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Reviewed work(s):

Source: *Kronos*, No. 25, Pre-millennium issue (1998/1999), pp. 152-186

Published by: [University of Western Cape](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41056432>

Accessed: 05/02/2012 17:01

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# THE RACIAL DIVISION OF GORDONIA, 1921-1930

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In 1921 a petition signed by 259 Baster men from Gordonia was submitted to Parliament.<sup>1</sup> They asked Parliament “to restore our previous rights in the settlement of Gordonia” given by the Imperial government in “perpetual Erfpacht”. A demand for restitution of land, the petition became re-interpreted by successive South African governments in line with policies of segregation. It catalysed, in fact, the racial division of the territory of Gordonia.

In the Gordonia settlement, established in 1880, Basters had been granted farms along the north bank of the Orange River from the Aughrabies Falls to the present Groblershoop as well as in the interior of the country. Subsequently, they had lost most of this land. Basters told a Lands Department official in 1921 they were “finding it practically impossible to find places where they can pursue their calling, which is agricultural farming, and even when they do succeed in securing places where they can live, their form of tenure is very insecure... [causing] them a great deal of inconvenience and financial loss.”<sup>2</sup> Moreover their tenancies were threatened, wrote the *Rand Daily Mail*, because “Europeans... more and more require their land for their own use.”<sup>3</sup> The petitioners blamed the loss of land on the government. Under the original regime, they claimed, land alienation was prohibited to persons not registered as citizens (i.e. mainly Basters). This was correct.<sup>4</sup> So far as they knew, these rights had been ratified when Gordonia was annexed to British Bechuanaland.<sup>5</sup> But after annexation farms were sold by public auction, including to people previously ineligible. Because their forefathers were even less educated than now, they did not pay attention to this violation of the conditions. They trusted that the government would defend them. But having now seen the original documents, the petitioners were amazed that farms were allowed to be sold. Even those who had sold their property, they claimed, were surprised that they were never warned by officials when these transactions were registered. This seemed to show that the former rules were no longer in operation despite the fact

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1. LDE 3953, 11106. (All archival documents are in the Pretoria archives unless otherwise indicated.) N. M. Theron and 258 others, “An den Achtbare Leden van het Parlement”, Upington, Gordonia. It is dated, in typescript, “September 1919”, with “May 1921” added below it in writing. I am grateful to Professor Henry Bredekamp for a translation of the document. It was submitted by the M.P. for Prieska and Gordonia, J.P. Coetzee (S.A.P.), who served as M.P. before 1920 and was re-elected in February 1921 to replace J.H. Conradie (N.P.) elected in March 1920. Incidentally Conradie complained in 1928 that he had lost in 1921 (by 18 votes apparently) because of “Natives” building a dam on the Orange river being put on the voters’ roll!!! (HAD, 20/3/1928, cols 2338-2359).
  2. LDE 3953, 11106, D. Liebenberg, Controller, Report, 27/5/1921.
  3. *Rand Daily Mail*, 14/3/1923. In LDE 3953, 11106
  4. LDE 3953, 11106. This, they claimed, was stated in Clause 6 of the “Gordonia Settlement Deed”. It is not clear what this document was, though a letter from the Private Secretary to the Minister of Lands to Coetzee, 14/6/1921, states it is returning the “Settlement of Gordonia” document. The document is not present.
  5. This was where their error lay. From April 1889 the British Bechuanaland administration freed the market in land: see A.H.F. Duncan, Surveyor-General’s report, 14/9/1889. BPP C5897, 1890, p. 31.

that there had been no cancellation of the rights by any of the governments. The result was that “we, the original inheritors, now have to roam around without property.”

They asked the government to recognise their original rights again, or, if that was impossible, to grant them another settlement for agriculture and stock-farming on the same conditions. They made this request in the interests of the coloured people, who, as an “in-between race” (“een tusschen ras”) had an eye on the future and saw a great danger approaching which threatened to drop them from civilisation. Because they could not compete with current white competition, they would be forced by poverty to degenerate back under the yoke of slavery.<sup>6</sup>

The inspirer of this petition appears to have been Nicholas Theron, an important figure in the Congregational Church. He was later to become the supervisor of the Mier settlement, established as a result of the petition. To have gathered all these signatures from a widespread area at this time was quite an achievement, probably only achievable through a church. In the Gordonia district at this time there were recorded as being 856 urban male and 3148 rural male “coloureds”.<sup>7</sup> The petition was thus signed by 6,5% of the coloured men in Gordonia, or 8,3% of the rural men in the area. Significantly, and reflecting the subordinate place of women at the time, it was not signed by any women. In 1907 there were 138 coloured voters and in 1909 126.<sup>8</sup> There are unlikely to have been very many more in 1921. The petition was thus signed by more than double the number of voters.

Of the 214 signatures still existing with the petition, there are some 70 different surnames, prominent among them Beukes (14), Isaks (13), Van Rooi (12), Kotzee (11), Van Wyk (10), Feris and Cloete (9) and Jansen and Jacobs (8).<sup>9</sup> All these, save the Jacobs, are names of land-holding families of the 1880s — and other such names are also present. Some 32 farms of residence are given, with the largest numbers of signatories coming from Kranskop (30), Vaalhoek (29), Hendrikspuits (25), Bloemsmond (15), Vreede (15), Zovoorby (14) and Soutputs (12). Of these farms, significantly, Krantzkop (Mouton), Vaalhoek (van Wyk), Vreede (Visagie, Doraan, Clarke, Van Wyk), Bloemsmond (Beukes) and Zovoorby (Zwart) were still owned by Basters.<sup>10</sup>

In 1922 Basters told government officials that “there were approximately 274 men who were desirous of obtaining agricultural land, and approximately 200 requiring land for stock-raising”.<sup>11</sup> About half of these, in other words, signed the petition. The officials were also told — in an indication of class distinctions among the coloureds — that there were “another 800 men

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6. LDE 3953 11106. At the same time as this petition, a more specific letter was addressed to Coetzee from 32 “coloured voters” from Keimoes, requesting that the government grant them Skanskop island in the Orange River for irrigation purposes, as well as land at Rehoboth in South West Africa. It also requested that the SAP would support all motions to abolish the “colour line in the industrial field”. 32 Signatories, Keimoes, to J. Coetzee, M.P., 18/3/1921.

7. Third Census, May 1921, Part I, Population, UG 15-1923.

8. JUS 49, 25199/10. Magistrates Report, Upington, 1910. In 1907 there were also 436 white voters and in 1909 420.

9. LDE 3953, 11106. The petition has “259 signatories” minuted on it and a letter regarding it refers to 259 signatures: Private Secretary to Minister of Lands to Coetzee, 14/6/1921.

10. I am unsure of ownership of Soutputs and Hendrikspuits. In 1923 the press reported about six Basters as still owning land: *Rand Daily Mail* 14/3/1923; *Cape Argus*, 9/3/1923. In 1930, according to an M.P., “there was only one coloured owner left, a widow woman, who could not sell, and she had two large farms.” Mr Faure, HAD, 23/1/1930, col 57.

11. The latter owned, together, about 7000 head of large and 30,000 head of small stock.

who are looked upon as labourers by them [the Basters], and for whom it is not necessary to make provision for land, either for grazing or for agricultural development.”<sup>12</sup> On both Baster and white-owned farms, in fact, other Basters and coloureds were living as tenants, apparently on a short-term basis, though what forms of payment were involved is unclear.<sup>13</sup>

### Segregation and the ‘coloureds’

This petition was to evoke a quite considerable response from successive South African governments. It led in the end to the *spatial* division of Gordonia along lines of race. It resulted in the establishment of “reserves”, not for “natives” but for “coloureds”. The history of the establishment of such “coloured reserves” in the rural areas has not been highlighted in the historiography of South Africa. It is unmentioned, for example, in J. S. Marais’s *Cape Coloured People* (1939) and barely touched on in Gavin Lewis’s *Between the Wire and the Wall* (1987). The coloured reserves in Gordonia are also unmentioned in the last pre-1948 survey of the coloureds, the *Report of the Inter-departmental Committee on matters affecting Coloured persons on Coloured Mission Stations, Reserves and Settlements*.<sup>14</sup> This article is a small contribution towards redressing this.

In 1923 the *Rand Daily Mail* argued, along the lines of the Baster petition, that the people of Upington had a “special claim” to land. Originally granted because of their services in “dislodging” the “Koranna and Bushmen”, the land had been lost since the area had been annexed by the Cape. “The titles of the farms precluded alienation except to burghers of the settlement, who were all coloured, and how the Cape government allowed the transfer is a mystery.”<sup>15</sup> Rather than restore Gordonia to the Basters, however, governments conceived of the solution in terms of the allocation in Gordonia of ‘reserves’ for coloureds — of the racial division of the area, of segregation.

Thus Denys Reitz, Minister of Lands visited Gordonia late in 1921, “interviewed several deputations of the coloured tribe of ‘Bastards’ living at Keimoes and in the vicinity” and told them that their request for the *restitution* of land was “unreasonable”.<sup>16</sup> However, well before this, he had responded to the petition by writing that “the time has come... when the Government must determine whether it will *set apart* land exclusively for their [bastards] occupation and cultivation.” (My emphasis)<sup>17</sup> As the *Rand Daily Mail* put it in 1923, “The Minister of Lands is applying on behalf of the Cape coloured community in and around Upington a principle of the Natives’ Land Act of 1913 — namely, that of creating areas in which non-Europeans can own or occupy land.” Segregation, in other words, was already, under the SAP government, the

12. LDE 3953, 11106. Watermeyer et al, Report, 15/1/1923.

13. See *Rand Daily Mail* 14/3/1923; *Cape Argus*, 9/3/1923 (In LDE 3953, 11106).

14. UG 33-1947.

15. *Rand Daily Mail*, 14/3/1923. See also *Cape Argus*, 9/3/1923

16. Minute, Reitz(?), 15/11/1921; PS to Reitz to Coetzee, 14/6/1921; Reitz to Administrator, South West Africa, 15/11/1921 (LDE 3953, 11106). Also D. Reitz, *No Outspan*, pp. 46-7 for a mention of his visit to the Orange River, with no mention of the Basters.

17. LDE 3953, 11106. Minute, 9/4/1921.

framework within which not only the “native question” but the “coloured question” was to be dealt with.<sup>18</sup> The *Rand Daily Mail* qualified its statement by adding that coloureds “fall, so to speak, between two stools — the white man has his Land Board and the native his reserve, but the Cape coloured man who wants to cultivate a patch of ground is assisted by nobody.... the Prime Minister laid it down in his recent speech on the Natives (Urban Areas) Bill that the segregation principle, however applicable to the natives, did not fit the cases of the coloured folk, for whom the whites have a special responsibility, and whom they should carry along with them in their own civilisation. The Cape coloured class, for the purpose of getting on to the land, are the worst off among the whole population.”<sup>19</sup> The answer, however, was sought in “reserves” for the coloureds — thereby in effect segregating them, as well as strengthening the definition of “coloureds” as an “ethnic group”.

The “white man has his Land Board and the native his reserve.” In fact the existing situation for coloureds was not even that of a “free market” open to white and brown alike. The Natives Land Act prohibited black ownership of land over areas outside designated “reserves”. But brown people were also hindered in the ownership of land. Writing to the chairman of the Orange Free State Land Board (responsible for land in the northern Cape) in 1923, Reitz claimed that “European settlement was gradually encroaching on what for generations have been the sphere of occupation of the nomad, and the latter is now realising that there will soon be no place for him.”<sup>20</sup> After the First World War in particular whites were settling islands in the Orange River, and government assisted settlement was taking place along the Kuruman river near the Bechualand border.<sup>21</sup> “Permanent provision for the [coloured] community is necessary” stated another document, “if the members are not to be gradually dispersed and ruined. The permanent and progressive settlement by Europeans in areas which only a decade or two ago were considered uninhabitable by the white man has reduced the sphere of movement of this formerly nomadic community which is rapidly losing the roving characteristics of the past.”<sup>22</sup> But this “encroachment” by Europeans was with the assistance of the state, in particular through the 1912 Land Settlement Act and the establishment of the Land Bank. In securing land, wrote the *Cape Argus*, the white man “will be asked a price considerably below market value, and be granted the easiest imaginable terms of payment, besides, probably, a cash advance to help him over his initial difficulties.”<sup>23</sup> The OFS Land Board stated that “as the law stands...there is no exclusive right conferred

18. S. Dubow, *Racial segregation and the origins of apartheid in South Africa*, 39-40 wrongly, in my view, argues that it was not clear that segregation was “approved...policy” of the pre-1924 SAP government. He fails to make any reference to Smuts’s classic exposition of segregation in 1917: J.C. Smuts, “Problems in South Africa”, *Journal of the African Society*, 16, (1917).

19. *Rand Daily Mail*, 14/3/1923.

20. LDE 3953, 11106, Reitz to Adams, 9/3/1923.

21. P. van der Merwe, *Pioniers van die dorland* (1941), Ch VIII ff.

22. LDE 3953, 11106, “Proposed Reservation of a block of land in Gordonia Division for the settlement of coloured persons” (n.d., c May/June 1923).

23. *Cape Argus*, 9/3/1923; see also W.Macdonald, *The Conquest of the Desert*, 194-5. T. Keegan, *Rural Transformations in Industrializing South Africa* (Johannesburg, 1986), 168-9 argues the Land Settlement Act was favoured by large landowners, thereby able to sell to the state who would sell in turn to poorer whites. Generally, researchers on rural South Africa have paid little attention to the Land Boards or the 1912 Land Settlement Act.

under the Land Settlement Act 12 of 1912 in [favour of?] Europeans. No differential treatment is imposed by the law” — but it added, significantly “*but in practice there is.*” (My emphasis)<sup>24</sup>

In response to a query from Reitz, the Secretary of the Land Board however claimed that applications by Bastards *were* considered: “We [the OFS Land Board] had a Section 11 case — in which two Bastards applied for assistance to purchase a farm near Upington — as the papers were not in order we had to refer them back. But my Board discussed the whole position re assisting Bastards and we came to the unanimous conclusion that we as a Board could not refuse to inspect and report and leave the acceptance or otherwise of our finding in your hands. We felt that we would be justified in assisting such people — more especially if they were voters.” In this case the Land Board apparently deputed him to visit Upington and interview the Baster applicants for land as soon as their papers were in order.<sup>25</sup>

In 1918 one C. J. Davids had raised the same question with the Land Board, claiming that “no man with Black Blood in his veins [sic], never mind how many years this may trace back, is not [sic] allowed to buy or possess a farm” on the Kuruman river. “Furthermore any white man who is lawfully married [to a person with ‘Black Blood’?] is also debarred... This seems most absurd as these men are quite capable of buying and paying for a farm and working the same on a most progressive plan. I understand that several applications have been refused for the above reasons and therefore on behalf of my friends and myself I wish to ask if this is the law of the country.”<sup>26</sup> He was assured by the Secretary of Lands that it was not the law....<sup>27</sup> however the *practice*, as the OFS Board remarked, was certainly different.

