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# THE GRIQUA CONUNDRUM: POLITICAL AND SOCIO-CULTURAL IDENTITY IN THE NORTHERN CAPE, SOUTH AFRICA

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Arts, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Johannesburg, 2001

# THE GRIQUA CONUNDRUM: POLITICAL AND SOCIO-CULTURAL IDENTITY IN THE NORTHERN CAPE, SOUTH AFRICA


## Abstract

This thesis focuses on the study of Griqua ethnic identity in South Africa. The purpose of the research is to explore critical questions of identity construction and mobilisation. The study investigates the social, cultural and political aspects of Griqua identity and leadership in South Africa. This is accomplished through an exploration of how Griqua people have engaged in national and international political processes. It also includes an examination of how these affect, and are affected by, people in local communities. This is achieved through an intensive focus on a single community, namely the people living in Griquatown in the Northern Cape. Griquatown is the site where people were first recognised as a specifically Griqua collective and a few monuments testify to this important Griqua (and Colonial) history. Despite 40 years of apartheid classification as Coloured, many people in Griquatown still see themselves as Griqua and emphasise their historical origins. Extensive research was conducted during 1996, 1997 and 1998. The focus concerned the lives of people in Griquatown and what being Griqua meant to them. This local focus has been integrated within a broader concern of national political processes. This analysis, through the study of household politics, ritual, religion and the gendered nature of interaction, is thus located in the interstices between national and local forces and accentuates these hitherto neglected areas.



**Keywords:** Griqua, Griquatown, ethnic identity, nationalism, gender, political moblisation, religion, ritual, status

**Declaration:**

I declare that this thesis is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination in any other university.

S R Caldwell.

**(name of candidate)**

13 **(day of)** February, 2001

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**Abbreviations:**

| | |
|---|---|
| **ANC** | African National Congress |
| **DCD** | Department of Constitutional Development |
| **DFA** | Diamond Fields Advertiser |
| **GCPO** | Griqua and Coloured People's Opinion |
| **GHS** | Good Hope Society |
| **GIC** | Griqua Independent Church |
| **GNC-Kr** | Griqua National Conference (based in Kranshoek) |
| **GNC-Ky** | Griqua National Conference (based in Knysna) |
| **GNF** | Griqua National Forum |
| **GNR** | Griqua National Council |
| **GPO** | Griqua People's Organisation |
| **KRC** | Khoisan Representative Council |
| **LMS** | London Missionary Society |
| **MBOD** | Medical Bureau for Occupational Diseases |
| **NGK** | Dutch Reformed Church |
| **NGSK** | Dutch Reformed Mission Church |
| **SABC** | South African Broadcast Corporation |
| **SAIRR** | South African Institute of Race Relations |
| **VGK** | United Reformed Church in South Africa |

# CHAPTER ONE:
# INTRODUCTION[1]

Attention, worldwide, was drawn to the plight of indigenous people with the declaration of the Year of the Indigenous People in 1993 and by the Decade of Indigenous People from 1993 – 2003. During this decade, indigenous people throughout the world have rallied together and attempted to change governments' perspectives of them as irrelevant, marginal and undeserving of special attention (Suzman, 2000; Saugestad, 2000). In South Africa attention focused largely on the 'bushmen' (Landau, 1996; Morris, 1996; Ross, 1996; Jolly, 1996: Sharp and Douglas, 1996; Smith, 1996; White, 1995) and on questioning their claimed authenticity (Saugestad 1996). It also, however, was directed at the plight of other authochtons: at Nama mobilisation as indigenous and autochthonous (Sharp and Boonzaier, 1993, 1994; Sharp, 1996, 1997; Robins, 1997); at the relationship between these people and the more international global context in which they operate (Bredenkamp, 2000, Robins 2000; Hamilton, 1997) and at the Griqua leaders who were particularly articulate in voicing their opinions and demands (Minkley, Rassool, and Witz, 1996; Saugestad, 1996; Bredenkamp 2000).

This thesis introduces new themes in relation to the debate on indigenous people in South Africa, in a discussion of the Griqua people who have long sought official recognition within their country of birth and who have only recently begun to acquire this recognition. The thesis documents negotiations between Griqua leaders, organisers and government officials and, in so doing, details a complex process of mediation and interaction that would be largely overlooked if one were to concentrate on the more overt discourse of Griqua leaders at official functions (Bredenkamp, 2000; Bank, 1998). Such a focus does not encompass all ethnic identification and, as Sharp has pointed out, there are important class differences between leaders and their followers. Whereas many leaders – and in particular Griqua leaders – are relatively well-off and educated, their followers and indigenous people in general remain impoverished and marginalised within the South African State (1996: 93). The thesis aims to address this marginalisation by drawing attention to these people. It examines the meaning of being Griqua for those 'quieter', poorer people who live in the small town of Griquatown in the Northern Cape, and who are relatively isolated from the Indigenous People's Forum and the United Nations.

[1] The financial assistance of the Division for Social Sciences and Humanities of the National Research Foundation (South Africa), towards this research is hereby acknowledged. Opinions expressed and conclusions arrived at are those of the author and not necessarily to be attributed to the National Research Foundation.

## ETHNIC IDENTITY AND NATIONALISM IN SOUTH AFRICA

The Griqua comprise an extremely diverse category of people who form part of the South African collectivity. They are defined neither by geographical boundaries nor by cultural practices. The name Griqua resulted from missionary intervention at *Klaarwater* (today called Griquatown) in 1815 when Rev. John Campbell of the London Missionary Society persuaded the diverse group of people north of the Orange River who called themselves 'Bastaards' or *Basters*[2] – comprising colonial 'misfits' or people of mixed parentage, Khoikhoi, San, Korana, escaped slaves and others – to change their name to a more respectable term (Ross, 1976: 12, also see Halford, 1949, discussed in more detail in Chapter Three). South African academics have been divided on the question of how to classify the Griqua people of South Africa. They have described the Griqua as a sub-category of the Coloured people (van der Ross, 1993: 21); as not constituting an ethnic group (Morris, 1982: 14); as constituting an ethnic group (President's Commission, 1983. 63; Waldman, 1989: 98) and as a nation (Cloete, 1986: 25). In part, the confusion of labels is due to the difficulties academics have experienced in handling the concepts of ethnic identity and ethnicity (Cohen, 1978; Comaroff, 1987; Kovacs, 1978; Handler, 1985; Williams, 1989).[3] In 1988 I argued, following Barth (1969) and van Binsbergen (1981), that the Griqua in Griquatown could be described as manifesting ethnic identity on the basis of self-ascription and their redefinition of the past. I further argued that, through an assertion of Griqua or non-Griqua identity, people were claiming an identity in which class was more salient than ethnicity (cf. Keys, 1981; van Binsbergen, 1981).

The literature on ethnicity and ethnic identity in South Africa helps one to view Griqua assertions of identity in context (Butler, 1989; James, 1990; Gordon and Spiegel, 1993; James, 1994; Sharp, 1980, 1994; Sharp and Boonzaier, 1988, 1994; Webster, 1991). South African ethnographic studies of ethnicity have tended to restrict themselves to the study of local dynamics in relation to, and shaped by, apartheid (cf. Eriksen, 1993: 97, Dubow, 1994). This results partly from the use of participant observation, which tends to force a narrow focus on one's research topic, and partly from anthropologists' relationship with the apartheid state (Gordon and Spiegel, 1993; Sharp, 1997). These studies have explained the emergence of ethnic identities by showing how these

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[2] *Baster* translates to mean bastard or child of illegitimate birth. However, the word gained additional social and economic meanings in the context of the Cape Colony. Socially, *Baster* came to indicate children of mixed parentage, especially children born to white and Khoi parents, but it also referred to children of Khoi and slave unions. Economically, the term *Baster* referred to people of a slightly better class who were transport riders, craftsmen or small farmers and did not perform menial work such as farm or domestic labour (Legassick, 1979:256-7, also see Nurse, Weiner and Jenkins, 1985: 226).

[3] Handler argues that ethnicity and nationalism are 'social phenomena constituted not merely by cultural difference, *but by a Western theory of cultural difference*. .... In other words nationalism and ethnicity challenge us as ethnographers to distance ourselves from a culture theory, grounded in Western common sense, that we share with the subjects of our studies' (1985: 171, original emphasis).

facilitated access to resources within the context of localised and apartheid-structured political economies (see, for example, James, 1990; Sharp and Boonzaier, 1994; Webster, 1991).[4] In this thesis I have adopted a broader perspective and have examined Griqua identity in terms of its wider context as advocated by Cohen (1969) and in the light of interactive multi-ethnic and multi-cultural circumstances (Cohen, 1978, Sharp, 1996, Martin, 1998). This allows ethnic identities and mobilisation to be seen as intrinsic to the development of modern states (Glazer and Moynihan, 1975, Handler, 1988, Hobsbawm, 1991). It also situates the recent efflorescence of Griqua identity both within the current multi-cultural nationalism advocated by the South African government and in the context of the international trend mobilising for social, political and economic rights on behalf of autochthonous populations (see especially Chapters Two and Four).

Prior to the 1994 elections and the development of a democratic government, anthropologists tended to reject ethnic particularism primarily because of the manner in which ethnicity was moblised by the apartheid government as a means of enforcing political division and economic exploitation (Dubow, 1994: 356; Sharp 1996: 102). Ethnic identity was therefore seen from two perspectives in South Africa. These have been summarised as 'naming' and 'claiming' by Comaroff (1996). 'Naming' referred to the primordial and essentialist approach adopted by the apartheid state to delimit other weaker collectivities. For this reason, any acknowledgement of the primordial elements of ethnic identity resonated strongly with the imposition of ethnic categorisation by apartheid engineers. 'Claiming', however, referred to the understanding of ethnic identity in a 'situational, contextual, and subjective sense. According to this usage, ethnicity is understood as a form of social identity that acquires content and meaning through a process of conscious assertion and imagining' (Dubow, 1994: 368). It was this 'social constructivist' approach that anthropologists and historians adopted, insisting that South African ethnic identities were historically constructed. The deconstruction of primordial discourses of identity during the 1980s thus acted as a critique of apartheid domination and came to be termed 'exposé analysis' (Gordon and Spiegel, 1993).

With the demise of apartheid and the dawning of a democratic era, anthropologists were faced with new theoretical and conceptual issues. They found that many previously marginalised categories of people – such as the Nama, Koranna or Griqua – began

[4] Eriksen has argued that, in general, studies of ethnic identity have not adequately addressed the role of cultural differences. He points out that analytical attention to cultural differences has moral and political dangers as it emphasises cultural stereotypes and tends to reify cultural differences. Thus academics have tended to focus on social process and not on cultural difference when writing about ethnic identity (1993: 136).

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articulating claims to an indigenous and primordial identity. Such claims were not the same as apartheid's imposition and did not deserve similar robust, deconstructive analysis (Sharp, 1996: 102).

> Striking those discourses [imposed by the apartheid government] down was an easy intellectual task, in that it did not call for any difficult moral choices. But now we are faced not only with the imposition of 'otherness' by the powerful on the powerless, and with the inscription of this 'otherness' in the cultural rhetoric- the texts – of those who have power. We are also being faced with the claiming of 'otherness' as a weapon in the hands of those who see themselves as weak, and as a means of articulating their demands for recognition, dignity and resources. Now we have some difficult distinctions to make (Ibid., 1996: 102-103).

Academics were caught between deconstructing these discourses, as indeed they had done in the past, or accepting essentialist notions of ethnic identity for political reasons. As Sharp points out, there were problems with both these approaches. On the one hand, it was difficult to accept these discourses wholly and uncritically and, on the other, it was impossible to distinguish between deconstruction for academic purposes and the political undermining of people's claims. Thus both these approaches came to be seen as equally limiting for academics, and Sharp points to the need to develop new theoretical perspectives (1996: 87).

A response to such challenges can be seen in Sharp and Boonzaier's analysis of Nama claims to an authochonous and primordial ethnic identity (1994). Their solution was to see the ritual enactment of these discourses as a performance: in which Nama people were 'able to approach these discourses as good actors in a play' (Sharp, 1996: 94). Their argument was that indigenous people articulated primordial discourses of identity when necessary, but that they did not wholly believe their own performances. Rather these actors were able to analyse, critically and reflexively, their own discourses of primordialism.

This approach was soon criticised by Robins for its failure to recognise that 'cultural hybridity, fragmentation and inconsistency' are fundamental components of Nama existence (1997: 26). Sharp and Boonzaier's analysis of Nama identity drew on a political economy model of reality which they saw as contradicting the ideological position emphasised by the Nama themselves. In seeing Nama articulations of their primordial links with their ancestors and the land they occupied as a performance, Sharp and Boonzaier created a distinction between one reality (the one the Nama could be seen to engage in daily) and their articulation of that reality (Robins, 1997: 26; also see

Sharp, 1997: 7). Their articulation of an autochthonous identity, Robins argues, has to be seen as more than an instrumental act guaranteed to secure certain economic gains. 'It is precisely because of their shattering encounters with Western domination and ethnocide that the cultural world of Namaqualanders is comprised of fragments, re-inventions, incoherence, disjunctures, silences and hybridity' (1997: 26).

The study of 'difference' in post-apartheid South Africa thus provided academics with new challenges and with the need to rethink seriously their anthropological approach. Part of this reworking involved the recognition of ambiguity and hybridity as a fundamental condition of many minority peoples and also of the paradox inherent in all nation-building projects (Sharp, 1997: 18, discussed in more detail below). It also entailed a recognition that all discourses of ethnic difference were relational and that indigenous peoples were 'entering into a dialogue with the wider society' in which many of the less positive aspects of Western society were contrasted with indigenous culture (Sharp, 1996: 92).[5] Finally, studies of difference conducted after the demise of the apartheid government provided academics with an opportunity to begin to analyse the previously ignored interrelations between emergent ethnic identities and the nationalism advocated by the new government. I turn now to a theoretical discussion of nationalism, the implications of which are further explored in Chapters Two and Four.

