

TRYING TO MAKE THEM VISIBLE: WOMEN IN PORT ELIZABETH IN THE LATE NINETEENTH — EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY

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'n Poging om hulle sigbaar te maak: vroue in Port Elizabeth in die laat negentiende — vroeg twintigste eeu

Hierdie artikel is 'n inleiding tot enkele aspekte van die geskiedenis van vroue in Port Elizabeth in hoofsaaklik die laat 19de- en vroeg 20ste-eeu. Enersyds is dit gebaseer op die statistiek in die sensusverslae vir 1875 en 1911, wat dan ook min of meer die periodisering aandui. Andersyds berus dit op 'n verskeidenheid literêre getuienis wat egter ongelukkig heel fragmentaries is.

In die eerste deel word geargumenteer dat die meeste vroue, alhoewel numeries 'n betekenisvolle deel van die bevolking, feitlik onsigbaar vasgevang was in die sosiaal gekonstrueerde wêreld van huislikheid en vroulikheid. Die plaaslike ekonomie is gekenmerk deur die manlik oorheersde en beheerde kommersiële en industriële sektore. Die vroeë fase van verstedeliking en industrialisasie het geen betekenisvolle veranderinge in hierdie beroepstrukture meegebring nie.

'n Breedvoerige bespreking van vroulikheid ("womanhood") en veelvuldige sosiale identiteite word nie aangebied nie. Dit is egter duidelik, selfs op grond van die beperkte getuienis in die tweede deel, dat sommige vroue wel 'n mate van sigbaarheid bereik het as, byvoorbeeld, eiendomsbesitters, ondernemers, sosiale kritici en lede van sportklubs.

Die evaluering van kontinuiteit en verandering, spesifiek vir vroue, in Port Elizabeth as 'n nie-mynbou- en hoofsaaklik manlik gedomineerde kommersiële sentrum wat boonop op die drumpel gestaan het van 'n moderniserende 20ste-eeuse Suid-Afrika is dus ingewikkelder as wat dit voorkom.

This is an introductory effort to explore some aspects of the history of women in mainly late 19th and early 20th century Port Elizabeth. On the one hand it is based on the statistics in the census reports for 1875 and 1911, representing more or less the periodisation under discussion. On the other hand it is based on a variety of literary evidence, which is unfortunately rather fragmentary.

In the first part it is argued that most women, although numerically a substantial part of the population, were almost invisible in the socially constructed world of domesticity and femininity. The local economy was characterised by the male-dominated commercial and industrial sectors.

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Early urbanisation and industrialisation did not change this occupational structure significantly.

An extensive discussion of womanhood and emerging multiple social identities is not presented here. But even from the limited available evidence in the second part it is clear that some women did achieve some visibility as e.g., property owners, entrepreneurs, social critics and members of sport clubs.

Evaluating continuity and change, particularly for women, in Port Elizabeth as a non-mining, predominantly male-dominated commercial centre entering an increasingly modernizing 20th century South Africa, is thus much more complicated than it seems to be.

It is not easy to contextualise an introductory article on women in a specific region within the broadening scope of South African historiography. Furthermore, the heyday of Rankean "wie es eigentlich gewesen" objectivity is gone for ever. It has been replaced at least partially by more or less post modernist paradigms, creating more problems than giving infallible answers.¹ The practice of history has further been compounded by an almost unmanageable diversification and specialisation² as illustrated, for example, by the papers read at the South African Historical Society's biennial conferences of both 1997 and 1995. One result of this has been the identification of methodological, epistemological and ontological issues that cannot be ignored.

The conspicuous absence of a lively debate on the social history of Port Elizabeth cannot be easily explained. Most of the studies by the small band of local and regional historians on the 19th and early 20th century are firmly grounded in the dominant political-administrative-cultural history tradition,³ underpinned by a meticulous Rankean methodology. Some of these studies have indeed put Port Elizabeth on the historiographical map of segregation. But the price South African historical writing has paid in general for a limited scope is equally valid for the Port Elizabeth historiography:

... the global revolution that has led to intellectual ferment elsewhere, has had little effect on the discipline of history within South Africa. The result of South Africa's preoccupation with conflict-orientated approaches has been a sterile and deadlocked environment.⁴

Most probably one shortcoming has been the absence of meaningful and stimulating links with the methodology of the social sciences and the resulting inability to generate new perspectives, formulate new problems, reread conventional sources and explore new ones as well as to introduce a high level of theoretical discussion.

