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Domestic racial interaction in later nineteenth century South Africa

Simon Dagut

I

This paper is primarily concerned with the ways in which white men and women - mainly the latter - interacted with their African, coloured and Indian domestic servants in the second half of the nineteenth century.[1] Its second concern is to argue that the study of this (and related) topics is of considerable. importance in the causation of the oppressive forms which South African states and social orders have taken.

The topic of this paper is situated at the intersection of two areas which have been largely neglected in South African historiography. While the attitudes and experiences of "ordinary" African people in nineteenth and twentieth century South Africa have received considerable (and distinguished) attention in the last twenty years, comparatively little "history from below" has been written about whites,[2] whether "Boer" or "Briton." Equally, while nineteenth century European, American and British empire domestic service has been fairly extensively examined, this is a relatively neglected area of South African historiography.[3]

Recently, of course, some historians of South Africa have turned their interest to discourse. In other words, the idea has begun to be taken seriously that language is not simply a transparent medium of expression. As a British practitioner of this variety of history puts it "the category of 'experience'... is not in fact prior to and constitutive of language but is actively constituted by language...."[4] It may be that the ways in which people understand and explain their intentions and experiences, the very words and phrases which are used, possess some causal momentum of their own. There are excellent reasons for believing that this may be so, reasons which do not require obedience to the Saussurean serpent nor an ingestion of the Derridean apple. Even if we hold to a referential theory of meaning so sober as to be naive, it is still the case that some "distinctions can hardly be said to exist in the world."[5] This simple linguistic truth leaves a great deal of room for the influence of the connotation of words to operate like a collective unconscious on the frequently unreflective flow of social language. It does not commit us to Derridean scepticism or a rejection of the importance of material facts.

The work of South African discourse historians has been largely characterised by an interest in formal and official statements on the "native question" and "native administration."[6] In fact, it is not completely innocent of the charge that what is actually being produced is contributions to the history of formally articulated ideas. It is entirely possible, and may in fact enable us to take greater advantage of the perspective proposed by discourse theory, to attempt a combination of a belief in the historical importance of "ordinary" people with the discourse historians' belief that the language of the social world is of genuine explanatory significance. What will be attempted here is a reading of the memoirs, letters, diaries and pot-boiling novels of later nineteenth century South African whites. This reading will take place with an eye to uncovering informal but persistent

habits of language and thought[7] on domestic servants. These, it will be argued, significantly determined white employers' interactions with their servants. What is more, they contributed to the ongoing creation and sustaining of the oppressive racial order.

II

As Cock pointed out in her study of the nauseatingly exploitative conditions under which domestic servants worked in the Eastern Cape in the 1970s,

> The role of the domestic worker is important in socialisation into the dominant ideological order. Often it is the only significant interracial contact whites experience, and they experience this relationship in extremely asymmetrical terms. Many white South African children learn the attitudes of racial domination from domestic relationships with servants and "nannies."[8]

Her study of the institution of domestic service describes a time which may well come to be seen as the "dark hour before the dawn" when the apartheid state appeared to have crushed all forms of resistance and racist beliefs had least competition for white minds. What we are presented with is a picture of an end-state.

At least for the whites of Grahamstown and Albany, "significant interracial contact" had been narrowed down to a point of extreme functionalisation and dehumanisation of servants. Gordon's study of employer-servant relations in Johannesburg, while suggesting more strongly than Cock's that some servant-employer relationships could be experienced as pleasant and mutually supportive, agreed that "most employers appeared to preserve a remoteness from the realities of their servants' lives."[9] Equally significantly, although Cock's sample of female employers was "sharply critical of servants in general," 98 percent were "satisfied with their present servant."[10] This satisfaction with the service received, combined with a comprehensive dehumanisation of their servants was not something which white middle class South Africans had always enjoyed. It was something which had been achieved.

For the 1820 settlers, for instance, their new African servants were very far from being effectively dehumanised. Cock cites the Phillips family, describing them as "a prime example of benevolent employers," whose letters expressed a genuine affection for their African child servant.[11] It is notorious that the fond language of the Phillipses was most atypical of the attitudes of Albany Settlers. Much more representative was the violent contempt for his servant expressed by Frederick Rex, who wrote that he "was in want of a flogging now that his belly is full,"[12] or the opinion of the famous Jeremiah Goldswain that even the most long-serving of his employees were fundamentally untrustworthy and dangerous.[13]

Cock argues that what these divergent opinions have in common is more important than what separates them. Both the amiable Phillipses and their less humane and more numerous neighbours regarded their servants very much as subordinates, often as children, but always as their inferiors. This was not merely as a consequence of the relative powerlessness of African people on the frontier (particularly after the millennial cattle killing,) but also because of beliefs about their personal and moral qualities. "[Servants'] relationships with their masters were consequently marked by an extreme inequality."[14] This is, of course, an accurate analysis, but perhaps it does not go far enough. "Subordination" is a rather wide term, and is used by Cock in a way which could imply that it is a state rather than a process which requires to be sustained by the superordinate. What is attempted here is an examination of the ways in which this process worked.

What is centrally important about these opinions from the point of view of this paper is that neither the Phillipses' "little Sabrina," nor the man Rex intended to flog, nor Goldswain's threatening "kaffers" had been effectively dehumanised or functionalised. Firstly, close personal attachment is very obviously the opposite of these. Secondly, a threat may be considered inhuman, but it is hardly functional to the threatened. Thirdly, it does not require one to be a Foucauldian to realise that the language of physical punishment is a very personal one.[15] Examples of all these former sorts of views can be found in the somewhat later period with which this paper is concerned, and will be provided. However, these examples will not be employed simply to demonstrate that considerable continuity existed between the racial attitudes of the settlers of 1820 and the English and Dutch speakers of the second half of the century. A close study of these sorts of statement is important to the analysis of the powerful, informal language of servant-keepers' racism. Such a study shows that expressions of this type are only the starting-point of an examination of the language and practice of white employers. These expressions of praise and affection or complaint and violence are located within a broader general demand for obedient, reliable, efficient, cheap and deferential service - for functionalisation and dehumanisation.

A later version of Goldswain's view of African servants as a potential threat is to be found in the work of the popular novelist Bertrand Mitford, who came to South Africa in 1874. He wrote a series of hyper-masculine novels of romance and adventure, of which the most autobiographical[16] is quoted from here:

> Marshall seems in a bit of a funk. He told me a couple of yarns to-day about fellows whose servants had warned them to clear. I should think that trick's played out, though." "Dunno. You'll still find people to believe in it. The niggers, of course, make it pay. Jack, in his capacity of old and faithful servant, warns his Baas [that an attack on his farm is planned.] His Baas believes him. Henceforth Jack has a high old time of it, and, provided he is careful in

> the yarn he invents, may go on to the end of the chapter. For my part, I don't believe in any nigger's fidelity. You can't trust one of them.[17]

Of course, a serious threat to life and property was fairly frequently presented to Eastern Cape and Natal settlers throughout the nineteenth century by farm servants transformed into warriors. What is significant about the way this threat is interpreted in Mitford's text is that the military danger is made worse for the cowardly "Marshall" and his ilk by their foolishness in allowing themselves to trust and thus, implicitly, to humanise their servants.

A similar point applies to the two other ways in which servants were experienced as a physical threat by their employers. As identified in Van Onselen's "Witches of Suburbia," these were poisoning and the varieties of sexual activity collectively glossed as "black peril" in the minds of the majority of whites.[18] Neither a poisoner nor a potential sexual partner has been successfully functionalised and, of course, a lover is the antithesis of dehumanised servant.