Grand narratives, seeking to explain the ubiquitous nature of nationalism, are best illustrated in the work of Anderson (1991), Gellner (1983; 1997), Hobsbawn (1990; Hobsbawn and Ranger (1983) and Smith (1991, 1995). Anderson has argued that nationalism is a particular product of culture which has gained a certain emotional legitimacy (1991: 4). His now famous definition of the nation as an 'imagined political community' alerted scholars to the political and ideological components of nationalism. The underlying idea is that people who make up the nation never know all the other members of the nation, yet each individual retains an image of their collective identity made possible through the emergence of print capitalism. This understanding of nationalism has, as Alonso has pointed out, revealed a 'misplaced concreteness' both in nationalist discourse and in academic thought (1994: 383).

Gellner (1983) and Hobsbawn (1991), like Anderson (1983), also understand the nation (and nationalism) to be a uniquely modern phenomenon which has arisen as a result of specific developments in European history. For Gellner, however, it is the centralised state's requirements of cultural homogeneity, in order to operate efficiently, that creates the conditions in which nationalism thrives (1983, 1997). Nationalism is furthermore

[5] Saugestad has similarly argued that 'indigenous' is a relational concept and that one group is 'only indigenous in relation to another encompassing group' (2000: 7).

seen as a recent form of social organisation which acts to subvert reality. While nationalism professes that it protects folk culture and diversity, in practice it undermines this and develops an anonymous and culturally homogenous mass society (Gellner, 1983: 124-5). Thus Gellner points to the constructed nature of nationalism which 'invents' nations where they do not exist (1983: 169). Anderson, however, expands on Gellner's approach and argues that nationalism should also be seen as a mode of political imagination (1983).

Smith is in agreement that nationalism is a recent phenomenon, arguing that it stems from European developments during the seventeenth and eighteenth century (1991: 74). His departure from Anderson and Gellner concerns his emphasis on nationalism as a 'form of culture and identity' which 'attains and maintains the *autonomy*, *unity* and *identity* of a nation' (1991: 73, 75 original emphasis). Smith recognises that nationalism can operate at different political, economic, social and historic levels, and has a 'chameleon-like ability' to shape itself to the prevailing needs and perceptions of particular communities and competing factions. This is rather like Gellner's idea that nationalism is not all that it represents itself to be. Smith further argues that it is for this reason that nationalism cannot be 'neutralised' by ensuring that cultural units be aligned with their corresponding political units (Smith, 1995: 13).

Within apartheid South Africa, homeland policies constructed ethnicity and nationalism as oppositions (Greenstein, 1995)[6] and this may have resulted in the strong focus on ethnicity within South African academic work (Adam and Giliomee, 1979; Butler, 1989; Dlamini, 1998; Minnaar, 1993; Segal, 1991; Marks, 1989; Maré; 1992). This meant that South African anthropologists neglected the relationship between ethnic identity and nationalism which, as Williams (1989) points out, is both complex and obscure: the two have often been intertwined in analysis.[7]

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[6] Greenstein himself does not see ethnic identity as an impediment to nationalism, arguing that in South Africa it provided the basis for the development of a comprehensive African identity (1995).

[7] Nationalism seems to have many of the characteristics of ethnicity and some writers have understood it to be a variant thereof (Eriksen, 1993: 101). Eriksen suggests that the key factor in distinguishing between ethnicity and nationalism is the relationship that nationalist ideology has with the state: it is an 'ethnic ideology which demands a state on behalf of the ethnic group' (1993: 118). In practice, however, it is not always possible to make so clear a distinction. Handler's distinction is similar to Gellner's notion of nationalist ideology as a 'false-consciousness' that invents nations and in so doing homogenises pre-existing cultures into one 'high-culture' (1983), although Gellner emphasises that one nation should have one culture and hence 'ethnic group' becomes synonymous with 'nation'. Cultural homogenisation, Gellner's key feature of nations, has also been identified as a characteristic of ethnic groups and Glazer and Moynihan point out that ethnic groups in the United States show remarkably little cultural differentiation (1977). Anderson defines a nation as an 'imagined political community' (1983: 3) and, again, this definition has also been used to describe ethnic groups in South Africa (see Sharp, 1988). Both Gellner and Anderson see nations as ideological constructions that are trying to establish a relationship between a state and a particular cultural group or ethnic group in order to secure political and economic resources.

Handler, in his study of Quebec, shows that nationalist discourses are 'attempts to construct bounded cultural objects' (1988: 27). In the process of nationalism, culture becomes objectified while the maintenance of ethnic boundaries and the resourceful use of history establishes a sense of continuity (Handler, 1988). This is necessary because, as Eriksen has suggested, nationalist ideology provides security and perceived certainty during situations of social change and conflict (1993: 100).

Nationalism as an ideology endorses cultural egalitarianism (Gellner, 1983); put differently, it is concerned with boundedness and homogeneity but encompasses diversity (Handler, 1988). Nationalism can also encourage resistance if a portion of the population sees itself as separate from the nation (Eriksen, 1993). Thus Friedman argues that '(e)thnic and cultural fragmentation and modernist homogenisation are not two arguments, two opposing views of what is happening in the world today, but two constitutive trends in global reality' (1990: 311 quoted in Eriksen, 1993: 9).

It is in the light of the recent changes in South Africa, which have reversed Coloured people's 'privileged' position vis-a-vis the power structures, that we can see the recent Griqua challenges to democracy and nation-building in South Africa (cf. Sharp, 1994). As discussed in Chapter Two, the far-reaching political transformation has opened up new avenues for the Griqua to pursue and they have adopted new arguments concerning cultural representation. At the beginning of my research, there was a strong feeling that, having lost out under apartheid, the Griqua were now being marginalised by the new government and would continue to be ignored by any African government that came to power. They responded to this alienation by seeking recourse to a Khoisan, indigenous[8] identity - which has recently been described by Bredenkamp as 'Khoisan revivalism' (2000). This has, in part, involved the redefinition of their identity. Previously 'Griqua' under apartheid, they have become KhoiKhoi for international, and more recently national, usage (President's Commission, 1983; Waldman, 1989 also see Sharp and Boonzaier, 1994; Bredenkamp, 2000).

Griqua leaders have understood this mobilisation, not as a challenging of nationalism, but as a process of claiming their rightful place in South Africa. These leaders are thus conforming to the multi-cultural principle that all ethnic groups have the right to remain

[8] In South Africa, as in other African countries, the definition is complicated by the argument that all Africans are indigenous in the sense that they are original inhabitants, 'non-dominant' and are culturally separated from white colonists (Saugestad, 2000: 5 – 6). An attempt to move beyond this position has led to the use of a post-colonial definition that stresses internal differentiation. In this definition, indigenous people are, according to Eriksen (1993: 126), 'non-state people' who are well-positioned to spur controversy against the state (also see Suzman, 2000; Nthomang, 2000; Thornberry, 2000).

distinctive and all individuals have the right to be treated as equals within the nation. Nationalism can, however, be seen to be inherently paradoxical and poses a vexing puzzle:

> The state may be accused of injustice both if it promotes equality *and* if it promotes difference. If the state stresses equal rights and duties, minority members may feel that their cultural distinctiveness is not being respected; that their boundaries and identities are threatened. ....If, on the other hand, the dominant group stresses cultural differences and turns them into virtues, minority members may feel that they are being actively discriminated against (Eriksen, 1993: 142 original emphasis).

Debating the nature of resurgence of ethnic identity and its relationship with the state does not, however, adequately address all that identity comprises. Indeed, as Comaroff has argued, it is '(a)ll too easy to underread the complexity of the political force fields, the physical conditions, and the material relations that inform contemporary constructions of ethnicity, nationality, and identity' (1996: 164). Rather ethnic identity is shaped in the expression of unequal power relations, in social and economic inequality as experienced at local levels and in the 'minutiae of everyday practice' (Comaroff, 1996: 166). These issues have been raised in this literature review, but they are also given comprehensive attention in Chapters Two and Four of this thesis.

Griqua women appear to be, in some ways, more Griqua than their male counterparts. The question of gender relations and of gendered identity is addressed throughout this thesis. It is not, however, a separate area of analysis, rather the thesis examines both men's and women's concerns as integral parts of understanding Griqua identity. Gender relations provide, perhaps, the most profound level of difference at the local level and in everyday experience, yet anthropologists have tended to treat ethnic identity and nationalism as gender-neutral. Women are usually absent from discussions of the state and politics (Geisler, 1995) and an examination of recent South African politics leads Walker to argue that gender equality is sure to be underplayed in the government's attempt to buy the allegiance of chiefs, what she calls the 'politics of traditionalism' (1994). But, as Delaney points out, citizenship can never be gender-neutral. In the process of building Turkish nationalism, for example, men and women's roles were defined according to the gender stereotypes of men and women's activities within the family (Delaney, 1995; also see Alonso, 1994: 384-385; Smith, 1991: 79). In this regard, women are often constructed as the biological and cultural reproducers of 'the nation' (Yuval-Davis, 1997: 37).

It appears that neither academics nor active participants in ethnic mobilisation have seriously contemplated the interaction between men's and women's roles. Although Eriksen points to the complex relationship between gender and ethnic identity (1993: 154), he limits himself to a discussion only of sexual stereotyping and gender symbolism. Studies of ethnic identity in southern Africa have addressed the question of how men mobilise for access to resources (see for example Vail, 1989), whereas women's efforts to do likewise are rarely seen as ethnic mobilisation (James, 1994). In South African writing, women have seldom been seen as ethnic subjects (but see Butler, 1989; James, 1994; and Webster, 1991). When women do claim an identity, this has appeared not as strategic ethnic mobilisation but rather as 'a wholehearted, unmediated and unreflexive affiliation to a culture' (James, 1994: 5; also see James, 2000b). Research among Australian Aborigines shows, however, that it is precisely this 'cultural work' of the women that has enhanced land claims and women's status (Povinelli, 1991).

It is far from obvious that women are dormant partners in the process of ethnic and political mobilisation. Their role as ethnic or political subjects may become more salient particularly in an era when both international and national development projects have been targeting women (and indigenous groups) as recipients of their funding (Eriksen, 1993; Escobar and Alvarez, 1992). In this thesis gender is seen as integral to all components of social life (Di Leonardo, 1991). The processes whereby Griqua men and Griqua women seek to acquire prestige, civil rights, material resources and political power and, in so doing, co-operate with or challenge each other, and attempt to define and restrict each other's roles are examined in Chapters Five, Six and Seven of this thesis. In this regard, the insight provided by Di Leonardo is particularly pertinent. In her work on Italian-Americans, she sees women as doing 'the work of kinship' (1984: 194). In the case of these Italian-Americans, this involved writing letters, presenting gifts, visits and telephone conversations, holiday get-togethers and so forth. This maintenance of kin relations between households was, in effect, a process during which gender relations became 'inscribed in constructions of ethnic identity' (1984: 194). Both men and women benefited from this kin work, men because it connected them to a broader family without any effort on their part and women because these kin networks allowed them to expand their authority and influence (1984: 200). There is no immediate parallel between Di Leonardo's study of Italian-American women and the women of Griquatown, but the idea of women doing the 'work of kinship' is particularly pertinent. As I show in Chapter Five, it is, in some contexts, women who are inherently Griqua and men who are defined as *inkommers*, or newcomers, to a broader Griqua family. It is therefore women who ritually construct Griqua society and who are given the task of cultural protection of the boundaries of this society (see Chapter Six). Much of women's behaviour is therefore couched in terms of an association with the home and

the domestic sphere, through which they are activating the control not only of their own domestic spaces, but also of a broader and more inclusive Griqua domesticity which allows them a particular ethnic claim to power and autonomy.

But, in examining the gendered quality of ethnic identity, I have found it pertinent to focus on individuals as well as on socially constructed categories of people. The study of individual consciousness in relation to ethnic identity has been largely neglected in Social Anthropology. In this thesis, I attempt to analyse the relationship between individual and collective identity, looking especially at one person and her relation to society. Within social science, this is generally tangentially referred to in debates on structure and agency (Giddens 1984, 1990; Cohen, 1994; Kuper, 1992) and the notion of the individual has been largely overlooked. This is not to say that individuals have not been examined in anthropological literature (eg. Tsing, 1993; Abu Lughod, 1993; Kaplan, 1998) but these have always been individuals in 'prescribed' positions (Burridge, 1979: 16) who are taken as somehow being exemplars of culture or society. Collective understandings of society are not, however, 'external, constraining communal values' which can be understood separately from the individuals who make up these aggregated representations of their worlds (Cohen, 1994: 115).

Whereas some academics might argue that anthropological studies of individuals are reductionist retreats into psychological theories (for example Reminick, 1983: 6), Kuper suggests that the 'characteristic unit of social life is neither individual act nor social value but the re-enactment of values; and these form systems which may be compared' (1992: 8-9). Similarly Strathern argues that academics have incorrectly conceived society as a construct that exists apart from, or above, individuals. It is, however, the relationships that individuals foster, between themselves and between institutions, that are important (Strathern, 1992a; 1992b; Holy, 1996) and Cohen therefore theorises a relationship between individuals and society without separating individuals and societies into separate conceptual categories (1994: 152). An understanding of society must therefore be sought both among individuals and at collective communal or institutional levels (Cohen, 1994: 118). Cohen further draws our attention to the hitherto neglected area of individual self-consciousness in relation to ethnic identity. He argues that academics have failed to ask what an individual is aware of when he or she invokes ethnic or national identity and they have failed to demonstrate how individuals are constructed in the images of these collective categories (Cohen, 1994: 124 -5). Williams similarly criticises the study of ethnicity for being a reflection of what anthropologists believed people to be doing, as opposed to what people themselves believed they were doing (1989: 404).

