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# The Afrikaner Women Of The Garment Workers Union, 1918-1939

**Brink, Elsabe**

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obedient and loyal members, grateful for the ministrations of their able leader.

During the seventies, two articles in a book edited by Webster, *Essays in Southern African Labour History*, by Mawbey and Lewis respectively, regenerated considerable interest in the women of the the GWU. Mawbey's article 'Afrikaner women in the GWU during the Thirties and Forties', collected edited versions of existing autobiographies of Hester Cornelius, Katie Viljoen, and Anna Sophia Swanepoel, better known as 'Mrs Swanie'. Lewis, by contrast, in 'Solly Sachs and the Garment Union', outlined the development and achievements of the GWU within the framework of the emergence of the clothing industry and noted that the majority of the labour force consisted of white, recently urbanised, Afrikaner women.[5]

These were followed by several other studies which examined the GWU more systematically. In 1979 B.M. Touyzs, in his M.A. dissertation 'White Politics and the Garment Workers Union, 1930-1953', as well as in his subsequent PhD thesis 'White Labour and the "Social Democratic" Movement in the Transvaal; the South African Labour Party, the South African Trades and Labour Council and the Trade Union Affiliates, 1930-1954', investigated the political activities of Transvaal trade unions, and in particular the GWU and why the latter withstood repeated nationalist assaults.[6] Martin Nicol's Economics Honours dissertation, 'The Garment Workers Union of the Cape Peninsula and the Garment Workers Unity Movement, 1927-55,' focused attention on the Cape GWU, while his recently completed PhD thesis, 'A History of the Garment and Tailoring Workers in Cape Town, 1900-1939', examines the Cape clothing industry more comprehensively and "tackles theoretical issues, specifically those re-

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[5] E.C. Webster ed., *Essays in South African Labour History*, Johannesburg: Ravan, 1978.

[6] B.M. Touyzs, 'White Politics', M.A. dissertation, University of Cape Town, 1979, p.3 and 'White Labour'.

lating to class struggle".[7] Nicol, in his introduction, claims that he approached this subject at least partly from the perspective of social history. This he failed to do, and apart from a chance remark that "clothing factories employ more women workers than any other branch of South African industry", the focus of his attention was genderless workers. He maintained that "an account of the social background of clothing workers over time and an investigation of the organisational implications of the majority of workers being women was omitted because of a lack of readily available sources".[8] This dissertation will attempt to rectify this, even if only for garment workers on the Witwatersrand.

In 1984 Leslie Witz investigated Solly Sachs's role as general secretary of the GWU from 1928 to 1952. He discussed Sachs's role thematically with the focus on trade union militancy, democracy, non-racialism, the GWU's independent political role and the nationalist assault on the union.[9] Although Witz initially intended to "include a dimension of home and family", the themes he investigated did not permit much evidence of the social background of the garment workers as women to filter through.

These studies do not consider the social circumstances of the Afrikaner working-class women who dominated both the clothing industry and the GWU on the Witwatersrand during the inter-war years. Hansi Pollak's sociological study (1932), 'Women in the Witwatersrand Industries',[10] goes some way to redressing this imbalance. In her investigation she collected some 500 questionnaires completed by women in the clothing, food,

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[7] M. Nicol, 'A History', PhD thesis, University of Cape Town, 1984, p.4.

[8] Ibid., pp.1, 4. Erika Theron's sociological investigation into the lives of Cape Town factory workers, completed in 1942, could have made a significant contribution in this regard. E. Theron, *Fabriekwerksters in Kaapstad,* Stellenbosch: Pro Ecclesia, 1944.

[9] L. Witz, 'Servant', p.14.

[10] H. Pollak, 'Women', M.A. dissertation, University of the Witwatersrand, 1932.

leather, and chemical industries on the Witwatersrand and sympathetically and thoroughly analysed numerous aspects of their lives: their home and factory conditions, their origins, their places of birth, their educational, marital and economic status, their contribution to the family income and their participation in trade union activities. Her study thus became not only a valuable secondary source, but, in addition, her investigator's notes contained much useful primary evidence on the lives and circumstances of the garment workers she had interviewed.[11]

The lack of attention paid to Afrikaner working-class women employed in the clothing industry is part of a more general lacuna in research on the Afrikaner working class as a whole. Radical, liberal English and conservative Afrikaans historiography alike, have dismissed Afrikaner workers as a class. They have been treated either as a group which, as a supportive class, has been co-opted into the ruling class, or as a 'problem' which had been solved. The gamut of liberal historiography on the labour movement in South Africa, from Gitsham and Trembath's first account in 1926 to Horrell's work in 1969, gives scant credit to Afrikaner working-class participation in the labour and trade union movement as a whole.[12] Representatives of the earlier radical school were even more dismissive of the white Afrikaner working class. With the notable exception of Lewis, they agreed with R.H. Davies that,

> no progressive white working class organisation therefore exists today in South Africa. The white rank and file realises on which

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[11] Ibid.

[12] E. Gitsham and J.F. Trembath, *A First Account of Labour Organisation in South Africa*, Durban: E.P. Printing Co., 1926. See also W.H. Andrews, *Class Struggles in South Africa*, Cape Town: Stewart, 1941; R.K. Cope, *Comrade Bill: The Life and Times of W. Andrews, Workers' Leader*, Cape Town: Stewart, 1943; M. Horrel, *South Africa's Workers: Their Organisations and Patterns of Employment*, Johannesburg: S.A. Institute of Race Relations, C.E. Folkey, 1969; A. Hepple, *Trade Unions in Travail*, Johannesburg: Unity Publications, 1954 and E. Roux, *Time Longer than Rope: A History of the Black Man's Struggle for Freedom in South Africa*, Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1972. For an example of Afrikaans historiography of white labour in South Africa, see F.J. Grobler, 'Die Invloed van Geskoolde Blanke Arbeid op die Suid-Afrikaanse Politiek, 1886-1924', PhD thesis, Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education, 1968.

side its bread is buttered and is subjectively a force of reaction.[13]

Finally, Afrikaans historiography also generally denied the existence of an Afrikaans working class by often equating it with the poor white problem. As early as 1917 D.F. Malan remarked that poor whites were in the process of becoming a class,[14] and by 1928 J.H. Botha likewise maintained that "die laagste stand in Suid Afrika is die armblankeklas,...die swakkere kragte van die maatskappy" (the lowest class in South Africa is the poor white class,... the weaker supports of society).[15]

The poor white class which was thus equated with the poor white problem, warranted investigation by the Carnegie Commission, which was initiated in 1930 by the American Carnegie Foundation. It consisted of eminent Afrikaner intellectuals of the time, such as J.F.W. Grosskopf, R.W. Wilcocks, E.G. Malherbe, W.A. Murray, J.R. Albertyn and Mrs M.E. Rothmann. They reported respectively on the economic, psychological,