On the basis of the evidence consulted for this paper, these phenomena seem largely to have been confined to urban areas and to the later part of the period. Large-scale "black peril" anxiety may, in fact, have been a Johannesburg speciality. Of course, both probably did occur elsewhere and at other times, but certainly less frequently. There was, for instance, a belief held among the whites of the western Cape from at least the 1850s, and probably much earlier, that Malays were capable of concocting love potions and subtly deadly poisons, though not specifically in the context of domestic service.[19] However, the only reference to poisoning encountered in the primary sources consulted for this paper refers to a suspected case which occurred in Pretoria in 1893:

> Mrs Nel held her "At Home" last Wednesday, and it is conjectured that the Tottie scullery maid, from some feeling of petty revenge, introduced rough-on-rats into the tea, sipped by the ladies present, the result being severe illness to all the partakers, and sad to say, the death of Mrs Nel's daughter Rosie....[20]

Here, the dangers of too complete a trust are emphasised. While this may very well be an over-reading of the evidence, there is also a hint of bad management on the unfortunate Nel's part. What, after all, had caused the scullery maid's "feeling of petty revenge?"

Outside Johannesburg, evidence of "black peril" anxiety has been equally hard to find. There is no mention of this anxiety, whether overt or veiled, in the vast majority of sources consulted. It is probably significant that the most explicit statements of this sort of fear were found in novels written by men. In Mitford's A Romance of the Cape Frontier, an inefficient and disrespectful farm servant, having undergone the familiar

transformation from servant to warrior, meets his employer in the bush and threatens him thus:

> When the land is red with the blood of the abelungu, and their sheep and cattle are in our kraals....Then the warriors of the Amaxosa will have great sport in hunting out the last of the whites from their hiding-places; and all the white men will be dead; but there will be plenty of white women - ha! ha! ha! - plenty of white women....[21]

The second form of negative characterisation of servants identified by Cock involved the language and practice of physical violence. As Van Onselen has pointed out, a frequent tactic in the racial language of white English speaking South Africans is to help "forge and fashion an oppressive present and then, in retrospect, attribut[e] it to an Afrikaner past."[22] Possibly, Crais's recent argument that British settlers and administrators preferred power-as-knowledge to power over the body is merely a sophisticated re-statement of this tactic employed by English-speakers.[23] There are some indications that this may be so. There can be no doubt that some English settlers were regularly violent to their servants (and other African, coloured or Indian people with whom they interacted) or imagined that this was a desirable state of affairs. For instance, the violence of the largely British immigrant transport riders in the Eastern Cape of the 1860s was deplored in these terms by a British immigrant journalist:

> I regret to say I cannot join in the conversation. I am indeed rather disgusted at it.[A Dutch] farmer has been relating to them the manner in which he tied up one of his Kafir servants this morning and flogged him with a yoke-strap. The story seems to interest the karweyers so mightily that for the next twenty minutes each has a similar exploit to relate - the one who by his own confession has behaved the most brutally being most applauded and laughed at.[24]

In her recollections (almost certainly written during the pre-1914 "black peril" scare on the Witwatersrand) a Mrs Stone remarked of Kimberley in the early 1880s that "one never knew in those days what fear of a native meant - the white man was his boss & if he did anything wrong then his boss gave him a thrashing." She and her husband owned a store much patronised by mine labourers. They preferred to punish shoplifters whom they caught by making them "pay besides getting a jolly good thrashing from the boss," rather than reporting them to the police.[25] This informal and violent course of action supports the point that some English settlers were just as violent as their Dutch-speaking contemporaries.

Equally, in the much more sparse nineteenth century popular literature in Cape Dutch and proto-Afrikaans, most references to servants (at least among the few sources which could be discovered) are entirely functional. Those which are more detailed do not differ markedly in tone from their English

equivalents. One particular case even indicated a high degree of trust. The owner of an inn in the Eastern Transvaal goldfields is depicted as having given "his major-domo, an old coloured-Hottentot, a sovereign and instructed him to go to goldfields to buy medicines."[26]

Despite these qualifications, the evidence, although it tends to the anecdotal, does appear to suggest that Dutch speaking servant-keepers behaved with more personal violence towards their servants than immigrants from, or strongly influenced by, Britain. To this extent, Crais's Foucauldian argument for the earlier period is supported.

In the early 1860s, the same journalist who deplored the violence of English transport-riders, published a description of what he considered to be a typical Boer "patriarch." It is a balanced and sympathetic portrait, but does accuse "the Boer" of "tyranny... towards the natives of the soil," and, in particular of being regularly inclined to beat his shepherds for lack of vigilance.[27] In the mid-1870s, Harriet Roche reported the existence of an individual she referred to as the "Saucy Dutchman of Heidelburg," to whom the people of the town brought their servants to be "given a good tanning."[28] Of course, both English and Dutch employers could have availed themselves of this service, but it significant that the specialist was a "Dutchman." Writing in the early 1880s, Sarah Heckford, who was not herself particularly reluctant to have her servants beaten, expressed revulsion at what she had heard of Boer cruelty.[29] In 1893, one Francois Retief, a wine farmer of Groot Drakenstein, stated that he thrashed his labourers in preference to attempting to use the courts against them.[30] In 1897, the proto-Afrikaans journal, Ons Klyntji, published what was intended as an amusing fable, in which a farmer holds a religious service for his farm servants.

> In the room in which he addressed them... the little hottentot sat on the dung, doing all sorts of mischievous tricks. This made the farm servants laugh. When they did, the farmer took his sjambok (oxhide whip) and quieted them. Soon, they laughed again, and again the master went among them with the sjambok.[31]

In general, as the language of the Eastern Province Magazine's reporter suggests, English-speaking employers seem to have beaten their servants less frequently than their Dutch equivalents. When incidents of physical violence were related, they were often (as we have seen) explicitly disapproved, especially if they were attributed to Dutch-speakers. If not, they were elaborately justified. When the impeccably enlightened Lady Lucie Duff Gordon threatened in exasperation to hit her servant, her letter to her family in England placed the incident in a detailed context of rationalisation and self-exculpation:

> We have got a new "boy" (all coloured servants are "boys", -a remnant of slavery), and he is the type of the nigger slave. A thief, a liar, a glutton, a drunkard - but you can't resent it; he has a naïf, half-foolish, half-knavish

> buffoonery, a total want of self-respect, which disarms you. I sent him to the post to inquire for letters.... Jack came back spluttering threats against "dat dommed Dutchman.... me go and kick up dom'd row. What for he no give Missis letter?"&c. I begged him to be patient; on which he bonneted himself in a violent way, and started off at a pantomime walk. I told him, "Ik sal je slaan" (I'll beat you) which is the last resource. He went off into the grandest guffaw I ever beheld, and was most anxious to fetch the "sjambok"... for me to try. "Oh yah, yah, yah, I like see Missis "slaan Jack," and roars of laughter.[32]

An equally detailed context of rationalisations for mild violence to a servant was provided by Harriet Roche in a letter to her English family fifteen years later:

> Boxing Boxer's ears was a trial to me, I confess, but I came to that at last, and repeated the dose when I once discovered its efficacy. I had been before but a poor thing in his estimation. I rose... at the end of the process full fifty per cent in his estimation.... All over, a subdued air and resigned demeanour, added to a more rightly-directed activity, testified that his cure for the nonce was complete.[33]

It is hard to imagine Duff Gordon's nervous prose or Roche's rationalisation of violence (against a ten-year-old) as salutary being wrung from the pen of a speaker of Cape Dutch. English-speaking men were less squeamish, but also clothed their violence to servants in the language of exception and justification. Three of the four beatings the young missionary Robert Mullins recorded in his diary for 1859 were administered to people attempting to steal food which he required to survive in the famine-ridden Xhosa country of the millennial cattle killing. He inflicted the other beating in his capacity as schoolmaster. He preferred to deal with the misdemeanours of his servants and coloured and African fellow missionaries through the exercise of what seems to have been rather a sharp tongue.[34] The action of a recently arrived Englishman in having hit the conductor of the Cape Town-Wynberg omnibus in 1862 was described as follows:

> There is a point in every nature, however gentle, beyond which it is not safe to provoke. The long pent-up wrath of our ill-used friend now breaks forth. He is luckily provided with an elastic cane, and therewith inflicts two or three sharp strokes... the [result is that the] dusky fiend petition[s] for his one shilling and sixpence in very different tones, and the now-initiated smilingly... paying the sum requested.[35]

Violence, once again, is reluctant and has a salutary, almost educative, effect. At the other end of the period, in 1894, the murder by beating of a cattle thief by an enraged and embittered old farmer in Glanville's A Fair Colonist is subjected to lengthy exculpatory analysis and justification. In fact, it appears that

the majority of English servant keepers never employed violence as a form of control over their servants.[36]

It is probably broadly accurate to understand violence as important to, but not at the core of, the way in which later nineteenth century white employers thought of (or actually exercised control over) their servants. This may apply less to Dutch than to English-speakers. In any case, conclusions about the domestic social history of nineteenth century pre-Afrikaners will have to await the use of a wider range of sources if, in fact, such exist in any quantity. Many of the statements that follow can be applied with complete confidence only to English-speakers.

