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TITLE: No longer Adams in a simple Eden: Culture and Clothing in Hermannsberg missions in the western Transvaal, 1864-1910

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Introduction

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Referring to the Hermannsburg station Linokana in the Marico district the Rand Daily Mail commented in 1907, fifty years after the arrival of the first Lutheran missionaries at that spot,

But the days of the missionary are over, for no fewer than four storekeepers have come to contest for the favours of the natives, and through them, and also through their intercourse in town with white men, our coloured brethren are no longer Adams in a simple Eden. They have learned to desire the possession of bright and gaudy clothes and tawdry jewellery, and they crowd into the stores bartering mealies and eggs for cheap clothes.¹

The scenario depicted suggests that chaos and moral decay were taking over power where once European missionaries used to work for the creation of humble Christian communities. Economic advance and urban involvement seemed to wield their corruptive influences over rural mission stations thus alienating "Adams" (probably "Eves" were incorporated in that term) from a simple Eden and introducing them to the degenerative effects of urban-style life.

Was it indeed African mission residents who no longer lived in a simple Eden or was it rather their European surveyors who lost their paradisiac dream of creating African society according to their vision? The work experiences and perceptions of African communities of Hermannsburg missionaries in the Western Transvaal in the decades between the mid-nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century clearly reflect how within roughly fifty years in South Africa they lost important features of their Edenic vision with which they had once come to the mission field.

Working among communities of the Western Transvaal the missionaries developed a radically redefined understanding of African society which they conveyed to their German supporters through articles in the monthly mission journal, *Hermannsburger Missionsblatt*. Clothing was a topic which loomed large in the descriptions of their experiences. It was an indispensable pre-requisite to prepare pagan Africans for becoming Christians and therefore had to be scrupulously submitted to the control of the self-styled agents of Christian civilisation. The loss of control over African clothing habits consequently resulted in the disapproval not only of African outward appearance but of African mission residents themselves because outward appearance was considered to be the mirror of a person's inner condition.

It is the aim of this paper to show how missionary perception of African costume was intimately related to the degree in which missionary families were incorporated into colonial settler society. From newcomers to South Africa with little means and the burning wish to convert pagan Africans to Christianity they developed into esteemed missionary and settler families with strong roots in the farming sector, some of them dwellers on representative mission stations among Boer neighbours, economically successful, living in respectable houses and stubbornly keeping to their German inheritance.

The argument to be unfolded in this paper is that their initial appreciation of African clothing can be attributed to the fact that after ten years of failure in their evangelical activities they were prepared to cherish any African who apparently took over their ideas about decent costume. However, towards the turn of the century missionaries developed a much more critical attitude, disapproving of individual selfexpression or African imitation of clothing habits which represented the sartorial flair of people in colonial society. Between Hermannsburg missionaries and African converts issues of clothing were a means of conflict in fighting over social status in the congregation.

To develop the argument the first part of this paper will refer to the Hermannsburg missionary vision which was closely tied to the German surrounding in which it originated. In a second part missionary entanglement in the realities of their South African work field will be focused on. To illustrate the change in missionary vision and activity special attention will be paid to the relations between Hermannsburg missionaries and the Bakuena ba Mogopa of Rustenburg and Pretoria districts among whom the mission stations of Bethanie and Hebron were located.

The Origins of the Hermannsburg Mission: the peasant creation of an Edenic vision about a mission to Africa

The men and women who came to South Africa to evangelise Africans brought with them a specific religious consciousness and a stable vision of peasant life which they had acquired from their experiences in nineteenth-century Germany. What brought them here and how did they justify their work?

During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries Germany became industrialised. Where formerly a nation had survived on agricultural production and by-industries, a process of provincialisation started to divide the country into prosperous regions around urban centres and into areas remote from the challenges and opportunities of industrialisation. When proto-industrial production broke down between 1830 and 1850 severe problems of underemployment and pauperism arose because industrial production was not able to absorb the masses of surplus labour before the 1880s. For those who made their living from the sale of agricultural products rising prices promised a certain degree of sustainability. However, the majority of the rural population relied on the sale of proto-industrial products and their labour power for survival, and as the prices for their produce remained low they had to spend most of their family income on expensive subsistence goods.²

The Lüneburg Heath, where the Hermannsburg movement originated, definitely belonged to the impoverished provinces of the Hannover Kingdom. The village of Hermannsburg was situated in the south of the Heath, which extended over more than 7,000 square kilometres of low quality soil stretching between the Aller and Elbe Rivers in the north-west of Germany. Apart from sandy tracks neither a net of paved roads nor railways opened up the countryside.³ In 1848, a year before the foundation of the mission society, Hermannsburg, which in 1821 had been populated by only 624 people, counted 1,014 inhabitants, and by 1871 the village would harbour 1,528 people.⁴

In the 1830s social and economic tension in rural society forced the Kingdom of Hannover to Initiate agricultural reforms, which had been discussed for decades, in order to change the landholding . 1

system and allow agricultural producers to go for higher profits. Until that time, famers still worked the ground which belonged to seigneurial landholders. They kept their land as family property but had to pay annual fees, or, in some cases, give part of their harvest and labour service to the landowner. In the 1830s all farmers entitled to inherit the land they worked received the right to pay the landowner a certain amount of money in order to become the landowners themselves, but this usually meant they ran into long-term debts.⁵