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[13] R.H. Davies, 'The White Working Class in South Africa', *New Left Review,* no. 82, November/December 1973, p.55, to which D. Kaplan replied in 1974 with 'Capitalist Development in South Africa: Class Conflict and the State', in T. Adler, *Perspectives on South Africa: A Collection of Working Papers,* Johannesburg: African Studies Institute, University of the Witwatersrand, 1977. See also H. Wolpe, 'The Working White Class in South Africa', *Economy and Society,* vol. 5, no. 2, 1976; E. Katz, *A Trade Union Aristocracy: A History of the White Workers in the Transvaal and the General Strike of 1913,* Johannesburg: African Studies Institute, University of the Witwatersrand, 1976; F.A. Johnstone, *Class, Race and Gold: A Study of Relationships and Racial Discrimination in South Africa,* London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1976; R.H. Davies, *Capital, State and White Labour in South Africa, 1900-1960*, London: Harvester Press, 1979 and D. O'Meara, 'Analysing Afrikaner Nationalism: The "Christian Nationalist" Assault on White Trade Unionism in South Africa, 1934-1948', *African Affairs*, vol. 77, no. 306, January 1978.

[14] D.F. Malan, *De Achteruitgang van ons Volk: De Oorzaken daarvan en de Redmiddelen,* Cape Town: Nasionale Pers, 1917.

[15] J.H. Botha, *Die Arbeidsvraagstuk in Suid-Afrika,* Amsterdam: H.J. Paris, 1928, pp.224, 225. For a synopsis of the phenomenon of white impoverishment, see J.E.H. Grobler, 'Die Verskynsel van Blanke Verarming in Suid Afrika: 'n Historiese Oorsig', paper presented to the 8th Biennial Conference of the South African Historical Society, 30 June-3 July 1981.

educational, health and sociological aspects of the problem.[16] The Commission defined Poor Whites not as an isolated phenomenon, but as "die akute uitwerking van toestande en strominge wat meer algemeen in ons volkslewe is" (the acute effect of conditions and trends more common to the life of our volk). The Commission included the following groups in their definition of Poor Whites: bywoners, tenants, owners of slivers of land which offered no subsistence poor settlers and a growing group of unskilled or poorly skilled workers and labourers outside agriculture.[17]

Solutions to the Poor White Problem, as defined by the Carnegie Commission, were succeeded by a number of congresses during the 1930's and 1940's. In 1934 a Volkskongres was held in Kimberley,[18] and in 1939 it was followed by one held in Bloemfontein. At the 1947 Johannesburg Ekonomiese Volkskongres, the migration of Afrikaners into the city, and the problems and possible solutions to the poor white problem received attention.[19] During the following decade the state and politicians discussed at length the possible division of the volk along class lines.[20]

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16 Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem of South Africa,* vols. I-V, Stellenbosch: Pro Ecclesia, 1932. It is considered to be "perhaps the most exhaustive and sympathetic sociological study to be undertaken in South Africa." R. Horwitz, *The Political Economy of South Africa,* London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1967, p.94. cf. J. Bottaro, 'Education and Development: The Carnegie Commissions in South Africa', *Africa Perspective,* no. 25, 1985, for a complete discussion of the Carnegie Commissions.

17 Carnegie Commission, *Poor White*, vol. I, Recommendations, p. v, Afrikaans edition (hereafter A).

18 P. du Toit comp., *Report of the National Conference on the Poor White Problem of South Africa,* 2-5 Oct. 1934, No place: Nasionale Pers, no date, p.126.

19 E.P. du Plessis, *'n Volk staan op: Die Volkskongres en Daarna,* Cape Town: Human & Rousseau, 1964. J.R. Albertyn ed., *Referate en Besluite van die Volkskongres byeengeroep deur die Federale Armsorgraad van die Gefedereerde NG Kerke om te oorweeg die Stadwaartse Trek van die Afrikaner Nasie,* Johannesburg, 1-4 Julie 1947. Pretoria: Minerva, 1947. During the thirties and forties a plethora of publications on this problem appeared, e.g. the Tweede Trek Reeks with titles such as J.H. Coetzee, *Verarming en Oorheersing,* Cape Town: Nasionale Pers, 1942.

20 See D.F. Malan's and N.J. van der Merwe's remarks in this regard.

This also resulted in considerable activity in the field of education during the thirties and the establishment of a Department of Social Welfare in 1937.[21]

The degradation of the impoverished Afrikaner, much as he needed investigation and salvation, evoked feelings of horror and shame, but very little sympathy from his more affluent brethren.[22] The words of J.R. Albertyn seem typical of the general opinion of poor white Afrikaners,

> Baie van hulle vervul ons hart inderdaad met kommer, weemoed en skaamte vanweë hulle swak inbors, hul weerloosheid, hul gemis aan ruggraat....die vraag is ....maar is daar dan 'n ingebore smet van minderwaardigheid by die Afrikaner?
> (Many of them indeed fill our hearts with worry, sorrow and shame, because of their poor character, their defencelessness, their lack of backbone... the question is ....whether there exists an innate blemish of inferiority in the Afrikaner?)[23]

Recently, Stals, in an attempt to deal with the question of Afrikaner poor, remarked that the poor white problem had been a "spesiale verskynsel" (special phenomenon) which had been solved, and that South Africa had never been,

> ...sonder Blanke arm mense nie, en dit is 'n natuurlike verskynsel in enige maatskappy dat sommige van sy lede arm is.
> (....without white poor people, and it is a natural phenomenon in any society that some of its members are poor).[24]

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G.D. Scholtz, *Die Ontwikkeling van die Politieke Denke van die Afrikaner*, vol. VII, Johannesburg: Perskor, 1978, e.g. pp.19, 158.

21 J. Bottaro, 'Carnegie', pp.12, 14.

22 D. O'Meara, *Volkskapitalisme*, p.27 and Carnegie Commission quoted by J.H. le Roux and P.W. Coetzer, *Die Nasionale Party: Die Eerste Bewindsjare*, Institute for the Research of Contemporary History, University of the Orange Free State, 1980, p.59.

23 J.R. Albertyn, *Referate*, 'Die Arbeiderstand', p.6. The problem of poor whites, and in particular the impoverished, urban Afrikaners, who made up a large proportion of the poor white problem, was 'solved' by rapid industrial expansion and protective labour policies of the Pact and Fusion governments.

24 E.J.P. Stals ed., *Afrikaners in die Goudstad, vols. I-II*, Cape Town: HAUM, 1986, vol. II, p.14. (J.J. Fourie was the author of volume I and Stals wrote volume II.)

He devotes a single chapter to the social problems of Afrikaners in the process of urbanisation. These incorporated poverty, unemployment and bad housing, immorality, alcohol abuse, gambling, disintegration of the family, poor use of leisure time and crime. He concludes the chapter with a discussion of the various social welfare agencies such as, for example, the Armesorgraad and related organisations established to cope with these problems.