To turn to later echoes of the positive, affectionate language employed by the Phillipses in Cock's study: One instance of this is contained in the memoirs of Harriet Roche, who travelled from the eastern Transvaal goldfields to Natal with her dying husband in 1876. On this long and difficult journey, she relied totally on two coloured men, who drove their oxwagon and cared for and protected them. She established a friendly relationship with these men and believed that she owed to this,

> much of what was surely heart-service on the part of these two coloured men, when my husband, a helpless invalid, and myself, depending wholly upon their sense of kindness and honour, sadly retraced our steps from the Transvaal to Natal. They were true as steel to us then, sober and vigilant, showing at times almost a womanly sympathy for sufferings neither they nor I could do much to alleviate.[37]

Another glowing portrait of a servant is presented in a serial novel which was run in JH Hofmeyr's Zuid Afrikaansche Tijdscrift in 1878. Here, an English newcomer is informed about a faithful and respected retainer on a western Cape wine farm:

> "Who is old Japie?" asked Stuart.
> "Old Dina, the maid who takes your clothes to be washed, is his wife," said Mrs de Villiers. "She used to be a slave."
> "He," Flip went on, "was also once a slave of my grandfather's. When emancipation came, he chose to stay with my father along with a few other slaves. He has always been a very faithful servant and is still my father's right hand in everything to do with hunting. He is a great despot; if you go hunting with him, you have to do precisely what he says...."[38]

Of course, these two effusions have in common the sense of servants' subordination which Cock identified. However, whereas it appears that Sabrina's "waiting at Table" was less important than her personality to the Phillipses, it is clear that the high regard in which the Roches' servants and the imaginary ex-slave were held related directly to their loyal provision of service. For Roche, the value of what appears to have been a genuine (if rather limited) friendship with her servants was primarily that it provided excellent service when this was most needed. The

idealised servant of the idealised Cape Dutch family portrayed in JH Hofmeyr's magazine has undergone the ultimate test of loyalty in having, as it were, turned down emancipation both for himself, and it is worth noting, for his wife. His complete loyalty and efficiency as a servant is merely emphasised by the classic device of being granted a limited area of autonomy. How often is not the "gem" also "a real terror" in the minds of the servant-keeping middle class?

It is also important to note that there came a point at which a liking for a servant could interfere with the efficient provision of service. An excellent illustration of this is provided by Sally Barker Broome's memoir of life in Natal. Broome was the second wife of Sir Frederick Napier Broome, a peripatetic imperial official and Natal Colonial Secretary from 1875 to 1877.[39] She employed a mission educated young woman as a nurse-maid for her children. Broome described her in great and affectionate detail:

> We have lately added to our establishment a Kafir girl, who is a real comfort and help.... a short, fat, good-humoured damsel of fifteen years of age, but looks thirty. Regarded as a servant there is still much to be desired, in spite of the careful and excellent training she has enjoyed in the household of the Bishop of Natal; but... as a nursemaid for the baby, she is indeed a treasure of sweet temper and willingness. To be sure she did race the perambulator down a steep hill the other day, upsetting the baby and breaking the small vehicle into bits; but, still, English nursemaids do the same, and do not tell the truth about it at once, as Maria did: it was done to amuse the two children....It is also rather singular that, in spite of the extreme slowness and deliberation of [her] movements, she breaks quite as much crockery in a week as any one else would in a year; and she is so inexpressibly quaint about it all that one has neither the heart nor the command of countenance necessary to scold....[40]

The crucial point of this description is its last clause, the confession that the young servant gave Broome so much personal pleasure that she was unable to exert the discipline which might have transformed her from a protegée of the Colensos into an efficient servant. Broome simply appreciated her servant's humanity and talents too much:

> [She] ought not to be a housemaid at all. She has a thirst for knowledge which is very remarkable, and a good deal of musical talent. She speaks and reads .... Kafir, English and Dutch - with perfect fluency and facility; and is trying hard to learn to write.... Every spare moment of her time she is poring over a book; and I wish, with all my heart, that I had the time to teach her to write, and to learn Kafir from her myself....[41]

It is clear from Broome's book that she left South Africa - taking her much-loved maid with her - no less "Eurocentric" but

considerably less possessed of simple racism than when she arrived. Her first contact with African people was a visit to the exiled Langlibalele at Uitvlugt on the Cape Flats. She thought him rather like "the big monkeys at the Zoo."[42] A year later, she received a visit from the family of one of her servants, whom she (rather remarkably) showed round her house. Her tone was still patronising, but the content of her remarks had been transformed:

> I find in those whom I have come across, like my visitors of last week, so much simple dignity mixed with common sense. Their minds too seem peculiarly adapted to receive, and profit by anything like culture and civilisation, and there certainly is a better foundation on which to build up both these good things than in any other black race with which I am acquainted.[43]

This set of attitudes could not have been maintained with any comfort were Broome to have been less socially exalted or to have stayed in South Africa for very much longer. It was not merely that she was likely to have suffered the scorn and ostracism which was meted out to "negrophiles" by the white community,[44] but that the internal logic of the institution of domestic service might very well have pushed her back on to a more conventional path.[45]

It has been argued here that although fear, violence and affection were very important to the institution of domestic service, they were not central to the language and practice of white servant keepers. If they were not, what was? The short answer has been identified by both Cock and Van Onselen. The usual form of the relationship was characterised by a mingling of depersonalisation and paternalism, in which the servant was treated with considerable reserve - for instance, family circumstances and real or full names were not known - and yet in some ways like a child - "firmly and fairly."[46] To this may be added a drive towards functionalisation, in which the servant was perceived only as that which performed a series of necessary services with the maximum of regularity and efficiency and the minimum of the sort of "fuss" likely to draw attention to the servant's humanity, whether as an object of affection or of any overt method of discipline.

The question that remains to be answered is how this was achieved. Again, the broad outlines of the process are fairly well known. What took place was that the "class-based attitudes" of British (and presumably other European) servant-keepers "were transposed to the South African scene [and] quickly incorporated into a racist ideology which served to legitimise a system of domination."[47] If "ideology" is taken to mean much the same as "mentality" or "habitus" this is no doubt an accurate view, but it provides no more than an outline of the process. The details remain to be filled in.

It has also been fairly frequently argued, though not in the South African case, that the vectors of this transposition of

attitudes were most frequently women. This tendency to "blame the memsahibs" for heightening the racial tension within and, ultimately, for causing the loss of Empire began life as a sexist myth. It has, however, been incorporated in a rather more subtle way, into some feminist historical thought on colonial gender and race interaction. This interpretation does not deny the importance in this context of other changes which took place in the later nineteenth century, such as the intensifying demands of capital or the general growth in size of white colonial communities or, indeed, of the greed, racism, violence and shortsightedness of European men. However, these feminist historians have identified three ways in which white women may have made a distinctive contribution to the racism of British empire. First, it has been argued that

> In keeping with gender roles brought from Europe, managing a household and raising a family - the generational and daily reproduction of the empire - constituted... primary tasks of European women in the colonies. These activities both provided material benefits for the husband and children and helped to identify further the social boundaries between European and indigenous communities.[48]

The creation of that most praiseworthy of institutions to many minds of the nineteenth century, an "English" home,[49] almost by definition caused a heightened awareness of the great difference between this ideal and the social structures to be found in the colony. Good English homes created by good English women, this argument runs, drove out what sympathy for other cultural patterns less domestically oriented single male colonists may have possessed.