Against this complicated and almost prohibitive background this article will not be at

For a South African statement see John Bottomley, "Paradigmatic confusion in the history of the New South Africa", *New Contree* 39, August 1996, pp. 28-44; Tom Gouws, "'Al was ons ook daar, ons weet dis nie waar nie' - Metodologie en geskiedskrywing in postmodernistiese perspektief", *New Contree* 39, Augustus 1996, pp. 39, 46-58.

2. See Paul Maylam, "Tensions within the practice of history", *S.A. Historical Journal* 33, November 1995, pp. 3-12.
3. See Joan W. Scott, "Gender: A useful category of historical analysis", *The American Historical Review* 91, 5, December 1986, p. 1070.
4. Bottomley, "Paradigmatic confusion", p. 31.

all presumptuous. Its aim is to present a preliminary introduction to some aspects of the history of women in Port Elizabeth, mainly during the period 1870-1914. It is based on fragmentary statistical and literary evidence and must be understood within the context of a selection from the prodigious literature on women's history.

Two generally known methodological problems should be mentioned briefly. Firstly, Patricia Branca's statement on women in Europe is equally valid for Port Elizabeth women: their history is "in essence the history of the inarticulate".⁵ This is a particular problem for this article. I am not aware of any collections of contemporary writing by women of Port Elizabeth, such as letters and diaries, comparable to those of Cape Town women consulted by Natasha Erlank.⁶ However, the journal of the Port Elizabeth Historical Society⁷ has provided some very interesting glimpses into the lives of some women. Secondly, given the conceptual complexity of women, the periodisation of their history cannot just be subsumed under the conventional male-authored and politically dominated periodisation.⁸ Even in the existing historiography of early Port Elizabeth, concentrating mainly on segregation, industrialisation and urbanisation there are different or overlapping models of periodisation. Thus, once women have been written into the history of this region as "active agents, controlling their own fate"⁹ in a changing and modernising society, a revised and more valid periodisation will hopefully emerge.

How visible were women in Port Elizabeth, demographically speaking? In an early list, compiled by Griffin Hawkins in 1822, 64 white male inhabitants are named, including a small number of rural residents. Although the details are sometimes ambiguous, from the attached "Notes on persons mentioned" (written by the editor of *Looking Back*) it is clear that at least 14 (or 22%) of these men were indeed married.¹⁰ This is surely a very early, if not the earliest, example of the contemporary denial of the existence of women in this society. Furthermore, the editor himself, in editing and elaborating on this list 156 years later, conceptually denied the existence of these women by presenting the list as "probably the first directory" of Port Elizabeth. He thus confirms one point of criticism: women are very often subsumed under the dominant category of men, residents or inhabitants.¹¹

In contrast to this, the Bethelsdorp women of 1849 are very visible from statistics

Branca, *Women in Europe since 1750* (London, 1978), p. 14; also J. Lewis, "Women and society: Continuity and change since 1870" in Anne Digby, Charles Feinstein and David Jenkins (eds.), *New directions in economic and social history II* (London, 1994), pp. 134, 139; and Cheryl Walker, "Women and gender in Southern Africa to 1945: An overview" in Cheryl Walker (ed.), *Women and gender in Southern Africa to 1945* (Cape Town and London, 1990), pp. 2-3.

6. Natasha Erlank, "Writing women in(to) early nineteenth century Cape Town", *Kronos* 23, November 1996, pp. 75-90.
7. *Looking Back*, published since 1961.
8. Branca, *Women in Europe*, pp. 10-11; Lewis, "Women and society", pp. 130-131; Helen Bradford, "Women, gender and colonialism: Rethinking the history of the British Cape Colony and its frontier zones, c 1806-70", *Journal of African History* 37(3), 1996, p. 369; Cheryl Walker, "Conceptualising motherhood in twentieth century South Africa", *Journal of Southern African Studies* 21(3), September 1995, p. 429.
9. Lewis, "Women and society", pp. 138-139.
10. A. Porter, "Griffin Hawkin's list of inhabitants of Port Elizabeth in 1822, with some notes on the persons listed", *Looking Back* 18(1), 1978, pp. 22-28.
11. Bradford, "Women, gender and colonialism", pp. 352-353.

