op die betrokke werksters te veel geverg het'.[207]

The 'headgirls' had to exercise control over the women in their dormitories. It remains difficult to determine whether this system existed in the tents between 1926 and 1931. Probably management only in-

---

[202] Mrs. A. Hugo, Zebediela, 2/4/1985 (1952).

[203] '..committee chosen by the inhabitants themselves, together with the matron and the manager of the estate'. U.W., C.P.S.A., Z.C., File Abj 5, 'Huishoudelike Reels en Wenke', undated.

[204] '...check that everybody did the right thing and identify wrongdoers'. Mrs. A. Greyling, Zebediela, 12/2/1985 (1930-1951).

[205] Goffman argued that in a 'total institution"'self-government gave inmates the right to complain in return for a lesser degree of loyalty to the 'counter-mores' of the institution. Goffman, *Asylums*, p.73.

[206] State Archive, Department of Social Welfare, VWN, Vol. 475, File SW 69/24, Report by the Secretary of Social Welfare, entitled 'African Realty Trust Limited. Zebediela Estates, Naboomspruit', 17/6/1938.

[207] '...the additional load was too much for the workers involved'. Letter to A. van Niekerk from Mr. A. van Blerk, from Potgietersrust, 28/10/1985 (1935-1975).

stituted it after the move to the shed in 1931.[208] On the issue of the appointment of 'headgirls', the majority of interviewees assumed that they 'was seker aangestel deur die koshuisvader en -moeder'.[209] The matron insisted, however, that the women chose their own 'prefects'.[210] Another said that initially management appointed people to the job, but after the women complained about it they were allowed to elect their own 'headgirls'.[211] The end of the Second World War saw the abolition of these structures of supervision. Thereafter the matron assumed direct control over the dormitories.

The responsibilities of women in these supervisory roles varied. At night they had to see to it that the lights went off at the correct time, and that everybody kept quiet.[212] In the mornings they had to ensure that all the beds were properly made up before the matron came to do inspection, and even recalled people from work to come and clean up when necessary.[213] They reported illness in their dormitories and dealt with any problem on which women approached them.[214] 'Headgirls' also acted as mediators between arguing parties.[215]

---

[208] This happened more at less at the time that shortages reduced the number of inhabitants in every room to half. See above, pp.8-9.

[209] '...must have been appointed by the hostel father and mother'. Mrs. E. Johnson, Alberton, 7/3/1985 (1939-1941).

[210] Mrs. E. Lamont, Potgietersrust, 12/2/1985 (1941-1953).

[211] Mrs. A. Derksen, Pretoria, 27/8/1984 (1935-1939). This is another instance where the paucity of documentary evidence proved a considerable handicap.

[212] Mrs. A. S. van Niekerk, Pretoria, 2/10/1984 (1939-1941). Mrs. K. Grobler, Boksburg, 12/9/1984 (1941). Mrs. J. Horn, Vredefort, 3/3/1985 (1938-1941).

[213] Mrs. J. Bekker, Bulge River, 28/11/1984 (1939-1945). Mrs. M. Thorolt, Westonaria, 26/2/1985 (1939).

[214] Mrs. E. Lamont, Potgietersrust, 12/2/1985 (1941-1953). Mrs. M. Thorolt, Westonaria, 26/2/1985 (1939).

[215] Mrs. K. Botha, Boksburg, 12/9/1984 (1941). Mrs. E. Johnson, Alberton, 7/3/1985 (1939-1941). Arguments broke out about boyfriends (Mrs. S. Heystek, Warmbaths, 4/4/1985 (1939-1961), Mrs. A. Greyling, Zebediela, 12/2/1985 (1930-1951)), because women insisted that the