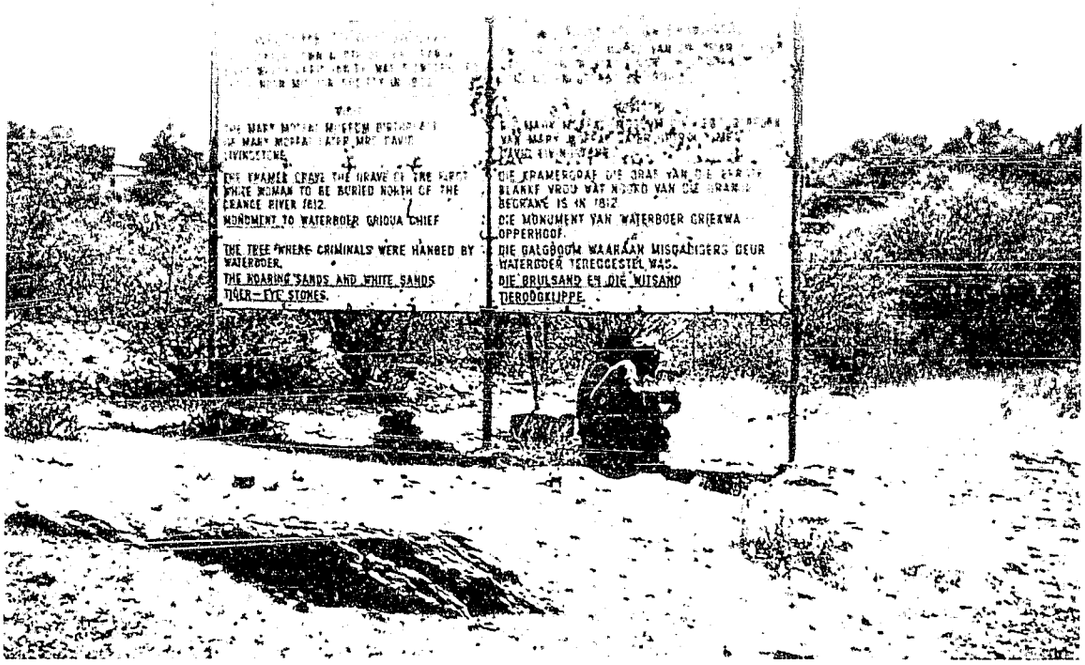
National identity, it has been argued, can be seen to be locally mediated (Sahlins, 1989 cited in Cohen, 1994) and Cohen takes this one step further to argue that local identity rests on individual consciousness. It therefore follows that

> individuals are more than their membership of and participation in collectivities, and ..., that collectivities are themselves the products of their individual members, so that ethnographic attention to individuals' consciousness of their membership is an appropriate way to understand the collectivity, rather than seeing it as constituted by an abstracted, if compelling, logic (1994: 133).

This emphasis on individuals and their identification with ethnic and national collectivities has been completely lacking from South African anthropology. In Chapter Seven of this thesis I examine the life of one individual – Sarah Meintjies or Liepie as she is known – and argue that there is no straightforward identification with either a national or an ethnic consciousness, but rather that she as an individual shifts her opinions and perspectives according to other processes that take place in Griquatown, affecting her and her immediate family in profound and intricate ways. Her sense of self, of Griqua and of South African identity is intertwined in complex ways with her experiences of daily life and her struggle to retain her respectability.

## GRIQUATOWN: THE PLACE

**Figure 1.1**: The entrance to Griquatown (1998)

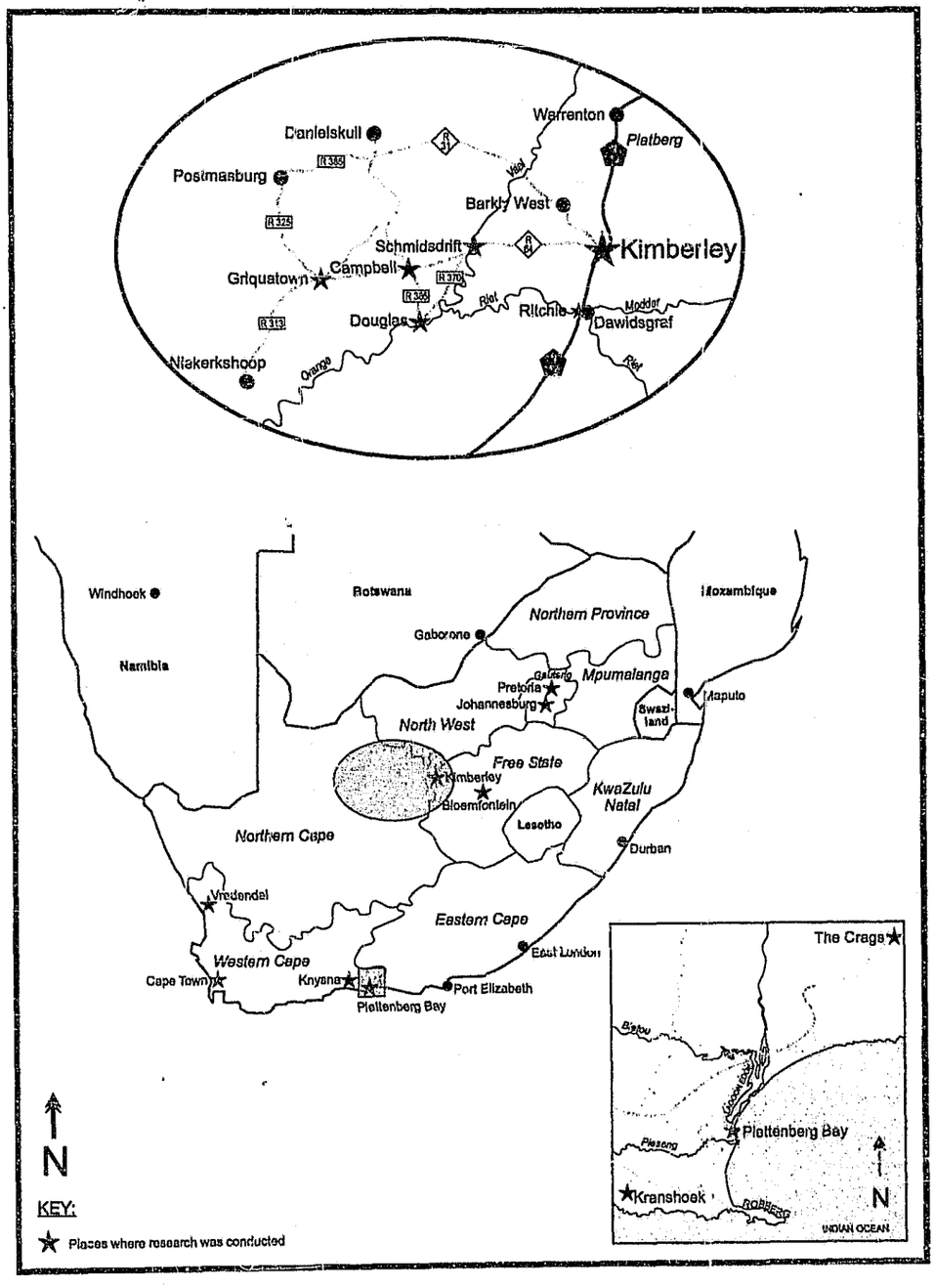


'Welcome to Griquatown' reads the pock-marked and rusted signboard immediately outside the residential area. While the sign invites people into Griquatown, most tourists rush straight through to see the flowers of Namaqualand. Many residents wish that they too could leave Griquatown as easily as these cars that barely stop. Few residents see the sign as having any significance and its primary purpose has been to provide shade for people taking refuge from the sun while they attempt to hitch-hike a ride out of town in search of employment.[9]

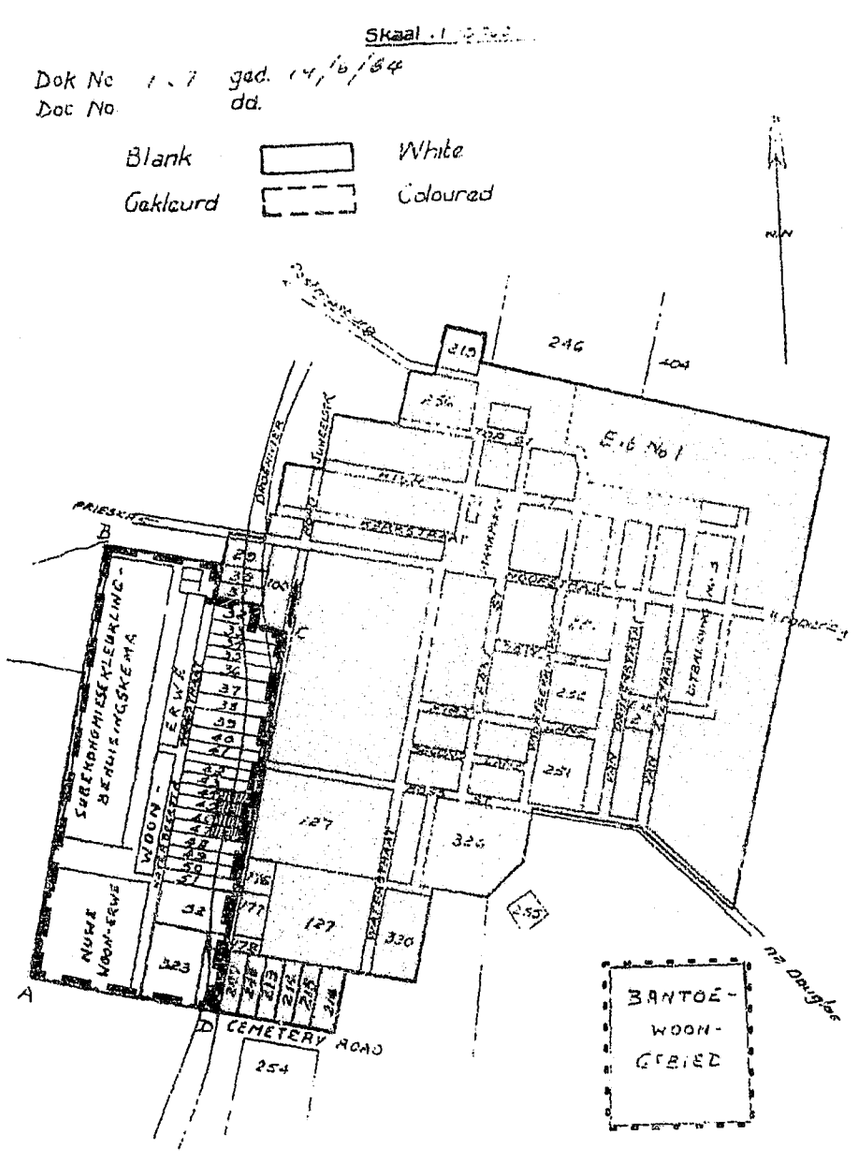
Griquatown is a small farming town which developed around a mission station situated in a shallow depression 150 kilometers due west of Kimberley (see Map 1.1). Few traces of the original mission station remain. By 1997, despite the change of government in South Africa, Griquatown still, in the main, resembled a classic apartheid town with segregated residential areas: the white area, known both as Griquatown and, in Afrikaans, as *Griekwastad*, is alongside a Coloured location initially known as Phillipsville and renamed Rainbow Valley in 1994.[10] Two and a half kilometers to the south west of Griquatown and Rainbow Valley is the African location called *Itiereleng* (meaning 'do it yourself') during the apartheid era and later *Matlhomola* ('place of sadness'). The name Griquatown thus referred both to this complex of residential spaces and to the smaller area occupied by the 'white' town (see Map 1.2). There have been some changes to the initial apartheid layout, however. When the legislation that enforced racial divisions was withdrawn at the end of the apartheid regime, schoolteachers and other successful residents of the Coloured and African locations purchased houses in the former 'white' area. In a further effort to reshape the town, new houses – built as part of the Reconstruction and Development Program – have been situated in the spaces between Griquatown, Rainbow Valley and *Matlhomola* in order to create a town that fills one geographical space.

[9] By November 1999, the sign on the eastern entrance to the town was obscured by a small tree and the western one had disintegrated.

[10] The term coloured is particularly problematic in South Africa and is discussed in far greater depth in Chapter Four. In this thesis, I use the capital C to refer to the official apartheid classification of people or places as Coloured, and a small letter c to indicate a more general and emic usage of the term.




**Map 1.1:** Illustrating the location of Griquatown and fieldwork sites.




**KEY:**

Griquatown (White residential area)

Phillipsville / Rainbow Valley (Coloured location)

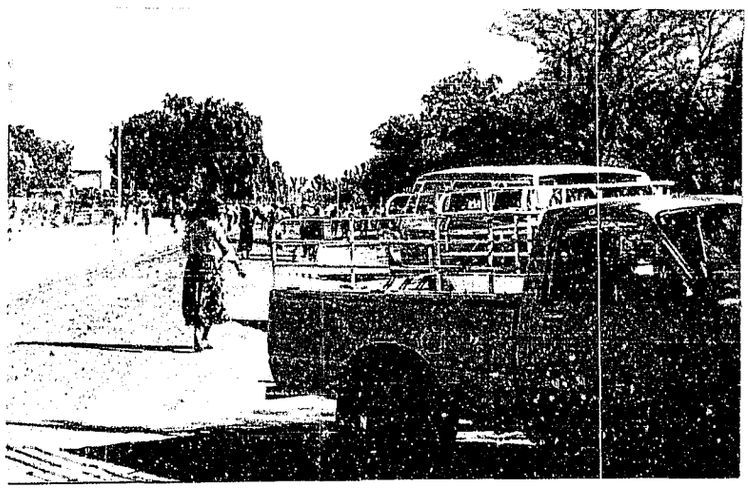
Itiereleng / Matlhomola (Black location)

**Map 1.2:** Griquatown layout as envisaged by the Town Council in 1964 (when finally built in 1984, Itiereleng was moved 2.5 km away from Griquatown).

The first impression one receives of Griquatown is of a small, quiet town. The next image is one of acute poverty. Cars are old, houses and shops are unpainted and people drift about poorly-dressed and obviously unemployed. This, however, was not always the case. During the 1970s, the Griquatown district was reasonably wealthy, with residents deriving incomes from diverse activities such as sheep and cattle farming, karakul-pelt farming, flagstone quarrying, lime works and the mining of asbestos,

manganese, iron ore and semi-precious stones.[11] By the 1990s, however, the asbestos mines had closed[12] and karakul farming had ended.[13] With the shifting farming and mining economy, the local populations experienced severe employment cuts. For example, between the 1960s and 1970s, 12 000 – 14 000 workers were employed on the crocidolite (blue asbestos) mines. By 1992 less than 500 labourers were employed on the remaining two mines still producing crocidolite (Felix, *et al.*, 1994: 267). Similarly when Karakul farming came to an end, many farmers experienced a difficult transition to mutton (primarily the Dorper and Black-headed Persian sheep) and retrenched some of their labourers.[14]





**Figures 1.2 & 1.3:** Views of Griquatown (1998)

[11] Griquatown Municipality Scrap book, no date

[12] The extreme medical dangers associated with asbestos have led to trade union and consumer struggles in First world countries. In addition, stricter legal controls and litigation cases in the U.S.A have resulted in decreased demand for asbestos and South Africa's exports have diminished to only a few countries that are still willing to overlook these dangers (Felix *et al*, 1994: 267).