The reforms also tackled the problems of enclosures, common wastes and the reallocation of scattered strips of land. For centuries by-industries in the Lüneburg Heath had relied on local forests for firewood and timber needed in the local brickworks, for weaving and flax-spinning. Once the forest was devastated, heath spread in the aftermath. Sandy soils were exposed to rain, which caused the decline of even more of their fertility. The large acreages covered with heath became essential for fuel and straw substitute. Although the common wastes were poor quality pasture land, sheep-farmers drove their sheep onto these lands making the wastes lose even more of their quality. Through the reallocation of scattered strips of fields into compact blocs belonging to individual landholders the land was hoped to be used more intensively. However, most of the Lüneburg Heath peasants doubted the advantages of the proposed reforms and therefore postponed the arrangements.⁶ Yet, the agricultural reforms helped a considerable proportion of small peasants and landless day-labourers to start their independent farming existence if they were ready to face new technologies and take some risks; between 1832 and 1885 landholdings up to 5 hectares doubled in number.⁷

Hermannsburg missionaries, however, feeling economic pressure primarily as social and moral disruption, did not resort to acquiring land or starting a professional career for their future in Germany, but instead, directed their efforts to finding comfort in evangelical activity abroad. They responded to a pietistic form of Lutheran religiosity introduced to their villages by Louis Harms, the charismatic founder of the Hermannsburg Mission Society. Spiritually, already during his studies, Harms was not devoted to the form of Christianity taught at German universities which stood in a rather liberal tradition and tried to tackle the implications of modernising society.⁸ University theology tended to attract urban audiences, people who led only a marginally religious life, and did not focus on the interests of the more traditionally bound rural believers whose popular religious culture iincluded mystical forms of religious expression and related to ritual practices centred around birth and death, illness and bad weather, and the agricultural cycle. Indeed, rationalist theology frequently stigmatised these forms of religiosity as 'superstition'.⁹

Louis Harms and his adherents wished Christianity to be an integral part of community life. In a polemical language their leader developed a critical attitude towards the rest of society, attacked bourgeois virtues, rationalism and human autonomy because he viewed these facets of modernising society as the cause of all social and religious confusion. The Hermannsburg movement put itself into the tradition of the reformatory movement of the sixteenth century and directed all its thoughts, actions and feelings towards leading a godfearing life. Besides, Harms succeeded in furnishing the movement with a distinct element of local culture and instilled a high degree of dignity and a notion of cultural respectability to his congregation. For instance, he introduced weekly bible reading sessions in all the

villages of his parish which were held in a mixed form of High and Low German and attracted a great number of people from all over the region. Preaching in the local dialect occupied much space in Harms' thinking and has remained unique to this day.¹⁰

Hermannsburg adherents also admired Harms for his story-telling.¹¹ In a strongly idiomatic language interlarded with local sayings and commonplaces he converted complicated theological thoughts into simple truths. Hermannsburg became the virtuous centre of the world without which medieval Christianisation in Europe and the Reformation in Germany would have taken other courses.

In his missionary vision Harms assumed that sooner or later the Christian Church would have to leave Europe, and missionary activity was just the appropriate means to prepare new surroundings for the true belief. The Hermannsburg understanding of foreign mission was to establish an idyll unthreatened by modernism and secularisation in unspolled surroundings, and all Hermannsburg inhabitants and affiliated communities were to be integrated into evangelical activities by contributing either in money, kind or labour what they were capable of. The mission was supported by thousands of minor donations, and farmers donated sums between 100 and 500 Taler annually. Additionally, a number of bible study groups all over north-western Germany collected money and sent it to the Hermannsburg Mission, which published the monthly mission journal and Harms' popular sermons to sell them all over Germany and abroad. Large sums of money were collected on the annual two-day mission festivals when thousands of people crowded the village to listen to Harms' words.

For Harms and his followers the notion of culture was closely tied up with Christianity. They conceived of Africans as resembling pre-Christian Gemanics, and were convinced that African pagans, still being morally unspoiled, would be able to perfect their purity by embracing Christian culture and belief. Conversion to the living God_would be their shelter against colonial encroachments by morally corrupt Europeans. Having in mind the state-building capacity of medieval Christianity when it spread over Saxony, Harms hoped to found a true Christian state in Africa devoted to the accommodation of God's kingdom.¹² Harms' plan was to settle among the Galla (Oromo) of East Africa. He did not know that political obstacles would force the Mission to base themselves in South Africa under British and Boer governments.

Harms proposed a mission strategy by which unmarried missionaries and colonist families would found communities in foreign lands devoted to their German mother congregation but having the power of religious and economic sustainability. He propagated an ideal of medieval churchly feudal government over land. Lord and tenant, master and servant, missionaries and colonists, church and young Christians would be bound together in a web of mutually beneficial obligations. While the colonists would be engaged in agricultural production to provide food and clothing, the missionaries would find new members to be added to the communities, becoming living arms of the living body of the Hermannsburg Lutheran Church. It was indeed a specific feature of the Hermannsburg missionary vision that Harms assigned space to the accommodation of cultural distinctions African converts would bring into the new Christian communities.