'Headgirls' played an ambiguous role as people placed in positions of authority over other hostel dwellers. In response, the attitudes of their fellow workers towards them, varied. Some saw them as burdened with considerable responsibilities, appointed to the job because it appeared as if 'hulle meer dissipline kon uitoefen, want so 'n groep meisies is partykeer ontverantwoordelik'.[216] In fact, 'ons het altyd so gemaak dat as hulle verjaar, dan kry hulle 'n klein geskenkie onder die kopkussing'.[217] At the same time, 'headgirls' reported infringements of the rules to the matron. This made them objects of resentment. Although some undoubtedly felt that 'wat hulle daar gedoen het, was vir ons goed', they nevertheless questioned 'hoekom sit hulle daai persoon aan, hoekom sit hulle nie 'n ander persoon aan nie?'[218] An interviewee described how one such 'prefect' enraged her by giving her an unnecessary scolding about the neatness of her cupboard. She told the particular 'headgirl' that 'ek gaan nou na ons matrone toe, en sy moet kom wys hier by ons kas, dan sal ek tevrede wees. Maar toe is ek blind van kwaadheid.'[219]

According to the matron, Mrs. E. Lamont, 'headgirls' received no payment for their duties. 'Hulle het dit sommer uit hulle eie gedoen.'[220]

---

windows remained open (Mrs. J. Horn, Vredefort, 3/3/1985 (1938-1941)), about clothes and accusations of petty theft (Mrs. M. Thorolt, Westonaria, 26/2/1985 (1939), Mrs. L. Smit, Roedtan, 3/4/1985 (1950-1953)).

[216] '...they were able to enforce better discipline, because such a group of girls were sometimes irresponsible'. Mrs. A. van Zyl, Potgietersrust, 12/2/1985 (1938-1945).

[217] '...they always found little gifts under their pillows on their birthdays.' Mrs. E. Johnson, Alberton, 7/3/1985 (1939-1941).

[218] '...whatever they did was acceptable as far as we were concerned', '...why did they appoint that person, why did they not appoint another'. Mrs. C. G. Ferreira, Johannesburg, 25/3/1985 (1939-1941).

[219] 'I am going to see our matron and I will only be satisfied if she comes and judges this cupboard. But by then I was blind with rage.' Mrs. S. Heystek, Warmbaths, 4/4/1985 (1939-1961). Unfortunately the outcome of this fracas is not known.

[220] 'They simply did it for its own sake.' Mrs. E. Lamont, Potgietersrust, 12/2/1985 (1941-1953).

'Jy het nie eens 'n dankie gekry nie. Jy het maar net aangegaan, soos jou manier maar is.'[221] There may have been some additional advantages to the job though. Once the two-tiered beds came into use in 1931, women who performed these functions had entire sets of beds to themselves.[222] The Inspector of Factories reported in 1939 that they only paid half board for their supervisory services.[223] Finally, the job involved some status if their fellow workers perceived of them as people 'in wie hulle vertroue het'.[224]

A discussion of the conditions which women experienced at Zebediela can give the impression that the estate simply acted on and manoeuvred its employees in ways that suited management's needs. Instead, these workers in turn played a role in shaping their environment, while gaining some sense of control over their daily life within the confines of the hostel. The fact that most of the interviewed women recalled their days at Zebediela with considerable fondness, cannot be disregarded. 'Dit was swaar dae, maar ons het baie lekker dae gehad.'[225] 'Sulke swaar jare wil jy eintlik vergeet. Maar as jy daaraan terugdink, dit was lekker dae.'[226]

---

[221] 'You did not even get a word of thanks. You simply carried on in your own way.' Mrs. A. Greyling, Zebediela, 12/2/1985 (1930-1951).

[222] State Archive, Department of Social Welfare, VWN, Vol. 475, File SW 69/24, Report by the Secretary of Social Welfare, entitled 'African Realty Trust Limited. Zebediela Estates, Naboomspruit', 17/6/1938.

[223] State Archive, Department of Social Welfare, VWN, Vol. 295, File SW 47/13/44, Report by the Inspector of Factories on 'Klagte - Zebediela Estate', 28/6/1939.

[224] '...in whom they had confidence'. Mrs. A. Lotter, Bulge River, 11/2/1985 (1938).

[225] 'Those were difficult times, but we also had many good days.' Miss L. Byrne, Zebediela, 14/6/1984 (1939-1975).

[226] 'You prefer to forget such difficult times. But if you think back, those were good days.' Mrs. L. Smit, Roedtan, 3/4/1985 (1950-1953).