[13] Changes in the fashion industry and a concern for the protection of endangered species led to a ban on fur coats. The Karakul industry, with its tendency to slaughter young lambs, was adversely affected by these shifts.

[14] For the farm workers, the end of Karakul farming also meant that they received less meat. As the lamb-meat from Karakul farming had no market value, farmers had allowed their workers to eat as much as they liked. Conversations, Hetta Hager, 10/01/1998 and Hendrik van Eck, Campbell, 13/01/1998.

From the 1970s onwards, the quality of life became progressively worse for the people of Rainbow Valley who experienced increasing poverty and unemployment. To some extent this has recently been ameliorated by increased access to state pensions – which, indeed, has discouraged them from re-entering employment. A household survey I conducted in 1988 revealed that occupants of only 38.4 % of the households received pensions and most people were employed as sheep shearers, drivers, builders, fencers, domestic workers, gardeners and farm labourers. In stark contrast, a 1997 survey showed that only 13% of the people living in council houses and 20% of the people in the informal shanty houses in Rainbow Valley were economically active (Macroplan, 1997: 6). As indicated in Table 1.1 (page 18), a further survey in 1997 revealed that almost 79% of all households in Rainbow Valley relied on at least one pension in order to survive[15] and that pensions provided the only source of income for 22% of all households. In pension-less households, residents employed a range of strategies to increase household income. Some people ran shebeens, or sold firewood, meat, sweets, etc., while others provided a taxi service or took in boarders. Many people did odd jobs such as scrubbing floors, washing, cleaning, painting, repairing gates or fences, in both Griquatown and Rainbow Valley.[16] None of these jobs provided secure employment and people spent long periods without work.

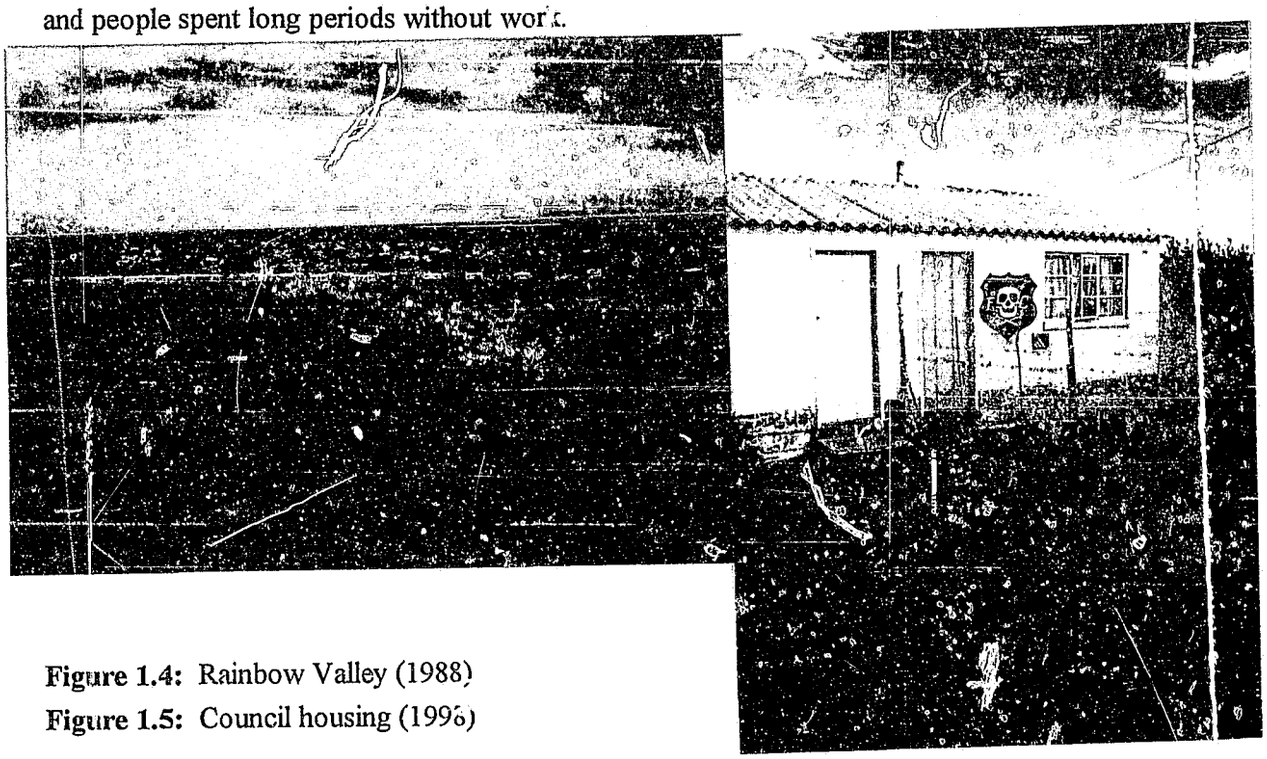


**Figure 1.4:** Rainbow Valley (1988)
**Figure 1.5:** Council housing (1996)

[15] Household Survey, 1997; Conversation, van Staden, Department of Welfare, Griquatown 14/01/1998

[16] Odd jobs did not pay well and people could expect to receive between R10 and R15 per day in Griquatown, R8 – R10 a day in Rainbow Valley and R12 – 13 per day on farms during the harvest season. Conversation, Anna Visser, 20/01/1998.

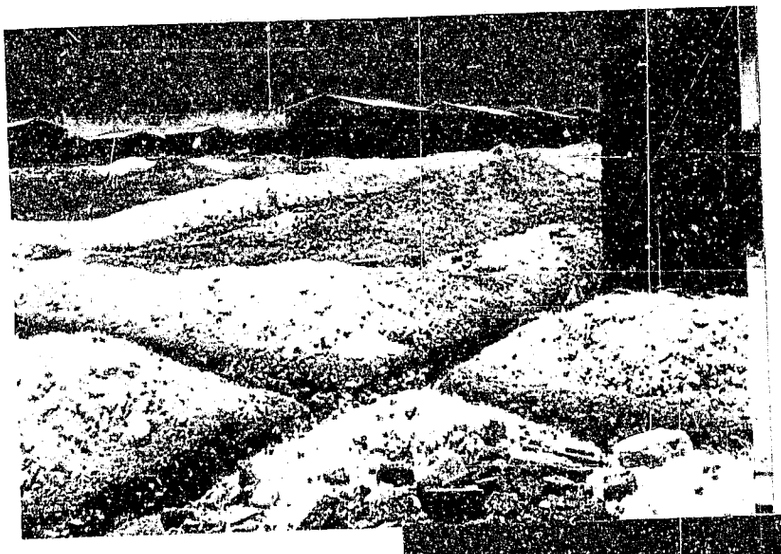


**Figure 1.6:** RDP foundations & new RDP housing (in shadow, 1998)

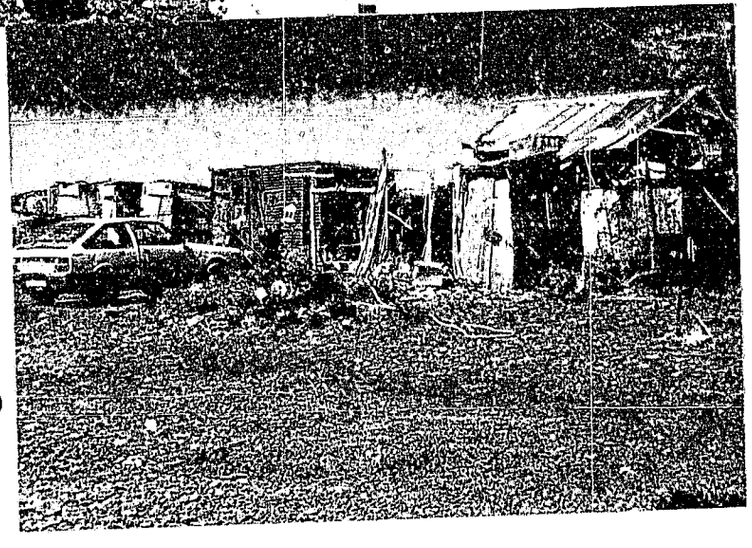


**Figure 1.7:** Shanty housing (to be razed once people are allocated RDP houses, 1998)

Those few women who were able to secure full-time employment in Griquatown were generally domestic workers and earned between R120[17] and R310 per month,[18] whereas men, as gardeners, earned between R230 and R450 per month. These wages contrast markedly with the R470 that was received by pensioners and others eligible for maintenance or disability grants. More formal posts, such as those at the municipality and as receptionist, paid about R500 per month, but only 25 men and ten women were employed in such posts. The Divisional Council also paid relatively well (between R700 and R1 200 per month), but employed only ten men to maintain and repair roads. The Reconstruction and Development Program housing scheme was the largest employer in Griquatown, employing 150 men and four women in 1998. Here builders earned between R600 and R700 a month, whereas unskilled workers earned less.[19] Almost a

[17] On 1/08/2000, $1 was equivalent to R7.05 and £1 to R10.60.

[18] Domestic work in Kimberley was better paid and one informant's daughter was able to remit R500 per month to her parents (Household Survey No. 19, Jan Hugo, 10/12/1997).

[19] Most households survived through the government pensions. A small number of households received no state pension and individuals had regular and well-paying work and / or received substantial remittances from family members living elsewhere. People from these households were employed in the best paid jobs in Griquatown, such as the Post Office, schools, shops – for example Pep Stores – and the South African Police Force. Many of

quarter of the households surveyed (22%) relied on money remitted from outside Griquatown. Sisters, mothers, fathers, husbands, boyfriends and daughters working in places such as Kimberley, Welkom, Port Elizabeth, Johannesburg and the Cape were relied upon to remit money regularly.

**Table 1.1: Sources of Household Income, Griquatown 1997.**

| Household Income | % of households in Griquatown |
|---|---|
| Employment provides entire household income | 19.4% |
| Government pensions supplement household income | 56.4% |
| Government pensions provide entire household income | 22.0% |
| Destitute households with no income | 2.2% |
| Total | 100.00% |

Not surprisingly then, Griquatown has been described as a 'pension town' or as 'having a pension culture'[20]: a reference to the fact that most people in Griquatown survived through pensions.[21] This phrase also pointed to the certainty that, for people in Griquatown, it was considerably more lucrative to receive a pension than to be employed. An old or disabled person could receive a pension of R470 per month whereas a job on a farm would pay only R270 per month (also see Brown, 1996). It was thus more profitable to be declared medically unsound, and to apply for a disability grant, than to look for work. Not only did pensions provide more money than formal jobs but, because of the limited work opportunities in Griquatown, being registered as a pensioner or the recipient of a disability grant was the best way to procure an income.

Ironically, while asbestos mining had provided jobs and a reasonably lucrative income between the 1960s and the 1980s, it was asbestosis, the fatal disease associated with the asbestos, that provided financial relief for many people in the 1990s. The bulk of the asbestos mines had been situated in the Hay Division of Griqualand West – in which Griquatown lies – and in 1930 Hall listed 35 active asbestos mines of varying size (1930:

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these households also had dual income earners. A few households were destitute and had no regular income whatsoever. These households can only have survived through the goodwill of other people in Rainbow Valley.

[20] In October 1997 the Post Office paid out a total of R445 152.64 in cash to 866 welfare recipients. The average payment was thus R514.03 although the range of payments was R130 – R5 320. Most people, however, received R470 – the standard payment for old age and disability grants.
If a claimant was married, then the spouse's income was factored into the pension payments and this generally accounted for extremely low payments. The extremely high payments, such as the R5 320 cited here, result from delays in processing applications. When the pension has been granted, it is backdated to the initial date of application.

[21] First National Bank, the only bank in Griquatown, 'imported' money twice a month in order to provide the necessary cash for these pension payouts. Conversation, Manager, FNB 14/01/1998

65-69).[22] Many people in Griquatown had lived in the vicinity of these mines or had been employed on the mines. Mine labourers who could prove that they had worked on a mine and who suffered from asbestos-related diseases were eligible for compensation. In the Northern Cape, asbestosis payments or *myngelde* (lit. mine money paid by the Medical Bureau for Occupational Diseases (MBOD), are a one-off – but crucial – source of income.[23] During the late 1970s and early 1980s, asbestos compensation varied from R6 000 to R30 000, depending on an individual's racial status, position held and employment duration (Myers, 1981: 241).[24]

Many other people had lived in the vicinity of asbestos mines, but had not been employed. Some of them also tested positive for *mynstof* (lit. mine dust, asbestosis) as a result of environmental exposure, but were not eligible for compensation from the MBOD. Their only hope of compensation was a state disability pension or *ongeskik pay* of R470 per month. People who suffered from first-degree complaints – less than 40% damage to the function of the lungs – were, however, deemed fit to continue to work. A recurring complaint was that the doctor in Griquatown would not declare people with first degree *mynstof* as *ongeskik* (lit. disabled or unfit).[25] He said that the person was able to do 'light work'. The residents of Rainbow scoffed at this. What was 'light work'? The boer (Afrikaner) did not distinguish between light work and other work.[26] Only individuals who suffered more than 40% damage to their lungs (second-degree poisoning) were deemed eligible for disability pensions.

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[22] Amongst the largest asbestos mines were Koegas, Elandsfontein and Blackridge. Koegas mine was closed in 1979 because it was worked out (Granada Television, 1986). In 1985 it become impossible for the mines to ignore the medical dangers of asbestos and towns such as Kuruman, Postmusburg, Prieska and Vryburg were declared 'dust control areas'. Although this meant that the asbestos waste dumps were to be covered with soil (*Distriksrekordboek*, 1978), little was done to redress the situation and to protect people from exposure to waste asbestos.

[23] The MBOD examined potential victims of asbestos-related diseases and compensation was paid for asbestosis, mesothelioma and lung cancer (Myers, 1981: 241).