The missionaries, who were susceptible to Harms' enthusiastic vision, underwent a four-year course of preparation. From Monday to Saturday the missionary trainees worked physically, learnt their

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lessons and devoted themselves to communal life. All craft and agricultural field work necessary to support the mission institution was done by the missionaries themselves. The young men were taught to read and write properly, took part in a wide range of religious courses but apart from German and rudimentary English they had no opportunity of learning any of the languages spoken in Africa.¹³ Their parents were small peasants, day-labourers, shoemakers, turners or bar-keepers, none of whom appeared to have been in the position to endow their sons with generous allowances. Except for a few cases, the missionary candidates had worked as farmhands or shepherds, had found shelter in the army, or tried to make a living as tailors, turners, joiners or millers. In their biographies incidents of disease and physical weakness loomed large. A number of them had lost one or both parents early in childhood and never attended school regularly as they had had to contribute to the meagre family income.

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Harms' religious vision stabilised their threatened lives, taught them to resist dangerous innovation and perpetuate a pre-industrial life-style. They were convinced they had received God's call and lulled themselves into the emotional certainty of having become God's partner in saving lost souls. Furthermore, emigration and the rooting in a better society seemed to be organised by a benevolent hand also promising the opportunity of acquiring higher social prestige.

In the beginning women were not intended to be included in missionary work abroad. But immediately after the arrival of the first eight Hermannsburg missionaries in Natal in 1854, their missionary colleague of the Berlin Mission Society, Carl Posselt, advised Harms in Germany to send women for without their support the men would be physically and emotionally exhausted in a short while.¹⁴ So after 1856 women arrived in South Africa to marry the missionaries and to 'revive and cheer up their husbands' energies.¹⁵ These women opted for a life relieved of the constraints of rural society and the limitations on professional activities available to them and decided to go into a challenging continent where they were supposed to work independently and with a responsibility they would never have been assigned in Germany. The knowledge of deprivations, dangers and early death lying ahead could not threaten them when they made up their minds.

A considerable part of the women who decided to become missionary wives had worked as domestic servants. This kind of work was unpopular because their masters and mistresses controlled them closely and because they were being treated more rudely in the times of dissolving communial life in houses and homesteads. Wages, provisions and accommodation were poor.¹⁶ Other missionary wives were raised as pastors' daughters or had even started careers as Protestant nursing sisters. Among them a specific religiously-based female identity developed which already in the early nineteenth century made them watch out for opportunities to become philanthropically active.¹⁷ The women's social status was slightly higher than that of their male counterparts, but men and women alike were equally unacquainted with what Africa had in store for them and had to come to terms with totally new situations in their lives.

Reality in Africa's Eden: missionary entanglement in urbanisation and renegotiations of social status within African and settler society in the Transvaal

In the Transvaal the Sotho-Tswana lived on land which was generally dry but which was also dotted with numerous springs. Part of their life was to overcome the severe productive limitations of their environment which might account for the fact that the Sotho-Tswana were relatively successful in the use of new economic opportunities for the fuller exploitation of the region's natural resources.¹⁸ At the turn from the eighteenth to the nineteenth century the Sotho occupied most of the arable land of the interior highveld. They were organised in autonomous chiefdoms comprised largely of related agnatic kinsmen. Continued fission split them into separate communities where little control was exercised over the segmentary units. Their dispersion assured the widest possible occupation of their lands but also rendered them vulnerable to enemies.¹⁹

Between the end of the eighteenth century and the 1840s major processes of Tswana state formation were underway. Challenged by land shortage coupled with an increase in cattle holding, the peoples on the highveld entered a period of discord and conflict for the control of trade.²⁰ By accumulating wealth chiefs could attract new followers and clients. The Tswana were aware of the new demand for, and availability of trade goods and, building on established trade routes and practices, bound themselves into trade networks.

Possibly there was an internal revolution among the Nguni- and Sotho-speakers as well as the 'antipodal pressures' exerted from the Cape Colony and Delagoa Bay. From the 1820s onwards external pressures such as mercantile capital hastened the preceding transformation. Due to continuous warfare, Sotho societies were weakened altered their settlement patterns when white settlers invaded their lands. Smaller communities especially were temporarily uprooted and had to resettle in more secure areas. While some of them organised plundering expeditions, the majority of chiefs sought temporary shelter with more powerful leaders of Sotho-Tswana polities. The western chiefdoms which remained in their places or only retreated to more defensible positions failed to cooperate with each other.²¹ They displayed a strong desire for an independent existence and preferred freedom in poverty to the subjugation to a powerful chief.

Between 1836 and 1854 several thousand Boers migrated north of the Orange River and took possession of the land they considered to be depopulated. Their trek parties amalgamated under various leaders but none of them was able to unite all trekkers into a single polity.²² In 1837 they defeated the Ndebele chief Mzilikazi and drove him northward but retaining tenure of the conquerred highveld proved to be difficult. Returning Sotho and expanding Tswana chiefdoms competed with them for the use of the land, and when the Boers dispersed into small settlements to resume their farming and hunting occupation they lacked the means to control the growing African population in their midst.

Many Africans, however, on their return found themselves on land claimed by Boer settlers. Patterns of exploitation and independence were defined locally and could change over time because a market in land developed quickly and resulted in the rapid accumulation of vast tracts of land in the hands of Boer notables.²³ Large landowners allowed as many black tenants as possible on their farms

and derived extra profits from the extraction of rent.²⁴ The larger the settler landholding was, the less the probability that the landholder would interfere with agricultural production. On smaller farms, however, rigorous systems of labour duties were frequently imposed.