These working-class Afrikaners have not been accommodated in accounts of labour history in South Africa either. Afrikaans historiography of labour tended to equate participation of Afrikaner workers in the labour process with the rise of Afrikaner nationalism and glorify the efforts of, amongst others, the Nasionale Raad van Trustees and their assault on the trade unions during the thirties. The Afrikaner working class, the main constituent of these unions, especially those employed in the mining, building and clothing industries, are overlooked.[25]

O'Meara, in his book *Volkskapitalisme: Class, Capital and Ideology in the Development of Afrikaner Nationalism, 1934-1948*, examined the rise to power of the Afrikaner middle class and their attempts to mobilise their fellow Afrikaners, who were members of the working class, into one volk. Although he did not err on the side of glorification, he also seems to have fallen into the same trap as Afrikaans historians of the Afrikaner working class. While O'Meara presented an excellent exposition of the rise of Afrikaner nationalism and the assault on the trade unions, he remained equally vague on the nature of the Afrikaner working class, the ultimate focus of these nationalist efforts. Pauw's sociological study

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[25] S. Pauw, *Die Beroepsarbeid van die Afrikaners in die Stad*, DPhil thesis, University of Pretoria, 1945. L. Naudé, *Dr Albert Hertzog, Die Nasionale Party en die Mynwerkers*, Nasionale Raad van Trustees, Potchefstroom Herald, 1969. See ch. 'Susters in Verdrukking'; E.J.P. Stals, *Afrikaners*, vol. I, ch. 5. See also P.J. Meyer, *Die Stryd van die Afrikaner Werker*, Stellenbosch: Pro Ecclesia, 1944.

of the career choices of Afrikaners in the city remained his major source in this regard.[26]

Van Onselen, in his essay 'Main Reef Road into the Working Class: Proletarianisation, Unemployment and Class Consciousness amongst Johannesburg's Afrikaner Poor, 1890-1914', added a new dimension to the understanding of the development of a working-class consciousness amongst Afrikaner poor resident in Vrededorp. He portrayed a vibrant community who carved a niche for themselves in a new and often hostile urban, industrial environment on the Witwatersrand. He maintained that,

> ....the unskilled Afrikaner workers of Vrededorp demonstrated not only an aggressive working class consciousness, but also a considerable degree of acumen....[27]

Except for Van Onselen's work, however, the men who belonged to the Afrikaner working class remained shadowy figures. Their female counterparts, Afrikaner working-class women, are even more conspicuous by their absence. Authors such as Walker and Weinbren, as well as Davidson, praised the particular contribution of the garment workers.[28] Other historians, however, have not hesitated to attach unsubstantiated labels to the Afrikaner women of the GWU. They were "weak", "helpless", "bewildered", and, to quote G.D. Scholtz more fully, they were,

> ....inderdaad soos klei in die hande van Sachs. Uit hul eie kon hul moouliks self optree om van hom ontslae te raak. Goedgesinde Afrikaners moes hulle help en bystaan.
> (....indeed like clay in the hands of Sachs. On their own they could barely proceed to get rid of him. Well-intentioned Afrikaners had to help and co-operate with them.)[29]

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[26] E.g. D. O'Meara, *Volkskapitalisme*, p.94.

[27] Charles van Onselen, *Studies in the Economic and Social History of the Witwatersrand: vol. I, New Babylon, vol. II, New Nineveh*, Johannesburg: Ravan, 1982, vol. II, p.161. Lewis also intimated the existence of an Afrikaner working class, but did not explore this notion in depth.

[28] W. Walker and B. Weinbren, *2 000 Casualties: A history of Trade Unions and the Labour Movement in South Africa*, Johannesburg: TUCSA, 1961, p. 301; B. Davidson, *Report on Southern Africa*, London: Johnathan Cape, 1952, p.183.

[29] G.D. Scholtz, *Ontwikkeling*, p.82. See also L. Witz, 'Servant', p.25.

These garment workers referred to above, did not readily fit the social niche reserved for Afrikaner women, that of *volksmoeder*. The place of the *volksmoeder* is in the home,

> Die vrou se plek is in haar huis. Dit was die leuse van die Afrikanervrou voor 1900. Vandag is dit nog die leuse van die Afrikanervrou....., maar die begrip 'huis' het gerek sodat dit tans die hele land, die hele volk insluit.
> (The woman's place is in her home. That was the motto of the Afrikaner woman before 1900. Today it is still the motto of the Afrikaner woman ..., but the notion 'home' has extended so that nowadays it includes the whole country, the whole volk.)[30]

When a woman by choice or necessity extended her activities beyond the domestic domain, she entered an "unnatural sphere", that of the office, shop, or factory which, it would seem, disqualified her for the title of *volksmoeder*.[31]

Afrikaner women in general have been the subject of many studies, which often served only to glorify their existence. Ever since the turn of the century an idealised myth of Afrikaner women moulded into the *volksmoeder* or mother of the nation, has been press-ganged into the service of Afrikaner Nationalists, social engineers and historians. However, this idealisation has not as yet been thoroughly investigated in South African historiography.[32] Moodie, as well as Hexham, recently identified this moulding of Afrikaner women into *volksmoeders*, but did not explain it fully. According to Moodie,

> ...the civil faith reserved a special place of pride for the figure of the Afrikaner woman.....the woman provided a deep well of moral

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30 A.P. van Rensburg, *Moeders*, p.98. German women during this period were subjected to similar notions that their pre-ordained place was in the home and that work was an unpleasant necessity. T. Mason, 'Women in Germany, 1925-1940', *History Workshop Journal*, no. 2, Autumn 1976, p.8. In addition, "women are often considered to be marginal to work, *because* they are central to the subordinate, complementary sphere of the *family*"(their emphasis). S. Hall and T. Jefferson eds., *Resistance through Rituals. Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain*, London: Hutchinson, 1975, p.211.

31 *Die Huisgenoot*, 22.1.1932, p.61.

32 Patterson briefly refers to the role of woman in Afrikaner society in S. Patterson, *The Last Trek: A Study of the Boer People and the Afrikaner Nation*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1957, ch.7.

> fortitude which complemented and even surpassed her husband's more practical exploits.[33]

To which Hexham added,

> The woman thus became the symbol of racial purity and the institution of marriage a key to preserving the future of the Afrikaner People.[34]

It would seem that the myth of the *volksmoeder* was first formally conceptualised in 1919 by Willem Postma, as an inspiration for the ideal figure of Afrikaner womanhood. His book *Die Boervrouw - Moeder van haar Volk* was commissioned by the Helpmekaarvereniging, to define the main characteristics of an Afrikaner women. She was found to be brave, self-reliant, she had a love of freedom, a sense of religion, a spirit of sacrifice, she possessed housewifeliness, she had integrity, virtue and served as an inspiration to the entire nation.[35] He concluded that "no nation has a better, worthier, nobler example than that of the Boer woman, her history, her life and character".[36]

In 1921 Eric Stockenstrom, in his *Die Afrikaanse Vrou: Die Vroue in die Geskiedenis van die Hollands-Afrikaanse Volk*, set out to trace the history of South Africa with as main focus, the Afrikaner woman.[37] He summarised the main characteristics of the *volksmoeder*,

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[33] T.D. Moodie, *The Rise of Afrikanerdom, Power, Apartheid and Civil Religion,* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975, p.17.