Reitz raised with the Land Board whether it would be possible to allocate land specifically to coloureds under the Land Settlement Act, since in theory the Act did not “enable the Government to discriminate between one citizen and another, coloured or white”. Therefore “To confine allotments to the coloured man would only be possible by a discrimination on the part of the Board as a policy. Government considers that some such provision should be made, for as the law stands, while Europeans and Natives are provided for, the ‘Bastard’ and the Coloured man are left in the cold.”<sup>28</sup> The Board responded that it had “no objection to land being allotted to ‘bastards’ ”, but preferred that “special statutory provision should be made for the allotment of land to coloured people in order to avoid adverse criticism.” It argued that if “land in one area set apart for bastards is gazetted under the Land Settlement Act 1912, white people are sure to apply for some of the farms and it is quite conceivable that for some farms only white people may apply.”<sup>29</sup> It preferred, in other words, statutory segregation.

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24. LDE 3953, 11106, Minute, OFS Land Board, 23/4/1923.

25. LDE 3953, 11106, Adams to Reitz, 19/3/1923. He contrasted the position with that in S.W.A. where “we cut out all applications from Bastards”, firstly because it was felt that they already had possession of one of the best areas in the territory (Rehoboth) and, secondly, because, unlike those in Gordonia, the Rehoboth Bastards retained their “Captains and Headmen”.

26. LDE 3953, 11106 C.J. Davids, Ardath, Kuruman to Secretary of Lands, 29/8/1918.

27. LDE 3953, 11106, Sec of Lands to C.S.Davids, 19/9/1918; 23/10/1918.

28. LDE 3953, 11106, Reitz to Adams, 9/3/1923.

29. LDE 3953, Minute, OFS Land Board, 23/4/1923.

One Piet Beukes born in 1907, recently told a story about 1921. “In 1921 Conroy came here to Upington for the first time...to Bloemsmond... the people came on horseback and ox-wagons and carts... There he got all the Basters along the Orange River together. Then he made a proposal. He would give land to them [Mier, Rietfontein, Louwbosch] if they promised to say that they were coloureds and then he would get them wine (at that time they were not allowed wine)... But the Basters refused... So he called up Lucas Theron and Niklaas Theron [management of the Congregational Church at the time, when there was no preacher] and [Willem] Swartz and [Kroontjie] Scholtz and explained his plan to them and asked them to vote for his plan. Niklaas Theron and Lucas Theron got the most voters who sold out to him to admit that they are coloureds... [Swartz and Scholtz lost the vote.] [He made Niklaas Theron president of the land] That is why we are classified coloured today. That is why I am saying that the problems we are faced with today are seeds which Conroy came to sow here. And those roots went right through this Groot Rivier... When he left here the boere started with this apartheid. They then refused to allow us, as Basters, to do horse-racing with them. They refused to do target shooting with us.”<sup>30</sup> Some facts are wrong here. Conroy was Minister of Lands not in 1921 but under the post-1924 Pact government, and there is no evidence that he visited Upington. Reitz, however, as already mentioned, did visit in 1921. Niklaas Theron was responsible for the 1921 petition — and was later to administer the ‘reserve’ established at Mier. The main point of Beukes’ story, however, is correct: that it was the government that changed ‘Basters’ into ‘coloureds’ — by offering them ‘reserves’ instead of the whole of Gordonia. This is also the argument of this article.

### **Agriculturalists and pastoralists**

In considering the allocation of ‘reserves’ the government made a separation between “agriculturalists” and “pastoralists”. “The coloured community is partly agricultural and partly pastoral. For the agricultural section — those who for a long period have eked out a living on the river itself — a partial solution may be found in the allocation of a certain river island area for their use.... But with the pastoral section, owning many thousands of stock, a different solution must be found.”<sup>31</sup> After some searching around with different possibilities, this would result in the allocation of Ecksteenskuil on the Orange River as an agricultural settlement and Mier in northern Gordonia as a pastoral settlement for coloured occupation. Let us look in turn at the possibilities canvassed for agricultural settlement and for pastoral settlement.

From the start, Reitz was “considering the possibility of allocating to them [the Basters] one of the Crown Land islands in the Orange River.”<sup>32</sup> Mr Liebenberg, Controller of Settlements in the Lands Department, was requested to

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30. Piet Beukes, interview by Ds. Aubrey Beukes and Martin Legassick, 22/7/1993 and 19/7/1995. Insertions from 1995 interview.

31. LDE 3953, 11106, Reitz to J. Adams, Chairman OFS Land Board, 9/3/1923.

32. LDE 3953, 11106, House of Assembly, 29/3/1921; HAD Debates, Vol 6.

visit the area in 1921 to see what could be done about the situation.<sup>33</sup> On 16 May he met with Baster representatives in Keimoes, headed by William Diergaard. Together with them, he inspected Skanskop island (800 morgen) and Cannon island (Blauwskop, 2000 morgen). The Basters rejected Skanskop island because they did not believe it would provide grazing for their stock (goats and donkeys). While recognising that a coloured settlement was needed, leading whites also objected to Skanskop island “because this is situated among islands settled by Europeans”.<sup>34</sup> The Basters were favourable to Cannon island. One Hendrik Swartz insisted, against the opinion of a government engineer, that it was irrigable.<sup>35</sup> Two other leading whites argued, however, that Cannon Island was “too valuable” to be allocated to coloureds.<sup>36</sup>

Liebenberg left it up to the Department of Lands to choose between the two islands, as “there are no other large islands, which could be made available to carry not less than 100 families”. He (and the Upington magistrate) recommended Cannon island, both because it could accommodate more families (300-350) and because it was “more apart from the white people”. Liebenberg also recommended a “very strict and very close supervision” of the settlement, and urged strongly that a condition of occupation be “that they will not be allowed to transfer their leases or their right to the ground to any person, whosoever”(on the grounds that they had already lost land in Gordonia “without their realisation of what they were doing.”) The Basters undertook to build canals themselves, if they could procure cement and pipes from the government. While they wanted allocations of 6 morgen each, whites recommended 5 morgen on the grounds that “the Bastards are not sufficiently persevering, and that they are too improvident, and that, if the area be made too large, it is liable to lead to failure.”<sup>37</sup>

In 1922 the government established a departmental commission to investigate the general disposal of and the “best means of developing” the state-owned irrigable islands in the Orange River. Though it was the interests of whites that were regarded as paramount, the commission was instructed to report also on the question of coloured persons<sup>38</sup>. It made proposals on (a) the islands near Upington from Vaalkoppies to Zwartkop and the government farm Kalksluit (b) the Cannon islands group, which it regarded as a good irrigation settlement for whites (c) the Skanskop and Ram island group, which it claimed were irrigable from the already settled Rooikop island (d) the islands at Aughrabies

33. LDE 3953, 11106, Minute, 9/4/1921.

34. These were Jan de Wet of Friersdale, Japie Lutz of “Brakpost island”, Mr Siepker of Rooikop island, and Tobias Clerq.

35. Hendrik Schwartz had been with three other Schwartz’s on Langklaas island (in the later Eksteenskuil settlement) since 1919. Arrie Louw, Getuienis om voor die *Kommissie van Ondersoek van Kleurling Nedersettingsgebiede aan die Oranjerivier te lê*. LDE 4891, 23426, vol 1. See also Sergeant, SAP, to RM, Upington 30/9/1920 Cape Archives (CA) (1/UPT 6(3) 15/1/20/11) which claims that F.J. Schwartz Senior had been on the island since 1917 and his two sons Jan and Frederick Jnr since 1919. Hendrik Schwartz based his judgement of the irrigability of Cannon island on his experience of constructing furrows for Rooikop and Bradwell Island. CA 1/UPT 6/1 19(1) for Schwartzes on Bradwell island see also HC Skipper et al to RM, Upington, 23/6/1913; HJ Skipper to RM, Upington, 23/9/1913 enclosing Flores Schwartz 20/9/1913 statement; RM, Upington to Sec for Lands 25/9/1913.

36. These were Dr Borchers of Upington and Frank Biggs of Louisvale.

37. LDE 3953, 11106, Report of D. Liebenberg, Controller, 27/5/1921.

38. LDE 3953, 11106, Private Secretary to Minister of Lands to J. Coetzee, 6/7/1922; *Cape Argus* 9/3/1923. See also *Rand Daily Mail*, (14/3/1923).

Falls (e) the government farms Karos and Zwartkop and (f) farms acquired “in connection with the extension of the Buchberg irrigation scheme”.<sup>39</sup>

The commission also made recommendations regarding land for “Basters”.<sup>40</sup> It recommended that “the islands in the section of the river between Rooikop Island and Cannon Island (that is between the farms Zovoorby on the North Bank and Eksteenskuil on the South Bank), which are not already occupied by Europeans should be made available and set aside for these people. The river at this point is approximately three to four miles wide and in that section there are many islands of varying extent. A number of these are very rocky and unsuitable for agricultural development, but there is also a very considerable number consisting entirely of arable land, the building lots for which could be surveyed on the rocky islands, a large number of the latter being above high flood level. The arable land could be cut up into holdings of approximately three morgen in extent and allotted to them in terms of [Land Settlement] Act 40 of 1895 (Cape).” It believed the arable land could be inexpensively irrigated, and that no financial assistance was needed for house-building or purchase of stock or implements.” This group of islands was to become known as the Eksteenskuil settlement. In addition, the Commission recommended that the “islands on Rooipad above the Aughrabies Falls” should also be allocated to the Basters. “In selecting these two sections of the River for the settlement of the Bastards, the Commission had in view that a centre would be created from which farm labour could be obtained.” Here was the classic expression of segregation, of ‘labour reserves’ providing partial subsistence for migrant labour.<sup>41</sup> They recommended these islands also on the basis of establishing “a clear line of demarcation between the European and Coloured settlers.”<sup>42</sup>

As regards the “pastoral reserve”, the initial proposal, from J. Coetzee in parliament, was the allocation of a portion of land in the Rehoboth district of South West Africa “for settlement purposes of coloured people in the North-Western districts of the Cape Province (usually known as Bastards)” as it was occupied by “people from the same race”. Reitz was favourable to this.<sup>43</sup> So, indeed, were the Basters led by Niklaas Theron, and as a result of Reitz’s visit to Gordonia in 1921 were keen to send a deputation to the Rehoboth captain, Van

39. LDE 3953, 11106, “Recommendations of the Commission appointed to inspect and report upon the Orange River islands, and certain Crown Lands abutting on the River” (n.d, 1923?) (a very torn copy is in this file, marked ‘original in file 470’, a file which could not be traced). In its general recommendations (for whites) it argued that irrigation facilities should be provided before land was disposed of “otherwise land will fall into the hands of speculators who as hitherto will exploit ‘poor whites’ to obtain development of land at practically no cost”.

40. The *Cape Argus*, 9/3/1923 relates that, regarding the Basters, “They did not report without having consulted European opinion. The white residents of Prieska and Gordonia know the local history and feel the reasonableness of assigning an area wherein the coloured inhabitants may acquire land”.

41. See H. Wolpe, “Capitalism and cheap labour power in South Africa: from segregation to apartheid”, *Economy and Society*, 1, 4, 1972.

42. LDE 4892, 23426 Vol 2, “Rapport deur Spesiale Komitee van Ondersoek...” Appendix B, *Verlag van die Interdepartementale Komitee oor die Eksteenskuil-Kleurling-Nedersettingsgebied*, 1952 See also Watermeyer and Faure, Report, 15/1/1923; “Recommendations of the Commission...upon the Orange River islands” (LDE 3953, 11106).

43. LDE 3953, 11106, House of Assembly, 29/3/1921; HAD Debates, Vol 6.

44. LDE 3953, 11106, Reitz to Administrator, SWA, 15/11/1921; N.H.Theron to Minister of Lands, 8/11/1921; 10/11/1921. LDE 2953, 11106 The deputation was to consist of Dr N.H.Theron, Christoffel van Wyk, and Johannes Klaasten. During his earlier visit, Liebenberg had also heard representations regarding land in Rehoboth from “men who specialise in stock farming”: Report of D. Liebenberg, Controller, 27/5/1921.

Wyk, to request permission to settle.<sup>44</sup> Thus after his visit Reitz wrote to the Administrator of South West Africa proposing the move of the Basters to Rehoboth, and requesting his views on the subject.<sup>45</sup> The Administrator was opposed to the idea, and explained that he was at the time conducting negotiations with the Rehoboth Basters “with the view to defining afresh their rights in an agreement the terms of which will be capable of execution and I shall therefore be glad if all disturbing elements can at the present juncture be avoided”. An increase in the size of the settlement, he argued, might “induce the Bastards to assume an intractable attitude.”<sup>46</sup> In fact, the boot was turned the other way. One of the recommendations of the Commission of Enquiry into the June 1922 Bondelswarts revolt in South West Africa was the establishment of a new “reserve for Hottentots” in the Gordonia district!<sup>47</sup>

With the idea of a settlement at Rehoboth failing, the next came from the 1922 Land Commission. Those of its members concerned with Baster settlement, went, after a meeting with Upington Basters on 14 October, accompanied by Johannes Van Wyk, to inspect the area “on the North bank of the river, between the Aughtabies Falls and the border of South West Africa”. This was the area today known as Riemvasmaak (see below). However after the inspection they reported to a meeting of Basters at Keimoes that the area was unsuitable for settlement.<sup>48</sup> The commissioners then suggested the Basters should consider a “block of land in the Kalahari”. The question was: which part of the Kalahari. At a meeting on 7 December the Basters rejected the idea of settling on land along the Auop and Nossop rivers. (This was the area which would subsequently become the Kalahari Gemsbok National Park).<sup>49</sup> Instead they proposed an area of about 146,000 morgen of land “recently surveyed to the South of the Kalahari Game Reserve.”<sup>50</sup> Settlement there, the commissioners claimed, would require Government to sink boreholes, and even then it could only accommodate 36 of the 200 families needing pastoral land. Nevertheless they supported the Basters and recommended allocating this land to them in terms of the Land Settlement Act, on condition that it could not be transferred without the consent of government, and that “no squatting will be allowed.”<sup>51</sup>

Despite the Basters reservations about the area, Reitz wrote to the Chairman of the OFS Land Board stating that for the pastoral land for coloureds, “Government considers that the solution is to be found in setting apart the Mier country north of Rietfontein and along the Nosop and Oup Rivers for allotment to them under the Land Settlement Act”, subject to the usual restrictions on alienation. He argued that “The average European is not likely to cast envious eyes on this area at present” — so it was all right for coloureds! He added that he thought “it would,

45. LDE 3953, 11106, Reitz to Administrator, SWA, 15/11/1921.

46. LDE 3953, 11106 Administrator, SWA to Reitz, 6/12/1921. Also Reitz to Theron, 3/2/1922. There the matter was dropped, although during 1922 there was still some discussion of settling the Gordonia Basters in South West Africa just north of the Orange River: see Coetzee to Reitz, 27/7/1922; Telegram, Boerlands to Coetzee, 24/10/1922.

