

Abstract

The idea of rumours as oral history, the appeal of an apparently isolated community, and the social and economic value of small towns in present day South Africa is what attracted me to Nieu Bethesda and the Owl House. My research report is divided into three chapters: economic viability, rumour as oral history, and race relations. I look at what constitutes the Nieu Bethesda brand; how it is formulated, marketed, sold, and received, the manner in which rumours could be seen as historical sources as well as value-producing acts, and the role of race relations in determining who benefits from or is able to capitalise on the tourism generated in Nieu Bethesda. I am not interested in proving or disproving stories, but rather extracting their social value in contributing to the brand identity. Nieu Bethesda is a microcosm that allows us to understand the broader South African context as well as the relationship between ideas of the country and ideas of the city. My fieldwork took place during March, June, July and September of 2013 as well as preliminary fieldwork conducted in November and December of the previous year. The methods used include participant-observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation through photographs.