Second[50], by learning their racial attitudes largely as "madams" within the extremely unequal relationships to be found, perhaps almost universally[51], within the institution of domestic service, servant-keeping women came to hold a particularly narrow view of the social position of African people. White men may have interacted with Africans as warriors, workers or traders. White women were somewhat more likely to know them only as servants. These attitudes, forged within an institution already oppressive by its very nature, they transmitted to the men from whom they shielded the details of domesticity and to the children they raised within it.

The third way in which women may have contributed distinctively to the pattern of racial interaction in the British empire relates to the likelihood that women in nineteenth century European society in general experienced a higher level of social anxiety than men because of their subordination relative to men. This relegation to a more circumscribed and less socially powerful "sphere," it is argued, was intensified in Britain's African colonies. The settlers and administrators of Africa, since their social world rested on much less secure foundations than those of Britain itself, tended to social conservatism by the standards of "Home." At "Home" in nineteenth century Britain, in any case, a very high degree of deference and self-effacement

was expected of domestic servants.[52] The especially limited range of socially acceptable activities available to British "ladies" led to their seeking a vicarious satisfaction in the punctilious maintenance of the forms of deference which they felt were owed to them by virtue of their husbands' social positions. This expressed itself in vehement demands for the deference of subordinates and particularly that of servants.[53] This argument applies more fully to the wives of Colonial Service officials in the administrative (Nigeria, Uganda) rather than the settlement colonies (South Africa, Kenya), and to the twentieth century rather than the nineteenth. Despite all these qualifications, it is still of some relevance, as we shall see.

How then, can the accuracy of these plausible general points be properly assessed for later nineteenth century South Africa? One of the several possible steps towards the answer, that which this paper will attempt to take, is to examine the lives of some individual servant-keepers throughout the period to discover exactly in what way, and to what extent, African, coloured and Indian servants came to be defunctionalised and dehumanised in their employers' language and practice. The individuals discussed in this paper have been chosen from among approximately 60 whose memoirs, diaries or papers have been consulted with an eye to domestic racial interaction and related topics. The opinions of these individuals are among the most vividly expressed of the 60, but the opinions themselves are as "typical" and representative as those of individuals can be.

The most detailed testimony available on these topics at the start of our period is to be found in Eliza Feilden's My African Home, a long memoir of her life in Natal between 1852 and 1857, compiled from letters which she wrote to her family in England during this time.[54] Feilden came to Natal as the wife of Leyland Feilden, a younger son of an upper-middle class family, possessed of considerable capital by colonial standards. Leyland Feilden attempted (ultimately unsuccessfully) to establish large-scale pineapple, cotton and sugar production.[55] By the hints dropped throughout her book, Eliza Feilden appears to have been of equally genteel background and accustomed to a high level of domestic service in England. When attempting to teach one of her first African servants to cook, she "many a time wished I had spent an hour a day in the kitchen in England, for I felt as ignorant of cooking almost as Louisa."[56] Her lack of practical skill was mirrored by her capacity for hauteur under stress and her familiarity with the giving of orders. She responded calmly, successfully concealing her admitted fear, when confronted by a drunken and mildly belligerent male servant her husband had brought from England:

> "I think, Gudgeon, you've been [drinking] already."
> "To be sure I have, and will again," and he seated himself on a chair in the hall.
> "Go away, Gudgeon, I shall give you nothing. Set off with you directly."[57]

She also experienced, as we expect, a fairly high degree of social anxiety and discomfort throughout her time in Natal. She worried, for instance, that the housework she did would damage her well cared for middle class hands, and remarked, of a ball she attended in Durban, that some of the ladies present she would have expected to find "cleaning her uncle's windows" in England.[58] She was relieved, on leaving Natal, to return to the more rigidly ordered social world of England and on her arrival in London, her first concern was with the unfashionable appearance of her clothes after five years in Natal.[59] Her first detailed impression of Africans was patronising but not particularly unfavourable except in one vital respect:

> The Zulu Caffres are really an intelligent-looking race, shrewd, keen at bargain, cunning, and lazy. On a nearer acquaintance with their ways and persons, I am glad we can do without them for household use. They rub their bodies with any kind of grease to protect them from insects and the sun; the scent of a Caffre is perceived from afar. A dirty, rough cotton blanket is their usual wrap. I much prefer them in rude nakedness with a sort of sporran hanging before and behind, their thick dark polished mahogany skin shining in the sun. They look quite manly with firm, erect step, and an air of careless freedom.[60]

As with many recently arrived nineteenth century immigrants to South Africa, Feilden experienced a physical, visceral revulsion from Africans which, in common with many others, she attributed to a distinctive and unpleasant smell. This "smell," best understood as a shorthand for all the forms of a very considerable "culture shock," was crucial, in many cases, to the development of racist domestic interaction. It is possible to admire, as Feilden did, the "noble savage," while also wishing to remain as distant as possible from Africans in the home.

Feilden, in common with very many others, did not find it possible to retain white servants despite her visceral revulsion from close personal contact with Africans. Her first African servant, whom she hired after about six months in the colony, was "a fine, strong, tall Caffre girl from the missionaries called 'Louisa.'" Feilden discussed Louisa in great detail, on two occasions even transcribing conversations they held. Her relationship with Louisa, though never easy, was an intensely personal one. She commented in detail on Louisa's appearance, her perceived lack of "thorough" cleanliness, her domestic skills and deficiencies, her level of education and her religious convictions, especially when these last clashed with Feilden's service requirements

> She is a fine able-bodied creature, [tall,] stout and thick-set. She looks magnificent....But, though active-minded, she is very idle, spares labour on everything, is never anxious to oblige, or to do any single thing she is not ordered to set about. She loves eating as all Caffres do, and stuffs till she is stupid, and then I have to do all, instead of three parts of the work. She talks of love

> to God, but does not strive to please her mistress, and, so far as I can judge, she does not know that she is a sinner, and yet I suppose she is as good a specimen of a convert to Christianity as most of those - the accounts of whom draw tears - in books or at meetings. She went to church as usual in the afternoon, but I told her she must be back before six in the morning to make breakfast. She arrived when I was washing the breakfast things and putting them away, and expressed no regret.[61]

Feilden gave Louisa a great deal of thought. She was disconcerted by her attitudes, by her behaviour in general and in particular by what appears to have been a complete lack on Louisa's part of respectful distance and deference.

> Louisa is a strange untutored creature; she observed that I look out for my husband when I expect his return of an evening. She came to me one day saying that he was visible. I went out to look, but he was hid from sight by bushes. I stood a moment looking. Louisa came behind (she is a sort of giantess), seized me round the ankles, and lifted me in the air, to look over the bushes! I was powerless as a struggling infant in her grasp. At last she set me down with a merry laugh at my discomfiture.[62]

After three months in Feilden's service, Louisa returned to her mission station to get married, leaving Feilden with a sense of personal betrayal. This experience seems to have been crucial to the formation of Feilden's attitudes. Louisa was replaced by a series of male servants, none of whom were mission-educated and none of whom appear to have occupied Feilden's consciousness to nearly the same extent as Louisa.