47. LDE 3953, 11106, Report on Bondelzwarts Rising, UG 30-1922, para 136a; Acting Sec for N Affairs to Sec for Lands, 22/8/1923.

48. The chairpeople of these two meetings were Pieter Hermanus and Willem Diergaardt

49. LDE 3953, 11106 See the maps of the proposed area enclosed in Surveyor-General to Secretary for Lands, 5/5/1923, etc.

50. The area is indicated in a map attached to the report: it begins north of the farms Steenkamps Pan, Kurrees and Vrede, and east of Blaauw Pan and Norokei, well to the south and east of where the reserve was eventually established.

51. LDE 3953, 11106, Watermeyer and Faure, Report, 15/1/1923.

given a water supply by boring, maintain a fairly large population.<sup>52</sup> The area is isolated and with the exception of a few farms privately owned and probably unoccupied it rather lends itself to a Coloured settlement”.<sup>53</sup> The Chairman responded that the land proposed by Reitz was “quite unsuitable for such men...only Ranchers of large means could take up that area”.<sup>54</sup> Moreover, he claimed, the title to this area was in dispute: “some big firms in Port Elizabeth claiming to have acquired this land from David Philander”, the Baster kaptyn of Rietfontein.

Ignorant that it had already been rejected, the Chairman suggested the area today known as Riemvasmaak. With “a moderate expenditure in cutting a road through, the Block should be ample and suitable for the 200 Bastards for the next decade.” He enclosed a report on this area he had submitted to the Orange Free State Land Board in 1917.<sup>55</sup> “Something must be done”, he concluded “as we are gradually cutting up and allocating areas over which they [the Basters] have had free run since the time of David Philander.”<sup>56</sup> Reitz pointed out that the Basters had already rejected this area and repeated the government’s aim of a settlement along the Auop and Nosop Rivers. “You are correct in saying there are old claims to certain land,” he added, “but there are not many of them, and I have given instructions that these must be cleared up. The mineral concession probably does not exist, but if it does, its terms are no bar in any case to coloured settlement.” He proposed that the Lands Department start by ‘gazetting’ farms with boreholes on which there were no outstanding claims so that “the coloured people should see something tangible being done for them at the earliest possible date.”<sup>57</sup>

In the event, on 18 June 1923 parliament resolved that 900,000 morgen of Crown land, “situate in the Mier country in the Gordonia Division, be reserved for the use and occupation of coloured persons”,<sup>58</sup> that a commission appointed by the Minister of Lands should determine the area of this required for settling coloureds presently resident in Gordonia, and that the “allocation of the remaining area to other coloured persons” would be subject to the approval of Parliament.<sup>59</sup> At this stage this was still mainly what was to become the Kalahari Gemsbok National Park.

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52. The farms in this area apparently did have boreholes on them, from the time of the First World War: see R.D. Jackson to A.H. Cornish-Bowden, 12/1/1924 [LDE 3953, 11106]
53. LDE 3953, 11106, Reitz to Adams, 9/3/1923. Cf Reitz to Adams 28/3/1923, where he adds “It is not heavy carrying country and at the best could only maintain a very small European population. It is cut off on the East by the [SWA] Protectorate and geographically has probably a good deal in common with the latter. Considering all the circumstances the Government came to the conclusion that no better area could be set apart for the purposes of the coloured people.”
54. LDE 3953, 11106, Adams to Reitz, 19/3/1923. He referred to a report on this area by himself and Mr Ritchie, dated 1915.
55. LDE 3953, 11106, “Extract from report dated 24/9/1917 submitted by Mr J. Adams to the Orange Free State Land Board.”
56. LDE 3953, 11106, Adams to Reitz, 19/3/1923.
57. LDE 3953, 11106, Reitz to Adams 28/3/1923.
58. LDE 3953, 11106, The resolution does not specify an Act in terms of which this settlement would be initiated. In May Reitz had been contemplating Act 15 of 1887: see Reitz, Minute, 2/5/1923.
59. LDE 3953, 11106, Resolution, Hof A 18/6/1923, Senate, 20/6/1923; “Proposed Reservation of a block of land in Gordonia Division...” The area was 1,122,000 morgen less 13 farms of approximately 200,000 morgen “which were granted to Europeans by the Vilander Chief prior to annexation.” Apparently 3 of these farms had been granted, and on 10 no titles had been issued: Surveyor General to Secretary for Lands, 5/5/1923. The government proposal was that “in any permanent individual tenure that may be granted there still [sic] be a condition to the effect that the land shall not be alienated or leased to or occupied by anyone other than a coloured person.” A later letter refers to 77 farms: R. J. Hunter, Control and Audit Office, to Secretary for Lands, 6/3/1926.

By this time Dr Abdurahman's African People's Organisation had become involved in the matter. Their conference on 3-7 April 1923 passed a resolution asking inter alia that: "the Government be asked to facilitate the granting of Crown Lands to deserving Coloured people in terms of the promises already made" and that "the Government be urged to facilitate the proposed settlement of Coloured people on Crown Lands and Orange River Islands in the District of Gordonia."<sup>60</sup> At a subsequent meeting with Reitz, Dr Abdurahman raised "whether labour colonies could not be started for coloured people along the same lines as Kakamas", urging the "necessity for places to which the coloured man could go when he finished his intermittent work with farmers in a district." Reitz was cool on this, pointing out that Kakamas was controlled by the church, not the government, and adding that "the provision of colonies for impoverished Europeans was a problem of equal if not greater importance than colonies for coloured people". If the APO cared to submit a scheme, however, he would examine it, but did not hold out much hope of anything being done. On the reservation of land, however, he was warmer. He said he intended to put before parliament the question of "setting apart the Mier country for coloured settlers, which would enable the Department to insert a clause restricting the transfers to coloured men."<sup>61</sup> He urged Dr Abdurahman to testify at the Select Committee on Crown Lands in May on this question.<sup>62</sup> Gavin Lewis writes how "on the eve of the general election, the SAP government... promised to set aside one million morgen for Coloured land settlement. But the land offered was situated in the arid semi-desert of the north-western Cape."<sup>63</sup> Reitz also told the APO delegation that "it was intended to set apart a certain area of the Orange River islands for a coloured settlement, but he did not indicate either where the area was, or what the extent of the land was."<sup>64</sup> This greater caution in the second case — where, as we have seen, within the department there were already specific proposals — was presumably because the Orange River land was more attractive to whites. However the difference in specification would affect the future development of 'coloured settlement' in the different areas involved.

Since the OFS Land Board had stipulated that a further inspection of the land was necessary before northern Gordonia could be allocated for coloured settlement,<sup>65</sup> the Lands Department attempted to send off a commission in 1923 to carry out this task. This proved impossible, however, since to be sure of a supply of water it would have had to proceed between June and August, and Treasury approval for funds was not forthcoming in time.<sup>66</sup> J. Coetzee, the M.P., frustratedly pointed to the interest being taken in the matter "by the whole of the

60. LDE 3953, 11106, M.J. Fredericks to Minister of Lands, 12/4/1923.

61. LDE 3953, 11106, PS, Minister of Lands to General Secretary, APO, 16/4/1923; Minute, 2/5/1923; F. Niser, Chief Clerk, Minute 3/5/1923.

62. LDE 3953, 11106, Minute 2/5/1923; Secretary for Lands to Abdurahman, 17/5/1923 The published report of the Select Committee on Crown Lands for 1923 [SC 19-1923] mentions the reservation of land for settlement of coloured persons in Gordonia, but is too abbreviated to contain Abdurahman's evidence.

63. G.Lewis, *Between the Wire and the Wall* (Cape Town, 1987), 90-1. His references are to A.P.O., 19/5/1923; 23/6/1923.

64. LDE 3953, 11106, F. Niser, Chief Clerk, Minute 3/5/1923.

65. LDE 3953, 11106, See Reitz to Adams 28/3/1923; Minute, OFS Land Board, 23/4/1923: "The Board is not prepared to set a special area apart for bastards until an inspection has been made. Messrs Adams and Ritchie did not inspect the area North of the Rietfontein and along the Auop and Nosop Rivers."

66. See correspondence, 1923, in LDE 3953, 11106. Also correspondence in TES 5621 33/179.

coloured people throughout this [Cape] Province". Any delay, he maintained, could cast doubt on the government's bona fides, "and may materially affect the next election... from a political point of view we cannot afford to lose their support"<sup>67</sup> Moreover plans for the despatch in July 1924 of the commission (including a representative of the APO)<sup>68</sup> were cut across by the dissolution of parliament in April for the general election.

As an epitaph on the era of the SAP government we may quote from a Government surveyor's impressions of the Bastards at this time: "Originally all of them, or their fathers owned land but were too indolent or incompetent to farm it, besides they were very easily taken in, the result is most of their land, practically all, has passed into the hand of Europeans and the Bastards are in a bad way today. Most of them are too lazy to work, others think that by doing manual labour they are lowering themselves to the status of a Hottentot, very few are trustworthy or honest and no one will employ one of them if he can help it. They have no idea of business but imagine themselves very clever so are easily done down. They have a rooted idea that the whole of Gordonia belongs to them and that they have been done out of their inheritance by the Whites and that the Government is now trying to force them into the Desert. They are all very simple, have not much faith in Europeans, are easily led astray, have a very good opinion of themselves, and are at present being advised by Native Sealawyers and Agitators who are making them very discontented with the idea of being allotted with land in the Mier country, the finest ranching country in South Africa."<sup>69</sup>

### **Riemvasmaak: I**

Riemvasmaak, as we have seen, had been proposed — and rejected — as a site for pastoral settlement of coloureds. In fact, Riemvasmaak was already occupied — by "Hottentots and Damaras". The idea of a land grant to Bastards stimulated Father Fages, Catholic priest at Keimoes and mentor to these people, to push forward his campaign for Riemvasmaak to become a "native reserve".

"We have recently seen in the papers" he wrote in 1923 to Dr Loram of the Native Affairs Commission, "that the Government is going to give land...to the Bastards of the Gordonia District. We rejoice at this measure because these people were rapidly drifting to misery and to all its consequences. The only black spot in this generous and just policy is that it is to be confined solely to the bastards section... it appears that the Natives are to be excluded from this scheme. Now, Dear Dr Loram we have here Hottentots and Damaras who deserve as well the attention of the Government... If they had a reserve allocated to them they would form a very contented, self-supporting and loyal section of the community. As it is today they have no home, they wander from farm to farm, the victims of unscrupulous people and they will soon be reduced to poverty. We have an example of how easily contented these people are and how

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67. LDE 3953, 11106, Coetzee to Secretary for Lands, 26/7/1923; Coetzee to Reitz, 26/7/1923.

68. LDE 3953, 11106, PS, Min of Lands to General Secretary, APO, 14/5/1924

69. LDE 3953, 11106 R.D. Jackson to A.H.Cornish-Bowden 12/1/1924.

grateful they are when the Government takes them into consideration. This example are these Natives at Riemvastmaak. Since the Government has allowed them to occupy the Farm and has reduced their grazing licenses, these people are perfectly contented and happy... Adjoining this farm Riemvastmaak are other lots of Crown land, most unsuitable for white people owing to its mountainous and rugged nature. Could this land not be allotted as a Native Reserve where the Natives, like the coloured (Bastards) people in the new scheme could have their homes and keep a certain number of stock while the able-bodied would go about and work[?]"<sup>70</sup>

Riemvasmaak had been occupied by Damaras since at least the turn of the century. Smith and Boezaiek, who researched land claims to Riemvasmaak for the Legal Resources Centre, claim the "earliest written reference to the original Riemvasmaakers" in a 1902 letter where the Gordonia magistrate states that "I am informed there are waterholes all along the Molopo, and that large numbers of Kaffirs and Bushmen squat there."<sup>71</sup> The letter, in fact, is referring generally to vacant Crown land in Gordonia, particularly in Ward 7, north of Riemvasmaak which was in ward 5. Moreover, while the Molopo passes through the Riemvasmaak farms, "all along it" does not necessarily refer to that part. This is a flimsy attempt to conjure up a reference. More cogent is a 1903 letter from the Gordonia magistrate describing Riemvasmaak as "an isolated area which has been occupied for years by native and other squatters."<sup>72</sup> This accords with the oral evidence collected by Father Zaby of occupation from before the turn of the century.<sup>73</sup> It also accords with contemporary evidence: that there are "many references to groups of Damaras/Hottentots in the South West corner of Gordonia from 1903 when they became refugees from South West Africa having suffered heavy German oppression as a result of the Hottentot rebellion [the Nama-Herero uprising in South West Africa] in the area."<sup>74</sup>

The magistrate's 1903 letter was in connection with an application for the lease of Riemvasmaak by Andries Oberholzer, who had in fact leased it in the early 1890s. However, according to Smith and Boezaiek, "no records of such leases entered into during the first 24 years of colonial rule [i.e. between 1885 and 1909] can be traced".<sup>75</sup> In 1909, they add, "certain land described as 'Lot No 1 Division Gordonia' (which could be a reference to Riemvasmaak) was leased to one de Villiers who later ceded his right to one Botes. Botes failed to pay the annual rent, was charged, found guilty and the lease was cancelled."<sup>76</sup> In fact the area leased to P. J. Botes was Bokseputs, and one van Wyk was leasing Annex

70. LDE 3953, 11106, Father Fages to Dr Loram, 16/7/1923.

71. CA 1/UPT 5/3/2, Acting Civil Commissioner to the Under Secretary for Agriculture, 30/7/1902, Smith and Boezaiek, "Legal aspects and status of Riemvasmaak Land", pp. 4, Annexure 4. No archival reference is given for the letter. See, for a more or less identical statement, O'Connell to Commissioner, Cape Police, Kimberley, 21/4/1898.

72. Civil Commissioner, Gordonia to Secretary for Agriculture, 10/9/1903, H. Smith and L. Boezaiek, p. 3, Annexure 5. Though they give no reference, it is in fact from LND 1/833.

73. Father A. Zaby, "Die Riemvasmakers, geschichte und kultur einer gemeinschaft", *Namibiana*, IV, 1, 1982.

74. SPP, "Submission", p. 4, referring to F. Cornell, *The Glamour of Prospecting*, 194, 300.

75. Smith and Boezaiek, p. 5. Surplus People's Project, "Submission to the Commission on Land Allocation on behalf of the community of Riemvasmaak", p. 4 cites a letter from the Surveyor General to the Secretary for Agriculture, 18/12/1903 (not quoted, reproduced, or referenced) supporting the idea the farms comprising the Riemvasmaak reserve were "Crown land which was unoccupied by white settlers."