[34] I. Hexham, *The Irony of Apartheid: The Struggle for National Independence of Afrikaner Nationalism against British Imperialism,* New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1981, p.53. Hofmeyer refers fleetingly to middle-class *volksmoeders*, who during the first decades of the twentieth century were increasingly organised into women's welfare organisations which catered specifically for poor Afrikaner women. I. Hofmeyer, 'Building a Nation from Words: Afrikaner Language, Literature and Ethnic Identity, 1902-1924', paper presented to the History Workshop, University of the Witwatersrand, January 30-Febuary 4 1984, p.22.

[35] W. Postma (Dr. Okulis), *Die Boervrouw: Moeder van haar Volk,* Commissioned by the Helpmekaar Kultuurvereniging, Bloemfontein: Nasionale Pers, 1918.

[36] As quoted by I. Hexham, *Irony*, p.53.

[37] E. Stockenstrom, *Die Afrikaanse Vrou*, Stellenbosch: Pro Ecclesia, 1921?

> Trou as huisvrou, teerhartig as verpleegster, ernstig in gebed, verstandig in raadgewing, het die Voortrekkervroue 'n verrykende invloed op die emigrante uitgeoefen. Hulle was altyd en bly tot nog toe geheel en al anti-Brits...(en)....die (Afrikaanse) vroue was onder 'n diep besef dat hulle die moeders van die toekomstige Afrikaanse volk was.
> (Loyal as housewife, tender-hearted as nurse, serious in prayer, wise in advice, the Voortrekker women exercised an enriching influence on the emigrants. They always were and still are totally anti-British... (and).... the (Afrikaner) women have always been deeply aware that they were the mothers of the future Afrikaner volk.)[38]

In 1929 Ds. J.D. Kestell elaborated on this praise of Afrikaner women,

> If we take note of all that the woman has meant in our People's history....her influence was consoling and uplifting. The sheer power of the life of our People has its roots in the pure life of the woman. Her influence kept the men from despair.[39]

She was seen as crucial to the survival of the nation,

> Die moeders van 'n volk speel 'n groter rol in die vorming van die mensemateriaal van die volk as enige ander groep.
> (The mothers of a volk play a more important role in the shaping of the human material of the volk than any other group.)[40]

This school of thought is still prevalent in recent Afrikaans historiography. *Volksmoeders* featured prominently in A.P. van Rensburg's book *Moeders van ons Volk*, as well as in Anna de Villiers's recent book *Barrevoets oor Drakensberg*, a collection of short biographies on the lives of a number of the most important women of the Great Trek such as Debora Retief.[41] In 1977 Celestine Pretorius, in a PhD thesis, 'Die Afrikanervrou as kultuurdraer en kultuurskepper tot 1806', analysed the role of Afrikaner women during the 17th and 18th centuries in the Cape. True to the tradition of the glorification of Afrikaner women, she con-

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[38] Ibid., p.232-233. Note the strong political position ascribed to them. Van Jaarsveld maintained of Stockenstrom's Afrikaner women that he only recognised heroines and martyrs - anonymous mothers of the nation. F.A. Van Jaarsveld, *Wie en Wat is die Afrikaner?*, Cape Town: Tafelberg, 1981, p.35.

[39] Ds. J.D. Kestell, as quoted by T.D. Moodie, *Afrikanerdom*, p.17.

[40] S. Pauw, *Beroepsarbeid*, p.393. During the thirties, *Die Huisgenoot* confirmed this view. Women were "voortplanters" (propagators). *Die Huisgenoot*, 22.1.1932, p.59.

[41] A. de Villiers, *Barrevoets*, Johannesburg: Perskor, 1975.

cluded that they played an important role as a civilising, cohering and purifying influence to uphold the moral standards of seventeenth century Cape society. They were courageous, tenacious and the hub of family life, as well as being companions and a help to their husbands.[42]

Nonetheless, this image did not remain static and it was not used exclusively by Afrikaner nationalists. A rise and decline in the use of the glorification of the *volksmoeder* in service of Afrikaner nationalism can be traced. At first it was used as a term of reverence towards, for example, Mrs M.T. Steyn, wife of the last president of the Orange Free State. During the late sixties and early seventies, however, it had become a term of caricature, especially in the works of Afrikaans literary figures such as N.P. van Wyk Louw and M.M. Walters.[43] Recently, African nationalists too, have begun to bestow honour on their 'mothers of the nation', especially Winnie Mandela.[44]

Nevertheless, a few studies on white women did escape this glorification of Afrikaner women. Olive Schreiner's *Women and Labour,* first published in 1911, remains a landmark in national and international feminist writings. Her works questioned widely held assumptions on women, and reflected her own experience of the disadvantaged and exploited position of women in society,

> Finely clad, tenderly housed, life became for her merely the gratification of her own physical and sexual appetites, and the appetites of the male, through the stimulation of which she could maintain herself. And as a kept wife, kept mistress or prostitute,

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[42] C. Pretorius, 'Afrikanervrou', PhD thesis, University of Pretoria, 1977, p.367. Van Jaarsveld, *Wie en Wat*, p.43. See also F. Jaff's book, *Women South Africa Remembers,* Cape Town: Howard Timmins, 1975. Especially the essay on Mrs Issie Smuts, wife of general Jan Smuts, is of interest.

[43] See Appendix for examples of the change in use of the term.

[44] See for example, *The Star*, 4.5.1985, and *Pace*, April 1986. A detailed bibliography of the literature on women in South Africa, black and white, appears in Durban Women's Bibliography Group, *Women in Southern Africa: A Bibliography*, Durban: University of Natal, Department of African Studies, 1985.

> she could contribute nothing to the active and sustaining labours of her society.[45]

Surprisingly, Olive Schreiner had an Afrikaans counterpart. In May 1921 Marie du Toit published *Vrou en Feminist: of iets oor die Vrouevraagstuk.*[46] Du Toit raised the question of the idealised picture of the Afrikaner woman and expressed her views on the position of women in marriage,

> .....gedurig hoor ons maar nog van mindere, minderwaardig, inferieur, swak, swak ja, maar ons moet darem die meeste dra sonder om te mor! Ons word herinner aan pligte, verantwoordelikhede, selfs verwyte kom.... En dit heet ons ereposisie by die anties. 'n Pakkameel-ereposisie voorwaar!
> (...continually we hear only of lesser, of lower value, inferior, weak, weak (women) yes, but we still have to carry most without complaining! We are reminded of duties, responsibilities, even recriminations come.... and that is called our position of honour with the aunties. A load-carrying-camel position of honour indeed!)[47]

Other works in praise, but not as much in glorification of Afrikaner women, are, for example, those of Mrs M.E. Rothmann, Erika Theron, M.J.M. Prinsloo, and D.M. Wessels.[48]

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[45] O. Schreiner, *Women and Labour*, London: Fisher & Unwin, 1911, Commemorative Edition 1975, p.34.