The first of these, Feilden called "Ginger." She did not describe his appearance or character beyond remarking that he was "a nice, handy, good-tempered Caffre..." and along with other general remarks on the "independence" and "laziness" of Africans, claimed that "they rarely care for you excepting as it suits their interest."[63] Apart from a visit by "Ginger's" family, whom Feilden described as picturesque and childish, Ginger himself was only mentioned again purely in the context of domestic work. In general, he worked "very fairly," but interpreted his obligations too narrowly for Feilden's convenience:

> What he believes himself bound to do he will do, if your eye is kept over him, and no more. Ginger refused to clean the boots of a gentleman who was staying in our house, saying that they were not his master's boots. I made him clean them, but again he declined cleaning Mrs Brenton's when she stayed with me.... I told him he must clean them, and I believe he did, but I was not strict to inquire, and after a struggle of this kind for the mastery, though I succeeded at the moment, I did not generally try it again, lest I should come off the loser.[64]

Both the tone and the content of this description are considerably and significantly different from Feilden's language about Louisa. "Ginger's" soul did not concern her - his domestic obedience did. Of course, at this early stage of British control of Natal, African communities and individuals still retained a great deal of independent access to resources and, at least in Feilden's case, this seems to have made obtaining suitably deferential service very difficult. This is well illustrated by Feilden's last mention of "Ginger." He left very shortly after this incident. It is hard to resist the temptation to think of this as Feilden's perception of the moment which made up his mind:

> Poor Ginger is very handy for a Caffre, but growing quite lazy with Mrs Welsh, upon whom, and all of her class [white servants], he looks with extreme contempt, and when squatted on the ground will ask her to hand things to him. She is rather fearful of exercising the authority I tell him she has. He says to her, "You are poor people, but me is a gentleman; me have plenty cows, plenty mealies, and plenty oats. When me in craal me do no work; me wife make fire, gather wood, cook food, and she say, "Now you come eat."[65]

After both Mrs Welsh and "Ginger" left her service, Feilden at last found an African servant with whom she was satisfied. This man she called "Ebenezer." At least to begin with, he spoke only Zulu and was completely new to domestic work. At first, these were experienced as an inconvenience but Feilden quickly came to think of "Ebenezer" as the best household servant she had yet had. His lack of English and her disinclination (she felt it was an "impure" language) and inability (she was rather deaf) to learn much Zulu ensured that communication with him took place only on the narrow front of domestic duties. When he in turn left after about six months, she remarked that, "We have made him quite the best servant we have had on the colony; he has a good, clear head, is very quiet, does his work nicely, and is strictly faithful and honest."[66] It is of some psychological interest that she also thought him quite sweet-smelling.[67]

It would be most convenient for the argument of this paper if the tale of Eliza Feilden's servants ended here when visceral revulsion at the outset had been transformed, via fascination and a struggle for deference, into complete instrumentality. In fact, her language and practice do not appear to have undergone any further major change during her time in Natal. Almost all of the references to servants in the remaining two-thirds of her book and four-fifths of her time in Natal are of this sort: "After our fire is lighted in the morning, and the kettle boiling, I send the kitchen Caffre to weed.... The Caffre returns to watch the pans on the fire for dinner and clean them afterwards."[68] However, no human life ever fits a set of generalisations perfectly. Feilden was capable of affection for and kindness towards her servants and despite her anti-missionary strictures was never opposed to the secular education of Africans, nor religious instruction, if carried out in a way likely to induce

the Protestant work ethic. It is not unfair to say, however, that those servants whom she liked were those who were most completely servants. Perhaps her favourite of all was "Tom":

> Caffre Tom, [who] speaks English, and, for a marvel, does his work without being watched. Some Caffres are very shrewd and clever, but Tom is the most of a genius I have yet met with, and possesses a frank, good-tempered face that meets one always with a smile. His accomplishments are various. He milks the cow and the goat, attends to the horse...shoes and boots, chops wood... and cooks...cleans out our rooms... washes the dishes nicely, and cleans knives. In short, he is now our factotum.... He drives a team of oxen well, and that is no joke. He gets double the usual wages, and we think he is worth the money. He is, moreover, very polite. It was a treat to see him hand me over a dangerous step... [He] offered his hand lest I should slip into the water. But to see him help me on to my horse! his hands clasped for my foot to step into, and his shoulder raised for my hand to rest upon, with such a gallant air. Tom was a gentleman![69]

It would be churlish to deny that Feilden had real affection for "Tom," but it would be obtuse not to notice that the basis of her affection was the excellent service Tom provided. His personality was not mentioned, except that he was "polite" and politeness, again, is clearly defined in this context as one of the refinements of service. Feilden began her domestic life in South Africa repulsed, fascinated and intensely aware of the Africans who were to be her servants. Just before her life in Natal ended, when she and her husband had finished their dinner they would, "take a little stroll in the garden, look for ripe papaws, call a light Caffre to climb the stem, and bring the fruit down...."[70]

The experience and language of servant-keepers in the following decades shows a high degree of similarity to that of the 1850s. This is clearly demonstrated in the fairly large collection of letters written to her English family by Annie Wilkinson from 1870 to 1874.[71] Annie Wilkinson was the wife of the first Anglican Bishop of Zululand, Thomas Edward Wilkinson.[72] After her death in 1878, the Bishop edited her letters in tribute to her

> with a view to giving an idea of the kind of life which a lady is called upon to live when she leaves her English home for the purpose of aiding in the extension of Christ's kingdom in such a wild and savage country as Zululand.[73]

Very interestingly, what follows is not what might be expected - the sort of "Exeter Hall" tract on the frock-coated respectability and piety of converts which so irritated South African settlers. There are two reasons for this. First, Bishop Wilkinson was appointed by Bishop Gray of Cape Town in direct opposition to the heretically enlightened Colenso. Both Wilkinsons' formally stated views on the appropriate attitude

towards African people were much more conventionally supremacist and paternalist. Second, and perhaps more importantly, these letters deal to a large extent with Annie Wilkinson's purely domestic experiences. These were very similar to those of secular settlers. They suggest that the width of the missionary-settler divide has perhaps been exaggerated. The ideology of each group was very different, but their purely domestic interaction seems to have been very similar. After all, there was no significant clergy-secular divide in the nineteenth century British middle class.

Wilkinson, like Feilden, had been used to a great deal of domestic service in England as the wife of a Suffolk curate. She remarked in one of her first letters from South Africa that "one has to do... a great deal that is done by servants at home."[74] She and her husband, like most new arrivals, suffered from an initial "culture-shock," which in their case was related to the extreme undress of Africans compared to their well-covered selves.[75] This was followed, again, by a phase in which Africans were described, both favourably and unfavourably, with great intensity of observation and language. As with many of their contemporaries, there was a distinct class element to these judgements. She was greatly impressed, and took entirely seriously, the grandeur which surrounded the Zulu monarchy:

> I have been to court.... Cetywayo was surrounded by his great men.... A war-dance was going on, and they sang their national song - really a grand thing. Cetewayo is a tall, fine, handsome man.... They are fine, independent men, a great deal superior to the women.[76]

Her first African servants on the other hand, were very much less satisfactory. They were

> a dreadful nuisance, so stupid and lazy, so inferior to the boys; but then, from time immemorial, they have been made drudges, and looked down upon. We have to try and raise them out of this....[77]

This is what might theoretically be expected of a missionary - an immediate dislike tempered by a conviction of the necessity to "raise" the "heathen." However, although she did contribute significantly to her husband's specifically missionary activity, her primary role was domestic. The greater part of her contact with African people was with domestic servants, and

> when they act as servants one is apt to forget what they are, and to expect more from them. But is this not provoking? You go into the kitchen and order a good fire for your ironing. You go in presently, the girls squatted on the floor, jabbering away, and your fire out! If you leave them a single minute, they squat down and do nothing. But they are good-tempered, and mean to do right.[78]

A clearly rather visceral dislike of people who "squat," "jabbering" was quickly transformed into a remarkably high degree

of control. Wilkinson appears to have had a very well-developed talent for command. As her husband commented,