76. Smith and Boezaiek, p. 5.

Bokseputs.<sup>77</sup> They add that in 1913 the Secretary of Lands approved the sale of the eastern part of Riemvasmaak. “This land was apparently previously leased. The sale however never took place, possibly because of the presence of Black farmers and because it was contrary to the provisions of the Annexation Act of 1895.”<sup>78</sup> Leases can also be found in the archives for 1912-13 for J.J. Oberholzer on Wagenbrand and M. and A. Lenhoff on Riemvasmaak.<sup>79</sup> In 1913 the Secretary of Lands wrote to the Upington magistrate assuming that in that area only Lot 7 was occupied “being the only individual who met with success in search for water”, and wanting to know the suitability for land settlement of Lots 1-6 and 8-13.<sup>80</sup>

Matters become clearer in the aftermath of the First World War. A 1961 publication of the Catholic church, commemorating 50 years of work in Keimoes, claimed that Father Fages, on a visit to Kakamas in 1923 met at Warm sand some thirty Damara families trekking from “Damaraland” and brought them to the attention of the Upington magistrate who allocated them Riemvasmaak to live, on “a farm which became a reserve for them.”<sup>81</sup> That Riemvasmaak was settled only in 1923 is certainly inaccurate, disproved both by the oral evidence of settlement around the turn of the century, and from the contemporary archives. Already in 1917 officials of the OFS Land Board were reporting that “Riemvastmaak is a kind of location for natives and we found about 20 families resident there with their stock, etc.”<sup>82</sup> (In 1920 there were 19 families comprising 145 people, of whom 29 were male adults.)<sup>83</sup> In 1920, moreover, the magistrate in Upington wrote that its inhabitants — “a number of natives of the Damara tribe” — had been “paying grazing fees to the Government for some years” and continued that “the only European person who ever visits these natives is the Priest in charge of the Roman Catholic Mission at Keimoes” — i.e. Father Fages.<sup>84</sup> Dawid Dawids, in fact, was baptised at

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77. CA 1/UPT 6/1 12(10), “[Lot 1]The lot in question consists of certain pieces of land situate in Field Cornetcy No 5... bounded on the north by the farm Aries, on the NE by the farm Narougas, on the south by the OR, on the east by Crown Land (lot No 2) and on the west by German SWA” [Bokseputs] RM, Upington, to PJ Botes 31/10/1913; “[Lot 2] bounded on the north by the farm Narougas, on the SE by the Molopo river, on the east by Crown land (Lot No 3 — [Riemvasmaak]) on the west by Crown land (Lot No 1) and on the south by the OR”. [Annex Bokseputs] RM, Upington, to WJN van Wyk 31/10/1913. See also lease to W.J.N. van Wyk dated 27/10/1909 (CA 1/UPT 7/3/3).
78. Smith and Boezaiek, p. 5. They give no reference for this letter.
79. Oberholzer, lease dated 15/5/1912; Lenhoff, lease dated 15/5/1912 in CA 1/UPT 7/3/3. A minute, probably by the magistrate, claims that Riemvasmaak, as crown land, “was put up for lease by auction in 1912 while I was stationed at Gordonia...I cannot remember whether the farm was actually leased or not.” Minute by ?, 6/5/1921. NTS 2957, 99/305.
80. CA 1/UPT 6/1 19(21), Sec for Lands to RM, Gordonia 17/11/1913; The reply was that the land was some of the best in the Gordonia district, suitable for all kinds of stock. Captain, SAMP, to RM, Gordonia, 22/12/1913.
81. R.K. Sending, *Keimoes, Vyftig Jaar, 1911-1961*. (Keimoes, 1961).
82. LDE 3953, 11106, J. Adams to Reitz, 19/3/1923, enclosing “Extract from report dated 24/9/1917 submitted by Mr J. Adams to OFS Land Board.” They recommended that the whole area — essentially the present reserve — be sold as 5 farms (valued at 2/- a morgen) under Act 12 of 1912 and that other provision be made for the existing occupants “as by reason of the mountainous nature of this country and the difficulty of access it is impossible to trace stock thefts and the families now resident there are suspected of being dishonest” Their recommendations covered the farms Riemvastmaak and Wagenbrand, and what they called lower and upper Waterval. They stated that the Irrigation Department required about 1000 morgen of lower Waterval around the Falls. They did not inspect the farms Bokseputs and Annex Bokseputs “as these are most difficult of access and it will be necessary for this inspection to be done for the most part on foot.”
83. NTS 2957, 99/305, Lieut, SAP District 10, Upington to Magistrate, Upington, 14/5/1920. In October 1922 there were reported to be “fifty natives” on the farm. RM Upington to NAD 28/10/1922, Telegram, (NTS 2957, 99/305).
84. NTS 2957, 99/305, RM, Upington to SNA, 17/5/1920. Handwritten notes record that the first occupation was in 1901; that the area was leased by one Lenhoff [from 15/5/1912 for five (ten) years?], who offered the lease for the last 2 years to Dawid Dawids for L67. [Father Hindley’s notes from RC church records. Surplus People’s Project, p. 5.]

Riemvasmaak in 1916 according to the Keimoes register.<sup>85</sup> And the archives contain a letter to the Upington magistrate from Fages regarding Riemvasmaak dated October 1920.

Fages wrote on behalf of the inhabitants of Riemvasmaak, who had “been there for quite a number of years”, requesting more secure tenure than their monthly grazing license. This, he said, would permit them to improve the farm regarding water, and make provisions for schooling. They were, he insisted, “very law abiding. They cause no trouble by stock stealing or otherwise. They can all support themselves with their livestock and the male population goes down periodically to Kakamas at harvest time to work for the colonists and to earn food for themselves.”<sup>86</sup> In 1920 the magistrate wrote in similar vein to the Secretary for Native Affairs that he wanted to visit Riemvasmaak and make “some suitable arrangement such as the appointment of a headman by which I can keep more or less in touch with them” He feared that otherwise “the farmers in the vicinity may... accuse the Government of allowing a colony of natives to live on the borders of their farms without any supervision whatsoever.” Riemvasmaak, he added “has been referred to by some as being a nest of thieves but I must admit that since I have been at this station no native from that locality has been charged with any crime.”<sup>87</sup> Thus began a struggle with the Lands Department for, essentially, the declaration of Riemvasmaak as a “reserve”, that was to last for more than a decade.

The immediate response of the Department of Lands to Fages was unfavourable. The land was to be disposed of under the 1912 Land Settlement Act, and the only “in the meantime” did the Upington magistrate only have authority to issue grazing licenses. “The department is not prepared to consider any application from the natives for a grant of their farm.” The magistrate “should visit the place and make it perfectly clear to the natives that they are occupying the land on a purely temporary basis and that when the holdings are ready for allotment they will be required to vacate the land. I am informing the Magistrate, that should he anticipate any difficulty in removing the large numbers of persons at present on the land, it would be advisable gradually to reduce the number of grazing licenses, with a view to enabling the natives to be absorbed in the course of time by the surrounding districts.”<sup>88</sup>

Fages took up the cudgels in reply. This instruction to the magistrate, he told the Secretary for Native Affairs, “has come not only as a surprise, but also as a great disappointment to the natives who have always been under the impression that, provided they behaved themselves and paid their grazing fees, they would not be disturbed.” What was to become of them were they turned off the land? What was to become of the stock which they had “honestly gathered together”? He was confident that the inhabitants would support the proposals to

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85. Zaby, 8. He adds that according to Donker, 1961, Fages had already visited Riemvasmaak in 1917-18. Zaby attempts to reconcile these facts on the basis that according to oral tradition, Dawid Dawids left Riemvasmaak during the First World War, and that Fages met up with him and encouraged him to return to Riemvasmaak.

86. NTS 2957, 99/305 Fages to Civil Commissioner, Upington, 17/10/1920.

87. NTS 2957, 99/305, Magistrate to SNA, 17/5/1920.

88. NTS 2957, 99/305, Secretary for Lands to SNA, 20/12/1920.

place them under Government control and supervision<sup>89</sup>. “The Farm Riemvastmaak I venture to say from a settlers’ point of view is quite unsuitable. Everybody who knows the farm is of the same opinion. It is very mountainous, water is very scarce, access to the place is most difficult and the distance from the nearest market great.” He asked that the decision be reconsidered.

Fages also wanted the history of the settlement looked into. “In justice to the natives and so as not to give them reason to lose faith and confidence in the white man I would strongly urge that before any further steps be taken, the question as to how the natives came to settle on this farm be thoroughly investigated. They have been there for many years. Some of them are born on the Farm. It is quite possible that years back probably before Bechuanaland was annexed to Cape Colony in 1895 they were put there by the European authorities and if that be the case and they are now turned adrift, the effect can only be one which will prejudice the native mind against the white man which is a contingency we cannot to [sic] strongly guard against.”<sup>90</sup> Following this up, in 1921 an unnamed official, probably a former magistrate in the area, minuted to the Lands Department: “I am not able to find any information in regard to natives on ‘Riemvastmaak’ nor do I think it likely that any exists. The natives on the farm can hardly be said to form a regular ‘settlement’; they are only in reality licensed squatters.” He added, however, “If it is taken up by settlers I presume at any rate that some supply of local native labour would be required which would absorb a considerable number of the present residents.”<sup>91</sup>

The 1921 visit by Denys Reitz to Gordonias secured a reprieve for Riemvasmaak’s inhabitants. After it, the Secretary for Lands was compelled to report to the Secretary for Native Affairs that the minister had decided “that the farm in question should not be alienated for the present but that the natives at present residing there should be allowed to remain and graze their stock over the farm”. Reitz had also decided that the grazing fees paid should be “very substantially reduced”, and be “merely nominal.” “It must of course be understood that the above decisions only refer to the natives who are on the farm and that no fresh natives will be allowed to enter on the land and enjoy the same privileges.”<sup>92</sup> The grazing fees were duly brought down from 1/- per head for large stock and 5/- per 100 small stock a month to 1d per head for large stock and 1/- per 100 small stock.<sup>93</sup>

It does seem however that areas of the present Riemvasmaak reserve were leased as grazing farms (not sold) to white farmers at this time. Thus Annex Bokseputs was leased to one Burger for a year from June 1922. One Mostert leased Wagenbrand between April 1924 and 1926.<sup>94</sup> One “Buizenhout”

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89. Made by the former magistrate, who was now at Grootfontein in SWA.

90. NTS 2957, 99/305, Father Fages to SNA, nd, received 25/4/1921. There is no evidence that the inhabitants were “put there by the European authorities” either before or after 1895.

91. NTS 2957, 99/305 Minute by ?, 6/5/1921.

92. NTS 2957, 99/305, Sec for Lands to SNA, 8/12/1921.

93. NTS 2957, 99/305, RM, Upington to NAD, 28/10/1922, Telegram. “Natives are not at present being pressed for payment they pay when they can.

94. See Smith and Bozaiek, 6, who comment: “Riemvasmakers state that white farmers never actually settled on Riemvasmaak land and never actually farmed there on a permanent basis. They merely used the land for seasonal grazing.” From Sergeant, SAP to District Commandant Police, 28/6/1923 (NTS 2939 19/305) it would appear Burger was still leasing in 1923.

(Bezuidenhout?) was also apparently leasing a portion of Riemvasmaak in 1923. This was pointed out by one J.M.Mouton, a “bastard Damara” ,<sup>95</sup> (living then on a farm in SWA) who had been refused the lease of the same land, being told both by the magistrate and the Secretary of Lands that they could not “as the Government wanted it. I was satisfied with the reply until I visited the farm in March last when I saw that the farm had been given to a farmer named Buizenhout or some such name. That is my complaint against the Government giving white people the preference.”<sup>96</sup>

More interesting is the case of one A. Marsh, who in 1923 is claimed to have been leasing Bokseputs (Lot 1) since 1919, and was accused by the same J.M. Mouton of illegally subletting this land, and wrongfully impounding cattle belonging to indigeous people.<sup>97</sup> Marsh, who was married to a “Damara” woman, also apparently ran a store.<sup>98</sup> Requested for comments by the Secretary of Native Affairs, the magistrate took Marsh’s side. He pointed out that six “Hottentots” had been imprisoned in March for assaulting Marsh and rescuing their cattle.<sup>99</sup> Interestingly enough, the police differed in their assessment. Marsh was “the last man to be given the lease of Block 1”, as he had three convictions for hotel-breaking, theft and supplying liquor to natives”; he was “indirectly the cause of all the trouble”.<sup>100</sup> The magistrate in the end recommended termination of Marsh’s lease, but the Lands Department, on purely racist grounds, decided not to do so: “Mr Marsh is not much more to blame for the troubles which have arisen than the wandering coloured men, and the latter may become considerably worse if the only white man in those parts, who is in a position to keep a more or less constant eye on them, is turned out.”<sup>101</sup>

Pursuing the concession granted by Reitz, Fages in 1922 wrote to C.T. Loram of the Native Affairs Commission, to whom he had apparently spoken when the NAC had visited Gordonia in 1921.<sup>102</sup> He wrote, it should be noted, regarding “the Coloured people of our Gordonia District”! The inhabitants of Riemvasmaak had now become transmuted from “Damaras” to “Coloureds” — and were to become “Natives” for Fages in 1923. “By your personal inspection of locations and by the several evidences given in front of your commission,” wrote Fages, “you saw in what a poor plight these people are and you came to the conclusion that something should be done for them without further delay. Their minds would thus be pacified in seeing that our government is quite prepared to improve their condition.” The people of Riemvastmaak, he stated, were “an interesting group, hardworking, honest, industrious and trying to make an honourable living”, and moreover “they remained loyal through the late Bondelzwarts rebellion though being constantly pressed to join in the revolt.”

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95. NTS 2939 19/305, Commandant, SA Police to RM, Upington, 5/7/1923.

96. NTS 2939 19/305, Statement by J.M.Mouton, Heriadaibes, 19/6/1923; also SNA to Secretary for Lands, 31/3/1922; 5/5/1922.

97. NTS 2939 19/305, J. Mouton, “Keirakbes”, 26/3/1923.

98. On Marsh see also Smith and Bozaiek, p. 6; Piet Beukes, interview by Ds. Aubrey Beukes and Martin Legassick, 22/7/1993.

99. NTS 2939 19/305, RM, Upington to SNA, 15/5/1923.

100. NTS 2939 19/305, Commandant, SAP, to RM, Upington, 5/7/1923; Sergeant to Commandant, 28/6/1923.

101. RM, Upington to SNA, 5/7/1923; Sec for Lands to RM, Upington, 18/9/1923.

102. No record can be found of this visit in NAC files. It is not clear if it was at the same time as Reitz’s visit or not.