[46] M. du Toit, *Vrou en Feminist*, Bloemfontein: Nasionale Pers, 1921?

[47] Ibid., pp.138-139. She also devoted chapters to issues such as, what is feminism, tomboys, fashion, the enfranchisement of women and women's work.

[48] Carnegie Commission, *Poor White,* vol. V; E. Theron, *Fabriekwerksters*, and M.J.M. Prinsloo, *Blanke Vrouearbeid in die Unie van Suid Afrika*, Cape Town: Nasionale Boekhandel, 1957. Other works include, Mrs Dr D.M. Wessels, *Die Vrou in die Beroepslewe: die Aard en Omvang van Vrouearbeid in Suid-Afrika,* Cape Town: HAUM, 1961. She also published *Vroue en Moeders wat Werk*, Cape Town: N.G. Kerk Uitgewers, 1960. This was part of the Report of the Commission of Enquiry of the Dutch Reformed Church into family life (part vii), and looked at the influence of women's work on her family and the volk. Recently prof. Edith Raidt, in an inaugural lecture at the University of the Witwatersrand entitled 'Vrouetaal en Taalverandering', traced the influence of women on the formation of Afrikaans during the 18th century, *Tydskrif vir Geesteswetenskappe*, vol. 24, no. 4, December 1984. cf. *Rand Daily Mail*, 27.9.1984, and *Beeld*, 28.9.1984.

The use and abuse of Afrikaner women has led to the acceptance of numerous, more often than not, falsely based generalisations about them. Afrikaner women taken up in industrial employment remain a particular enigma. In 1928, at a time when increasing numbers of white women were entering the industrial labour market Ds. Kestell, a leading Afrikaner, expressed fear for the moral safety of such Afrikaner women,

> ...Die karakter van die Afrikaner volk sal verdwyn as die vroue in die fabrieke verlore gaan.
> (...the character of the Afrikaner volk will disappear if the women are lost in the factories.)[49]

In 1946 Pauw dismissed these working Afrikaner women completely in his authoritative book on the career opportunities of Afrikaners in the city. He justified his view in accordance with the myth created of the Afrikaner woman,

> ...die vrou is as huisvrou by die gesinsarbeid betrokke en nie by die beroepsarbeid nie.
> (the woman is involved in family labour as a housewife and not with occupational labour).[50]

This is an unwarranted dismissal of Afrikaner women. In his analysis of Johannesburg municipal voters rolls of 1934, Stals found that only 27,4% of all housewives, that is, economically inactive women over 21, were Afrikaner women, as compared to English women, who formed 72,6% of the total of economically inactive women. In volume I of *Afrikaners in die Goudstad*, Fourie, although analysing this category of economically inactive people differently, also found that in the category 'huishoudelike verpligtinge, huisvrouens ens.' (home responsibilities, housewives etc.), Afrikaners constituted 20,5% of the total and

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[49] J.D. Kestell, *Die Burger*, 1.6.1928, as quoted by G.D. Scholtz, *Ontwikkeling*, p.27. Recently Kinghorn more systematically analysed the implications of the experiences of Afrikaners in factories in the urban industrial areas, in terms of the development of a theology of apartheid. J. Kinghorn, 'Die Apartheidsteologie binne die N.G. Kerk: Enkele Teologiehistoriese Opmerkings', *Tydskrif vir Geesteswetenskappe*, vol. 25, no. 1, March 1985, p.3.

[50] S. Pauw, *Beroepsarbeid*, p.20.

non-Afrikaans speakers the rest.[51] This would suggest that during the twenties and thirties the majority of Afrikaner women were indeed economically *active* in Johannesburg (my emphasis).

As yet no detailed analysis has been made of the occupational distribution of Afrikaner women in Johannesburg. However, it is clear from Pollak's investigation in 1932, that the majority of women employed in the manufacturing industry (circa 90%) found work in the clothing, leather, chemical and food and drink industries. Of these women more than 50% were employed in the clothing industry.[52] An investigation into the work and home lives of the garment workers as a group, therefore, could provide a reasonable reflection of the lives of Afrikaner working-class women in general on the Witwatersrand during this time.

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This dissertation will examine the working and home lives of the garment workers to ascertain their role and function in the urbanisation process of Afrikaner working people on the Witwatersrand from 1918 - 1939. In chapter one, two of the strategies for survival implemented by recently urbanised Afrikaner poor will be analysed. First their settlement in working-class communities in the poorest suburbs of the city will be sketched. Second, the obstacles which confronted fathers, brothers and husbands of the garment workers, the traditional breadwinners of the family, in their efforts to gain entry into the industrial labour market on the Witwatersrand during the twenties and thirties will be examined. Major difficulties, such as a decline in employment opportunities, unemployment, an oversupply of labour and the accompanying decline in wages will be looked at briefly.

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[51] E.J.P. Stals, *Afrikaners*, vol. II, p.47, vol. I, p.200.

[52] H. Pollak, *Women*, p.6. (In 1915/16 it employed 49,9% and in 1932 55,1% of all women in the manufacturing industry.)

Against the background of these strategies for survival of the family functioning as an economic unit in the city, an analysis of the industrial employment of its female members will be undertaken. Chapter two then examines the entry of white female workers onto the industrial labour market. The development of the Witwatersrand clothing industry as a major industry requiring female labour, which provided more than fifty percent of all white women in the manufacturing industry with employment, will be outlined. Prevailing conditions, exploitative practices which existed in the industry at the time and the vulnerability of women to exploitation in the clothing industry will also be scrutinised.

Chapter three traces the influence of these developments, namely the effects of urbanisation, industrialisation and male under-employment on the lives of the garment workers. Difficulties facing garment workers as mothers, such as marital and child care problems, as well as the contribution of the garment workers as daughters towards the economic survival of the family will be examined. The chapter concludes with an examination of the plight of young garment workers without families in the city and tries to establish the implications of the threat of prostitution for these young single women. Chapter four proceeds to an investigation of the economic marginality of the garment workers. It examines the way in which these women who were neither on the brink of destitution, nor all on the verge of becoming prostitutes, but still in need of assistance, turned to the union when they were in need and how the union responded to these requests for aid in matters related to employment, accommodation, health, welfare and leisure.

Finally, chapter five analyses the social marginality of the garment workers; circumstances which lowered their esteem in the eyes of a society which considered them to be in need of rehabilitation. Abuse in the factories reinforced an image of a lack of decency, respectability and virtue and this inspired the garment workers as well as the GWU to respond by affirming and underlining the noble and virtuous qualities of the women

employed in industry. The GWU also proceeded to generate a code of conduct amongst their membership which would govern social behaviour in the factory and which would reinforce the respectability and sense of worth of the garment workers.