> there was no one on the station - no one, indeed, elsewhere, of whom I ever heard, who could manage them as well as the writer of these letters. They delighted in her bright and sunny temper, and yet fully appreciated being kept in order by the firm and strict hand which was ever ready, if necessary, behind this genial disposition.[79]

This knack of command combined with what appears to have been an engaging personality and a good grasp of the Zulu language led Wilkinson to like her servants. This may have been a mutual affection. Her servants tended her children devotedly, especially when they were sick.[80] However, the terms in which this affection were expressed are highly significant. Of the five instances of praise of servants in her letters, one is simply a manifestation of overt racism ("I quite forgot they are black; they have such honest faces" (67), but another is really touching and almost purely affectionate:

> It is so pretty to see her [Wilkinson's daughter's] love for her Zulu nurse. I offended the old nurse the other day. The child had broken ten of her hen's eggs, and I wanted to replace them. She said, "Are you going to pay me for what my own child has done? My things are my child's."[81]

Even here, it is possible to argue that the what is being praised is the devotion of the nurse to her duty rather than the nurse herself. The other three expressions of praise relate purely and explicitly to the efficient and unobtrusive performance of the functions of domestic service. For instance:

> Telesa, who has been with us ever since we have been here, is such a good girl. For the last six months she has had all the work to do, and has done it well, housemaid, parlourmaid, and cook. I will give her the meat and vegetables, and then she will entirely cook the dinner herself. She sees the bread is getting low, and mixes and makes it herself, also the butter. She is far better than many an English servant.[82]

Wilkinson was the wife of a missionary in the pre-war Zulu kingdom. This meant that her contacts with African people were not as narrowly restricted to the context of domestic service as were many of her contemporaries in white controlled South Africa. The contrast between her relationships with her husband's "native deacons" and her servants is very striking. The first of these she described rather patronisingly as "such a good fellow," and clearly also thought of him largely in terms of his function. However, her interaction with him was much more personal than with her domestic servants. "He sleeps in the house when E is away. At this moment he is sitting by my side learning to write."[83] A deacon who "took the morning prayers, and preached in the evening" was clearly not susceptible to the sort of functionalisation possible in the case of domestic servants.[84]

A striking and lucid variation on the themes of the previous decades is to be found in Annie Martin's memoir, entitled Home Life on an Ostrich Farm, which describes domestic life on such a farm in the Karoo for several years after 1881.[85] Unusually, and rather awkwardly for our purposes, the text is arranged thematically rather than chronologically. However, it is possible to reconstruct to some extent the chronology of Martin's South African domestic experiences. Her first impression of other-than-white people in South Africa was very vivid and broadly favourable. She experienced the Malays of Port Elizabeth as picturesque and to the extent that they were sinister, picturesquely so.[86] "Hottentots" Martin found bizarre, degraded and barely human, but her first impression of Africans was positive and, as is to be expected, closely observed:

> The Kaffirs are much pleasanter to look at, some of the young girls being rather nice-looking, with graceful figures, on which blankets of a beautiful artistic terra-cotta colour are draped in folds worthy of an Arab burnous. Occasionally some of the red ochre with which the blankets are coloured is daubed over the face and head, the effect being rather startling. The slender, bronze-like arms are often completely hidden from wrist to elbow by a long spirally-twisted brass wire, looking like a succession of the thinnest bangles quite close together.[87]

This observation was made during Martin's first few months in South Africa. In this brief period, the two servants whom the Martins had brought with them from England had not yet left their service. Naturally, this domestic servant couple, "excellent servants", did not stay with their English employers for long and Martin's English middle-class insulation from the skills and drudgeries of domestic service ended.[88] This insulation had been fairly complete:

> Ladies [in England]... after the short quarter of an hour devoted to interviewing the cook and giving the day's orders, need trouble themselves no more... but are free to pursue their own occupations....[89]

From its context, this ought to be considered as an ideal to which Martin had aspired, but it seems likely that the reality of her previous domestic life had not been far from this ideal. She remarked that "the usual bringing-up of English girls, followed by years of... hotel life" had completely failed her for colonial housekeeping and that she had had to rely on the skill and experience of her husband.[90]

Almost as soon as her domestic duties began, it seems, her opinion of African and coloured people was radically revised. People who had been picturesque became physically repulsive in the domestic context. This repulsiveness had two closely inter-related aspects. First, she began to experience what is perhaps the most primitive origin of all racism: a revulsion against physical appearances. Martin appears to have suffered from a fairly extreme case of this:

> Our next specimen was a nearly white half-caste, with light-coloured wool, and pale-grey, dead-looking eyes; who always reminded us of one of the horrible, sickly-looking white lizards, so common in Karoo houses. She was half-witted, and most uncanny-looking; with such a ghastly, cold, unsympathetic manner that we named her Medusa....she always took me by surprise by doing something ten times more stupid than anything I had dreamed of.[91]

Second, she found her servants dirty, dishonest, clumsy, smelly and extremely inefficient. They became, in her mind, a racial focus of all that was unpleasantly new to her about domestic arrangements in a technically backward and isolated colony:

> ...that yellow Hottentot or dark-skinned Kaffir...stands... against a background of dirty dishes.... Dogs, fowls... pigs... are kindly acting the part of scavengers on her unswept kitchen floor... her wastefulness and untidiness affording them so good a living that... [they] trip you up at every turn if you are rash enough to enter the dirty domain of their protectress. The latter, like some malevolent goddess, is surrounded by an atmosphere of the most evil-smelling fumes.... the doer of the mischief has no word of regret or apology, but, taking the occurrence as a matter of course, shows all her even white teeth in a bright, good-tempered smile, as she says, "Yes, missis, de soup is burnt."[92]

This phase of absorbed hatred of her servants, accompanied on one occasion by childish spitefulness[93], passed. Unfortunately, because of the thematic arrangement of the material, it is not possible to estimate how long this may have taken. Nor is it possible to correct for the likelihood that the arrangement of her text caused Martin to compress and exaggerate this phase. Other contemporary sources, and common sense, suggest that such emotions did not fall into neatly divided periods. Nevertheless, Martin does appear to have moderated her attitudes and to have succeeded in obtaining efficient and psychologically unobtrusive service. For instance, in a section of her text dealing with the weather, free from any straining for effect about domestic matters, she described the way in which she dealt with the damage caused by a storm:

> ... with my dark-skinned hand-maiden and another Kaffir woman, wife of one of the herds, whom I have pressed into service, I go to work; boldly attacking... the cleaning out of the bedroom.... It all looks hopeless, but we refuse to be daunted, and set to work with a will.... A Falstaffian bundle is made up for the wash, which will keep a Kaffir hard at work for two good days turning the washing-machine; a vigorous scrubbing... goes on indoors; and by the time the gentlemen return to lunch... things have already assumed a brighter aspect.[94]

Unusually for the many memorialists absorbed in the details of colonial life, Martin possessed an analytical self-consciousness.

Towards the end of her section on domestic servants, she pointed out that

> English people settling in the Cape Colony usually start with a strong prejudice in favour of the coloured race. They think them ill-treated, bestow on them a good deal of unmerited sympathy, and credit them with many good qualities which they do not possess. By the time they have been a year or two in the country a reaction has set in; they have discovered that the negro is a fraud; they hate him, and cannot find anything bad enough to say of him. Then a still longer experience teaches them that the members of this childish race are, after all, not so bad, but that they require keeping in their places - treating in fact as you would treat children twelve years old. In intelligence, indeed, they never seem to advance much beyond that age. You must, of course, be just with them; but always keep a distance. Above all, never let either men or women servants know that you are pleased with them, or they will invariably presume.[95]

The phrase about treating African and coloured servants "as you would children twelve years old" is unsurprising and conventional. A slightly closer reading of the paragraph shows, of course, that this sort of highly literal paternalism was not central to her position. It is most unlikely that she would have advocated "keep[ing] your distance" from children of her own race. Nineteenth century white South African parents were far from being the monsters embodied in the popular imagination of Victorians. Paternalism was not central to the successful management of servants so culturally different from their employers, but distance and reserve.