compiled in that year concerning the Order in Council of 1846 regulating labour relations.¹² In this economically struggling and socially disadvantaged settlement there were 66 married women and 19 widows. For every wife the following particulars are listed: name, age, her husband's name, age and "trade", the number of years he had been in Bethelsdorp, the ages of their children and statistics on their economic activities (cultivation, livestock). Every widow is listed under her name, age, years of residence, number of children and livestock statistics. But even in this list the visibility is clouded. The years of residence refer only to the husband and only they are given some occupational status. The literacy statistics are tabulated only into "adults" and "children". Very significantly, from the additional observations made by Joseph Kitchingman, the resident missionary, it is clear that the literacy statistics refer only to males. Thus he added 40 "women", meaning wives, who could read and 15 "women", in other words wives, who could write, without unfortunately naming them. Furthermore, the detail about each family's economic activities again subsume the specific role of the wife under that of her husband.

Based on this rather simple piece of historical evidence short biographical sketches of 85 mid 19th century Bethelsdorp women can be written. Betta, aged 50, was married to 56 year old Wenzel Hemro (Heemro), a carpenter who had been living in the settlement for 38 years. She gave birth to three boys, two of whom were then above 12 years, and three girls, all of whom were then above 12 years. While Wenzel and five of the children could read, only three of the children could write. Betta's literacy level is unknown. Apart from Wenzel's carpentry work, the family had to live on the income generated by cultivating half an acre of garden land and 150 muids of salt collected from the communal pan. Added to this, they had a wagon, 10 oxen, a cow and a calf. These statistics do not include the collection of aloe juice as another important source of income. Many women were responsible for this part of the family's economic life, especially if, or when, they were not employed elsewhere as wage labourers.¹³ It couldn't have been easy for the middle-aged Betta to raise six children on these meagre resources, especially as none of the children were listed as being employed. Wenzel had been living in Bethelsdorp since he was 18; we don't now about Betta. Most probably it was more or less the same. It is also possible that she, like many other Bethelsdorp women, did wage labour in Port Elizabeth or Uitenhage, and also some needlework. Similar sketches could be written of Maria Stuurman, Roset Norkie, Jannetje Bousac (Boesak?), Hannah Whitbooy (Witbooi?), Rosalyn Williams, and all the others.

Since the middle of the century a relatively steady increase especially in the commercial¹⁴ and residential functions, supplemented by the emergence of some professional ones, stimulated a first phase of urbanisation and early industrialisation in Port Elizabeth, even if the latter was based mainly on typical early industrial small-scale manufacturing. Thus by the early and mid 1870s, classically regarded as the beginning of the industrial period in South African history, Port Elizabeth, as a non-mining, predominantly commercial

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- 12 Master and servant: Addenda to the documents on the working of the Order in Council of the 21st July 1846.
 - 13 André Appel, *Bethelsdorp, 1828-1945: Van sendingstasie tot stadspesiferie* (UPE Research Publication C27, 1994), p. 83; R.F. Kennedy (ed.), *Journal of Residence in Africa by Thomas Baines 2* (Van Riebeeck Society, No. 45), pp. 304-305.
 - 14 A. Mabin, "The rise and decline of Port Elizabeth, 1850-1900", *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 19(2), 1986, pp. 275-303.

centre, occupied the fourth position in the urban hierarchy.¹⁵ Without intentionally ignoring the multiple social identities of women and at the risk of generalization, it is clear from table 1¹⁶ that in terms of geographical distribution and racial groups women constituted a substantial portion of both the urban and rural populations of Port Elizabeth, with a single exception. If the municipality is regarded as the most urbanised area by 1875, then 90% of all women were living there already. In this developing urban environment they constituted 43% of the total population. The only exception to this profile was the presence of African women, who were merely 7% of the total urbanised women. But then, as is generally known, the African labour market during this early industrial period was dominated in Port Elizabeth, as elsewhere, by economically active single male migrant labourers.¹⁷ Even in a rural area like Bushy Park, with its well established farms, white and coloured women were 44% of these two population groups. But strikingly, in this latter area as well as another rural part, called Port Elizabeth fieldcornetcy, there was a relatively higher presence of African women.