The relative shortness of the time that they lived in the hostel influenced women's ability to adapt to life in that institution. Women who had relatives employed by the estate in permanent positions or had family that lived nearby, left the hostel virtually every weekend. Even the less fortunate ones had a seasonally determined limit to their stay. The shorter the period of continuous time spent in the institution, the more likely a program could have been maintained that participants accepted.[227] These workers' need of, and ability to secure, other jobs, enhanced or undermined the likelihood of them fitting into the system. In the case of the very needy, 'was jy miskien bang gewees hulle se, "Wel, as jy kom kla, dan hoef jy nie meer te kom nie".'[228]

Devising their own 'informal' rules of conduct constituted one way in which women adjusted to living their every day in close contact with others. 'Daar is sulke reels wat ons so ondermekaar (gehad het)...om dit darem vir 'n mens makliker te maak.'[229]

Women also used the social opportunities provided by the estate for more than just entertainment. Netball, for instance, did not only keep everybody busy and healthy. When they began to play this game in the early forties , participants got a chance to meet more people when they played against outside teams. 'Volkspele' (folk dancing) constituted a pastime particularly loaded with political overtones in the late thities

---

[227] Zebediela was not an 'ordinary' factory, partly because of the seasonal nature of employment. The short duration of the season gave women a clear view of the end of their stay in the hostel. This provided a stark contrast with the inmates of Goffman's asylums and other 'total institutions'. Goffman, *Asylums*, p.67.

[228] '...perhaps you were scared that they will say, "Well, if you came here to complain, then you do not have to come again".' Mrs. C. G. Farreira, Johannesburg, 25/3/1985 (1939-1941).

[229] 'We had rules amongst each other...to make things easier.' Mrs. A. van Niekerk, Pretoria, 2/10/1984 (1939-1941). She stated that women tacitly accepted that nobody was to occupy the limited number of bathrooms, toilets and washing facilities for too long. These were clearly the areas where the estate did not make adequate provision.

and forties. Some 'het nie daarvan gehou nie, daarvoor gelag of so'.[230] But for others it became a form of political expression without fear of official reprimand. 'Daar was meisies wat volkspele gespeel het, wat baie bewus was van die OB's.'[231] This interviewee actually worked at Zebediela throughout the Second World War. During that period, while discussions of a political nature appears to have been formally forbidden, woman did not stop discussing these issues. They learnt that 'jy kan voor daardie een nie praat nie. As julle 'n klompie daar bymekaar sit, het julle maar gepraat en so aan, maar nie hard sodat dit uitgegaan het nie'.[232] When one woman returned from the sickbay after a short absence, other women remarked in a joking tone, 'o, jy het uitgekom uit die konsentrasiekampe uit'.[233]

The Saturday dances did not just provide the innocuous entertainment envisaged by management either. It also gave an opportunity for 'meisies wat saam met 'n ou in 'n trok gaan sit het, sommer die hele nag'.[234] Despite the strict supervision on these occasions, some young women slipped away to meet their male friends in private, even if it had to be in places

---

[230] '...did not like it, laughed about it'. Mrs. A. van Niekerk, Pretoria, 2/10/1984 (1939-1941).

[231] 'There were girls who did folk dancing, who were very aware of the Ossewabrandwag (Oxwagon Sentinel movement).' Mrs. A. van Zyl, Potgietersrust, 12/2/1985 (1938-1945).

[232] '...you should not talk within the hearing of some people. When a group sat together you talked, but not loud so that anyone else could hear'. Mrs. J. Bekker, Bulge River, 28/11/1984 (1939-1945).

[233] '...so you have returned from the concentration camps'. Mrs. C. G. Ferreira, Johannesburg, 25/3/1985 (1939-1941). This comment related the experiences of Afrikaners in the concentration camps of the Boer War with those in internment camps in the Second World War, which in turn reflected the kind of polarisation amongst Afrikaners discussed above.