# CHAPTER 1

# WITWATERSRAND WORKING-CLASS COMMUNITIES - 'OUR TOWN IS FULL OF NEED'.

## Introduction - The Seductive Swindle of the City

The inter-war years in South Africa witnessed a massive migration of rural Afrikaners to the cities. The white rural population of the country declined steadily, and on average 19 000-20 000 whites poured into the urban centres each year.[1] The Witwatersrand acted as a magnet to vast numbers of these migrants, and as a result its population was nearly doubled during this period, from 230 657 in 1921 to 402 233 in 1936. (See Table 2.) As most of these arrivals were Afrikaners, the Afrikaans-speaking population on the Witwatersrand doubled during the first decade of the twentieth century and again in the second.[2]

A number of theories have been advanced to explain the attraction of the city for the inhabitants of impoverished rural areas. These explanations have centred on such factors as the impoverishment of the rural areas, the continuing capitalisation of land and agriculture, the increased employment opportunities of the city, well- organised and rich welfare organisations and the 'bright lights' of the city.[3]

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1 C.C. Nepgen, November 1931, as quoted by E.J.P. Stals, *Afrikaners*, vol. II, p.32.

2 See also Ibid., p.19.

3 *Ibid.*, vol. II, ch. 1. The standard work on the subject of rural exodus and influx into the cities is by the Carnegie Commission, *Poor White,* especially vol. I, chs. 5 and 6. Other studies include, e.g., P. du Toit comp., *Report*; J.R. Albertyn ed., *Die Stadwaartse Trek;* C.W. De Kiewiet, *A History of South Africa, Social and Economic,* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1941; F.A. Van Jaarsveld, *Die Afrikaner se Groot Trek na die Stede,* Johannesburg: Perskor, 1982; R. Morrell, 'Rural Transformations in the Transvaal: The Middelburg District, 1919-1930', M.A. dissertation, University of the Witwa-

*Die Kerkbode*, official mouthpiece of the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa, graphically captured the essence of the 'urban pull' school of thought when it spoke of the "'blink-bedrog' van die stad" - the seductive swindle of the city - that attracted hopeful migrants. "The opportunities in the city are great", it warned, "but its seduction is twice as great".[4] The bustle of the city, its entertainments, bright street lights and shop windows were seen as contributing to urban social and moral decay.

More recent accounts identify other stimuli which precipitated the influx into the cities. Stals, for example, in his recent history *Afrikaners in die Goudstad*, maintains that,

> die regering (het) die pad vir die versnelde verstedeliking van die Afrikaner gelyk gemaak en verbreed.
> (the government smoothed and widened the road for the accelerated urbanisation of the Afrikaner.)[5]

Along with other authors[6] he argues that after its election victory in 1924, the Pact government did much to create attractive white employment opportunities in the urban areas of the country and to smooth the urbanisation process of the Afrikaner. A Ministry and Department of Labour was founded and employer and employee relationships were eased by the promulgation of the Industrial Conciliation Act of 1924. A 'civilised labour policy' was pursued to protect white unskilled labour

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tersrand, 1982 and I.J. Van Eeden, 'Interne Migrasie Patrone van die Blanke Bevolking van Suid-Afrika met Besondere Verwysing na die Transvaal', M.A. dissertation, Rand Afrikaans University, 1975. The latter deals with the question of migration from a demographic point of view.

[4] *Die Kerkbode*, Ds. P. Du Toit, 'Stedelike Bearbeiding', October 1938, p.653. E.P. Thompson referred to the possible attraction for nineteenth century British rural migrants of the 'bright lights' of the city, but maintained that they were more often propelled to the city by a crumbling village economy. E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979.

[5] E.J.P. Stals, *Afrikaners*, vol. II, p.8.

[6] For example, R.H. Davies, *Capital, State*, pp.225-227.

in the face of competition from the vast unskilled black labour market.[7]

In addition, adverse conditions in the rural areas and a need for economic improvement served to push migrants off the land.[8] Likewise, Hopkins, in his study of the English working class from 1815-1945, found that,

> ...in spite of all the insanitary horrors the new towns still attracted migrants in such large numbers, for many must have considered life in them with all the drawbacks, still preferable to life in the countryside.[9]

Similar considerations played a role in the migration of poor whites to Johannesburg. In 1920, Mrs Lys, a Rand Aid Association officer, told the Johannesburg Unemployment Commission that poor whites maintained,

> "Why should we not come to Johannesburg? Look what we are offered". Johannesburg had free hospitals, homes for babies, schools, clinics and a chance to bring their children to be educated, physically treated and to get a good many things free.[10]

In 1932 the findings of the Carnegie Commission indicated that the same practices had persisted,

> some families actually speculate on the help of churches and charitable bodies. As a rule such families learn to sponge upon charity after settling in the towns.[11]

Towards the end of the decade, representatives of welfare organisations in Johannesburg maintained that in contrast with rural towns, the city

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7 For an assessment of this policy see D. Yudelman, *The Emergence of Modern South Africa: State, Capital and the Incorporation of Labour in the South African Goldfields, 1902-1939,* Cape Town: David Philip, 1983, pp.236-238.

8 Carnegie Commission, *Poor White*, vol. I, Recommendations, pp. xxi-xxii (A) and vol. I, p.178 (A).

9 E. Hopkins, *A Social History of the English Working Class, 1815-1945*, London: Edward Arnold, 1979, p.30.

10 Central Archives Depot, Pretoria (hereafter CAD), K.35. Unemployment Commission, Evidence to the Commission. Evidence Mrs Lys, Johannesburg, 1 October 1920.

11 Carnegie Commission, *Poor White*, vol. I, p.184.

still attracted migrants through the presence of well-organised and rich welfare bodies such as the Rand Aid Association, and several Benevolent Societies which were well-established features in the lives of the poor in Johannesburg.[12]

Each of these approaches is at least partly misleading, since they imply all that poverty was primarily a rural issue which to a large extent fell away once rural migrants settled in the city. This, however, was not the case. Rural Afrikaners arriving in the city found refuge mainly in the poorest suburbs of Johannesburg which stretched from Jeppe, east of Johannesburg, across suburbs such as Booysens, Malvern and Ophirton to Vrededorp and Fordsburg and to the predominantly Afrikaans-speaking West Rand. Here, since the early mining camp days of Johannesburg, Afrikaner poor had managed to eke out a sub-economic living and to evade waged labour by means of alternative independent marginal employment activities, such as brick-making, cab-driving and transport-riding.[13]

However, increased capitalist encroachment on these forms of employment, as well as industrialisation which burgeoned during the 1910's, closed off these avenues of independent enterprise and men were forced to take up waged labour. Many became miners and others took up work on state relief schemes, and still others had to find work in industry. Due to a variety of factors, many men could not easily find industrial employment with which to support their families. Therefore the burden of the urban survival of the family gradually shifted onto the other members of the family who could more readily find work in the industrial environment.[14]

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[12] CAD, VWN 594. Notes on a discussion between social research officer, Department of Social Welfare and social services representativ re immigrant families in Johannesburg, 11.8.1939.