[24] The categories for which one could claim compensation and the amount of compensation had been racially based during the apartheid era. Coloured and White workers had been classed together whereas different compensation requirements existed for African workers. Different criteria were also considered with regards to the form of payment and the nature of compensation after the death of the worker (for more information see Myers, 1981). The payment could either be made as a lump sum or on a monthly basis. Most people, however, appear to have chosen the single payment and the money seems to have rapidly vanished. Ouma Mol, for example, was paid out R11 000 and R6 000 for Asbestosis, but the money was lent to various people and spent. Conversation, Audrey Williamson, 15/12/1997.

[25] Pleural asbestosis, the most common form of asbestosis, does not lead to physical impairment. It has been argued that, because of the lack of physical damage, compensation is not necessary Myers, however, points out that such an argument neglects the 'reality of progression of the disease after stopping work and the increased incidence of cancer in later life (1981: 236). The Medical Bureau for Occupational Diseases argues that a person can continue working with first degree asbestosis whereas a second degree sufferer is incapacitated. Should a person's disorder progress from first to second degree, it would be immediately apparent to the Health Authorities and the person would be compensated accordingly (Conversation, Dr Banyini, Director MBOD, 8/01/1999).

[26] Conversation, Paul Martin, Ds. David Isaaks and Dawid Smith, 11/09/1997

Because so many people in Griquatown worked on the mines and suffered accordingly, *myngelde* was an important source of income. Because of the large sums of money involved, some people were genuinely disappointed when they discovered that they were not suffering from asbestosis or *mynstof*. There was also a degree of status associated with the receipt of *myngelde*. Asbestosis sufferers were considered to be rich and hence valuable to their families.[27] Stories about *mynstof* and the associated large sums of money, such as the one related below, circulated rapidly through Griquatown:

> Hendrik Bankies' brother, Joseph Bankies, had died. His lungs had been removed and sent away for testing. After it was confirmed that he had suffered from *mynstof*, the question was raised as to who was to inherit his compensation. People said that the money should have gone to his daughter, but as she was already in her 30s and no longer a dependant, she could not claim it. Instead it was claimed in the name of Henry Bankies' son who was 19 years old. The agreement was that the money would be shared and Joseph's daughter would get R10 000 of the R34 000.[28] The money was used for three gravestones of R10 000 each and then each of the six children was paid R4 000. With the remaining money, two more gravestones were purchased (note that this equals R84 000 and not R34 000).

This example demonstrates the competing claims for asbestosis payments and the manner in which families attempted to redistribute the money. The fact that so much money – in this case even more than was actually available – was said to be spent, illustrates the enormous importance of these payments for the purchase of very expensive items. The concern was not, however, only with money. Rather, the above story demonstrates a fundamental concern with identity and, as an important component of identity, descent. R30 000, an amount equivalent to five and a half years of pension payments, was said to be spent on the erection of three gravestones. A further two gravestones were then said to have been erected with the remaining money. Thus the essence of this apocryphal story is the appropriate use of asbestos payments to mark the graves of deceased family members. In so doing, the living were cementing the relations between themselves and the people from whom they were descended and drew their identity. It is remarkable that only after the bulk of the money was said to have been spent on gravestones were the living descendants allocated money for more immediate and material needs. Asbestos mining, therefore, as well as producing wealth and resulting in death, provided the wherewithal to establish continuities with the dead and to emphasise historical ties with land around Griquatown. In using payments to erect gravestones, both for those who had died of asbestosis and for other family members, the living were locating themselves and their ancestors as being of Griquatown.

People in Griquatown, then, were poverty-stricken, unemployed, depressed and – to a large extent – disabled or poisoned by *mynstof*. Nonetheless, as illustrated by the above example, these people continued investing in a sense of identity, emphasising who they were and who they were descended from. They demonstrated the need to define and cement their identity as being 'of Griquatown'.



**Figure 1.8:** Pension registration day

Before turning to an in-depth study of the meaning of identity and place for the people of Griquatown (discussed particularly in Chapters Five, Six and Seven), it is necessary to examine the manner in which my fieldwork was conducted.

## FIELDWORK AND METHODS

Griquatown – the primary research site on which this thesis is based – was not an accidental fieldwork discovery.[29] As a South African and an anthropologist, I have a long history of involvement with the people and places in the Northern Cape. For many years I considered the Northern Cape – and in particular the city of Kimberley – to be my home. In 1987 I accompanied Fiona Barbour, a friend and fellow anthropologist who worked at the McGregor Museum Kimberley, to a *saamtrek* (rally) in Griquatown. I was her 'research assistant' and, as a third year anthropology student, I earnestly followed her instructions and attempted to record details of the event. A year later I returned to Griquatown to study girls' initiation rituals as part of my Honours degree. For a month I interviewed people about the significance of the ritual and I attended one such ritual. It was during this period that I was introduced to the complex ways in

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which Griquatown residents thought about their identities. It was these themes of ritual and identity – and the difficulties associated with understanding and representing them – that were constantly to draw me back to Griquatown and finally to result in the decision to return and initiate this study into Griqua identity.

Having visited Griquatown in December 1994 and January 1995 to film a girl's initiation ceremony, my research formally began in September 1995 when I drove to Griquatown to hear Nelson Mandela – then President of South Africa – address Griquatown residents and honour the leaders of the Griqua people. I was not, therefore, the 'professional stranger' or 'outsider' depicted in the anthropological literature (cf. Wilson, 1988: 42).[30] My relationship with the people of Griquatown was already established and people's photograph albums contained both photographs taken by me and photographs of me. Neither was I the solitary white male living in isolation amongst people of strange customs (Stocking, 1992: 59, Clifford, 1997: 197). Rather I was a young white woman returning to the Northern Cape – a place I had thought of as 'home' for many years – and visiting people I had known for almost a decade.[31]

Griquatown was, in many ways, an 'anthropologically appropriate' place to situate my research, despite the familiarity of returning to a place where I was known. Getting to Griquatown entailed a journey of considerable distance, before arriving in a rural town defined predominantly by its agrarian activities (cf. Gupta and Ferguson, 1997: 8).[32] It therefore entailed a 'necessary' spatial separation: Johannesburg – my place of work and of theoretical writing – was distanced from my fieldwork activities – the site of data collection.[33] The tropes of entry and exit – that serve to construct the difference between fieldwork and 'home' – thus remained a part of the research experience for me although, as Agar has argued, these entries and exits occurred more frequently as a result of working in my own country (1980: 52).

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[30] Clifford, for instance, has argued that doing fieldwork may involve a return to a 'place never known personally but to which she or he ambivalently, powerfully "belongs"' (1997: 208). He furthermore suggests that this process of returning is not the same as going to do fieldwork, as the researcher's associations, commitments and interests will be differently organised.

[31] See Wilson who argues that because her research was based at Greenham, a peace camp comprising an international community, in no way could she be considered an outsider or 'professional stranger' (1988: 42). Gupta and Ferguson comment that the idea of 'going into the field' and 'returning home' is difficult for those people who do not conform to a Euro-American middle class model (1997: 17). It is, in addition, difficult for people who – despite the fact that they may to a certain extent conform to this model – are doing fieldwork in their own country and in areas with which they are familiar.

[32] Also see Clifford who argues that the word 'field' invokes ideas 'of cleared space, cultivation, work, ground' (1997: 187). In this sense, the agrarian and rural nature of Griquatown further emphasises its anthropological appropriateness.

[33] Two different styles of writing constitute ethnographic research. Fieldnotes, written in the field, have an immediate quality. They are 'close to experience', fragmented, comprise primarily raw data and are intended for personal use. In contrast, the writing of ethnographic papers is academic, theoretical and perfected for a public audience (Gupta and Ferguson, 1997: 12).

'The unspoken premise that "home" is a place of cultural sameness and that difference is to be found "abroad" has long been part of the common sense of anthropology (Gupta and Ferguson, 1997: 32; Clifford, 1997: 186). Despite the fact that Griquatown was 'different' from Johannesburg, it was not possible to sustain an absolute separation between 'home' and the 'field' and Griqua leaders, from various places in South Africa, visited me in Johannesburg. As Okely has suggested, anthropology conducted in home countries cannot construct social difference in geographical terms, and boundaries are constructed in more elusive terms (1996: 4). I attended conferences alongside some of my informants and listened to their presentations. On one occasion, and at the writer's request, I read one such paper in advance and offered suggestions. Informants and I discussed conference presentations and arguments. In addition, I carried a notebook and tape recorder to academic conferences and conducted participant observation amongst both my academic colleagues and other research informants.[34] Despite the frequency with which I did this, it remained an eerie experience, perhaps because of the collapsing of both spatial and disciplinary boundaries. The 'field' came even closer to my 'academic home' when informants visited me in my office at Wits University or telephoned from colleagues' offices and informed me that they were presently filming a television show or attending a conference and I was welcome to join them. Studying the attitudes and behaviour of my academic colleagues during these events left me uncomfortable, not least because of the arrogance of the academic process (cf. Agar, 1980: 41).[35] In such instances, the activities of my informants can be seen as similar to those of anthropologists going into the field: they traveled to conferences where they presented their 'work'; met people who could assist them in their causes or organisers and political representatives in similar positions. Like anthropologists they conducted research but, instead of going to rural villages, their research was done at universities, museums and other institutions which purportedly researched and preserved cultural items or knowledge. Fieldwork might therefore be more accurately described as 'travel

[34] Wilson argues that ethnographic research ought to be considered as 'confrontation', thereby undermining ideas of anthropological objectivity and destroying the anthropological other (1988: 54). Similarly Tedlock encourages the 'observation of participation' which allows for the integration of the self and the other in a single ethnographic narrative (1991: 69). Also see Hastrup who describes the research process as a violent relationship in which the anthropologist – in pursuing the anthropological project -- 'systematically violates the other's project' (Dwyer, 1977 cited in Hastrup, 1992: 122).

[35] Gupta and Ferguson point out that in Central and Eastern Europe similar processes are underway. Here the 'field' is in close proximity to academic institutions and academics are frequently called upon. In addition, researchers maintain their links with people in the field long after the actual fieldwork has been completed (1997: 28).

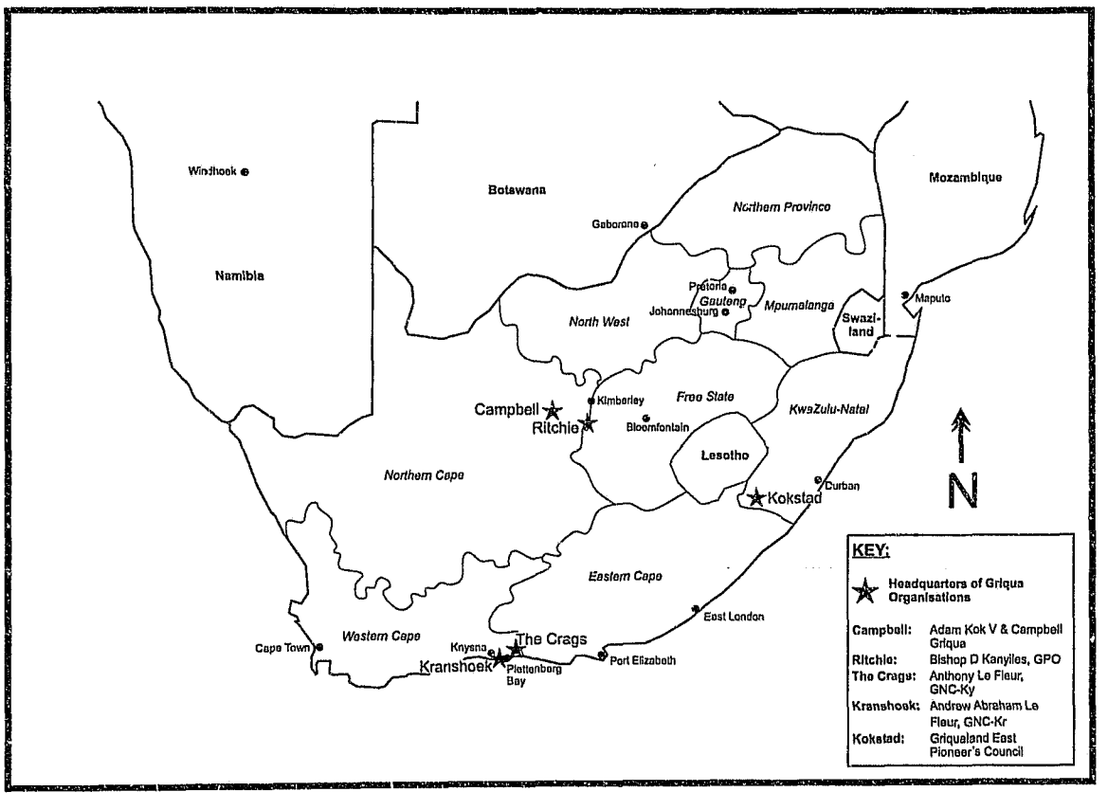
encounters' for, as Clifford points out, both anthropologists and informants frequently travel to each others' home and to the 'field'. Thus, argues Clifford, fieldwork can be seen to occur in 'worldly, contingent relations of travel, not in controlled sites of research' (1997: 198).[36]

The emphasis on research in 'the field' has operated to limit the kinds of anthropological data collected and Gupta and Ferguson point out that interpersonal relations are strengthened at the expense of other, less local and personal types of information (1997: 15). Although I chose Griquatown as my primary research site, I was concerned to investigate Griqua activities at the level of national negotiation and political representation. There has been considerable Griqua political action in South Africa during the 1990s. Griqua leaders, such as Andrew Abraham Stockenstrom le Fleur, Bishop Daniel Kanyiles, Adam Kok V and Anthony le Fleur, campaigned vigorously for official state recognition of the Griqua people and for redress, primarily through constitutional accommodation and land reform, for the injustices committed against the Griqua during the apartheid era. In order to research this national scenario, I spent considerable time visiting these leaders' headquarters and researching their associated organisations: for example, Andrew Abraham Stockenstrom le Fleur and Anthony le Fleur each headed an organisation known as the Griqua National Conference; Adam Kok V campaigned on behalf of the Campbell Griqua, whereas Bishop Kanyiles led the Griqua People's Organisation. Many of these leaders opposed the authority of their rivals and organisations often undermined or disregarded the followers of other organisations. In a frequently enacted situation, one leader would issue a statement on Griqua mobilisation or demands only to have another organisation or leader challenge his words. In addition, and to further complicate matters, there were a number of other organisations, created through those organisations which were working together, and which sought to unify and strengthen Griqua representation in South Africa (discussed further in Chapter Two). Today, few of these political processes are evident in Griquatown and the reasons for this lack of local level political mobilisation are discussed further in Chapter Five. In order to research this complex process, I attended the political rallies, cultural events or rituals of these different organisations. I also observed numerous meetings between government officials and Griqua representatives.