[234] '...girls who wanted to spend the night with a man in a [railway] truck'. Mrs. P. Erasmus, Bulge River, 28/11/1984 (1937-1941).

as uncomfortable as railway trucks.[235] Women interviewed recalled the presence of 'dames wat verwagtend geraak het'.[236]

The opportunities for meeting men presented by these dances, was not entirely as frivolous a concern as it may seem, considering the number of women who met their future husbands at Zebediela. This made it important to dress up in fashionable clothes.[237] The women spent a great part of their free time on Saturdays on their clothes, hair and cosmetics. 'Almal was besorg oor hulle voorkoms.'[238] Partly this formed a reaction to spending so much of their working days in uniform after 1931. In a way concern about outward appearance functioned to re-affirm the personal in an institutional context. Those who did not dance acted as hairstylists to other residents with intricate hair fashions like 'goodies' and 'waves'. As Saturday approached, dancers hid their evening dresses so that on the big night non-dancers could judge 'watter een se rok is die mooiste'.[239]

---

[235] Another favourite spot was behind the orange lugboxes stacked on the veranda of the packhouse. 'Saterdagaande het ons dit altyd die "luck boxes" genoem - dan kon jy net sien hoe sit party meisies agter die "lugboxes" en vry.' 'On Saturday nights we called it "luck boxes" - you could see many women petting behind the lugboxes'. Mrs. C. M. Snyders, Alma, 14/11/1985 (1928-1933).

[236] '...women who became pregnant'. The absence of safeguards on the windows led to 'outjies in die nag wat skelm deur die venster geklim het'. '...youngsters who climbed through the windows at night'. The woman who related this, continued by saying that 'ons het dit nooit gedoen nie, want ons was susters bymekaar gewees'. '...we never did it because we sisters were together'. Mrs. K. Botha, Boksburg, 12/9/1984 (1941).

[237] A recent study argued that 'the interest which girls show in make-up, hairstyles, dress, and jewellery is often scorned by their male counterparts as a "waste of time". However, viewed in terms of their adult career expectancies it can be interpreted as the essential prerequisite for attracting and keeping "the right man"'. Rojek, C. *Capitalism and Leisure Theory* (London 1985), p.17.

[238] 'Everybody was concerned about their appearance.' Mrs. A. Botha, Steynsrus, 4/3/1985 (1937-1939).

[239] '...whose dress was the prettiest'. Mrs. E. Johnson, Alberton, 7/3/1985 (1939-1941).

In 1938 Quin noted that they had to encourage 'thrift and avoid waste of money which unfortunately takes place rather frequently'.[240] He did not explain why this was necessary. Possibly management tried to rationalise low wages with this reproach about 'unwise' spending. A private shop, owned by 'vreeslike gawe ou Jode', existed close to the hostel.[241] The owner, Mrs. Lesoes, stocked everything the Zebediela women could possibly need, both necessities and luxury goods like evening dresses, material, jewellery, 'mooimaakgoed' (cosmetics), and chocolate. Many rural women bought their first 'klaar rokkies' here.[242] The owner, 'het natuurlik baie geld gemaak, want die meisies het onnodige goed ook gekoop'.[243]

The extent to which a number of women bought goods on credit became a serious problem for the store-keeper. Some of the rural women had an enduring fear of accumulating debt - 'vir skuld is ek so bang soos die duiwel vir die slypsteen',[244] or, 'ek was bang, ek is nie daarmee grootgemaak nie'.[245] Others, however, had fewer misgivings. They 'het skuld gemaak, klere gevat wat hulle wou en so aan, en dan ontduik hulle'.[246] The shop owner reacted by boarding every passenger train that

---

[240] State Archive, Department of Social Welfare, VWN, Vol. 475, File SW 69/24, Report by the Secretary of Social Welfare, entitled 'African Realty Trust Limited. Zebediela Estates, Naboomspruit', 17/6/1938.

[241] '...very pleasant old Jews'. Mrs. P. Erasmus, Bulge River, 28/11/1984 (1937-1941).

[242] '...store bought dresses'. Mrs. J. Bekker, Bulge River, 28/11/1984 (1939-1945).

[243] '...naturally made a lot of money because the girls also bought unnecessary things'. Mrs. A. Lotter, Bulge River, 11/2/1985 (1938).

[244] '...I fear debt as much as the devil fear the grinding stone'. Mrs. A. Greyling, Zebediela, 12/2/1985 (1930-1951).

[245] '...I was afraid of it because I was not brought up with it'. Mrs. J. Bekker, Bulge River, 28/11/1984 (1939-1945).