[13] C. Van Onselen, *Studies*, vol. II, p.111; E.J.P. Stals, *Afrikaners*, vol. I, ch. 6.

[14] Carnegie Commission, *Poor White*, vol. II, p.117 (A).

In this chapter, the problems confronting urban Afrikaners as outlined above, are analysed. First the working class nature and structure of the poverty-stricken communities in which the rural Afrikaner poor in general and the families of garment workers in particular, settled on arrival in the city, will be examined. Changes in the labour market, such as increasing unemployment, an over-supply of labour, which adversely affected wages and the employment possibilities of Afrikaner men in general and the male relatives of the garment workers in particular, will be discussed briefly. In addition, impediments such as a lack of skills and education, as well as ill health which further handicapped these men in their search for employment, will be outlined.

## Witwatersrand White Working-Class Communities - An Overview

The rural exodus and urban influx of Afrikaners to the Witwatersrand seem to have occurred according to a distinct pattern. In view of their lack of resources the garment workers and their families sought refuge in the poorer sections of the city, in close proximity to the main industrial areas, where accommodation was relatively cheap.[15] They settled mainly in the suburbs of Vrededorp in Johannesburg and George Town in Germiston. During the 1920's Germiston, the major railway junction of the Witwatersrand, developed into an important industrial area on the Reef.

In 1936 Abel Coetzee found that the majority of Afrikaners resided in low-income suburbs stretching from the east to the west of Johannesburg, across the southern suburbs and onto the West Rand towards Krugersdorp. These included suburbs such as Jeppe, Jeppe's Extension, Booysens,

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[15] For a discussion of black working-class settlement and culture in Johannesburg slumyards, see E. Koch, 'Without Visible Means of Subsistence: Slumyard Culture in Johannesburg, 1918-1940', in B. Bozzoli ed., *Town and Countryside in the Transvaal*, Johannesburg: Ravan, 1983. Also E. Koch, 'Doornfontein and its African Working Class', M.A. dissertation, University of the Witwatersrand, 1983.

Braamfontein, Vrededorp, Fordsburg and Brixton.[16] (See Map 1.) A more general analysis of the 1934 municipal voters' rolls revealed that the majority of Afrikaans-speaking municipal voters resided in the south-western and north-western suburbs of Johannesburg, which were generally perceived to have poorer residents than suburbs towards the north of the city. Afrikaners formed respectively 48,6% and 54,1% of the total number of municipal voters' in these suburbs.[17] Likewise, Pauw established in an analysis of the 1939 provincial voters' rolls that 62,2% of all male voters in Vrededorp were Afrikaners. In Fordsburg, Jeppe and Turffontein, these percentages were respectively 36,8%, 30,2% and 26,6%, while the Johannesburg West electoral division contained 24,7% Afrikaans male voters.[18]

Migration to the largest industrial area closest to the place of origin of migrants, seems to have been a general trend. Erika Theron's investigation during the 1930's into the migration patterns of female factory workers in Cape Town similarly indicated that the majority of these women originated from the rural areas surrounding the Cape peninsula.[19] These findings correlate closely with those of Hansi Pollak who found that a third of the 540 women she had interviewed in her investigation on the Witwatersrand, had been born in Johannesburg or on the Reef, a quarter in the rest of the Transvaal, 20% in the Cape and 10% in the OFS.[20] A survey carried out by the Carnegie Commission in a Johannesburg shirt factory revealed a similar trend. Of the 110 Afrikaner girls employed there, the majority had come from the Transvaal rural areas, followed

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[16] A. Coetzee, *Die Opkoms van die Afrikaanse Kultuurgedagte aan die Rand, 1886-1936,* Johannesburg: Afrikaanse Pers, 1936?, pp.336-338.

[17] E.J.P. Stals, *Afrikaners*, vol. II, pp.20-22. In 1949 these percentages were 64,7% and 46,5% respectively.

[18] S. Pauw, *Beroepsarbeid,* p.170.

[19] E. Theron, *Fabriekwerksters*, pp.11-12.

[20] H. Pollak, *Women*, pp.266-267 and tables 50-51.

by the Cape and then the OFS. About a third had been born on the Rand.[21] In 1934 a list of the first inhabitants of the SAVF Harmonie Hostel revealed that of twenty girls, seven came from Transvaal towns such as Potchefstroom, Piet Retief and Heidelberg and four from Free State towns such as Kroonstad and Heilbron.[22] According to Coetzee, rural migrants from the Orange Free State settled mainly on the East Rand, in close proximity to the gold mines, whilst new arrivals from the Cape and the western districts of the Transvaal settled mainly on the West Rand.[23] Likewise, a decade later in 1939, an analysis of new arrivals in Johannesburg applying for relief revealed that the majority of applicants originated from the surrounding Transvaal countryside. It was found that the 151 Transvaal cases represented 233 adults and 282 children. The families from both the OFS and the Cape had, in total, fewer children than adults. It can therefore be deduced that more family migrations took place from the Transvaal countryside into Johannesburg than from the Cape and OFS, which accounted for relatively more single migrants to the Reef. (See Table 6.)[24]

Once resident, new arrivals in the city did not often move very far away from their initial area of settlement, if they moved at all. These usually were poor but relatively stable working-class communities. Among the group of women interviewed for this study it was found that in the majority of cases the women had not migrated far from the suburb where they had initially settled. Many of the women who were interviewed at their homes, had lived there for 40-50 years, e.g. Mrs Pennells and Mrs Vosloo, while many others, having been widowed, had moved into the local

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21 Carnegie Commission, *Poor White*, vol. I, p.185. Of the 110 girls, 30 were born on the Rand, 43 in the Transvaal, and 23 and 12 in the Cape Province and Orange Free State respectively.

22 CAD, VWN 465. List of inhabitants of Harmonie Hostel, 1934.

23 A. Coetzee, *Kultuurgedagte*, p.327.

24 CAD, VWN 594. Analysis of Immigrant Cases for 1939. Memorandum, the Social Services Association of South Africa, Johannesburg Branch, to Secretary for Social Welfare, 9.1.1940.

old age home, for example Mrs Britten, Mrs Du Toit, Mrs Herman and Mrs Labuschagne.