Christianity was introduced to the Transvaal as early as in the beginning of the nineteenth century. Returning migrants brought it with them from the Cape Colony or Orange River Territory and spread its news in their homes. British Protestant missionaries reached the South African interior far beyond colonial administration. As they had to support themselves and their families, they mixed commercial activities with bringing the gospel and became an important agency in introducing European goods among African societies.²⁵

One of the smaller polities which went through these times were the Bakuena ba Mogopa in what were later to become the Rustenburg and Pretoria districts. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries they had lived in Rathateng, situated on the lower reaches of the Crocodile River, before they migrated north-east, settling in the Phalane mountains and later north-east of what today is Brits, the area bounded by the Crodocile River in the west, the Apies and Pienaar Rivers in the north and Hennops River in the south. Mzilikazi attacked them several times and destabilised their polity. After the Bakuena ba Mogopa chief was killed in warfare in 1834 or 1836, Mamogale, at that time aged about 60, took over the chiefship from his deceased brother.²⁶ That was shortly before the Voortrekker party of Hendrik Potgieter arrived in the area. Either before or after Mzilikazi's defeat Potgieter's party entered relationships with Mamogale's people, who at that time were starving, and gave them cattle in exchange for labour power on their newly acquired farms.

A few years later Mamogale and a section of his followers left for Basutoland to escape Boer labour exactions. The part of his people remaining on the highveld had to fill up the power vacuum left behind and redefined their relations with the Boers on whose land they dwelled. One of the migrants, David Morope Modibane, son of headman Ramalibane, had encountered Methodist missionaries on his journeys through the Orange River Territory and the Cape Colony and become an itinerant preacher.²⁷ On his return home he inspired a section of his community with the new religion. Mogate, leader of the community during Mamogale's absence and residing and Matlare, did not appreciate David's preaching, so in 1860 the preacher and his small band of adherents left the place. Two years later he left his congregation. When Wilhelm Behrens, missionary of the Hermannsburg Mission Society, arrived at Mandabula two years later he already found a couple of buildings these people used for prayers and realised that they possessed a number of books in which they read.²⁸

In 1864 and 1865, when among the Bakuena ba Mogopa the Hermannsburg missionaries Behrens and Kaiser founded the mission stations of Bethanie and Hebron, the mission society looked back on a ten-year experience of missionary endeavour in Natal, Zululand and near the border of the Bechuana Protectorate which was mainly characterised by struggle and failure. One of the major problems they encountered right in the beginning was that apart from basic English they spoke neither speak Dutch/Afrikaans nor any of the African languages so that for years to follow it was considerably easier to converse with those people who knew Dutch/Afrikaans because that language was similar to their Low German home dialect. Louis Harms realised that it was extremely difficult to manage the South African mission field from Germany which led him to appoint a superintendent of the mission field in 1859. Considerable religious and secular authority was vested into the new representative of mission authority; he started to discharge German colonists, introduced stricter hierarchical structures in the mission field and demanded submission to him. His views on Africans differed from Harms' vision insofar as he considered European colonialism to be the guarantee of law and order. Consequently, he, whose African middle name was 'beating up the people', assessed Boer Christianity and their government positively and iustified white domination over black people.

The people are children. One knows that in order to raise children one has to discipline and admonish them to live in the fear of God. Remember, discipline comes first, only after it admonition follows which does not mean anything without preceding discipline.²⁹

Although the first superintendent's authority was not well-liked among the missionaries and although in 1863 tensions had grown to such an extent that he quit his office, the structural changes he had initiated with regard to deference and the idea of white supremacy were to remain permanent features of the mission.

Still eager to convert communities to the Christian belief Hermannsburg missionaries managed to establish contacts with the South African Republic to work among the black population in their state. Voortrekker distrust against foreigners in general and British traders and missionaries in particular made the settlers allow German missionaries among the Tswana because they were content to establish themselves within the framework of the existing social order without questioning it. Hermannsburg superintendent Hohls and the President of the South African Republic, MW Pretorius, agreed, 'not to incite the Africans to murder and revolt as the English tend to teach them.'³⁰ Hermannsburg missionaries kept to their promise. Although during the years of their work in the Transvaal they found a lot to criticise about the Boers, they neither aroused public controversy in German newspapers nor supported Africans in their cases against Boer settlers or officials. That did not mean that on a more private level they did not complain to each other and their home board about the issues of labour demands, violence against Africans, un-Christian Boer behaviour and stupidity of their white neighbours who impeded them from doing evangelical work.

Like many of his colleagues, missionary Springhorn of Pella, Marico District, complained that Africans did not attend his bible classes because too often they were called to work on the farms, 'As soon as the Boers call them they have to go, no matter whether they want to or not.'³¹ His superintendent commented on this report from the official view-point of the mission, 'And this is indeed a benefit for them!'. Missionary Hasselblatt, having recently arrived on Mosetla among the Bakhatla on the Apies River, disliked the Boers because they almost raided his station.

One evening a cart of Boers drove in. They were two field cornets both of them authorised to exercise power on my station. They accused me of not having given notice that I lived here and fined me with about 7 Taler. Furthermore, they complained that there were still kaffirs on this place whereas Brother Backeberg had told them they had all moved to Mabotse with their chief ,

Makepan. (...) The Boers went away having achieved what they wanted, namely a raid to get money.³²

Ultimately, however, Hermannsburg missionaries were rarely prepared to challenge Boer landholders. They were not prepared to value African interests higher than Boer demands, even though they realised that these demands undermined the congregations they were trying to build.