In the case of really experienced and acculturated white servant-employing South Africans, this psychological gulf was deeply ingrained and functionalisation and dehumanisation were accomplished with much less difficulty. Such, at least, seems to have been the case of the Mary and Edith Struben in the Transvaal of the 1880s. This mother and daughter provided the homes, comforts and, in Mary's case, some of the income which supported the Struben brothers, Harry and Fred, in their pioneering mining activities on the Witwatersrand.[96] Mary Struben had been in South Africa since at least 1861, when she married Harry. Harry had been raised in Natal and the Orange Free State from the age of ten and had been a member of the Transvaal Volksraad.[97] Edith was born in South Africa and first visited England at the age of 19.[98] The Strubens of the 1880s were very far from being in a state of culture shock.

Their diaries and letters reflect an extremely functionalised view of African servants. It must be admitted that a reason for this was that their diaries and letters tended to be laconic. Unlike many others, it seems that the Strubens kept their letters and wrote their diaries with almost no eye on posterity. Even with this caution borne in mind, it is remarkable to note that in seven years of keeping a daily diary Mary Struben made only

five definite references to Indian or African people in contexts not directly related to the provision or direction of service. In September 1882 she mentioned that she saw "some coolies dragging a net" for fish in Durban bay. On the 5th of the next month "Harry attended a public meeting against the restoration of Ketchwayo." On the 11th of September 1883, she noted that one of their servants, whom they called "Vassall" was "ill with dysentery." In December 1885, she remarked that "a grand kafir dance was held at the kraal" on the Strubens' farm. Finally, on the 13th of February 1887, "we saw Vassall who had come up on a trip with some Boers."[99] One entry simply states "I had to beat Klein Boy."[100] All her other references to other than white servants were purely functional.[101] For example, "Sent Leguan & Willem with cart, & Mrs Browne, oranges, peas, carrots, eggs, lemon syrup, they got £3.11.9 - kept Gibson in the kitchen."[102] The most common verb employed by Mary Struben when recording her interaction with African servants was "sent." This is not to say that Mary Struben was an unsuccessful or unpopular employer. Her servants appear to have stayed in her employ for remarkably long periods by the standards of the time, one of them ("Leguan") staying in her service for at least three years.[103] However, in great contrast with Feilden, Wilkinson or Martin, the comings and goings of these servants do not seem to have made any emotional impact at all on Mary Struben.

At the age of sixteen, Mary Struben's daughter Edith found herself housekeeping for her father and her younger siblings in a small cottage while he and his brother prospected and began to exploit the reef they had identified on Lourens Geldenhuis's farm. This was Edith's first direct experience as a manager of domestic servants. As a third-generation South African, her attitudes were very different from those of immigrants. She knew that the primary function of Africans was to work. The challenge for her was not to overcome unfamiliarities of culture, language, status or experience, but simply to begin to exert control effectively herself. The first servant she herself superintended was a washerwoman from a neighbouring farm:

> There is an old ayah there (Dinah) who was at once very willing to come.... She seemed very surprised & pleased with the machine & shook her head for a long time when she first began to wash. She did them pretty well considering & seems very willing to learn. She came again this morning to fold and stamp; but in the first art she little excels, & seems very limp in the second she says that she has been used to ironing everything, so folded the clothes abominably. I showed her how to do them & she says she will be better next time. I gave her the few things that needed ironing to take to her own house; with some starch and two irons.[104]

The contrast between Edith's comments on her first servant and that of a similarly placed immigrant could hardly be more striking. This is a vivid and detailed description; but it is a description of an embodied collection of domestic skills. Edith was not unobservant - she later became a well-known painter and

photographer[105] - nor was she a violent or neglectful employer. There is no mention of violence to servants in her letters or diaries. She also bought cloth and made up clothes for the Strubens' servants.[106] It was simply that there was an indissoluble link in her language between the African people of the Transvaal and the provision of service. This link was so tight that it seems to have blotted out other more personal forms of interaction. Edith's described a servant of her uncle's whose appearance she found unpleasant as "very ugly & so weak that he can't carry 6 pumpkins."[107] The most affectionate terms in which she described servants are these: "Papa has lost sprightly Piet & now has got poor unfortunate yellow Saul who never seems to get on well with his work despite all his efforts."[108]

Of course, the Strubens found a great deal of payable gold and had become really wealthy by 1887. Edith and her mother moved to Cape Town. Her attitude towards the coloured people of Cape Town was a mirror image of that of British immigrants. Used to Africans, she found the coloured people she encountered in public places, like the railway station, intimidating and unpleasant.[109] Her family's prosperity seems to have enabled them to employ highly trained (probably white) servants, whom Edith found merely "quick & competent."[110] In her greatly increased free time, she took to playing the organ. Her first description of this is a marvellously ironic conflation of two meanings of "instrument:"

> At last! I have permission to practice on "Trinity" church organ.... we had to hunt about for a blower, & picked up a black in the street who was only too glad to come, & only made it wail about twice, he was tired I suppose.[111]

To conclude: In the last thirty years, a great deal of attention has been paid to the ways in which the South African racial order was created and sustained. This paper is intended to supplement this process. First, it has suggested that social historians are now in possession of the theoretical tools which will enable them to do justice to a hitherto neglected set of evidence - the informal racial language, or "habitus" of whites. As a result of the adoption of this technique, this paper has been able to draw attention to the causal significance of the social institution of domestic service and the racial interaction that grew up within it. Second, this paper has attempted to characterise more precisely the forms of this interaction. Specifically, a re-assessment of the roles played by violence and paternalism in the employer-servant relationship has been suggested. It is argued that neither was as important as the functionalisation and dehumanisation of other-than-white servants. Third, the forms of this interaction have been found to have been highly continuous throughout the period between the 1850s and the late 1880s. This may be because the social institution of domestic service (like slavery or family forms) is a very persistent one. Domestic service probably continues to exercise its influence over the broader society within which it operates throughout places and periods otherwise characterised by a great degree of difference and change.

It is suggested that the attitudes forged in this remarkably persistent and ubiquitous institution contributed importantly to the on-going maintenance and creation of the oppressive racial order. The way in which Edith Struben came by her ability so blithely to practise her music may be no less important to South African history than the reef which her father was among the first to mine.

Notes

1.This paper uses terms which may lose in political correctness what they gain in precision.

2.Exceptions include: B Bozzoli, The Political Nature of a Ruling Class, 1890-1933, London, 1981; E Katz A Trade Union Aristocracy, Johannesburg, 1976.; and parts of V Bickford-Smith, "Commerce, Class and Ethnicity in Cape Town 1875-1902," Cambridge Ph.D, 1988 and C Van Onselen, Studies in the Social and Economic History of the Witwatersrand, 2 vols., Johannesburg,1983.

3.Exceptions are: B Bozzoli, "Marxism, Feminism and South African Studies," Journal of Southern African Studies, 9, 2, 1983; J Cock, Maids and Madams, Johannesburg, 1980 and "Domestic service and education for domesticity: The incorporation of Xhosa women into colonial society," in C Walker (ed) Women and Gender in Southern Africa to 1944, Cape Town, 1990; C Swaisland, Servants and Gentlewomen to the Golden Land, Pietermaritzburg, 1993; C Van Onselen, "The witches of suburbia: domestic service on the Witwatersrand, 1890-1914," in his Studies....

4.P Joyce, Visions of the People. Industrial England the question of class, 1840-1914, Cambridge, 1991, 9

5.F Palmer, Semantics, 2nd ed., Cambridge, 1981, 47

6.For example, A Ashforth, The Politics of Official Discourse in 20th Century South Africa, Oxford, 1990. C Crais, The Making of the Colonial Order. White Supremacy and Black Resistance in the Eastern Cape, 1770-1865, Johannesburg, 1992 is an important partial exception to this statement. It analyses, at a rather general level,the racial language and attitudes of "ordinary," non-official Cape Dutch and British settlers.