[36] Clifford further cites the work of Narayan who argues that 'native' anthropologists – like all anthropologists – belong to various different communities. These alliances and identifications 'crosscut, complement and trouble' each other. As such, native anthropologists are 'multiply located vis-à-vis their work sites and interlocutors' (1997: 206). Removing the distinction between 'native' and 'outside' anthropologists leads to the questioning of other, related oppositions such as 'cultural insider' or 'outsider', 'home' and 'field' and most importantly, ideas of sameness and difference. Okely has similarly questioned the importance of spatial boundaries. She suggests that different categories of people inhabit the same spaces and that the boundaries between these people are manipulated depending on the contexts. Furthermore, the 'boundary' of social difference is often a consequence of the anthropologist's identity and his or her choice of research topic (Okely, 1996: 3)

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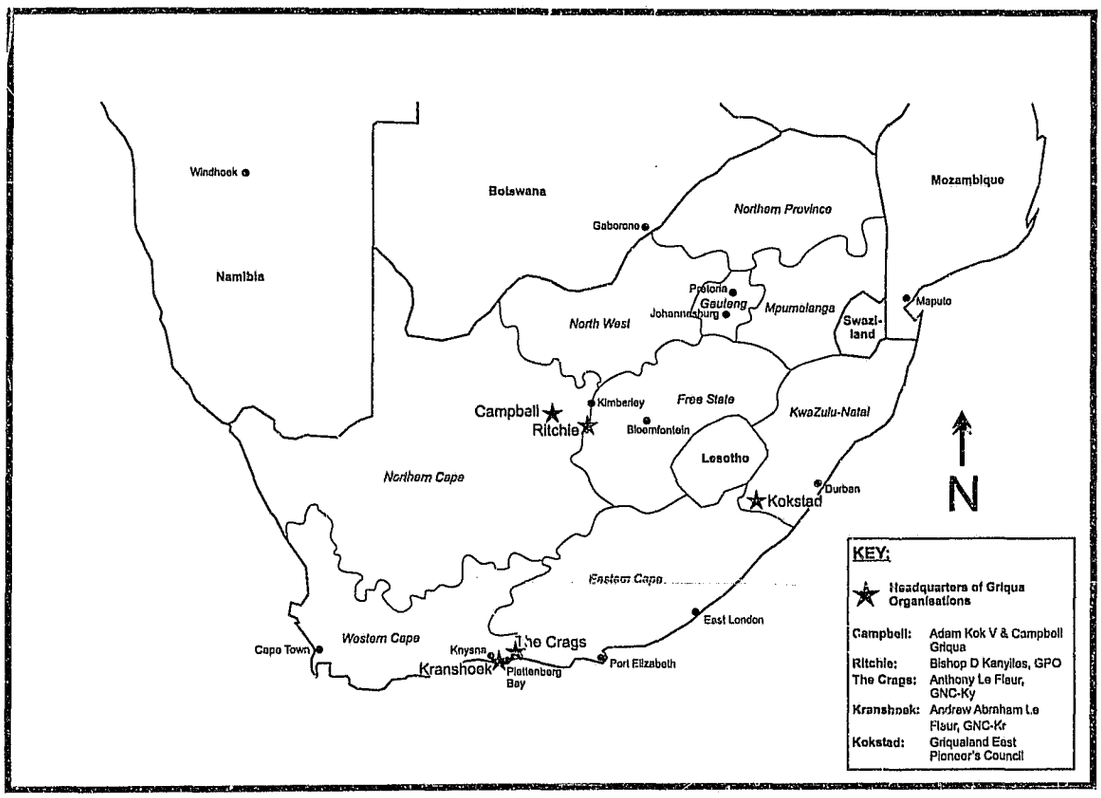
During the course of my fieldwork I visited towns such as Kranshoek, Kurland (The Crags), Vredendal, Bethany, Douglas, Ritchie, Campbell and the cities of Cape Town, Bloemfontein, Kimberley and Pretoria (see Map 1.3). Fieldwork for this thesis therefore attempted to expand on participant observation and the idea of a local research site. This broader approach investigated composite 'sites that would afford... positionalities at varying points along a participant-observer continuum' (Passaro 1996, cited in Gupta and Ferguson, 1997: 33). In this manner, the research challenges notions of space and difference inherent in anthropological evaluations of the field.




**Map 1.3:** Illustrating the headquarters of the main Griqua organisations.

As mentioned above, my initial entry into Griquatown and what was then known as the Coloured location was ten years prior to my Ph.D. fieldwork. When I had first come to Griquatown, I had sought out two women – Trooi Visser and Maria Pieterse – who, I knew, officiated at girls' initiation ceremonies. I recall that neither woman had much time for me. It was only after Maria had taken ill and I had spent many hours visiting her that they were prepared to assist me. Trooi, in a pensive mood one August evening

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in 1997, spoke about my history of visits to Griquatown. She said '(t)he first time Linda came in a green car. I had seen the green car parked outside the police station. I decided I wanted nothing to do with this *boeremeisiekind* (farm girl). Then Linda came back in a yellow car'.[37]

In the above extract, Trooi remembers the cars I drove and my visit to the police station. Anthropologists, Okely warns, always risk being associated with officials (1986: 25). In 1988 I had been advised by staff at the McGregor Museum to report my activities to the local police station as the presence of a stranger asking questions in the Coloured location was sure to arouse suspicion. I had thought very little of the brief visit I had made to the police station in Griquatown. Rather naively, it had not occurred to me that such an association could jeopardise my relations with people living in the town. I was taken back, ten years later, to realise that Trooi had seen me enter the police station. Not only had this influenced our first encounters, it remained firmly entrenched in her memory. Whereas I had thought that a lone white woman entering the Coloured township would look suspicious, from Trooi's point of view it was my association with the police that was questionable. She elaborated:

> Linda only came to see what ugly old Trooi, with whom she had been associated ten years, was doing. That time when she saw me I was not so ugly and (I) was the first old woman to see her in Griquatown... I made her my child. Because this *noes* (young girl) who is here... This *noes* probably wants to shoot us. But I did not know that the *noes* was looking for the Griqua language. And when the *noes* came again, I found out that she was after the Griqua language. Then we had to talk in the Griqua language. But that time when the *noes* came, I became so fond of her, because I saw that she was 'discovering' the language. The first time my heart was against the *noes* ...[38]

Trooi, not unsurprisingly, initially saw my presence as dangerous. As she said, she thought that I was going to shoot her and she decided to have nothing to do with me. This explains her initial reluctance to talk to me. Agar has suggested that this malevolent association may stem from the fact that anthropologists request intimacy from the people they meet, but are in effect strangers. 'What reasonable person would not be suspicious of someone like that?' he asks (1980: 59). Anthropologists, rather, have to earn the trust of their informants over a reasonably long length of time. During one's initial fieldwork, it is not surprising that people will find a means of explaining the presence of an anthropologist from their own repertoire of social categories (Agar, 1980: 59). In my case, there were few indications that might have suggested to Trooi

[37] Conversation, Trooi Visser, 18/08/1997.
[38] Conversation, Trooi Visser, 18/08/1997.

that I was not there to do violence to them. She had seen me in the police station and had no social categories in which to insert a strange young woman asking questions about Griqua practices.

Agar's suggestion, to avoid being categorised as potentially dangerous, is to try to tell everyone, as clearly as possible, what you are doing there (1980: 60). In 1988 I had explained to Trooi and Maria that I was interested in Griqua initiation ceremonies. This was confirmed when I later supplied the necessary sheep and attended one such ritual. From then on, my purpose was established and many people – most especially those who had attended the particular ritual or who had been interviewed by me – knew the reasons for my presence. Nonetheless, as Agar further notes, this message does not always come across to everyone. In my case, the message both came across too well in the case of particular people and did not come across at all for others. On the one hand, my concern with girls' initiation ceremonies was still seen as my primary interest ten years later. Often, when women or children saw me, they would spontaneously break into song and dance characteristic of the initiation ritual. I was constantly approached and requested to assist with initiations or instructed to interview old women on this topic. On the other hand, there were people who had not met me in the 1980s and who had no idea what I was doing in Griquatown. After my arrival in 1998, men would occasionally comment that I was please not to lock them up. This was in response to the Gauteng registration plates on my car which had been recently issued and not yet recognised in Griquatown. The plates were official-looking and displayed the Gauteng coat of arms, which led many people to believe that I was a government representative.

During my fieldwork in Griquatown I relied heavily on my friendships to assist my understanding of social and cultural events. Within anthropology generally, students have been encouraged to build rapport – 'a kind of achieved friendship, kinship, empathy' (Clifford, 1997: 215). Although Clifford identifies alliance-building with mutual benefits as the underlying feature of these relationships (1997: 215), informants have often been more generous and tolerant towards bumbling and often socially incompetent anthropologists than such alliance-building might be thought to involve (Peacock, 1986: 59). Indeed I had a lot to learn and it was, mostly, through my friends that I slowly came to understand what life was like in Griquatown and how to cope. For example, men would occasionally claim to be in love with me. This was an euphemism that allowed them to request sex without necessarily offending me. I rejected such advances and explained about my boyfriend. Few men accepted my attempt at an equally polite response and we would engage in a perpetual round of exchanges until I inevitably gave up being polite and simply ended the conversation. It was only later that Anna explained to me that eye contact was a crucial part of these exchanges. One

'tested' one's partner or potential partner by maintaining eye contact. The first person to blink or look away was clearly lying or misrepresenting the truth. As I had been embarrassed by such declarations of love and by my responses of fidelity towards my boyfriend, I had tended to look away during these conversations. This, in the minds of my suitors, meant that I was clearly manufacturing an excuse. Much later on I was to learn that the various Church ministers of Griquatown, all of whom were men, had warned that I was not to be harassed. No doubt this significantly reduced the number of proposals I experienced.[39] I also had to learn how to deal with drunk men who were often a lot less subtle about their desires. I recall one Saturday morning when Liepie and I were walking through the main street of Rainbow Valley, a very drunk man followed us and shouted out loud '*ek wil gehê wees, ek wil gehê wees*' (lit. I want to be had). Liepie almost collapsed with laughter when I asked what he meant. It was from Liepie that I learnt the valuable lesson of how to avoid conversation with drunk or undesirable persons: simply keep walking, do not stop and do not slow down.

In both Griquatown and Campbell I had to learn how to identify people and how to cope with a confusing mass of names and nicknames. In both these towns many people had the same names and surnames. This was not in itself a problem because people, rather than being known by their formal names, were known by nicknames. The problem, however, was that people considered my research to be important and they wanted to be acknowledged by their correct names in my notebook. When I asked people who they were, I received the information documented on their birth certificates and identity documents. If, however, I asked how, say, Petronella Gabriel (her formal name) was doing, no-one knew who I was talking about. With time I learnt to request that people identify themselves with both their formal names and their more colloquial names. That went partway towards solving the problem. Matters were, nonetheless, further complicated when I came to realise that many people had more than one colloquial term of address. Even armed with people's nicknames, I could seldom identify a person in a conversation with others and if I did refer to someone, people seldom knew who I was talking about. I was comforted when I realised that I was not the only one with this problem. In Campbell some children were instructed to take medicine to one woman. Instead they took it to her namesake and left it there. It was several days before the mistake was discovered. In another instance, I asked Ouma Fytjie Williams if she was the 'grandmother' of Martin Engelbrecht (meaning that she had raised him). She insisted that she did not know this man, until Anna Naidoo arrived and helped me out by

[39] Many anthropologists have responded to experiences of this sort by 'manufacturing' husbands, wearing wedding bands and taking photographs of their spouses and children into the field. I decided against such an approach because of the long-term nature of my involvement. It was, I decided, too difficult to remember who I had told what to. In addition, such a mythical approach would have undermined my decision to provide information about myself while in the field (discussed below).

explaining that Martin Engelbrecht was the formal name for the man she had raised and knew by another name.[40] The clue to identifying people lay partly in knowing the people of Griquatown and the context of the conversation. For example, if people were talking about Ragel being drunk, the odds were that they were talking about Ragel van Wyk, otherwise known as Tattie who lived in Kruger Street, and not about Drunk Ragel in Waterboer Street. As Drunk Ragel's nickname suggests, there was little point in commenting on her lack of sobriety as she was perpetually drunk. In part the clue lay in stringing together bits of formal and informal information that identified a person. One would, for example, talk of Vykie (her nickname) Lottering (her surname) of Bloem Street. In this way it would be clear to everyone who the person in question was.



**Figure 1.9:** Aunt Sophie Julius – my hostess during fieldwork

During my fieldwork I utilised the 'multimethod ethnographic approach' (cf. Johnson, 1990: 11). In Kimberley and Johannesburg I made extensive use of phone calls to academics, Griqua leaders, Government officials and people in Griquatown. I also followed newspaper articles, television broadcasts and spent considerable time searching the internet which contained a surprisingly large collection of references to Griqua. In Griquatown, I lived in Rainbow Valley. In this sense it could be said that I conducted participant observation in the classic anthropological sense (see below for more discussion on participant observation). I attended funerals, initiations, baptisms, weddings, *nagmaal* services, numerous church services, choir services, women's church services, the opening of the Good Hope Society mortuary, rallies, local government

[40] Interview, Fytjie Williams, Anna Naidoo, 26/08/1996.

elections, court cases, and so forth. I also 'hung around' – walking to and from town, chatting to neighbours, visiting people in hospital or taking them to the doctor, attending fêtes or educational videos in the recreation hall. Every so often I would accompany a group of women on expeditions to collect *buchu* (an aromatic herb). I also went horse-riding with the local policeman known as Basie (who kindly refrained from telling everyone that my hasty return home was actually a case of being galloped away with). This was very different from my negative associations with the police in 1988. Basie was a young coloured policeman, highly respected and much liked by the people of Rainbow Valley. In addition to participant observation, I had access to numerous official records at the Town Council,[41] at the Magistrate's Office[42] and at the Museum.