What brought missionaries and Africans together was their common belief that the acquisition of land was the only means which ensured a community's stability. Missionaries and Africans shared the notion that authority had to be based on land. On some stations missionaries and chiefs were prepared to share authority over African commoners; on others that was not the case, and tensions between the missionary and the chiefly regimes evolved. But wherever the missionaries got a foothold among Africans in the Rustenburg and Pretoria districts it was because they bought land.

Among the Bakuena ba Mogopa, at first, Bethanie was founded without their leader Mogate in Matlare wielding heavy influence over the station. After with the help of the missionary the Bethanie Mogopa had purchased the ground, they settled along four parallel main roads, each of which belonged to a separate headman.³³ Each family was assigned a square lot where buildings were planned: a rondavel kitchen, a rondavel building for grain storage and a square (white) house to live in. Shortly after the foundation of Bethanie, Mogate demanded a missionary for his establishment as well, so that in 1865 Heinrich Kaiser and his wife settled among them on Boer Roos' farm with the consent of the latter.³⁴

Both congregations added up converts quickly but when in 1867 Mamogale returned from asylum with Moshoeshoe, rainmaking and circumcision ceremonies were announced at once to consolidate his chiefly position. Although the Christians were reported not to lend an ear to the aged Mamogale, labour discipline on the settler farms was being disturbed. For a month Mamogale was imprisoned in Pretoria, but after his release he and the majority of the Matlare residents moved to a new place, Makolokoe. Their exodus resulted in the deterioration of labour relations on the Roos farm because the Christians who stayed behind had to render service to the Boer which up to then had been shared by more Bakuena. Missionary Kaiser started to look around for land to buy but there was nothing available for a reasonable price. Finally, in 1871, the heads of 26 Matlare families bought Hebron and had the farm registered on Kaiser's name so that in 1872 the Matlare congregation moved to its new home.

Bethanie missionary Behrens and Mamogale's son, Raikane, developed a close relationship. Although Raikane never converted to Christianity he accepted Behrens, who wrote letters to Rustenburg officials for him. In 1874 Raikane and Behrens went to Pretoria together for Raikane to to take the oath of allegiance so that the Boers would recognise him as acting chief.³⁵ His father was still alive - would even surive him for four years - but too old to govern the Bakuena ba Mogopa without his son's assistance. Throughout his chieftainship up to 1880 Raikane showed deference to Boer authority. He paid fines if some of his subjects went to the diamond fields without official permission and handed offenders over to the Pretoria government, whom he received back because he himself was supposed to punish them.³⁶

When in 1873, after threats by the field cornets H. Pretorius and Thomas Potgieter, one of Raikane's headmen, Thabeng, left the Apiesriver farm he used to live and work on, Raikane took it for granted that the cattle Thabeng left behind would become his own property as he had lost one of his subjects. He gave notice of Thabeng's flight and was told to take care of the cattle. This Raikane could not do easily as pasture land was scarce and as he did not live on the farm Thabeng had fled. He requested the allocation of additional land which he needed to kraal Thabeng's cattle, but soon received orders to hand the fourty heads of cattle over to Thomas Potgieter, the man who in Raikane's eyes was responsible for Thabeng's withdrawal.³⁷

In 1876 Raikane called back his brother Nikodemus, whom he had sent to assist in a Boer commando, under the field cornet E. Engelbregt. He sent one of his other brothers, Gert, and supplied the commando with ammunition and cattle for slaughter.³⁸ As most farmers had joined the commando, Raikane also gathered subjects to send them to work on the headless farms.

The Bakuena ba Mogopa lived on several white-owned farms. The missionaries were ready to buy land if they were given the money but land had to be available. Among the Mogopa only Bethanie, Hebron and some adjacent plots were purchased. These stations extended over large acreages but the majority of Mamagale's and Raikane's people still had to live on Boer farms and yield labour power or render other services. Raikane tried to appease his white neighbours which definitely found the approval of the German missionaries. In 1874 he and Behrens drafted a letter to the State Secretary in which Raikane assured the Boer authorities of his loyalty because 'this government is well-meaning to us blacks.'³⁹ Three years later, after the British had annexed the Transvaal, Raikane pledged allegiance to the new colonial power. He adressed Theophilus Shepstone and told him there was

only <u>one</u> feeling among th numberous native Tribes in the Transvaal...: that of joy and gladness and that of thankfulness towards Her Majesty the Queen... I dare state, that we are thoroughly convinced the best Government in the world for the natives in Africa is the English.⁴⁰

In these years when the missionaries struggled to get hold of land on behalf of Africans they were still confident that their evangelical message would progressively get through. They relied on the chiefs supporting their concern and found only praise for them when they took over European-style clothing. With 'decent' clothing African pagans emerged from their sinful background, even if chiefs would not convert to the new religion immediately. Clothing turned them into cultured human beings and was recognised as the most visible outward mark of civilisation whereas the obverse was held to be true of an absence of it.⁴¹ It was only on the first encounters between Hermannsburg missionaries and Africans that the European eye was able to overlook African nakedness. When Wilhelmine Brandt, a missionary bride, disembarked from the ship which had brought her to South Africa, on seeing the first black African in her life, she forgot all conventions and exclaimed,

at once a boat with two naked black rowers came up... In one's love for the poor one totally overlooks that they are naked; only around their loins they wear a greasy towel, I had to restrain

my feelings not to grab the first one, give him a hug and kiss him. (...) Although they are naked they have got rings in their ears, around their legs, fingers and arms, and they wear bracelets around their necks, and have got feathers in their hair.⁴²

The bride's remarks were unique because the distinction between being dressed and undressed was crucial to her understanding of this person's decency. Coming from a world where clothing was highly significant she was extremely aware of its absence but in this particular moment of excitement was able to assume a state of moral integrity in this African as she noticed other items the man used to adorn his body.⁴³

Conversion was intimately connected to a change of dress. Purification rituals took place on two levels; the new outward appearance mirrorred the new interior attitude of the convert.