Mrs Labuschagne, a garment worker during the early twenties, summarised the immediate problem which faced a rural migrant on arrival in the city during the early twentie', 

> Werk was nie maklik om te kry nie. Ek is dom. Jy kom van die plaas af en jy ken nie die dorp nie, en jy moet maar 'settle' jy weet. (Work was not easy to find. I am stupid. You come away from the farm and you do not know the town, and you just have to settle, you know.)[25]

Regardless of their inexperience and alienation, these rural immigrants were forced to 'settle' and find accommodation. However, housing in Johannesburg was scarce and expensive. During the period under review, 1918-1939, the pattern of supply and demand for housing changed considerably. After the First World War, there was a steady demand for cheap rentable housing, whereas the supply consisted of relatively expensive houses with rentals of £12.10.0 or more per month. By 1923 the supply of working-class houses for rent outstripped the demand, to the extent that a survey of the Johannesburg City Council found that some 322 houses in working-class suburbs were standing empty.[26]

The rapid influx of impoverished whites from the rural areas into Johannesburg prior to and during the Great Depression dramatically altered this picture of available, but relatively expensive accommodation. In many cases people who could previously afford to own or rent a house could no longer do so and were forced to let the house or portions of it to defray costs and contribute towards rent or bond repayments. The father of Mrs Pennells found himself in a similar predicament. He had

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[25] Interview 16.

[26] S. Parnell, 'Whites in the Slums of Johannesburg, 1920-1935', draft chapter, M.A. dissertation, University of the Witwatersrand, forthcoming. The following section relies heavily on information gleaned from this paper. My thanks to the author for making it available.

done well on the Barkley West diggings and bought a house in Richmond, a suburb close to the centre of Johannesburg. However, as conditions deteriorated during the twenties, he let his house and took up employment at a butcher in Linden where accommodation was included as part of his wage. Likewise, in an effort to defray costs, Mrs Nel let her house and moved into the rooms at the back of the property.[27]

Not surprisingly, many new arrivals in the city could not afford to rent such accommodation. In 1933 the Johannesburg City Council found that some 1 121 white families resided in unhygienic and overcrowded slum conditions in areas such as Fordsburg, as well as in parts of Jeppestown, Doornfontein and Newlands. At the time rooms were let at a pound per month and were shared either by a family or, on occasion, up to four or more adults.[28] As is evident from Map 1(insert), these impoverished migrants often found accommodation in the slumyards of racially integrated suburbs of Johannesburg as well. In addition, in a survey of slum housing conducted by the Johannesburg City Council during the mid-thirties it was found that about 48% (928 of 1 922) of families actively in need of rehousing were white.[29]

As with the settlement patterns of Afrikaners in general, the garment workers also settled in the poorest suburbs of the city. The greatest number of garment workers were found in Jeppe, Jeppe Extension and West Malvern in the east, Ophirton and Booysens in the South and Fordsburg and Vrededorp to the West.[30] Of all these areas, Vrededorp on the west side of the city centre was the most densely populated by garment workers.

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[27] Interviews 21 and 19.

[28] E.J.P. Stals, *Afrikaners*, vol. II, p.25. In the 1930's and 1940's rooms varied from three to four pounds per month and houses from seven to eight pounds.

[29] S. Parnell, 'Whites in the Slums'.

[30] Johannesburg Public Library (hereafter JPL), Voters' Rolls, Johannesburg, 1931.

George Town, the oldest suburb of Germiston, was also well populated by garment workers. A study of voters' rolls for Vrededorp and George Town reveals that in Vrededorp seven and eight garment workers lived in 11th and 5th Streets, Vrededorp, whilst four garment workers lived in 8th and 12th Streets and three garment workers each resided in 14th, 15th and 17th Streets respectively.[31] Mrs Harmse, a garment worker who was interviewed for this study, moved into the suburb after her marriage and still resided there in 1985.[32]

Vrededorp has always had a reputation for poverty and slum conditions. In 1893 it was initially set aside by the Kruger government for poverty-stricken burghers who had been forced off the land by the 'accelerated capitalist development of the late nineteenth century.'[33] Vrededorp was,

> said to be one of the worst slum areas in existence, harbouring as it does in its sea of iron shanties the flotsam and jetsam of low class Coloured peoples, Chinese, Indians and Natives - many of purely criminal class,[34]

acting Standard Bank Inspector Mr J. Leash reported in 1921. In 1930 Inspector A. Innis maintained that Fordsburg and Vrededorp were still the worst slums in Johannesburg where,

> Poor Whites, Indians, Chinese, Coloureds and Natives were living cheek by jowl.[35]

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31 Ibid. Germiston, 1931. The houses situated in Vrededorp and George Town, the most dilapidated and oldest townships of Johannesburg and Germiston respectively, were demolished in the 1960's and these suburbs are now being redeveloped. *Germiston Advertiser and East Rand Recordor* (hereafter *Germiston Advertiser*), 31.8.82.

32 Interview 12.

33 C. Van Onselen, *Studies*, vol. I, p.145.

34 Standard Bank Archives (hereafter SBA), INSP 1/1/214. Standard Bank Inspection Report, The Bank Generally (hereafter Inspection Report), 14.4.1921.

35 SBA, INSP 1/1/301. Inspection Report, 14.3.1930.

In 1931 the SAVF of Mayfair echoed the general view that Fordsburg and Vrededorp were of the most impoverished areas in Johannesburg,

> Fordsburg is ongetwyfeld die armoedigste distrikt (sic) van Johannesburg en die armoede en ellende wat ons hier aantref is ontsettend.
> (Fordsburg is undoubtedly the poorest district of Johannesburg and the poverty and suffering we find here are incredible.)[36]

The Carnegie Commission described the state of affairs in Fordsburg as 'particularly unsatisfactory'.[37]

As members of a relatively stable population residing in one of the oldest suburbs of the city, the Afrikaners of Vrededorp from a very early date developed into a cohesive working-class community.[38] Van Onselen maintained that during the pre-World War I period,

> this Afrikaner corps in the reserve army of labour demonstrated its capacity for organised resistance from an early date and that in this struggle it manifested an essentially working class consciousness.[39]

In the succeeding decades, this community did not lose its cohesive structure, but retained it and elaborated on it. For example, in 1925 Vrededorpers sent a deputation of rate-payers to General J.B.M. Hertzog protesting against the derogatory way in which their suburb was spoken of.[40] Again, in 1937, the pending declaration of Vrededorp as a slum area was averted by the concerted efforts of its inhabitants, who objected to the erection of a new sub-economic housing scheme which would eventually rehouse the community in which they had invested their life's

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[36] CAD, VWN 2865. SAVF Mayfair, application for registration as welfare organisation, 26.3.1931. cf. SBA, INSP 1/1/292 and INSP 1/1/320. Inspection Reports, 31.1.1929, and 30.9.1932.

[37] Carnegie Commission, *Poor White*, vol. I, p.220. As was the case with Germiston, the gold mines south of Johannesburg were the major employers of the men from Fordsburg and Vrededorp, with the prosperity of these suburbs depending entirely on them. SBA, INSP 1/1/338. Inspection Report, 9.1.1934.

[38] C. van Onselen, *Studies*, vol. II, p.160.

[39] Ibid., p.112.

[40] E.J.P. Stals, *Afrikaners*, vol. II, p.22.

**Author** Brink Elsab├⌐
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