[246] '...accumulated debts, took the clothes that they wanted, and then slipped away'. Mrs. P. Erasmus, Bulge River, 28/11/1984 (1937-1941).

left Zebediela to check that none of her debtors slipped away.[247] She also complained to the manager, but he could only admonish those women who bought extensively on credit and warned everybody against the dangers of this practice.[248]

The matron recalled that 'die meisies was partykeer nogal baie sieklik as hulle nie hard wil werk nie'.[249] Resigning from Zebediela, however, constituted perhaps the most drastic form of resistance. The economic world outside the Estate conditioned this response to a large extent though. Women left because of grievances about the uncomfortable sleeping arrangements, the poor food, hard work, inadequate pay, and homesickness. Others secured better jobs or withdrew from the labour market altogether through marriage.

This paper focused the attention on changing forms of accommodation for white women workers at the Zebediela Citrus Estate. Because these women migrated seasonally, they had to be housed at the estate. For the first few years after 1926, management accommodated the migrants in tents. Conditions were fairly primitive. They remained so after a storm forced the women to move into a big barn-like building in 1931. The inhabitants had access to few recreational facilities. As the estate's growing output required more and more workers, circumstances in the shed became increasingly crowded. To control the growing number of women, management appointed 'headgirls' from amongst the workers to assist the matron. The late thirties, however, presented a watershed for Zebediela. Fewer women chose to work at the estate. It made it even more important for manage-

---

[247] Mrs. P. Erasmus, Bulge River, 28/11/1984 (1937-1941). Mrs. A. Greyling, Zebediela, 12/2/1985 (1930-1951).

[248] U.W., C.P.S.A., Z.C., File Abj 5, 'Huishoudelike Reels en Wenke', undated. Mrs. P. Erasmus, Bulge River, 28/11/1984 (1937-1941). Mrs. A. Hugo, Zebediela, 2/4/1985 (1952).

[249] '...sometimes the girls were very ill if they did not feel like working hard'. Mrs. E. Lamont, Potgietersrust, 12/2/1985 (1941-1953).

ment to attract and to keep workers. This imperative led to the building of a modern new Hostel. The Hostel was divided into twelve dormitories. In each of these, 'headgirls' continued to maintain discipline. Workers still lived in crowded conditions with little privacy. The new arrangement did prove more comfortable though. Management also provided the workers with more recreational facilities. Inhabitants continued to pay 1s. 6d. per day for board. Over the years this represented a growing loss for the estate.[250]

Partly Zebediela suffered form a growing labour crisis because more options for employment opened up for white women. In turn this affected management's ability to use the threat of dismissal to control workers. Control was not just this one-dimensional though. Instead, management enforced discipline by playing on the customary value system held by many of these Afrikaner women. Those values emphasised obedience to authority, conformity, and assigned a particular role to women. An even more subtle process was also at work though. Management did not foist these values on the women workers. Rather, these women internalised particular norms and used them as guidelines for their own behaviour. Control was therefore not just applied externally. Instead, Zebediela witnessed a process whereby these white women disciplined not only themselves, but also their peers.

For a few years after the Second World War ended, management struggled on with white workers. In the Hostel each woman benefited by having more space available. The declining numbers living in the Hostel even allowed management to abolish the use of 'headgirls' as a mechanism of control. The estate's labour problem simply grew worse though. Finally in 1953,

---

[250] In 1944 the Manager vetoed an attempt to minimise costs by increasing board. U,W., C.P.S.A., Z.C., Memo from the manager to company messo from the Manager to headquarters on 'Packers and Graders Wages - Messing', 1/3/1944. By 1953 the deficit on the Hostel amounted to £2 887.3.10., U.W., C.P.S.A., Z.C., 'Packhouse and Production Costs, 1953'.

black women replaced these white workers as packers and graders. This change led to a fundamental shift in Zebediela's provision of accommodation, which saw black women housed not in the vacant Hostel, but in separate compounds.[251]

[251] This issue falls outside the scope of this study, but a comparison with the accommodation of white women would be a fascinating study that could reveal a great deal about the particular and different forms of control to which black and white women workers were subjected, and the interaction between class, race and gender.