One morning she went down to the river, washed her head and cleaned it from the black earth which had covered it so far, put on a colourful scarf, the sign of the Christian women in Bethanie, and publicly confessed her new way of living.⁴⁴

Just as baptism was a public announcement that from then on a person would lead her life in the face of God, the change of garments visibly symbolised the inner cleansing. The cleansing ritual bore meaning to the missionaries who based their interpretation of it on a Christian background, as well as to the new convert, who, without the missionaries taking notice, performed a traditional ritual of female initiation to womanhood. Usually the traditional ritual started with a period of seclusion when Tswana girls were smeared with black clay and did not appear in public.⁴⁵ This nameless Hermannsburg convert applied the traditional initiation ritual to herself before she was initiated to the new belief.

In church men wore black trousers and jackets. Those service attendants who could not afford European-style clothing felt ashamed and kept in the back rows while in the house of God.⁴⁶ Status was renegotiated in church each Sunday. Missionaries failed to recognise that clothing acquired a different symbolism from the European one. They stuck to their acquired interpretation of who was allowed to wear which garments on which occasions. Whereas in the years of initial evangelical success Hermannsburg missionaries had seldom apprehended that if converts put on too fancy dresses and glearning accessoires, their personalities would again be hidden under a cover of condemnable luxury and potential sin, they quickly changed their minds. If Africans wore clothes 'their own way', it was considered to be the wrong or indecent way. Hermannsburg missionaries associated clothing with social rank and because conversion to Christianity was a means of redefining social rank, indeed, a new system of social hierarchies was invented, but missionaries after the initial success in building up congregations started to be confused over the loss of control over their congregation with respect to clothing. On Kana, Rustenburg district, missionary Wenhold became furious about Lukas, who

used to work with British employers in Rustenburg and tried to imitate their dressing customs. He wears gaiters which people wear when horse-riding. But he has no horse to ride, of course. He has got a watch-chain and nothing to attach to it except for his knife. He really wanted to make others believe he was something like a hero in the congregation, and some of them started to show respect for him. I have often tried to bring him back to his senses, but with no success. So I thought my cane might be the appropriate medicine to tear down his noble arrogance ⁴⁷

Women were especially involved in the transfer of new notions of clothing and in providing the technical skills to produce European-style clothes. Each Christmas Mrs Engelbrecht of Ekombela distributed one piece of clothing to each station labourer and their family members.⁴⁸ Mrs Schröder of Liteyane sewed garments her husband presented to the Hurutshe chief Moilwe.

He always wears clothes. In the week he is dressed like a Boer while on Sunday he wears a black suit. If he happens to pop in while we are having our meal, he is always welcome to share it with us. His manners are excellent.⁴⁹

Without the skills and services related to clothing, missionaries would have had a more difficult entrance into their new African communities. In turn, the degree of determination with which Africans controlled the appropriation of European-style dress was remarkable. No wonder that sooner or later conflicts had to arise between missionaries and station residents over the use of it.

In the 1880s, with the discovery of gold on the Witwatersrand, major economic challenges changed the relationship between Hermannsburg missionaries, Boers and Africans. The German missionaries had already earlier in their lives responded negatively to the implications of an industrial take-off. Now the bugbear they had fied in Germany arose in South Africa. Meanwhile, many of the missionary sons and daughters were growing up and establishing themselves in German farming communities which consisted of missionary offspring and German Hermannsburg immigrants who had joined their countryfellows and relatives in South Africa. The missionary families became respectable settler families with a strong affinity to farming.

For the majority of the Transvaal Boers industrialisation bore painful implications. Productive capital was not generally generated from agricultural production. The smaller landowners and the landless were likely to be among the victims of the industrial revolution.⁵⁰ Competition between white farmers and black peasants grew with the settlers enviously watching the advantages of African homestead production.

For the Bakuena ba Mogopa the fight over land resources ensued. To generate cash income men and women had to resort to labour migration to the mining fields and the cities. The Mogopa chiefship was weakened when, after Raikane's death in 1880, the young Christian Lerothodi Marotshe Jacobus More Marnogale succeeded his father. He was officially appointed chief over the Rustenburg section of his people only in 1884, when his grandfather Marnogale died, and the Pretoria section of the Bakuena ba Mogopa was handed over to the authority of one David. Jacobus More Marnogale was reported to have caused fission among his people over the succession issue. Owing to the dispute, apparently many families left the vicinity, and Jacobus himself would have preferred to move to Hebron area because more of his people lived in the Pretoria district at that time, but finally he remained under Rustenburg authority.⁵¹

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Although the missionaries never figured conspicuously as intermediaries on the political scene, in the 1880s and 90s they were more eager to make sure that the land Africans purchased was formally registered in the mission's name.⁵² It happened more frequently that when labour contingents for public work were demanded Jacobus More Mamogale would not send as many men as were requested. He explained that too many of his people already worked for the government or in the gold mines.⁵³