My research was also supplemented by household surveys. These took two forms during my research period. I was in the habit of doing a quick household census when I visited someone's house for the first time, if I returned after a long absence or if there were clearly people living in the house whom I had not previously recorded. This provided a means of getting to know the people and provided some indication of socio-economic status and change over time. It also made it possible to document itinerant household members, who would be brought to town on Friday afternoons by a farmer and collected again on Monday mornings. Secondly, a formal survey was conducted during October and November 1997. Having estimated that there were approximately 800 'houses' in Griquatown, my assistant and I surveyed every eighth abode.[43] Any structure in which people lived was considered an abode and we therefore surveyed people living in formal ex-council housing, in shacks, in mud brick housing, in adjoining extensions and in any combination of the above. As some properties contained a multitude of different abodes occupied by different people, we sometimes surveyed two abodes on one plot. All in all 77 surveys were conducted. Although, as Johnson has argued, a larger sample provides greater exactness, the intention of this survey was to complement the information I received through participant observation, through friends and casual informants and the interviews I held with key informants (1990: 22).[44]

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[41] The following files were made available to me: Minutes of the Coloured Management Board 1971 – 1978; Group Areas Act 24.10.56 - 1.7.1980; Housing, sub-economic 1968 - 1983; Coloured Affairs 1963 - 1975; Bantu Administration 1957 - 1977; Diverse 1977 - 1985; Labour Bureau 1958 - 1974; Location, Bantu Administration 1977; Location new extension 1978 - 79; Market 1955 - 1978; New Sub-Economic Housing Scheme and Recreation Hall.

[42] I was given access to the records of all the court cases for 1997 and to the District Records Book.

[43] The Macroplan Survey estimated that there were 542 formal and informal houses and 743 families resident in Rainbow Valley (1997: 2,4).

[44] During the survey, I sought to re-interview the people I had surveyed in 1988. Of the 35 people surveyed in 1988, I managed to find 32 people. This suggested a degree of stability amongst the residents of Griquatown, despite the frequent migration of some people in search of work.

The survey involved a comprehensive questionnaire that sought to cover a range of topics. People were questioned about their household membership (*de jure* and *de facto*), about their socio-economic status, religious affiliation, ethnic identification, ritual experience and census responses. In addition to the formal questionnaire, both Audrey Williamson, my assistant, and I included other, more open-ended and informal questioning when appropriate. This meant that these interviews were very intensive, took several hours to complete and yielded a great deal of data. Nonetheless, not a single person demonstrated impatience or reluctance to participate in the survey.[45] Every survey was tape recorded and rough notes were taken during the survey. Thereafter the respondent's comments were transcribed, attempting to remain as true to the spoken idiom as possible.

The same kind of household survey was undertaken amongst the members of the Griqua National Conference (Ky)[46] living in the Eastern Cape in order to provide comparative data. Here members of the GNC-Ky completed the survey forms themselves – which left no room for informal and open-ended surveying. Surveys were generally much shorter, the responses being written and not verbal, and with far more constrained answers. The results of this survey were particularly interesting when compared to the Griquatown survey. The surveys indicated that there were significant differences within the broader Griqua population resident in South Africa, most especially in terms of the meaning associated with being Griqua (these results are further examined in Chapter Four).

The implicit suggestion made here is that people in Griquatown accepted me. In Trooi's comment (cited above) she accepts that her heart has softened towards me over the years. Certainly I was very grateful that people did treat me kindly and I was reassured when people said that they were prepared to tell me things that they had not told other researchers.[47] No doubt my constant presence over the years and my residence in Rainbow Valley also facilitated this. People frequently commented that I was willing to enter their homes, whereas other researchers tended to call them to the Museum. In addition, we went for long walks on balmy summer evenings and collected wood together. I was not concerned solely with the collection of information, I was interested in their lives as individuals and as persons I knew. I was also careful to inform people

[45] See Pendleton who suggests that long and intensive interviews are not necessarily problematic as informants are used to functions such as weddings, funerals and other speeches that can last for most of the day (1990: 172).

[46] The 'Ky' stands for Knysna and serves to distinguish this organisation from another Griqua organisation, also called the Griqua National Conference, which is based in Kranshoek and is therefore referred to as the GNC-Kr. The details concerning these two organisations and the reason for their similar names are discussed in Chapter Four.

[47] Conversations, Anna Visser, Liesbet Waterboer, Sarah Mokokong 17/08/1996; Anna Naidoo, 5/09/1996).

about what was happening in my life outside of Griquatown as I did not want my information gathering to be a one-way procedure. People in Griquatown knew when I had had an argument with my parents (they could hardly avoid knowing as Sophie, the woman with whom I was staying, had watched me arguing over the telephone and then consoled me while I cried). My friends knew of my partner's proposed visit and of my indecision over the future of the relationship. After having met him and sized him up, they each offered their opinions as to whether I should end the relationship or not. To be open about myself, my emotions, problems, joys and frustrations was a way of giving something back to the people who had so kindly incorporated me into their lives. Nonetheless, I tended to carry my notebook almost everywhere with me. This was, in part, because the notebook provided me with some security and a sense that I was actually working and that my research was progressing. In part, the notebook served as a reminder that, no matter how friendly or unlike other researchers I was, I was still doing research and collecting information.[48] Comments made to me were going to be recorded. I was, in fact, often teased about my notebook and the doggedness with which I insisted on writing down things as I heard them.

In most instances doing research was remarkably easy. Everyone in Griquatown was concerned that I should meet 'the right people'. Sarah Mokokong, who worked at the Mary Moffat Museum and who occasionally accompanied me on interviews, Sandra Lottering, who had been my friend since we were aged 16 and 21 respectively, and Audrey Williamson, my research assistant, took this task most seriously. Sarah, for example, introduced me to Rev. January of the African Methodist Church. After I had asked him a few casual questions, he felt the need to alter the focus of my questions. He reached over for my notebook and proceeded, without prompting, to write me an essay on the Church, his and his father's role as religious leaders. His father, it turned out, was to be buried the following day and he extended an invitation that I attend the funeral. Sarah immediately decided to accompany me and agreed that we would be present the following day. Prior to taking his leave, Rev. January asked me to write down my name and purpose in Griquatown. The following day, Rev. January welcomed me to the funeral and said he was glad that I had attended and instructed me as follows: 'Sister Linda, you write down everything you observe'[49]. I was similarly welcomed to

[48] Also see Benedict who suggests that her notebook 'represented order and system; counting and measurement; collation and comparison; and objective observation. The notebook defined my progress; it promised completion; it rationalized and legimized my presence in that strange place among those strange people. It connected me to the values of ethnography and was a reassuring reminder of my own values, my own logical categories...' (1993: 7).

[49] Speech by Rev. January, African Methodist Funeral Service, 20/09/1997.

the opening of the Good Hope Mortuary by Isak Greeff, whom I had first met in 1987. He introduced me to the guests and told them that I attend funerals and my work is to write things down.[50] It was a real pleasure to do fieldwork in contexts where people wanted and expected you to record information.

Not all my research was, however, easily conducted. In Campbell an old and embittered man named Jan Balie refused to talk to me, arguing that all academics and journalists misrepresented him and twisted his words. Jan Balie had reason to be bitter: Vyefontein, the land his parents had owned and the place where he had been born, had not been returned to him despite numerous applications to the Department of Land Affairs, and recently, the only white man in Campbell who supported his claim for Vyefontein had been murdered in his home. All his life, Jan Balie had struggled to make a living and academics and journalists, who thrived on his stories, had never really helped him. Nonetheless, after his initial antagonism Jan Balie did speak to me, at length and in considerable detail. His attitude towards me and other researchers was similar to his attitude towards wealthy farmers in the area. On the one hand he despised them and resented their success which contrasted markedly with the poverty, dispossession and struggle that had characterised his own life. On the other hand, his commitment to farming and the land overrode this resentment, and his respect for other people, regardless of who they were, was primary in his life. Perhaps an example best illustrates this:

> I had offered Mr Balie a lift to Douglas (a neighbouring town) where a 'Griqua' meeting was scheduled. As we drove along, Mr Balie explained how he refused to help any of the local farmers. He would have nothing to do with them, he decided. Soon afterwards we came across two ostriches that were wandering along the road. Mr Balie explained whose ostriches they were and how, as far as he was concerned, they could stay on the road where they were sure to be knocked down and turned into fresh meat. When we arrived in Douglas, however, he insisted that we stop at the nearest telephone before attending the meeting. To my surprise he phoned the relevant farmer and told him that his two birds were out on the road and needed to be fetched.

Like Trooi Visser and Maria Pieterse, Mr Balie's original attitude towards me was one of distance. Although he did agree to assist me in my research, he never came to like me as some of the people of Griquatown did. Wax argues that it is in the 'areas of mutual trust and, sometimes, affection that the finest fieldwork can be done' (Wax, 1971: 373, cited in Hastrup1992:118; also see Langness and Frank, 1981: 35). Even though many people were fond of me, they nonetheless were not always pleased with me, my behaviour or my research and it was particularly when people were drunk that they were able to express their more ambivalent feelings towards me.

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[50] Speech by Isaac Greeff, Good Hope Society Mortuary Opening, 11/12/1997.

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Several woman anthropologists have described themselves as 'honorary males' during their fieldwork (Okely, 1996: 32; Hastrup, 1992: 119). This characterisation stems from the fact that they have gained entry into public meetings and other forums usually reserved for men and their concern to document political power and other 'male' interests (cf. Bowen, 1954). Anthropology thus allows women to evade 'normal' domestic roles associated with their gender – often that of mother or wife – both in the society they are studying and, for a period, in their own society. Such a description is inappropriate for my fieldwork. I was seen neither as a regular woman, nor as an honorary male. The following example shows how I was, sometimes to my own disadvantage, able to move between domestic domains and public meetings:

> I was staying with Mr and Mrs Smith[51] who were both very involved in the VGK church (United Reformed Church in South Africa) and, because their house was built alongside the Church, they undertook much of the day-to-day upkeep of the church. The forthcoming synod meant extra work for every member of the VGK and especially for the Smiths, as the VG minister, Dominee Isaaks, his wife and another elder would be staying with them. The entire house had to be spring-cleaned. In the days leading up the synod, I helped with endless domestic tasks, washing curtains, scrubbing carpets, polishing verandahs, tidying rooms and making beds. On the first morning of the synod I found myself attempting to bake several cakes and attend the synod meetings. I sat in the Church hall for about 15 minutes, listening and trying to follow proceedings, then I would run home to check on my cakes, then back to the synod. After a couple of hours, both cakes had flopped and I had not understood very much of the meeting. I reflected rather ruefully on the impossibility of trying to help Mrs Smith with the house and her guests while following the workings of the synod.

Clearly, I was not an honorary male, although I was allowed to attend meetings that were predominantly, but not exclusively, male. Neither was I granted the ambiguous status of 'alien race' as suggested by Okely (1996: 32). Rather, I was a young woman who was able to enter some domains that tended to be male-dominated because of my research interests. I was also expected to perform the duties that any other young woman in Griquatown would do as part of her daily activities. There was nothing unusual in Mrs. Smith's requests that I make food for her son, or wash dishes or assist in the house. Indeed I was included in – and excluded from – certain topics and areas of research depending on what I said and did, rather than on my gender. I realised, towards the end of my fieldwork, that it was, ironically, from women's talk about sex and relationships that I was most excluded. It was in the context of my partner's forthcoming visit that I accidentally broke the conventions of women's gossip and informed him of our discussions concerning his visit. Liepie, Audrey and others were

[51] Mr Smith was a retired school master who ran a small café in order to bring in additional money. Mrs Smith was a housewife who claimed to do no 'work' that produced an income. She did, however, spend many hours preparing food to be sold in the shop and occasionally took on catering jobs at the Griquatown municipality from which she made a small profit.

horrified to hear of my scandalous behaviour. I was severely reprimanded for taking women's talk out of its correct domain and Liepie swore that she would never again gossip with me. She relented somewhat, however, and after this event, women would tell me something and then warn me to 'shut up'.[52] This led me to initiate a new round of questioning that concerned women's solidarity and gossip. As this occurred after I had built up considerable relations of trust, it operated to open new avenues for future research. This serves to demonstrate the importance of taking one's relationships into the field with one. Although many people in Griquatown knew that I had a boyfriend, it was only through the interactions between him, me and other people that I came to be aware of other, previously closed, topics of conversation in Griquatown.

Most of my fieldwork was done in Afrikaans which is the lingua franca in Griquatown. Some people, however, continue to speak a Khoi dialect, known as Griqua or Xiri.[53] As the following quote indicates, these Khoi words were often interspersed with Afrikaans. Italicised words are Afrikaans and underlined words are Griqua (spelt phonetically, an English translation of this quote appears on page 26):

> *Jy wil maar net kom* gekapa *wat maak ou* kisse khois *wat ek met 10 jaar aankom. Daai tyd wat ek meet haar* gekapa *het was sy nie so* kissi *nie, en is die eerste ou* khois *wat ek op Griekwastad* gekappa *het, wat ek my kind gemaak het. Want die* noes *wat hier is... die* noes *wil ons seker vandag* kor. *Maar ek weet nie die* noes *soek die* toevra na *nie. En toe die* noes *weer* haar *toe vind ek uit die* noes *is op die Griekwa taal uit. Toe moes ons kom* knopa *op die Griekwa taal. Maar daai tyd wat die* noes haar *toe word ek so lief vir hom want ek sien die* noes *kom op die taal uit. Die eerste slag toes my* kap *teen die* noes, *toe die* noes *op my* kap *kom, toe sal ek die* noes *verstaan.*

Although academics have argued that the Griqua language is 'almost extinct' (Nurse, 1975: 10a; Nurse, Weiner and Jenkins, 1985) or extinct (Traill, pers.com. 1989), many older people in Griquatown still used a click language they called Griqua when talking to each other. Younger people did not often speak Griqua, but – judging by the number of quiet sniggers heard when elderly women made crude jokes – they understood perfectly well what was being said. Morris, working in Campbell in the 1980s found that '..the Afrikaans spoken by the older generation, in particular, is difficult to follow, interspersed as it is with Xiri words' (Morris, 1982, 1). My own experience was that people would use both Griqua and Afrikaans words when speaking to each other. When speaking directly to me they would often edit out the Griqua words and speak predominantly Afrikaans. Nonetheless, this dialect of Afrikaans still retained Griqua or Khoi translations and idioms that made the Afrikaans peculiar to the Northern Cape.