This loyalty, he added, “was brought about because the Government had just allowed them to stay on the Farm though without any assurance for any future provision should they ever be required to leave the farm, and because their grazing licenses had been brought down to their reach.” This proved, he asserted, that “our natives are not the creatures whose standard cannot be raised as some irresponsible people would like to make them out to be, but are, on the contrary, quite amenable to the white man’s rule and to remaining loyal to it.” What he wanted was for the government “to go a step further and to set aside this Crown land Farm Riemvastmaak together with other adjacent Crown land as a native reserve and organize it as such. A headman could be placed over these natives who would be responsible for their good behaviour and for keeping squatters out of it. Missionary work could be done amongst them by erecting school and church and thus render them still more useful citizens of the land...This would eliminate their present precariousness of tenure.... Everyone acquainted with the position and the nature of these Farms knows that they are not suitable for white habitations or settlements yet these poor people would be quite satisfied with it. By not being too far from the River settlements, the younger people of this suggested Reserve would be a good supply of labour for the settlers while they would have a place where to graze their stock and where to settle their families.”<sup>103</sup> Here again was the classic idea of the “labour reserve” — to provide subsistence for the families of migrant workers. Loram endorsed the idea in a letter to the Secretary for Native Affairs and added: “Incidentally it would assist Uppington[sic], Prieska and other towns by drawing off redundant natives.”<sup>104</sup>

There is some evidence that the population of the Riemvasmaak area became augmented around 1922. Those imprisoned in 1923, claimed the magistrate, were illegal inhabitants of (Lot 2) and Riemvasmaak: “coloured people (mostly Hottentots of a very degenerate type)”. The magistrate claimed that they were “a truculent lot”; in July 1922 five had been charged with vagrancy, stock theft, and resisting the police.<sup>105</sup> The police added that the 1922 arrests took place after the Bondelswarts rebellion and were of Hottentots who “were squatting on Block 2, but had been wandering about between S.W.Africa and Block 2, Gordonia”;<sup>106</sup> two of these were among those arrested in 1923. All these “Hottentots” they claimed, had now removed from Block 2. On the other hand, the police stated, “The Natives on Block No 3, Riemfasmaak, are law abiding on the whole and up to the present there are no complaints against these natives.”<sup>107</sup> This suggests that the “Damara” inhabitants who had been there since the turn of the century became supplemented, perhaps with new immigrants from South West Africa after the Bondelswarts rebellion. This is

103. NTS 2957, 99/305, Fages to Loram, 6/10/1922. Both the past and present magistrates of Gordonia favoured this plan, he claimed. This would eliminate their present precariousness of tenure. “They would like to make improvements on it specially to dig wells as the water is very scarce.” They had been given permission to do so, but denied the possibility of compensation if required to leave.

104. NTS 2957, 99/305 Loram to Sec, NAffairs Comm, 7/10/1922.

105. NTS 2939 19/305 RM, Uppington to SNA, 15/5/1923.

106. NTS 2939 19/305, Shortly after the rebellion, the police received reports that “strange natives were wandering about the mouth of the Bak River, which is the boundary line of S.W.Africa and Gordonia, and that they were stealing stock”: Sub-Inspector, SAP to Commandant, 6/6/1923.

107. NTS 2939 19/305, Sub-Inspector, SAP to Commandant, 6/6/1923.

supported by Mouton's request that "the Government give the coloured the same privilege as regards grazing fees as enjoyed by the Damaras on the farm Riemvasmaak. The present tariff being too high."<sup>108</sup>

As we have seen, Fages renewed his plea to Loram in 1923. In July that year the Secretary of NAC told Loram that the Native Affairs department had decided that the question of a Native reserve in Gordonia should "stand over until the Dept of Native Affairs has ascertained what action the Lands Department was taking in regard to their scheme of coloured settlement".<sup>109</sup> And in August the Acting Secretary for Native Affairs wrote to the Department of Lands arguing that "if so large an area as 900,000 morgen is being reserved... it should be sufficient not only for the coloured population (i.e. persons of mixed descent) but also for Hottentots and Damaras as well and it would seem unnecessary to have two separate reserves for the accommodation of coloured persons on the one hand and Hottentots and Damaras, to whom the bastard population are doubtless closely akin, on the other."<sup>110</sup>

### **Ecksteenskuil**

Under the new Pact government, a resolution was passed on 3 September by the House of Assembly (and 5 September by the Senate) regarding settlement at Ecksteenskuil: "The reservation for use by coloureds and the grant to persons recommended by the magistrate, assisted by two farm owners nominated by the government, to rent for a period of ten years, subject to such conditions as the government might fix, of the islands in the Orange river, between Rooikop and Cannon islands (i.e. between the farms Zovoory on the north bank and Eksteenskuil on the south bank), which must not be occupied by whites."<sup>111</sup> This would appear to have covered the following islands: Geelbosch, James (Long), Langklaas, Rhebok, Skaap, Smal, Vygebosch, Melkbos, Steenberg, Donker, Klip, Paarde, Pietsmal, Piet Rooi (subsequently washed away), Hongerhoogte — and possibly also Smit, Hanekom, Meyer, Bella Vista, George, Inkbosch and Droebos.<sup>112</sup>

At Kakamas, Keimoes and Friersdale cultivation was already taking place on islands around the turn of the century. Bradwell, Foster and Elim islands were opened up also around 1900. A syndicate was established on Rooikop island around 1907-10 by Abraham Lenhoff, Wilhelm Frank and Anton

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108. NTS 2939 19/305, J. M. Mouton, Statement, 19/6/1923.

109. Sec NAC to Loram, 30/7/1923 [*Smith and Bozaiek*, 7 and Annexure 6.] It refers to a letter from Loram of 24/7/1923 forwarding Fages's letter of 16/7/1923 (LDE 3953, 11106) Note that the Department of Public Works, [Letter of 1/10/1992] is wrong to claim Riemvasmaak was "set aside for native occupation in 1923" [*Smith and Bozaiek*., 9]. Equally *Smith and Bozaiek* are wrong that "Riemvasmaak land was set aside for the inhabitants in the 1920s", 9.

110. LDE 3953, 11106, Acting SNA to Secretary for Lands, 22/8/1923. The Secretary of Lands replied that there would be inspection of the area in 1924: Sec for Lands to SNA, 17/10/1923.

111. LDE 4892, 23426 Vol 2, *Verslag...oor die Eksteenskuil Kleurling Nedersettingsgebied*, (1952), 9. "De uithouding voor gebruik door kleurlingen en die toekenning aan personen door de Magistraat aanbevolen, bijgestaan door twee plaatselike grondbezitters door de Regering te worden benoemd, van huren voor een tydperk van tien jaar, onderworpen aan zulke voorwaarden als de Regering moge vaststellen, van de eilanden in de Oranjerivier, afdelings tussen Rooikop en Cannon Eilanden (d.i tussen de plaatsen ZOVOORBY op de noordoever en EKSTEENSKUIL op de zuidoever) welke nog niet door blanken geokkupeerd worden."

112. CA 1/UPT 6/3/15/1/20/3, PR, Dept of Lands to AJ Coetzee, Basters Eiland Komm, PK Rooikop island, nd, received RM, Upington, 21/12/1936; Interview with Dawid Andrew by Cecil Prinsloo and Martin Legassick, born 1916, Lang island, 23/11/1995.

Sieper, who leased to poor whites; and not long after M. Gadd (on Bradwell island) and Collett (on Foster island) began producing lucerne for the ostrich industry. Collett bought Foster island after the First World War and Bradwell island was bought by a syndicate including Lenhoff and Frank. Brakbos island was opened up by Lenhoff and Japie Lutz between 1911 and 1920. After the First World War another prominent island farmer and owner was H.J. Skipper of Gras island. By 1928, it is reported, there were 25 privately owned and built canals between Upington and Kakamas.<sup>113</sup>

Coloureds (and whites) were also already in occupation of some of the islands designated for coloureds by the 1923 resolution. Settlement had been authorised by the Minister of Lands during the First World War, provided settlers were given permission by the Upington magistrate.<sup>114</sup> Perhaps the first coloureds on the islands to irrigate were Dawid Oranje and Dirk, Niklaas and Johannes Louw, who occupied Piet Smal island in 1913. This was possible because the Rooikop island syndicate had already in 1906 built a canal from which land on Piet Smal island could be irrigated. These paid a third of their harvest to the Rooikop island syndicate. Two whites were also on the island at that time, namely Dawid Engelbrecht and Willem Hanekom.<sup>115</sup> Langklaas island was occupied in 1917 (or 1919) by one Arrie Louw together with Frederick Snr, Frederik Jnr, Jacobus and Hendrik Schwartz. Initially this was without authorisation, but they obtained permission in 1921. Some of them paid L3 a year for 6 morgen of land, and some L2/10/0 for 5 morgen.<sup>116</sup>

There was more coloured occupation of these islands in the early 1920s. Johannes Visagie and his son settled Klip island in 1920.<sup>117</sup> Frans Basson was apparently on Langklaas island from May 1920, Hendrik van Wyk got a lease there in July 1921, Jan Williams in March 1922, and Flores Abrams in September 1922.<sup>118</sup> It appears that some of these paid rent in kind to H.J. Skipper, who forwarded the cash rent to the Upington magistrate.<sup>119</sup> Floris Schwartz had a lease on Smal island from 1921 and Zedokus Feris and C.J. Schwartz from

113. M. Legassick, "Development of the Orange River islands"(Unpublished paper, 1998).

114. LDE 4892, 23426 Vol 2, *Verlag...oor die Eksteenskul Kleurling Nedersettingsgebied*, (1952), 6-7.

115. LDE 4891, 23426, vol 1, Willem Gous, *Getuienis [aan] Kommissie van Ondersoek van Kleurling Nedersettingsgebiede*.

116. CA 1/UPT 6(3) 15/1/20/11; LDE 4891, 23426, vol 1, *Arrie Louw, Getuienis [aan] Kommissie van Ondersoek van Kleurling Nedersettingsgebiede*, Sergeant, SAP to RM, Upington, 1/9/1920; RM, Upington to NCO, SAP, Keimoes 4/9/1920; H.J. Skipper to RM, Upington, 18/9/1920; Sergeant, SAP to RM, Upington, 30/9/1920; RM, Upington to H.J. Skipper 15/[10]/1920; Sergeant, SAP to RM, Upington 14/1/1921; Contract of agreement FJ Schwartz and J Schwartz 9/12/1920; Jan Swartz, 21/3/1921; RM, Upington to NCO, SAP, Keimoes, 24/3/1921; Sergeant, SAP to RM, Upington 24/5/1921; Contract Arrie Louw 3/5/1921.

117. LDE 4891, 23426, vol 1, Johannes Visagie Jr, *Getuienis [aan] Kommissie van Ondersoek van Kleurling Nedersettingsgebiede*.

118. CA 1/UPT 6(3) 15/1/20/11, H.J. Skipper to NCO, SAP, Keimoes, 16/4/1921; Franz Basson, Contract of agreement, 3/5/1921; H.J. Skipper to NCO, SAP, Keimoes 14/7/1921; H. van Wyk, Contract of agreement, 27/7/1921; H.J. Skipper to NCO, SAP, Keimoes 24/9/1921; J Williams, Contract of agreement, 28/3/1922; H.J. Skipper to NCO, SAP, Keimoes, 19/8/1922; F. Abrams, Contract of agreement, 1/9/1922.

119. CA 1/UPT 6(3) 15/1/20/11, RM, Upington to NCO, SAP, Keimoes, 24/3/1924; H.J. Skipper to NCO, SAP, Keimoes, 26/3/1924; H.J. Skipper to RM, Upington 8/2/1928.

1922.<sup>120</sup> William Maasdoorp applied for a lease on Melkboschkop island, west of and adjoining Klip island, in May 1922, though it is unclear if it was granted.<sup>121</sup>

To establish a living on the islands was hard work. Arrie Louw described it in evidence to a Commission in 1952: “we first built a little dam from branches and dug a canal to lead water onto the land for irrigation. The island was terribly bushy, and to get onto it we had to swim through a number of small streams because there were no bridges or roads. We had a very difficult task to clear parts of the island of bushes and trees. Digging the trees made us sweat and caused us many headaches. On the cleared and levelled part we made a garden first where we planted mealies and pumpkins. After that we dug out the bushes and trees bit by bit and levelled the cleared parts to sow wheat on it.

“When I settled on this island, I had only a spade, an old axe, a borrowed plough and four oxen (owned by Willem Gouws and Matthys Louw) and two goats. With only these implements I began to work the land and bring water to it. It went very hard for us and on many days we had no food besides goats’ milk, but this did not cause us to give up. We had to dig the canal and work on the ground for one or two days in the week and for the remaining days we went to work for whites to get food for ourselves and our families. It took us about a month to complete a canal of about 1100 yards long from the little dam to the garden land.

“In 1920 we bought 5 bags of lime from the late Jan Delie and replaced the dam of branches with a stone and lime dam. In that year I had about 1 \_ morgen of land cleared and levelled. On that piece of land I won my first harvest of wheat. I got 25 bags.”<sup>122</sup>

Johannes Visagie told the same Commission: “I and my oldest brother were my father’s only help and because my father was physically too weak to work the land, us two had to bear the brunt of it... No-one had lived on the island previously and everything was waste and derelict. We did not know where to start with digging out bushes and trees and also how to begin to work the land. The ground was badly washed away because it was the ‘path’ of the Orange river. To make a beginning in such a place under such conditions was a task which caused us sleepless nights and headaches. We had to stop the work several times to go and work for food among the farmers, and then return to drudge and sweat on the land. This state of affairs lasted for a considerable time...

“After we had a respectable bit of ground levelled, the big problem of how to bring it under irrigation cropped up. In the beginning we got superfluous water from Mr Nurick of Ecksteenskuil and it was naturally insufficient to water the ground properly. It took toil and sweat to bring water to the irrigable land.”<sup>123</sup>

Zedokus Feris testified that: “When I came and settled on Smal island, I had 20 goats, 2 donkeys, 2 cows and an old spade.... The island was terribly

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120. CA 1/UPT 6/4/15/1/20/25, Floris Willem Martinus Swartz [Schwartz], Contract of agreement, 22/3/1921 [damaged]; HJ Skipper to NCO, SAP, Keimoes 28/4/1922; Z.B. Feris, Contract of agreement, 19/5/1922. C.J. Schwartz, Contract of agreement, 20/5/1922. See Zedokus Feris, *Getuienis [aan] Kommissie van Ondersoek van Kleurling Nedersettingsgebiede*, (LDE 4891, 23426, vol 1) who claimed that both his and F. Schwartz’s lease date from 1922.