Missionary Behrens reported that the Christian community at Bethanie thrived as they took advantage of the economic opportunities the new industrial markets offered. Peasants either used their own wagons to take their produce to the urban centres or sold it to the Bethanie general dealer, the missionary's nephew August Behrens, who transported load after load to the gold fields. Bethanie Christians sold grain, chalk, fuelwood, cattle, pigs, chicken and eggs.⁵⁴ In return they purchased oil lamps. Behrens commented,

they learn to use the world and live almost like whites. From time to time one gets frightened by their sight - where will all this end? (...) Everybody thinks he has the right to buy and wear what he likes and what he can pay for. And because ranks like in Germany do not exist here one cannot do anything against it. (...) Welfare is God's blessing but the misuse of secular goods turns out to be their moral ruin.⁵⁵

For Hermannsburg missionaries the last twenty years of the nineteenth century were a period of utter confusion because they realised how easy it was to lose control over converts who migrated to the cities and because in the face of industrialisation they had to redefine their interests. One thing was for sure: they did not want to establish themselves in the urban centres but decided to remain based in the rural areas. However, they also realised that things would not any longer go on as before, and as they had come to perceive African societies as dissolving into chaos, they hoped that the British would ensure social order again because they considered the Boers becoming stunted in lethargy and cowardice, 'The Boers are always great heroes as long as they talk. If, however, they have to act they tremble like aspen leaves.'⁵⁶

What Hermannsburg missionaries disliked most about the Boers was that they treated black people like slaves in order to maintain white supremacy. While the Boers based their supremacy on the pursuit of idleness, the British showed more energy and will of conquest and intended to uplift Africans through industriousness.⁵⁷ More strongly than ever before the missionaries believed in the importance of European influence as a pre-requisite for conversion, and because they conceived of the Boers as being inferior representatives of European civilisation, they doubted that they would ever be able to exercise a positive influence on Africans.⁵⁸

In these years they developed a specifically ruralised belief in the dogma of racial inequality and the necessity of black subjugation to white masters, who had to behave like masters and not like degenerated sloths. But imagine the disappointment Hermannsburg families felt when a few years after the promising annexation of the Transvaal, the British retroceded authority to the Boers. Later, they concentrated on the exploitation of the Witwtersrand resources and left the countryside to its own. Disappointedly, Hermannsburg missionaries by and by associated the British not so much with the notion of well-behaving white masters but more or less with urban influences which were responsible for the destruction of traditionally well-proved social hierarchies.

With the South African War missionaries' attitudes changed dramatically. The war turned the scale for Hermannsburg accommodation in South African society because it was an agonising experience for all missionary families as the sons of families living in Natal joined the British forces, while in Transvaal youths participated in Boer commandos. More or less willingly, Transvaal missionary and settler farms paid for war expenses in cattle, horses and provisions. For them the question of guilt was clear: since the discovery of the gold fields the British in their greed for luxury and gold had never come to terms with rich land lying in the hands of simple farmers. Again and again they had contrived plans to take over the land from those to whom it belonged. Now they succeeded in making the settlers suffer not only from drought and disease but from military activity as well.⁵⁹

During the war white-owned farms, livestock, crops and other property were ferociously destroyed and looted. While the landlords and their families were taken into concentration camps, former black farm workers participated in the destruction of their exploiters' material assets.⁶⁰ The Boers found their fears corroborated: the subordination of African communities could not yet be taken as a matter of course.⁶¹

In the regions of Hermannsburg activity, against the background of long-lasting disputes over land and labour, the relationship between African tenants and Boer farmers deteriorated. Across Hermannsburg stations and their surroundings, some chiefs seized the livestock of rival chiefs whom they suspected of collaborating with one white force or the other.⁶² Africans informed the British about the close ties between Germans and Boers, stated on which friendly terms the farming neighbours remained even after 1900 and how they had incited each other against the British.⁶³ After the Boer defeat most of the missionary sons had yielded their weapons, but Germans still traded with their neighbours. Like other white farmers, missionaries and their families were detained in concentration camps thus being cut off from their lands and livelihoods. When the Bethanie missionary was interned, Jacobus More Mamogale received the church registers into his care.⁶⁴ August Behrens, the general dealer considered him

a decent fellow and our friend. Although he had to obey the British he also rendered service to us and the Boers... After our internment he gathered everything the Tommies had left behind, also my business papers, and took care of them. 65

After the war Hermannsburg missionaries had to state their nationality before their compensation claims would be considered. Many Hermannsburg descendants were confused, considered themselves to be burghers or German, or both. After the physical destruction of their property and mission stations their identity was at stake.⁶⁶ Behrens stated that he was an ex-burgher but that he would not take the oath of allegiance in favour of the new government because the British Liberals had already thrown them over once before in 1881. He definitely did not trust them.⁶⁷ For this

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stubborn attitude the British Magistrate in Rustenburg conceived of him as a 'political agitator first, a hard tusk, and master second, and a missionary third.⁶⁸

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Years of uneasiness followed. In 1903 Jacobus More Mamogale died and left the chieftainship to his underaged son. For three years Mogale Daniel More acted as regent but found little pleasure in his task so that in 1906, on the demand of the Bakuena ba Mogopa, the 20-year-old Johannes Otto More Mamogale came into office.⁶⁹ He had received his education at Hermannsburg schools and at Lovedale. School and land issues divided the missionary and his congregation. At Hebron the community tried to expropriate Hermannsburg interests in their land because those whose families had provided the money for the farm's purchase in 1871 felt betrayed by their chief and their missionary. The argument revolved around the issue whether other families who had only later given a share to Kaiser should be allowed access to the land.⁷⁰ Alarmed by the complicated arguments in this dispute, Behrens was reluctant to transfer a portion of the Waikraal farm to the name of the chief alone.⁷¹