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[52] Conversations, Sophie Julius, Sarah Meintjies, Audrey Williamson, 12/01/1998.

[53] Griqua is a Khoi language similar to Nama (Nurse and Jenkins, 1975: 73; Cloete, 1986:2?).

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[53] Griqua is a Khoi language similar to Nama (Nurse and Jenkins, 1975: 73; Cloete, 1986:29).

This language, interspersed as it is with Griqua words, has been termed 'Griqua-Afrikaans' and has a particular idiom and intonation that differs from what is termed 'standard' Afrikaans (Cloete, 1986: 29, for an example of Griqua-Afrikaans see Hager, n.d.).[54]

The Afrikaans used in Griquatown does not only reflect the Khoi heritage of Griquatown residents. Everyday speech also contains various Tswana and English words and, in so doing, reflects the mixed origins and history of the Griqua populace (see Chapter Three). I quickly picked up the most common Griqua or Tswana words, although people frequently complained that I spoke '*te hoë Afrikaans*' (too educated Afrikaans). By this they meant that I used too many Afrikaans words, failing to practise the code-switching into English that was an essential part of the language.[55] The following sentence provides an apt example: '*(H)oeveel mense moet weer ge*displace *kom, dis weer apartheid, kan jy sê, in* reverse gear' (how many people have to be displaced again, it's again apartheid, you can say, in reverse gear).[56]

It is the Griqua language, rather than Griqua-Afrikaans, that is seen as fundamental to the future well-being of the Griqua people. In meetings, rallies and on other informal occasions, considerable emphasis is placed on people's inability to speak the Griqua language. Indeed, as Ouma Koeletjie (Gertie Pieterse) said, 'I know my own language. You must speak your own language, but the children don't want me to teach (them)..... I speak Griqua, but it's probably just me who speaks the language. ..... Learn your language, speak to your children in your language'.[57]

In the Northern Cape, the Griqua language is especially important for the definition of a Griqua collective (although other Griqua organisations, based elsewhere, scoff at this and argue instead for their important role in the production of Afrikaans). Language, as

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[54] Commication between masters and slaves had, initially been in a form of Dutch, which later evolved into Afrikaans (Martin, 1998: 531; Giliomee, 1994: 543). The slave contribution to the development of the Afrikaans language has been strongly disputed by Afrikaans linguists (Armstrong, 1979: 82). Emphasis on the history of the Afrikaans language has shifted from one extreme to the other over the years. Initially white masters rejected the 'kitchen language' or creole Dutch spoken by their servants, in favour of a 'civilised Afrikaans'. Subsequent to 1994 and the ending of the apartheid era, the 'diglossic non-standard Afrikaans' has been used as a literary language and, in so doing, the distinctions between the white Afrikaner 'standard' Afrikaans and the spoken, 'non-standard' variety used by coloured people have been significantly undermined (Wicomb, 1998: 371). In addition, the notion of a 'standard' Afrikaans spoken by Afrikaners has been opposed by some Griqua activists (from outside Griquatown) who argue that it was their ancestors who developed the Afrikaans language in the first place (van der Ross, 1984: 94). Afrikaans is therefore neither the inheritance of white Afrikaners nor, 'the language of the oppressors' as it has often been called (Wicomb, 1998: 370).

[55] Similarly Okely, doing research amongst a marginal section of her own society, found that she did not need to learn a new language or vocabulary, but rather had to learn another way of speaking her mother tongue (1996: 23).

[56] Interview, Erick Scholtz and Eddie Fortuin, 20/08/1997

[57] Gertie Pieterse (otherwise known as Ouma Koeletjie, Public speech, Thanksgiving Festival, Campbell, 14/12/1997.

Martin Engelbrecht pointed out, provides an indisputable means of identifying a minority group: '(t)he moment you can speak a language, you can be identified as belonging to a group. It is very important for the continued existence of your identity'.[58] This is especially so because, although the new South African Constitution recognises the rights of individuals rather than those of ethnic collectivities, it also acknowledges the 'historically diminished use and status of the indigenous languages' and suggests that redress should occur (Constitution of South Africa, 1996: 6).[59]



**Figure 1.10:** Me – attending a *mokwele* ritual (1997)

To sum up, the fieldwork process – embodying a collaboration between me, the residents of Griquatown and other people who identified themselves as Griqua – forms the backbone of this research, which concerns the understanding of identity as a theoretical problem. My interest in the topic stems from my own struggles with 'being Jewish' (also see Cohen, 1992: 222). In this regard, both Cohen and Hervik advocate 'the conscious use of the self for making sense of others' (Hervik, 1994: 92), rather than attempting to escape oneself and searching for a neutral objectivity.[60] As suggested above, my knowledge of myself, my feelings, emotions, struggles and contentment have been a part of the fieldwork process and have influenced this research in particular ways. Understanding more about ourselves, and using notions of ourselves, helps us to better comprehend the complexity of the people we describe in ethnographic accounts. Cohen suggests therefore that anthropologists draw on the self, experientially at first, in order to develop a means for using the self ethnographically (1992: 229). It is thus tentatively, and with some hesitation, that I re-introduce myself into this thesis in the penultimate

[58] Martin Engelbrecht, Interview, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, 22/12/1995. Also see Papenfus who points out that the denial of mother tongue education and the suppression – or negative identification – of a language is an abuse of human rights (1997: 44).

[59] There have been some attempts to develop Khoi languages in the Northern Cape. The Nama language will, ideally, be taught in schools (Papenfus, 1996: 46).

[60] Also see Agar who suggests that anthropology is both a private and a professional process (1980: 42).

chapter where I explore relations between Liepie, her husband, the broader community and myself. In keeping with Cohen's suggestion, this is not however an anthropology about 'the anthropologist's self', rather it is an attempt to recognise that anthropology is influenced by anthropologists' conception of self (1992: 230).

**CHAPTER OUTLINE**

Chapter Two introduces the theme suggested in the title of this thesis and situates the Griqua conundrum within a broader South African context. In so doing, it examines the divisiveness of intra-ethnic relations and explores the nature of Griqua leaders' interactions with various South African governments. It argues that the factionalism within Griqua society should be seen, not necessarily as a specifically Griqua cultural trait, but rather as an inevitable part of the new process of nation-building. This chapter concerns itself with leaders of Griqua organisations, men such as Andrew Abraham Stockenstrom le Fleur, Bishop Kanyiles and Adam Kok V, living throughout the country. These leaders occupy the uppermost rung of leadership in their respective organisations (the Griqua National Conference, the Griqua People's Organisation and the Campbell Griqua) and have some historical claim to their positions. They are also highly influential in their organisations and much of the intra-ethnic conflict is shown to be related to individual status and hierarchical competition. The chapter argues that the establishment of working relationships between Griqua leaders – and the stressing of unity and egalitarianism in these relationships – became possible only once leaders felt that their Griqua identity was secure in the new South Africa. Achieving this confidence entailed a long process of negotiation, documented here, which eventually led to the government recognising the Griqua as a valid component of South African society, making a commitment to try and deal with Griqua issues, and backing that commitment with financial support. This process gave government officials confidence to tackle other indigenous people's demands and led to the establishment of a 'new Directorate of Traditional Affairs' that incorporated various other indigenous South African peoples. It was the inclusion of the Griqua in this broader organisation that finally provided these respective leaders with a reason for Griqua unification.

The historical background of Griqua people in South Africa and the role of the missionaries in the creation of a Griqua identity is examined in Chapter Three. The chapter demonstrates that the category 'Griqua' has always contained a degree of ambiguity: an uncertainty concerning who is (or who is not) Griqua. Those people who lived in, or close to, mission stations and who were subjected to mission authority, were identified as Griqua, for example, while those living in the surrounding area were often seen as Khoi, Baster or Koranna. Thus it was the town itself – Griquatown – that became crucial to the residents' sense of who they were (discussed further in Chapter

Five). Being Griqua during the nineteenth century was also about being Christian and – although the Griqua were more concerned about recognition by Colonial authorities than about Christianity *per se* when they agreed to the establishment of mission stations – this has remained a fundamental part of Griqua identity. Finally the chapter examines how historical divisions between leaders were resolved by various individual leaders and their followers moving away from mission stations. The missionaries, however, encouraged permanent settlement and the building of stone houses as nomadic life was viewed as primitive. This is further discussed in Chapter Six of the thesis.

The next chapter, Chapter Four, continues the theme that Griqua is a constructed and ambiguous identity. In preparation for what was to become an apartheid government, everyone in the Northern Cape was classified according to race in the 1950s. Griqua people's classification demonstrated the ambiguousness of their identity. They were initially 'mistakenly' seen as African rather than Coloured, although some individuals ended up with both African and Coloured documentation. This was the beginning of a process whereby the name Griqua came to be superseded by the term Coloured in both the Griquatown Council and in broader official political debates. The chapter further demonstrates that it is the syncretic nature of Griqua identity that allowed for a movement of people across the apartheid boundaries of race. This confusion of racial identity attracted – and continues to attract – large-scale academic interest. The chapter attempts to move beyond the constructivist argument, by suggesting that, although Griqua identity is inherently ambiguous and ambivalent and carries within it the possibilities for people to draw upon the positive values of the past and reject the negative connotations that developed during the apartheid era, there remains a fundamental ideological commitment to being Griqua that cannot be reduced to instrumentality.

Picking up on the theme of status, but inverting it, Chapter Five concerns those people who do *not* have historical title to leadership and are therefore *not* able to engage in high-profile negotiations with government officials. The chapter also expands on the ideological meaning associated with ethnic identity, first introduced in Chapter Three. It explores the idea that belonging to Griquatown and engaging in domestic life are fundamental parts of being Griqua. In Griquatown the distinction between *inkommer* (newcomer) and *boorling* (born of the town) is part of a broader ethnic identity. *Inkommers* cannot be 'of Griquatown' and therefore cannot cast themselves as Griqua. Having said that, however, the categories *inkommer* and *boorling* are themselves ambiguous and all men are – to a certain extent – seen as *inkommers* to their in-laws' homes and, by implication, to being Griqua. Thus *inkommer* and *boorling* become important categories whereby people identify themselves and assert their social standing.

A discussion of these interrelated categories leads to an examination of the changing avenues which people pursue in order to gain status. This involves a shift from a commitment to organisations that articulated Griqua concerns in the late 1980s to religious mobilisation and charismatic leadership which, in the 1990s, best enabled men to achieve social recognition and status.

Being Griqua is something stressed particularly by women. As argued in Chapter Six, this is done through ritual manipulation that asserts women's claim to the home. These rituals are drawn from a mixture of Khoi and missionary heritage, both of which stress women's position within the home, but they are also closely aligned with Tswana world views: this syncretism speaks of the mixed nature of Griqua identity. Whereas Chapter Five draws on the idea of identity and space and is related to dichotomous notions of the family and *inkommers*, this chapter expands into an examination of identity, ritual and space in relation to the home. It argues that ritual allows women temporarily to occupy and take command of the home, to make assertions about their ownership of space and status and to emphasise their identity and status as Griqua. Such assertions are inverse to women's profane relations with men. Everyday interactions between women and men involve competing claims to homes and property which stress that all residents depend on a broader Griqua 'family' for their survival.

In an attempt to examine how the ambiguities of identity are reproduced in the home, Chapter Seven explores one woman's experiences. Liepie is both the daughter of a famous Griqua leader and, as she insisted, a coloured woman. She is a married woman who should remain at home, but also an independent woman who selects her own friends and makes her own decisions about where she goes or what she does. Whereas she emphasises her identity as a well-read and independent woman, she is also a dependent wife who needs both her husband's attentions and his financial support to maintain her home. This chapter further examines how events in her, her children's and her husband's lives affect the people both inside and beyond the household. Picking up on earlier themes, this chapter explores the ideology of Griquatown as one large family in which almost everyone is related and in which everyone has an intimate knowledge of everyone else's business. Implicit in this penultimate chapter, with its explanation of what it means for an individual to belong to a community and to a broader society, is a further critique of the social constructivist and instrumental approach to identity.

# CHAPTER TWO:
# NO RAINBOW BUS FOR US:
# BUILDING NATIONALISM IN SOUTH AFRICA[1]

*We [the Griquas] ... are one nation, with one leader, one church, one tradition, one culture and history (Andries le Fleur, Sunday Times, 10 August 1975).*

*For me, division is a monster. My humble advice is to throw off the rusty chains of division (Nelson Mandela in Griquatown, September 1995)*

## INTRODUCTION

In May 1994 South Africa underwent a 'truly remarkable' transition from an apartheid and racist-dominated government to a government of national unity. South Africa appeared to the rest of the world as a 'textbook case of democratization (Adler and Webster, 1995: 76). In addition to electing a democratic government, South Africa partook in the 'international game' of states; it began to develop a nation - the now famous 'rainbow nation' - in order to be seen as legitimate by the international 'community' (Simpson, 1994: 464, 472). For the Griqua people of South Africa, having unsuccessfully petitioned the apartheid government for official recognition, inherent in this transition to democratic governance was both an increased threat to their identity and the promise of new possibilities. This chapter explores and analyses negotiations that took place between the democratic government and various Griqua organisations shortly after the 1994 elections and, in so doing, documents the processes by which Griqua politicians and activists sought for official recognition.

The process of building a new nation based on common citizenship in South Africa occurred after the long history of ethnic manipulation, initially by the colonial and later by the apartheid state, in order to segregate, control and exploit the mass population (Dubow, 1994: 356, Skalnik, 1988, also see Chapters Three and Four). Thus the basis on which the new rainbow nation was to be built and, according to Simpson, its ultimate saving grace, would be the sense of belonging in South Africa which was felt by members of all ethnic groups (1994: 473). The process of building a democracy and creating a new national image has, however, been neither easy nor unproblematic. There have been many debates about how to deal with ethnicity in the new South Africa. Authors such as Giliomee have argued that ethnic categories cannot be omitted from the new constitution and that the new dispensation must allow for power-sharing between

[1] I am grateful to Bruce Kapferer whose work on Australian and Sri Lankan identity provides the inspiration for this chapter (1988).

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