121. CA 1/UPT 6/4/15/1/20/18, H.J. Skipper to NCO, SAP, Keimoes 13/5/1922.

122. LDE 4891, 23426, vol 1, Arrie Louw, *Getuienis [aan] Kommissie van Ondersoek van Kleurling Nedersettingsgebiede*.

123. LDE 4891, 23426, vol 1, Johannes Visagie Jr, *Getuienis [aan] Kommissie van Ondersoek van Kleurling Nedersettingsgebiede*.

bushy and in some places almost impenetrable. We two built a little dam of stones and lime in one of the little streams.... It took several months to dig the canal of about 5000 yards from the little dam to the irrigable land. We had sometimes to discontinue digging the canal to go and work for food for ourselves and our families... I slaughtered all my cows and goats while I was working on the canal and the land... In 1924 I had cleared and levelled about 1 \_ morgen of land.... There I planted mealies, pumpkin and watermelon. In 1923 I had my first wheat harvest.... It gave me 5 1/2 bags.”<sup>124</sup>

Once parliament passed the resolution, two (and, later, three) Keimoes landowners were appointed to assist the Upington magistrate to place coloured settlers and set up a Committee of Management. The magistrate was given authority to cancel all temporary leases from 1 March 1925. At first, 3 morgen of land were allotted; this was later increased to 6 morgen. When it was discovered that there were 17 white landowners on these islands, Parliament modified the conditions of occupation to allow them to remain.<sup>125</sup>

With the resolution, more coloureds settled. Willem Gous and Hendrik Beukes obtained contracts for land on Rhebok island in January 1924.<sup>126</sup> Bernardus Feris settled on Smal island in 1925, Jan Schwartz on James island in 1925, Adriaan van Wyk on Geelbos island in 1926, and Dirk van Eden, Adriaan Gouws and Albert van Wyk on Vyebos island in 1927.<sup>127</sup> According to the Minister of Lands, there were some 30 coloured families settled at Ecksteenskuil by 1930, but this may well be an underestimate.<sup>128</sup> As well as clearing the ground and building canals, they built, in the 1930s and 1940s, roads, bridges, and schools, all at their own expense. In 1930 whites protested at attempted transfer of a holding on Smit island by a white to a coloured named Barend Tities, claiming that his contract forbade this. They were told that the property was in the coloured settlement.<sup>129</sup>

The settlement, like all the islands, was hit by floods in 1925 and 1934, as well as droughts. Residents later described the setbacks that this caused. “The floods of 1925 devastated the land terribly with the consequence that we had to start again, suffer hardship and hunger to restore the land to a useable condition. After this flood we each got a loan of L10 from a certain Mr Willem Moolman, who lived at that time at Raaswater, so that we could work the land. We paid the amount back in payments at the same time as our rent...Because of the nationwide drought in 1933 we won no harvest on this island.... In 1934 the Orange

124. LDE 4891, 23426, vol 1, Zedokus Feris, *Getuienis [aan] Kommissie van Onderzoek van Kleurling Nedersettingsgebiede*.

125. LDE 4892, 23426 Vol 2, *Verslag...oor die Eksteenskuil Kleurling Nedersettingsgebied*, (1952), 9-10. Parliament passed these measures on 13 and 15 May 1925.

126. CA 1/UPT 6/4/15/1/20/15, RM, Upington to HJ Skipper, 18/1/1924; LDE 4891, 23426, vol 1, Willem Gous, *Getuienis [aan] Kommissie van Onderzoek van Kleurling Nedersettingsgebiede*.

127. LDE 4891, 23426, vol 1, Bernardus Feris, Jan Schwartz, Willem van Wyk, Dirk van Eden, *Getuienis [aan] Kommissie van Onderzoek van Kleurling Nedersettingsgebiede*. Dirk van Eden mentioned that he got the contract after three whites failed on the island. See also Patterson to RM, Upington, 5/5/1923; 9/7/1923; RM, Upington to Sec for Lands 6/12/1929 [CA 1/UPT 6/3/15/1/20/5]: Hanekom and Van Wyk gave up on the island before 1923; one Meyer left the island in 1924, and one de Klerk with a temporary lease left in 1927 “when it was required for coloured settlement purposes”.

128. HAD, 23/1/1930, col 55. In July 1927 the Irrigation Commission inspected Skanskop island to see if it was suitable for Baster settlement, but considered it undesirable because it would form “a wedge between the European inhabitants of Neilersdrift, Brakbos island and Keimoes.” (UG 7-1929, p. 23).

129. CA 1/UPT6/4/15/1/20/16, 13 settlers of Smit island to RM, Upington 16/4/1930; RM, Upington to Secretary for Lands, 13/6/1930.

river again spilled its banks and damaged the crops and the land.... It caused difficulties to restore the land. After the floods we got mealies, wheat and mealie-meal rations from the government. For this we later got bills from the government. I paid my bill about a year later. The toil and trouble to restore the land was dreadful, but with courage, patience and perseverance we devoted ourselves to the task and achieved wonders.”<sup>130</sup>

“The 1925 flood seriously damaged the land and I had to sweat and toil to restore it. After the flood Mr Nurick refused to give us his superfluous water and we were thus obliged immediately to make an attempt to get water out of one of the little streams.”<sup>131</sup>

“At that time [1925] the government made L300 available for the occupants of allotments on the Settlement to restore the destroyed ground, but we used the money to restore our water... [In 1934] the dam we had made in the river by Lang island broke and was swept away by the water.”<sup>132</sup>

The main unhappiness among inhabitants of the settlement was with the limited ten-year tenure they were granted. The APO conference in April 1925, for example, resolved that: “the Government be approached with a view to granting fixity of tenure to Coloured people occupying certain islands in the Orange River.”<sup>133</sup> Only in March 1948 was Ecksteenskuil proclaimed as a permanent coloured settlement — of 1400 morgen and 4 island groups — under Act 7 of 1946.<sup>134</sup> By 1956 there were more than 80 families on 2-6 morgen plots, paying rentals of 10/- a year for irrigable land and 1/- a year for building plots.<sup>135</sup> (Today there are some 119 families, each owning about 3 hectares.)<sup>136</sup> Even then, purchase of the land was not allowed, and when residents were allowed to purchase, they could not get title deeds. As David Andrew, who had been on Smal island since 1925, explained: “the ten years expired in 1935, as we reckoned. Then the government said to us, ‘No, there’s a proving time of five years. We must first see who qualifies for the ground and who doesn’t.’ And when the five years were up, the war broke out. Then the government said ‘We can’t stand and bother with this land now.’ Then one found the settlers, the adults went to the war, and their sons went like locusts to the war. Because they had to see to it that no-one could come to take our land. And it is quiet until now. Just a bit heartbreaking. Now the land is actually on the basis of sale, you can buy it now... there are those who have paid for the land. But we sit and wait for title deeds.. We have a *grondbrief*. You can’t take that to the bank and get a loan.”<sup>137</sup>

130. LDE 4891, 23426, vol 1, Arie Louw, *Getuienis [aan] Kommissie van Ondersoek van Kleurling Nedersettingsgebiede*. Also Willem Gous in *ibid*.

131. LDE 4891, 23426, vol 1, Johannes Visagie, *Getuienis [aan] Kommissie van Ondersoek van Kleurling Nedersettingsgebiede*.

132. LDE 4891, 23426, vol 1, Zedokus Feris, *Getuienis [aan] Kommissie van Ondersoek van Kleurling Nedersettingsgebiede*.

133. Cape Times, 15/4/1925; (LDE 3953, 11106).

134. LDE 4892, 23426 Vol 2, *Verslag...oor die Eksteenskuil Kleurling Nedersettingsgebied*, (1952), 10. On 15 March (H of A) and 26 March (Senate).

135. J. Brauer, *Cape Times*, 18/2/1956. Brauer was wrong to characterise all these as “descendants of those who helped to build the irrigation furrow near Upington.”

136. Interview of Cornelius Kok by Martin Legassick, 24/11/1995

137. Interview with Dawid Andrew, 23/11/95

## Mier

As regards the ‘pastoral’ settlement in northern Gordonia, the 1924 Pact government was soon under pressure, both from J. Coetzee (who had lost in the election to the Pact candidate, J. H. Conradie), and from the APO. Both wanted to know when the Commission would be sent to inspect the area, as required by the 1923 resolution.<sup>138</sup> In 1924 Coetzee was reassured by the Secretary for Lands that “I have not hustled matters because it was too late for this year. [The Minister] is going into the matter during the recess.”<sup>139</sup> In the event, no further action was taken until 1926.<sup>140</sup>

The Pact government stressed that the northern Gordonia settlement should not just be for the coloureds of Gordonia. The segregationist — as opposed to restitutionist — elements of the settlement were thereby accentuated. Section (c) of the resolution passed in 1923, which read that after Gordonia coloureds had had land allotted, the allocation of the remaining area “to other coloured persons shall from time to time be subject to the approval of Parliament”, was therefore amended in 1926 by Parliament to read that such allocation could be made (without permission of Parliament) to “such other coloured persons throughout the Union who may be found at various times to be in need of land”.<sup>141</sup>

Rather than working with the APO as the SAP government had done, moreover, the Pact government cultivated the more conservative African National Bond.<sup>142</sup> On 14 April 1926 the Minister met a deputation headed by W.H. Le Grange, its chairman. They asked about assistance for Coloureds to acquire land under Land Settlement schemes, and “all information relating to the...Crown Lands in the Gordonia District; promised by the late Government to the Coloured Community, for Land settlement” They wanted immediate steps taken to start irrigation and boring works there, as well as the appointment of the commission to investigate the “pros and cons” of such a land settlement.<sup>143</sup>

On the Land Settlement Act the Minister replied, disingenuously, that “there was no distinction drawn in the Act between Europeans and coloured people. The coloured members of the community, provided they held the qualifications under the Act and provided they had the necessary capital to undertake farming, were entitled equally with Europeans to make application in terms of the Act... the approval of applications was primarily in the hands of the Land Boards but, if and when applications were submitted by coloured members of the community they would be referred to and dealt with by the Boards in the

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138. LDE 3953, 11106, Coetzee to Secretary for Lands, 17/8/1924. He also asked whether the Government intend to open up the Orange river Islands (presumably for white settlement). For the APO, see *Cape Times*, 15/4/1925.

139. LDE 3953, 11106 Secretary for Lands to Coetzee, 1/9/1924. He added “We are busy on the Orange River islands at the moment”.

140. This was partly because the government was waiting for the appointment of a new, fifth, Land Board, with responsibilities for Marico, Rustenburg, Lichtenburg, Ventersdorp, Klerksdorp, Christiana, Wolmaranstad, Bloemhof in the Transvaal and the Cape north of the Orange River. For its appointment see Government Gazette 18/9/1925 No 1573.

141. Resolution, passed by Hof A 22/4/1926; Senate 19/5/1926. See also Minute, 29/9/1925 in LDE 3953, 11106.

142. ANB, “Report of Committee on Lands”.

143. LDE 3953, 11106, “ANB, “Report of Committee on Lands”, Rev A.A.Petersen, chairman. They also raised the issue of the Malay location in Johannesburg and proposed the cutting up of deserted mine land into small holdings for coloureds.

ordinary way.”<sup>144</sup> The APO had already exposed Pact government policy regarding land settlement. At the 1925 APO conference it was reported that at two meetings with the Secretary for Labour the preferential settlement of poor whites on the land had been discussed. “‘We will deal with the Coloured people later’ was what they were told.” The conference had resolved that government be asked to provide land for the settlement of “competent coloured agriculturalists” assisted through the Land Bank “on the same basis as European farmers.”<sup>145</sup>

Regarding the northern Gordonia settlement, the Minister told the ANB that further extensive boring would be needed before much of the land would be habitable<sup>146</sup>, and promised a commission, which at least one member of the coloured community would be asked to “accompany”. He emphasised his intention to make the settlement available for all “members of the coloured community, and not for any particular section of them, such as the Upington men alone.” He added that because the Mier settlement was intended to meet the reasonable needs of coloureds, “the coloured community could not well expect to have their applications considered in other purely European areas” — rather contradicting his earlier remarks on the Land Settlement Act!<sup>147</sup>

The commission in fact was constituted soon after, arrived in Upington in July 1926, and travelled all the way through northern Gordonia to Union’s End. It consisted of Mr Liebenberg, chairman of the Transvaal Land Board, Dr du Toit, a government geologist, R.D. Jackson, government land surveyor, “a representative of the Cape Province for the coloureds”, Le Grange, and “one from Upington for the bastard community”, by name Johannes Klaasten.<sup>148</sup> Liebenberg and Du Toit submitted a joint report, while Le Grange and Claasens submitted separate reports. Liebenberg and Du Toit’s report was largely technical, on the availability of water and the prospects for stock-raising and agriculture. It recommended stringent prohibitions on the ability to transfer land to whites. And it concluded: “Taking the position in general we consider the country to be eminently suitable for stock raising, but whether the coloured community is the most desirable settler for the area is a point which only time can prove, as it is doubtful whether they would feel their responsibility sufficiently to employ only the best farming methods and thereby guard against deterioration of the veld.”<sup>149</sup> While this appeared to cast aspersions on coloureds, it was in fact the first of a series of opinions on the area they surveyed which would result in the shifting of the pastoral coloured settlement from the (subsequent) Kalahari Gemsbok area to the area further south around Rietfontein.

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144. LDE 3953, 11106, H. d.P., “Memo”, n.d, c. 14/4/1926.

145. Cape Times, 15/4/1925 (in LDE 3953).

146. LDE 3953, 11106, At the time there were apparently 16 bore holes on the Oup river, including at Bokspuits, KijKij, Sekwats and Kameelsleep: R.D. Jackson to A.H. Cornish-Bowden, 12/1/1924.

147. LDE 3953, 11106, H.d.P., “Memo”. The ANB delegation had also asked about government support for coloureds to acquire land in urban areas for small holdings “on the easy payment system”. The Minister rejected this on the grounds that it was not done for whites. The question of locations for coloureds separate from those of “natives”, not on the original list of ANB issues, was also discussed: see Minister of Lands to Administrator of Transvaal, 20/4/1926; Administrator to Minister of Lands, 24/4/1926.

148. Cape Times, 22/7/1926 (LDE 3953, 11106). This article includes a history of the British Bechuanaland Concession Court in Mier, mentions that Sir David Graaff owns one or two farms in the area, and provides an etymology of the word ‘Mier’, meaning lake, not ant.

149. LDE 3953, 11106, Part II, Report of D.P. Liebenberg and A.L. du Toit. Submitted in August? (See Director of Irrigation to Secretary for Lands, 1/9/1926 LDE 3953, 11106).