During the war, when white landlords were absent, a good deal of African economic activity had taken place on white-owned farms. After the resettlement of the farms and the redistribution of cattle seized during the war unrest became palpable in the countryside. Boers demanded labour service from their tenants that had been unfulfilled because of their wartime-absence. Africans used every opportunity to purchase land for their own settlement and use. But their legal access to land-ownership was gradually undermined.⁷²

In these years Hermannsburg missionaries displayed a fervently puritanic opposition to clothing that celebrated the sensual delights of sartorial flair for their own sake. Africans returning from the cities upset them because they wore boots and suits, watch-chains and hats.⁷³

Our youths give me much sorrow and anger. They often go to the big cities for work and some of them are ruined with heart and soul. Boys, 17 or 18 years of age, swagger around with hats and noble walking-sticks, they even come to church like this. A red or white piece of cloth must stand out from their jackets for about two to three inches and their chests are adorned with miscellanous jewels and watch-chains so that, if on sees such a gentleman, one might think he has got more than one watch. If, however, you ask for the time he answers embarrassedly, I do not have a watch. Or, for instance, in this hot summer time a young man is sitting in church, bathed in perspiration, wearing thick gloves, but he does not strip them off. He saw a white man wearing them and now he thinks this is wonderful and that is why he bears his lot manly. Furthermore, everybody must wear the valuable garments rich people wear, everybody must wear them no matter whether black or white.

Helplessly and furiously, missionaries witnessed Africans 'go white'. In their comments on African clothing, men and women were targeted alike although the missionaries emphasised that urban influence on women was even worse than on men because only frivolous women went to town and exercised their evil influence on the few decent girls who entered urban employment. Men, at least, if they watched out, would always find reliable Christians when they went to town.⁷⁴

In all ranks moral decay and chaos rage, parnts are blind and youngsters undisciplined. They are proud of education, art, culture and science which they apparently consider more important than the stupid gospel. Oh - what will we see on the Day of the Last Judgement?⁷⁵

Hermannsburg pastors railed at their congregations in Germany and abroad.

Conclusion

In fact, the history of relations between Hermannsburg missionaries and converts was the history of Hermannsburg incorporation into settler society and their changing attitude towards African society. The missionaries were determinedly devoted to an idyll of rural society and had to defend their world view in the face of industrialisation in South Africa. Their ideal was to take advantage of the market opportunities offered by the industrial take-off on the Witwatersrand in order to create sustainable Christian communities and a farming future for their own offspring but they wanted to remain out of the towns.

In their struggle they supported and found support from those members of African society who believed that the elderly should have the right and the obligation to exercise authority over the younger generations. The missionaries therefore respected chiefs and notables who wore European-style clothing and displayed a fervent contempt for those who developed their own ideas of what to wear and how to wear it.

For both Hermannsburg missionaries and converts issues of clothing became a means of asserting and renegotiating status in a quickly changing social environment. From the beginning of missionary endeavour, African converts and station residents drew inspiration from the idea of conversion to Christianity which was intimately tied up with the appropriation of European-style dress. Through labour migration and experiences in the cities they encountered even more sources of inspiration by checking out the clothing habits of the missionaries' more secular counterparts. The missionaries who initially welcomed African readiness to adopt European clothing soon discovered that African use of new-style dress easily went beyond missionary control and served to open up alternatives in negotiating social hierarchies within African society. Especially when the young returned home to the rural areas and displayed the symbols of modern city life Hermannsburg old aversions against the socially superior classes were revived instantly; already in Germany they had not participated in the display of wealth but instead had been mocked and intimidated by those who proudly presented themselves to the poor.

Becoming gradually incorporated into settler society they themselves searched for criteria to distinguish themselves from their black congregations and invented supposedly inherited regulations about clothing which they had probably never encountered in Germany. In the years of growing class awareness Hermannsburg missionaries resorted to the obsolete ideas of ranked society and associated certain ranks with the privilege to wear certain items which were prohibited to lower ones, thus taking refuge in a created world of ancient rules on clothing which they intended to protect their rural identity from the inevitable incursions of urbanisation and modernisation. By arguing that the values of ranked

society was something they brought along from their German origin - which was definitely not true - they

created a notion of distinct German culture and kept distance from their black congregations.

By the end of the century the Hermannsburg missionary families yearned for the alleged

harmony of an ancient world which had never existed. It was them, not the converts, who were no longer 'Adams in a simple Eden'.

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¹⁶ Annette Jorns, Lebens- und Arbeitssituation von Frauen im Lande Braunschweig 1830 - 1865. (Braunschweig, 1991), pp. 15 - 68.

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¹⁹ William Lye, 'The Distribution of the Sotho Peoples after the Difagane,' Leonard Thompson (ed), African Societies in Southern Africa. (London, 1969), pp. 191 - 206.

²⁰ Andy Manson, 'The Hurutshe and the Formation of the Transvaal State, 1835 - 1875.' International Journal of African Historical Studies 25: 1 (1992), pp. 85 - 98. And Andy Manson, 'Conflict on the Western Highveld/ Southern Kalahari, ca. 1750 - 1820.' unpubl. paper, n. d.

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⁷⁴ *Hmbl* 53 (1906), p. 101.
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