7.This notion owes much to Bourdieu's habitus, "embodied history", "a spontaneity without consciousness or will." (P Bourdieu, The Logic of Practice, Oxford, 1990, 56)

8.Cock, Maids and Madams, 7

9.S Gordon A Talent for Tomorrow, Johannesburg, 1985, xxii

10.Cock, Maids..., 138

11.Cock, "Domestic service...," 81

12.ibid, 82

13.ibid, 82

14.ibid, 81-3

15.A full, and explicitly Foucauldian, discussion of this theme is found in Crais, The Making...., especially chapters 3 and 5.

16.Dictionary of South African Biography (DSAB), III, 618

17.B Mitford, A Romance of the Cape Frontier,London,1891,248

18.Van Onselen, "The Witches...," 43-54

19.D Fairbridge (ed) Letters from the Cape by Lady Duff Gordon, Oxford, 1927, 42

20.The Nugget, 16/3/93

21.Mitford, A Romance...., 120. An early, but much less aggressive expression of this theme occurs in I Fenton's fictional statement of the "Exeter Hall" position on the frontier conflict, Adventures of Mrs Colonel Somerset in Caffraria, during the War, London, 1858. Ernest Glanville's sophisticated potboiler of 1894, A Fair Colonist, involves the rescue of an "English lady" from similar perils.

22.Van Onselen, "The Witches...," 40

23.Crais, op. cit.

24.The Eastern Province Magazine (EPM), Vol 1, 9/61 - 2/62

25. University of the Witwatersrand Archives (Wits), "Reminiscences of Mrs Harry Stone," A1737

26.Het Zuid Afrikaansche Tijdschrift (ZAT), 6/1881. Own translation.

27.EPM, Vol 1, 9/61 - 2/62

28.H Roche, On Trek in the Transvaal, London, 1878, 106

29.S Heckford,A Lady Trader in the Transvaal,London,1882,238

30.Cape Parliamentary Papers. Report of the Parliamentary Select Committee on Labour, Evidence of Francois Johannes Retief, 17/3/1893. Since this evidence was found in the course of reading the Committee minutes on a different topic, no definite

conclusion as to the representativity of Retief's opinion can be formed.

31.Ons Klyntji, 9/1897.

32. Fairbridge (ed) Letters..., 78

33.Roche, On Trek..., 236

34.University of the Witwatersrand, Archives of the Church of the Province of South Africa, "Diary of Robert John Mullins, 1854-61," AB 482

35.Cape Monthly Magazine, 6/1862

36.There are too many uncertainties and subjective factors to enable a statistical analysis to be made of the frequency of violence in the evidence. However, if only book-length memoirs, substantial collections of letters and lengthy diaries are taken into account, it would not be too inaccurate to claim that no more than a quarter of these texts report violence of any sort against servants.

37.Roche, On Trek..., 1878, 108

38.ZAT, 3/1878

39.DSAB, Vol.II, Cape Town, 1972, 89

40.Lady Barker, A Year's Housekeeping in South Africa, Leipzig (Barker), 1877, 146

41.ibid, 147

42.ibid, 23

43.ibid, 283

44.A vivid description of the isolation of the Colensos after the Zulu War is to be found in M North Memoirs of a Happy Life, London, 1893. The width of the settler-missionary divide is proverbial.

45.Barker's servant, "Maria," returned to South Africa roughly three years after having left with Barker. In England, she had been, it seems, presented to "Her Majesty the Queen... and several Duchesses." On her return to South Africa with the Barkly family, she proved, once again "a great amusement," but, though highly skilled, an unsatisfactory servant. By 1879, she was living a traditional life as the wife of a headman in a village in Lesotho. (F Barkly, Among Boers and Basutos, London, n.d.)

46.Van Onselen, "The Witches...," 40

47.Cock, Maids..., 181

48.M Strobel, European Women and the Second British Empire, Bloomington, 1991, 17

49.See N Yuval-Davis, "Anglomorphism and the Construction of Ethnic/Racial Divisions in Britain and Australia," in R Nile (ed) Immigration and the Politics of Ethnicity and Race in Australia and Britain, London, 1991

50.Strobel, European Women..., 22

51.The tensions created by the institution of domestic service seem remarkably able to transcend race and period boundaries. See, for instance, K Hansen "Body Politics. Sexuality, Gender and Domestic Service in Zambia," in C Johnson-Odim & M Strobel (eds) Expanding the Boundaries of Women's History, Bloomington, 1992

52. Cock, Maids..., 180. See also L Davidoff, "Mastered for Life: Servant and Wife in Victorian and Edwardian England," Journal of Social History, 7, 4, 1974

53.B Gartrell "Colonial Wives: Villains or Victims?" in H Callan and S Arderner(eds) The Incorporated Wife, London,1984,181

54.E Feilden, My African Home, London, 1883

55.DSAB, III, 288

56.Feilden, My African Home, 27

57.ibid, 12

58.ibid, 74, 177

59.ibid, 352

60.ibid, 15

61.ibid, 31. Here, perhaps, is a neglected cause of that deep rift between missionary and settler in South Africa. The well-known white prejudice against the "educated native" may have drawn some of its strength from encounters such as this.

62.ibid, 34

63.ibid, 46

64.ibid, 53

65.ibid, 56

66.ibid, 102

67.ibid, 106

68.ibid, 118

69.ibid, 215

70.ibid, 302

71.T Wilkinson (ed) A Lady's Life and Travels in Zululand during Cetewayo's Reign, Being the African Letters and Journals of the Late Mrs Wilkinson, London, 1882

72.DSAB, IV, 781

73.Wilkinson, i

74.ibid, 38

75. ibid., 9, 16

76.ibid, 50

77.ibid, 45

78.ibid

79.ibid, 48. Bishop Wilkinson believed, rather remarkably for a missionary, that Zulus were "like animals" and tended to develop an animal devotion to his wife's sterling character.(161)

80.ibid, 69

81.ibid, 160

82.ibid, 146

83.ibid, 153

84.ibid, 225

85.A Martin, Home Life on an Ostrich Farm, London, 1890. It has not been possible to find references to Annie Martin or her husband other than this text, from which it appears that the Martins had travelled to the middle East, the United States and the West Indies, that Mr Martin had worked on the Diamond Fields before returning to Britain to marry Annie and that he had a considerable amount of capital to invest in his ostrich farm. It is also worth noting that Annie Martin described the technicalities of ostrich farming, her numerous pets, other local animals and plants in considerably greater detail than any human individuals.

86.ibid, 13, 14

87.ibid, 16

88.ibid, 191

89.ibid, 182

90.ibid, 191, 195

91.ibid, 197

92.ibid, 183

93.The usual scene in which a "malingering" servant was compelled to consume a noxious "medicine" of the employers' devising. (197)

94.ibid, 92

95.ibid, 200

96.A Cunningham, The Strubens and Gold, Johannesburg, 1987

97.ibid, 11

98.University of the Witwatersrand Archives (Wits), Edith Struben Diary, A116/A1.2

99.Wits, Diary of Mary Struben, A116/A1.1.1

100.ibid, 20/12/1885

101.Mary Struben's diary suggests that she was considerably harassed by a succession of unsatisfactory and drunken white tutors and housekeepers. (21/5/1883; 17/11/1885)

102.ibid, 23/10/1884

103.From November 1882 to January 1886

104.Wits, Edith Struben, Letters to Mary Struben, A116/A1.2, 20/5/1885

105.Cunningham, 122

106.ibid, 8/6/1885; 17/9/1885

107.ibid, 8/6/1885

108.ibid, 22/7/1885

109.Wits, Diary of Edith Struben, A116/A1.2, 24/12/1887

110.ibid, 24/11/1887

111.ibid, 9/11/1887