Le Grange's report was much more explicit on this question. The area they had inspected, he wrote, could "be made available for stockfarming if sufficient water should be bored for by the Government for the benefit of stock and domestic use". But he had reservations. Settling coloureds there, he believed, would be impossible "before there has been made provision for proper settlements... where the coloured population could come together and from which settlement any person who has become efficient can of course apply for a farm....it won't be advisable for the Government to allow people to scatter on the land as there are always persons who have no ability to attain a farm." He proposed the farm Kameelsleep for such a central settlement, cut up in 1 morgen erven, and also the farm Rietfontein: "although it has been represented to me that the Rhenish Missionary Society has applied for the title of Rietfontein."<sup>150</sup> (In fact the Rhenish Mission Society had had a mission at Rietfontein since 1885, and had been granted the farm shortly after that). "I am of opinion that by granting such application to the said Society a sound scheme would be prevented from making a success of the settlement of the coloured population on Mierland. For the simple reason that there is the finest opportunity at Rietfontein to build up a splendid settlement water being plentiful and there could beautiful irrigation works be made, but not only this. Such a central place could be made very useful for business purposes, as a cattle-market etc." Considering it "most undesirable" for "our white population" to take up farms, he wanted the government to get back those already taken up (Sekwats, Oikolk, Kijkij), including one owned by Sir David Graaff.<sup>151</sup>

Johannes Klaasten submitted two versions of his report. In the first, after noting the types of bush and water supply, and commenting on the suitability of the land for cattle farming, he drew "the attention of the Government to the first spot where a water supply can be obtained. Such spot to be made by Government the Central or principal station from where if possible irrigation can take place. I recommend to have the principal station made in such a way that the small man can also participate and I can assure you such a scheme will be a success. In connection with such a land settlement on that extensive piece of ground it is my opinion that how closer the settlement so much easier, more convenient and cheaper the development of the land as would be the case when the settlers were scattered thereon. There will be more development when there is a place of rest, the weakest man will look forward towards the future with ambition."<sup>152</sup> These were the same points that Le Grange was making. Klaasten concluded by pointing out that the land between Twee Rivieren, the Ouop and Nosop — what is today the Kalahari Gemsbok National Park — was "still a wilderness or nearly

150. LDE 3953, 11106, On this representation see Minute to Minister of Lands 26/8/1926. "Mr Le Grange called to see you. Is proposing that Government should hand over farm Rietfontein... I told him that I thought that the Berlin Mission or the Rhenish Mission had rights over this ground, but I was uncertain."

151. LDE 3953, 11106, Part ii, "Report from Mr W.H. Le Grange". The Afrikaans original from which this is translated is in LDE 3953, 11106, Part ii. Submitted in W. H. Le Grange to Minister of Lands, 12/10/1926, delayed by getting the approval of the Gordonia representative. See *ibid* and Le Grange to Minister of Lands 12/8/1926.

152. LDE 3953, 11106, Part ii, In a second version he made clearer that allowing the 'poor man' to have a share in irrigation would "lay the basis for the conservation of the whole settlement of Coloureds.": "Raport van Johannes Klaassen, Uppington", 21/3/1927. I am grateful to Suzie Newton-King for translation of the Dutch/Afrikaans of the second report.

so and that the settlers will have to fight wild animals”, and hoped for government assistance in this.<sup>153</sup>

In August one J.P. Bergmann, of Louwbosch (near Rietfontein) strongly supported the idea of a settlement at Rietfontein. He wrote to the Minister of Lands, saying that unfortunately he was not at home when the commission visited. It was impossible in his view to conceive of a “baster kolonie” between the Nosob and Aup rivers. The water in the rivers was at a depth of 200 feet, and poor people could not afford the necessary boreholes. He suggested instead that around the mission which owned the farms Rietfontein, Skepkol and Kalkputs there was enough land “to settle thousands of Baster families and give them a chance to make a living. The water is almost above the ground in certain places. The land is among the most fertile that I have known, and Sannaspoort is almost a natural dam.” It would cost about L5000 to improve it. The land which could be irrigated from it was 10-15,000 morgen, of so good a quality that erfs of 6 morgen would give the chance of a first class living. He himself sold fruit and vegetables to Upington. “Nou ja Meneer, here is a block of 90 thousand morgen which would be just the right place to make a reserve... Give me the chance (if you think well of the matter) to get a written option from all the owners before one wakes up sleeping dogs.” He could buy the land today at a low price (for a small commission) and save the government money. He recommended taking the surveyor Jackson’s advice.<sup>154</sup> He wrote again in October: “Since I wrote to you it appears that the Basters are of the same opinion that they must get the land at Rietfontein” and offered to do the work on the dam wall.<sup>155</sup>

Replying to Bergman on 12 November, the Under-Secretary of Lands explained the parliamentary constraints the Minister was working under — he had been “confined” to the land between the Aub and Nossop rivers and did not have the power to consider the founding of a Baster colony in the neighbourhood of Rietfontein.<sup>156</sup> However the previous day the idea of a Rietfontein settlement had got support from the Western Land Board. Having read merely the Liebenberg and du Toit report, it decided that: “it would be difficult to establish a successful settlement for the coloured people between the Auhoop and Nosop rivers because it is all loose sand veld, and there is the danger that with too many stock at the water holes, it would eventually return to being a howling desert. It is advisable to investigate the land and the possibility of irrigation works in the neighbourhood of Rietfontein with an eye on the founding of a colony for the Baster community in that area, even if necessary in connection with the land between the Auhoop and Nosop rivers.”<sup>157</sup> A minute to the Minister of Lands in the same month drew attention not only to the reports of the commission, but to the Western Land Board decision and to Bergmann’s letters and asked “what

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153. “Report from Johannes Klaassen”, translation from Dutch/Afrikaans original, both in LDE 3953, 11106, part II. This version is signed “N.H. Theron, Secretary”.

154. LDE 3953, 11106, Part ii, J.P. Bergman to Minister of Lands, 2/8/1926.

155. J.P. Bergman to Minister of Lands, 26/10/1926.

156. LDE 3953, 11106, Part II, Under-Secretary of Lands to JP Bergmann, PK Mier, 12/11/1926.

157. LDE 3953, 11106, Part II, Westelike Land Raad, resolution, 11/11/1926

action you wish taken now". It added that the Rietfontein mission was outside the area authorised by parliament.<sup>158</sup>

Though it is not reflected in material in the archives, things had swung in favour of the area around Rietfontein. In 1929 the chairman of the Land Board and the Under-Secretary of Lands were asked to inspect this land and recommended it. The Minister approved the recommendation and five farms were bought: 73,000 morgen for £13,000.<sup>159</sup> In 1929 the Coloured Persons Settlement Areas (Cape) Bill (No 33) was in fact tabled to confirm the settlement. It was read for the first time, but its second reading was cut across by the election of that year.<sup>160</sup> It was introduced again in 1930 by the Minister of Lands.

Reviewing the history of the proposal for a pastoral settlement, the Minister made clear that the report of the commission of 1926 had been "very disappointing". The area originally proposed by parliament "was quite unsuitable, inasmuch as the grass... will be trodden up by the stock, and there was practically no possibility of getting water." The commission, he added, had suggested that "I should try to get hold of an area south of the Rietfontein Mission Station, which will be suitable for the purpose": he omitted to say which of the commissioners had in fact suggested this. This had been done. The area of 450,000 morgen embraced about 50 farms (30 Crown Land). There were five adjacent farms owned by coloureds which it was proposed to attach to the 'reserve'. "This area is easily separable from the farms occupied by Europeans." Provision was made for its extension, upon approval of Parliament. He proposed a board of control, and election of a local committee by the people themselves. The occupants should not have ownership rights: "it would not be in the people's interests. We know from experience that they then lose the farms through Europeans buying them up. These very people nearly all had farms along the Orange River, and they admit that by easy credit, and the supply of drink, they have been ruined." The board would be able to cancel right of occupation; but right of occupation could be inherited for children or dependants. There would be no trading without permission, and no liquor could be sold or imported. It was an experiment he added. "If it succeeds, other areas can also be proclaimed... by virtue of the resolution of Parliament, and provision is also made that coloured people from other areas can also apply to be included."<sup>161</sup>

The principal debate was on the question of segregation. In the second reading debate, Heaton Nicholls, member for Zululand (and in the 1930s an ardent segregationist so far as 'natives' were concerned)<sup>162</sup> pointed out that the Bill represented "an entirely new departure in our legislation in regard to land settlement", in comparison with the 1912 Land Settlement Act or the 1913

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158. LDE 3953, 11106, Part II, Minute to the Minister, 23/11/1926.

159. Minister of Lands, HAD, 23/1/1930, cols 55-7; Faure, col 57. This is dealt with in file 14972 of the Lands department records, which I could not trace in the archives.

160. HAD, 1929, cols 1379, 1811.

161. Minister of Lands, HAD, 23/1/1930, cols 55-7. The Coloured Persons Settlement Act, No 3 of 1930, is dealt with in file 14098 of the Lands Department records, which I could not trace in the archives.

162. See for example S. Marks, *The Ambiguities of Dependence in South Africa: Class, Nationalism and the State in Twentieth-Century Natal*, (Johannesburg, 1986).

Natives Land Act. “Here, in this Bill, we are establishing segregation for coloured people... we are taking power under this Bill, by simple resolution of this Parliament to set up coloured areas all over the Cape... it may profoundly affect the policy of the future... we may apply it to other coloured people in Natal tomorrow.” On the third reading he moved for the deletion of the clauses allowing the extension of the settlement’s boundaries and the establishment of other settlements in the Cape merely by resolution of parliament: he believed an Act of parliament was required. On the basis of a resolution, the House “might adopt a principle without adequate discussion, and set up segregation in the Cape, which seems to me eminently undesirable without a full discussion.” “The coloured people in the Union”, he added, “have their rights under the Land Settlement Acts... and stand equally with Europeans in applying for land... There is no doubt that the Minister could in carrying out the resolutions of the select committee have brought this settlement under the ordinary Land Settlement Act, but he could not set up machinery, especially applicable to the coloured people. He has chosen to have this Bill, and I approve of that entirely... but he should have left it there... We shall have got into recognizing three forms of segregation — black, white and coloured. Since the question of the territorial segregation of the races has been one of the burning topics of our public life, it seems undesirable to bring in another form until we know what we are doing.”<sup>163</sup>

His amendment was opposed by Faure, member for Hottentots Holland, who argued that there were “many ordinary and respectable coloured people in the Cape Province who also want land.” Faure added that it was “all very well for the hon. member for Zululand to say that the coloured people can also obtain land under the Land Settlement Act, but he knows well that if a European and a coloured person want the same piece of ground that the former will get it.” It was also opposed by Stals, who claimed that Nichols wanted to provide land not for coloured people, but only for a “group of coloured people” in Gordonia: “if it is right for Gordonia, it is right also for the other parts in the Cape Province”. “The idea of coloured segregation seems to be a sort of nightmare with the hon member for Zululand. It may be that the hon. member feels strongly about it, but I think that there is absolutely no danger in it. Any properly thinking statesman knows that such a policy will not be possible in South Africa at all.” The guarantee of requiring a parliamentary resolution meant there was no need to bother now about further segregation. The Minister of Lands also rejected the amendment and assured that “as far as I am concerned it is not the policy of the Government to establish coloured settlements all over the Cape Province. We have already several small coloured settlements, and it may be necessary to have another.”<sup>164</sup> Parliament would control the matter. In the end, Heaton Nicholls withdrew the amendment.<sup>165</sup>

There were a variety of other comments. Mr Faure, who had inspected the land, believed that only Baster stock farmers would move there, unless the storage dam at Sannah’s Poort was improved. “If the Government does that, I

163. H.Nicholls, HAD, 23/1/1930, cols 59-60; 6/2/1930, cols 498-9.

164. LDE 3953, 11106, Part II, A petition from coloureds in the Kuruman district wanting government to buy land for them there was turned down around this time because of the Mier settlement.

165. HAD, 6/2/30, cols 500-502.

think the ‘Bastards’ along the Orange River and on the islands might be induced to go there, as there is excellent land for them to cultivate. They have been unjustly treated and exploited, and we will thus get better control over them”. Mr Stals welcomed the bill as doing something for the coloured people when things had already been done for the European and the native. He hoped that the Bill would also include the Griqua, enabling them to become landowners again. He appreciated the proposed regulations, as one did not want to establish “a kind of Tom Tiddler’s ground for the coloured person.” He thought there should be wariness on how it affected the labour question. Mr Krige commented on the extent of the Minister’s power under the regulations, and hoped that the settlers would eventually get titles to land and become members of the board of control. “As to the Gordonia settlement, the people there owned the land in days gone by, but through no fault of their own they lost the title to their land.” Mr Van Coller wanted the inhabitants to elect two of their own people to the board of control — which was rejected by the Minister on the grounds that white settlements had no such provision.<sup>166</sup> Van Coller also felt that government should make provision for housing, and warned that “serious trouble” might come regarding communal grazing rights and the use of water.<sup>167</sup>

In May 1930 parliament passed a resolution rescinding that of June 1923 and reserving “for the purposes of the Mier Coloured Persons Settlement Area” 25 farms in northern Gordonia.<sup>168</sup> They did not include Rietfontein or Schepkolk. They represented less than one third of the area that had been ruled by the Baster Dirk Vilander in the nineteenth century and annexed by British Bechualand in 1891 (additional territory of Vilander’s was in German South West Africa). Vilander’s rule had also extended over the area that became the Kalahari Gemsbok Park, as well as the area to the south of the new Mier settlement. Some farms were added to the Mier settlement in 1934 and 1939, and in 1968 Rietfontein and Schepkolk were incorporated into it.<sup>169</sup> According to a study by the Surplus People’s Project, in 1990 there still existed tensions between the original Baster inhabitants of the area, and “coloureds” who had moved to the area since 1930. The Basters have become the “underdogs” relative to many of the “coloureds” who are wealthier.<sup>170</sup>

## Riemvasmaak: II

In 1925, under the Pact Government, the Department of Lands renewed to the Native Affairs Department the demand for the removal of the inhabitants of Riemvasmaak (now estimated at 80 to 100 “Native families”) so that “the farms

166. In committee Faure moved that the Minister be empowered to add settlers to the board, in order to “restore the confidence of the bastard towards the white man”. He gave examples of currently well-off Basters. One, for example, had died recently at Keimoes worth L15,000; another, Gordon Breytenbach, owned 600 head of cattle and 2000 sheep. “They are a little race by themselves, with a language of their own.” This was agreed. HAD, 3/2/1930, col 354.

167. HAD, 23/1/1930, cols 57-63.

168. LDE 3953, 11106, File II, The farms were Lekker Draai, Kykwas, Januaries Kop, Kakochap, Ogenas, Kooi Hoop, Rolletjes, Kaa Straat, Tonsip, Brand Duin, Simons Pan, Haakschein, Rooipan, Pulai, Loretto, Sebobogas, Witstraat, Langkaa, Tween Dabas, Dwangas, De Stoelle, Haakschein Vley, Louw Bosch, Groot Mier, Klein Mier No 1: Resolution of House of Assembly 20/5/1930.

169. Surplus People Project, “*If one can live, all must live*”: a report on past, present and alternative land use in the Mier Rural Reserve in the Northern Cape, 12-13.

170. SPP, “*If one can live...*”, 17-21.

Riemvastmaak, Wagenbrand and Waterval” could be divided into five and disposed of (to whites) under the 1912 Land Settlement Act. As a sop, it was added that “a small extent of land” in the Richtersveld in Namaqualand might become available for disposal by the Government. “In such an event it is proposed to make some of it available for occupation by certain Natives many of whom are at present squatting in the neighbourhood of Port Nolloth and O’okiep and it is suggested that, if difficulty is experienced by your Department in finding land for the Riemvastmaak Natives, they might also be moved to the Richtersveld area.”<sup>171</sup> Once more this initiated conflict between the NAD and the Department of Lands, a type of inter-bureaucratic conflict identified by several students of this period.<sup>172</sup>

When this was reported to him by the NAD, the Upington magistrate responded: “If these natives are removed to the Richtersveld area, in what way are they going to be employed, or how will they earn a livelihood?” Some of them, he added, had “been on these farms for years, and the majority are employed on the Kakamas Labour Colony. They are not allowed to keep stock at Kakamas, and use these farms for that purpose, paying the grazing fees. I must say that considering the number of natives about, there appears to be very little stock theft, but it is possible that it may go undetected.” He suggested that they could be accommodated on Block No 1 [Annex Bokseputs].<sup>173</sup> The NAD replied to the Department of Lands, supporting the magistrate’s analysis and proposals. The Department of Lands replied that they were not prepared to reserve Annex Bokseputs “for Natives.”<sup>174</sup>

In an internal NAD communication forwarding this correspondence to the Secretary for Native Affairs it was pointed out that the inhabitants of Riemvasmaak were “apparently, strictly speaking, not Natives, but Damaras and Hottentots”. Therefore, it was implied, it would be more appropriate for the Department of Lands than the NAD to issue instructions to the Upington magistrate for their removal.<sup>175</sup> Herbst, the Secretary for Native Affairs, previously an Assistant Magistrate at Rietfontein, then wrote a strong letter to the Department of Lands on behalf of his Minister, hoping that the inhabitants of Riemvasmaak would not “be deprived of the privilege.” of leasing grazing. “These coloured people have been driven from pillar to post in the past and the fact that they have for years been left undisturbed affords proof of the barrenness of the area. They have been allowed grazing rights for their stock, and they have themselves found useful employment upon the Kakamas settlement. If they lose the use of ‘Riemvastmaak’ no alternative provision can be made so far as this Department is aware. They will then almost inevitably lose their stock, and with

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171. NTS 2957, 99/305, Acting Under Secretary for Lands to SNA, 26/10/1926.

172. See, for example, S. Dubow, *Racial Segregation and the origins of apartheid in South Africa, 1919-1936*, especially Part II. One of the tasks set by David Duncan, *The Mills of God: the state and African labour in South Africa, 1918-1948*, (Johannesburg, 1995) is to study the “tension between the repressive and welfare functions of labour regulation and between the departments which applied them”, 3-4.

173. NTS 2957, 99/305, RM, Upington to SNA, 27/11/1925; SNA to RM, Upington, 29/10/1925. The magistrate claimed that “3 natives with families” were living on Waterval and “26 natives with families” on Riemvasmaak, making 182 people in total.

174. NTS 2957, 99/305, SNA to Sec for Lands, 4/12/1925; Sec for Lands to SNA, 19/1/1926.

175. NTS 2957, 99/305, NAD to SNA 27/1/1926.

it their amenability, and degenerate into stock thieves and marauders, while the Kakamas settlement will lose their labour which these people furnish. The country is known to me and is useless for white settlement, and it is probable that the sum of the rentals already collected from these coloured people amounts to more than the value of the land. In the Minister's opinion it would be undesirable and hardly humane to send them to the Richtersveld where they would have no means of subsistence, and would run serious risks at the hands of the present inhabitants of that area." He suggested that removing their grazing rights at Riemvastmaak would be inexpedient at least until "the establishment of the Coloured Settlements in the Mier country."<sup>176</sup> Thus — though all their dealings thus far had been with the Native Affairs Department — the inhabitants of Riemvasmaak were redefined by Herbst as "coloureds".

The Department of Lands was put in a quandary. They wrote back to the NAD that "if the people squatting on these farms are coloured people...they will be allowed to remain there until provision can be made for them in the Mier country." If, on the other hand, they were "Natives, Mr Grobler [Minister of Lands] desires that your department should make provision for them elsewhere in order that Riemvastmaak and Waterval may be utilised for land settlement purposes."<sup>177</sup> The NAD duly enquired of the Gordonia magistrate "whether the persons residing on the farms in question are coloured persons as distinct from Natives of Bantu origin" and received the (ambiguous) reply that "The non-European persons residing on the farm Riemvastmaak are all Damaras and those residing on Waterval are Hottentots."<sup>178</sup>

The Lands Department interpreted this to mean that the inhabitants were "coloured people (rather than Natives)" and pursued the possibility — originally raised by the Gordonia magistrate — of removing them to Annex Bokseputs. They explained the need for this in terms, firstly, of the "considerable pressure" brought to bear on their Department "to release Riemvastmaak, Waterval and Wagenbrand for white settlement", and, secondly, because "the proposed scheme for settling people in the Mier country is unlikely to materialise for some years to come". (In fact, it was a mere three years away). On Annex Bokseputs, they added, the inhabitants would "be just as near if not nearer Kakamas" and would "also have the opportunity of finding employment with the white settlers" who were allocated the farms. They wrote to the NAD that "It is presumed...your Department is not particularly interested, but should there be any remarks which you would care to offer in regard to the proposal it would be esteemed if you would be so good as to place them on record."<sup>179</sup> Both the Gordonia magistrate and the SNA raised no objections to these proposals.<sup>180</sup>

176. NTS 2957, 99/305, Herbst to Sec for Lands, 2/2/1926.

177. NTS 2957, 99/305, Sec for Lands to SNA, 18/8/1926 referring to an (untraced) minute of 19/6/1926.

178. NTS 2957, 99/305, SNA to Magistrate, Upington, 21/8/1926; Magistrate, Upington to SNA 3/9/1926.

179. NTS 2957, 99/305, Sec for Lands to SNA 30/3/1927 referring to an (untraced) minute of 9/9/1926; Sec for Lands to SNA, 3/5/1926 referring to an (untraced) minute of 7/4/1926.

180. NTS 2957, 99/305, SNA to RM, Upington 12/5/1927; RM, Upington to SNA 20/5/1927; SNA to Sec for Lands, 27/5/1927; also SNA to Min of Justice, 23/7/1927.

Despite all this, however, the inhabitants of Riemvasmaak were not removed, nor the farms allocated to white settlers. The next mention of the area discovered in the archives is a letter from the Gordonia magistrate to the Secretary for Mines and Industry in November 1932, regarding the working of minerals on Riemvasmaak and adjoining farms.<sup>181</sup> He wrote that “Recently I was asked by the Secretary for Lands for an expression of an opinion as to the disposal of this block of land. I urged that as this land was useless for farming purposes, it be made available for native occupation.... As a farming proposition the whole concern would have an outside value of L3000 and would, at most, be able to accommodate 3 to 4 settlers.... The land all along the Orange River is being very rapidly developed and many European farmers are already settled there, and their numbers will steadily increase in the next few years. A large number of native labourers will be required by them for certain periods of the year, when ploughing and harvesting operations are in progress. These labourers will not be permanently employed and must of necessity have an area available where their families could reside and the few head of stock they may be possessed of may graze.” Once again, there was the proposal that the Riemvasmaak area become a ‘reserve’ — this time, however, for “natives”.<sup>182</sup> In February 1934, moreover, he wrote that he had “been informed that the Hon the Minister of Lands has approved of these farms being reserved from alienation and placed at the disposal of the NAD for use by Natives.”<sup>183</sup>

According to the Surveyor-General’s office in 1993, they were informed by the Department of Lands on 16 November 1933 “that the Minister had approved the reservation of the component farms Bokseputs, annex Bokseputs, Riemvasmaak and Wagenbrand, thus placing the area at the disposal of the NAD for use by natives.”<sup>184</sup> However in May 1934 the NAD stated quite clearly that “the farms in question have not yet been formally reserved as Native locations.”<sup>185</sup> In 1936 the NAD repeated this: “It is proposed, when a suitable opportunity arrives, to include them in the scheduled areas under Act No 27 of 1913. This will require a special Act of Parliament.”<sup>186</sup> In June 1937, however, the NAD wrote to the Gordonia magistrate that Riemvasmaak, Bokseputs, Annex Bokseputs and Wagenbrand “and other land in the same category” had vested in the South African Native Trust under Section 6(1) (a) of the Native Trust and Land Act of 1936, which states that “there shall be vested in the Trust.. .all state owned land which has been reserved or set aside for the occupation of blacks.”<sup>187</sup> Yet in August 1937 the NAD stated that the farms had not yet been

181. According to research by the Surplus People’s Project, however, there is a record of a letter from Father Fages to the Secretary for Lands, 22/8/1929 applying for permission for a coloured school at Keimoes. Approval was given in 1930. *Smith and Bozaiek*, 7; SPP, “Riemvasmaak Reference List” (From Tim Hoffman).

182. NTS 6887, 226/319 Part III, RM, Upington to Secretary for Mines and Industry, 8/11/1932. See also RM, Upington to Inspector for Mines and Industry, Bloemfontein, 12/2/1934.

183. NTS 6887, 226/319 Part III, RM, Upington to Inspector for Mines and Industry, Bloemfontein, 12/2/1934.

184. Surveyor General, 22/6/1993, *Smith and Bozaiek*, 7-8, Annexure 12; Surveyor General, Minute C 1848/1, 18/11/1933, SPP, “Riemvasmaak Reference List” (From Tim Hoffman).

185. NTS 6887, 226/319 Part III, SNA to Secretary for Mines and Industry, 14/5/1934. Also SMI to SNA 11/5/1934.

186. NTS 6887, 226/319 Part III, Secretary for Mines and Industry to SNA, 25/6/1936; SNA to SMI 30/6/1936.

187. NTS 6887, 226/319 Part III, SNA to RM, Upington 19/6/1937. Also SMI to SNA 9/6/1937; SNA to SMI 19/6/1937. They referred the magistrate to the provisions of section 23, 24 and 43 of this Act and regulations 66-9 published under government notice 494 of 2 April 1937. Also *Smith and Bozaiek*, 8.

reserved as ‘native locations’!!<sup>188</sup> Against this we have the claim made in 1940 by Jacob Booyse, supported by the Gordonia magistrate, that “Ek is voorman van die Naturelle Reserwe sedert 1930.”<sup>189</sup> In 1949 he amended this to 1934 — although more recent testimony suggests he was appointed only after the death of Dawid Dawids on 12 January 1940.<sup>190</sup> According to the magistrate of Kakamas in 1973 a “temporary reserve” known as “Bokvasmaak Native Reserve 498” was declared in 1934, to accomodate people until the 1936 native land legislation was completed.<sup>191</sup>

Smith and Bozaiek claim that the NAD took over control and administration of Riemvasmaak from the Department of Lands in the early 1930s. They refer to letters from the Department of Public Works and the Surveyor General in the 1990s, however, which state that Riemvasmaak was never proclaimed as a “reserve” in the Government Gazette. They conclude “it is not entirely clear whether *formal* reservation took place, and if so, when.”<sup>192</sup> To this the Surplus People’s Project report adds that “while the area fell under the Dept of Native affairs and S.A. Development Trust, it was not officially proclaimed a reserve possibly because of complications arising from prospecting claims in the area which was believed to be rich in a number of different minerals”<sup>193</sup> It is true that the Department of Mines wrote to the NAD in March 1934, stating that the farms possessed large mineral possibilities and if they were to be reserved for natives they would “by virtue of the provisions of Section 40 of Act No 16 of 1907 (Cape) automatically become closed to prospecting without the consent of the Governor-General” and therefore the question of reserving the land for native occupation should be left in abeyance for the present.<sup>194</sup> The NAD however replied that it was “not anticipated...that the location of these Natives on these farms need interfere with any mining that may become necessary. The area is an extensive one and there are not many Natives to be accommodated.”<sup>195</sup>

Despite all these uncertainties, by the 1930s for all intents and purposes Riemvasmaak had become a “native reserve”.

## Conclusion

The racial division of Gordonia was triggered by the Baster petition presented to parliament in 1921. Demanding restitution of the whole of their land in Gordonia, the Basters were fobbed off by the offer of two “coloured reserves”. Not only was this establishment of reserves for coloureds thus far unprecedented in the Union of South Africa. The fact that “reserves” and segregation were the

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188. NTS 6887, 226/319 Part III, SNA to SMI 21/8/1937.

189. NTS 12, 31/1, Jakob Booyse to SNA 22/8/1940; Magistrate, Upington to SNA 30/9/1940.

190. NTS 12, 31/1, J. Booyse to Minister of Native Affairs 12/3/1949; Asst RM, Kakamas to RM, Upington 22/3/1958. See also SPP, *Submission...*, 9, and photo of Dawid Dawids grave.

191. *Cape Times*, 12/10/1973, SPP, *Submission...*, p. 7.

192. Surveyor General, 22/6/1993; Dept Public Works, 1/10/1992 in *Smith and Bozaiek*, 8-9.

193. SPP, *Submission...*, p. 6.

194. NTS 6887, 226/319 Part III, Sec for Mines to SNA, 14/3/1934.

195. NTS 6887, 226/319 Part III, SNA to SMI 21/3/1934. They added that no other land was available for them and the Minister was very anxious to secure them a resting place on properties where they have been resident for a very large number of years past. “They will possibly be of use as labour on the development of any mines that may come into being.”

model followed confirms that the South African Party government had adopted the policy of segregation. Segregation was, in other words, the creation of the Smuts-Botha government. The post-1924 Hertzog government merely elaborated on this policy. Moreover, the “reserves” were conceived of as providing for the families of migrant workers, thus performing the function of sustaining cheap labour accorded to them (as mentioned above) in the argument made by Harold Wolpe. Ironically, the main questioning of this extension of the policy of segregation to the coloureds was by the arch-segregationist Heaton Nicholls in parliamentary debate in 1930.

Simultaneously with serving an economic function, the establishment of reserves performed a political, social and ideological function. Territorial definition gave shape to “coloured identity”. Through being offered segregated reserves — it is the insight of Piet Beukes — the Basters were made into “coloureds”. They were turned from a self-defined people, as they had become by the late nineteenth century, into second-class subjects of the South African state.

Thus Ecksteenskuil (from 1923) and Mier (from 1930) were established as “coloured settlements”. The apartheid government hardened their definition, and transferred them to administration by the Department for Coloured Affairs in the 1950s. With the racial division of Gordonia on these lines, the area of Riemvasmaak also became implicated. Riemvasmaak was occupied by “Damaras and Hottentots”. An unequal discourse took place between these and the South African government as to whether they should be defined as “coloureds” or “natives”. In Namaqualand south of the Orange (in South Africa) so-called “Hottentots” were regarded as “coloureds”. In Namaqualand north of the Orange (South-African administered South West Africa) they were regarded as “natives”. The inhabitants of Riemvasmaak of course sought to manoeuvre to gain the most favourable situation. Eventually, though ambiguously, Riemvasmaak became defined as a “native reserve” in the 1930s.

The people of Riemvasmaak (by now including Xhosa also) were forcibly relocated by the South African government in 1973 (and their land restored only in 1995). Many issues sprang up in the Ecksteenskuil and Mier settlements also under apartheid rule which remain as yet unresolved. Hopefully this article provides something of a background framework within which the problems of all these peoples can be worked out.