After almost 40 years of increasing urbanisation and early industrialisation women were, by 1911, demographically speaking almost on a par with their male residents. Even if the available statistics cannot be compared exactly, it is clear that in no single area of Port Elizabeth women were numerically a small minority. The influx especially of African women into this urbanising environment was most conspicuous in the new developing townships, especially Korsten and New Brighton. In Korsten, a well-known multi-cultural and almost peri-urban area, women constituted just under half of the population, while in the new municipality of Walmer they were exactly 50%. The proportional decline of African women in the municipal (urbanising) area from 7% in 1875 to 4% in 1911 was obviously a consequence of the establishment of New Brighton.¹⁸

If women were indeed a substantial part of the population, what do we know about their multiple social identities? Surely, conventional wisdom also applies to Port Elizabeth. We may not conceive women here in any way as a "sisterhood of all women". Being a woman could also mean being a wife, but not necessarily a mother, a mother but not necessarily a wife, a wage or casual labourer, a "white blouse" worker, a small entrepreneur, an adherent of an established church or some religious grouping or a member of a social or racial group.¹⁹ An extensive discussion of this is not possible at present. If we again try to establish a long-term trend, based on available statistics (table 2), a strong continuity from the 1870s to the second decade of this century emerges concerning women as wives. At the beginning of the period about 50% of both European and Coloured adult women were married and approximately one third of both groups were single. Among the African population single status was predominant: almost 80% of the women (and even worse: 95%

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15. A.J. Christopher, *Southern Africa* (Studies in Historical Geography, Folkestone, 1976), fig. 51.
 16. All statistics are from and all calculations are based on these two census reports, unless otherwise stated. The concept "African" include all the different categories of "Black" people and "Coloured" includes the "Hottentot" and "Mixed and other" categories. Unfortunately, the 1911 statistics for New Brighton are based on different sources and there are no separate details for Bethelsdorp. P. Smit and J.J. Booysen, *Swart verstedeliking: Proses, patroon en strategie* (Universiteit van Pretoria, 1981), fig. 6; André Appel, "Demografiese en sosiale tendense in vroeg industriële Port Elizabeth, ca 1870-1914", *Suid-Afrikaanse Historiese Joernaal* 23, Desember 1990, fig. 1, p. 86.
 18. For a history of early New Brighton see Gary Baines, "New Brighton, Port Elizabeth, c 1903-1953: A history of an urban African community" (Ph.D, UCT, 1994).
 19. Branca, *Women in Europe*, p. 13; Lewis, "Women and society", p. 137; Walker, "Conceptualising motherhood", p. 426.

TABLE 1: PORT ELIZABETH POPULATION, 1875 AND 1911

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| AREA | EUROPEAN | | | | AFRICAN | | | | COLOURED | | | | TOTAL | | | |
|------------------|----------|------|--------|------|---------|------|--------|------|----------|------|--------|------|-------|------|--------|------|
| | Male | | Female | | Male | | Female | | Male | | Female | | Male | | Female | |
| | n | % | n | % | n | % | n | % | n | % | n | % | n | % | n | % |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Municipality | 4851 | 55,6 | 3877 | 44,4 | 1465 | 78,5 | 402 | 21,5 | 1140 | 46,5 | 1314 | 53,5 | 7456 | 57,1 | 5593 | 42,9 |
| Fieldcornetcy PE | 132 | 71,7 | 52 | 28,3 | 20 | 60,6 | 13 | 39,4 | 17 | 68,0 | 8 | 32,0 | 169 | 69,8 | 73 | 30,2 |
| Bushy Park | 208 | 53,6 | 180 | 46,4 | 89 | 67,9 | 42 | 32,1 | 188 | 59,1 | 130 | 40,9 | 485 | 57,9 | 352 | 42,1 |
| Bethelsdorp | 7 | 77,8 | 2 | 22,2 | 11 | 73,3 | 4 | 26,7 | 192 | 51,1 | 184 | 48,9 | 210 | 52,5 | 190 | 47,5 |

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| AREA | EUROPEAN | | | | AFRICAN | | | | COLOURED | | | | TOTAL | | | |
|--------------|----------|------|--------|------|---------|------|--------|------|----------|------|--------|------|-------|------|--------|------|
| | Male | | Female | | Male | | Female | | Male | | Female | | Male | | Female | |
| | n | % | n | % | n | % | n | % | n | % | n | % | n | % | n | % |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Municipality | 9094 | 50,0 | 9096 | 50,0 | 997 | 60,6 | 647 | 39,4 | 5536 | 51,0 | 5318 | 49,0 | 15627 | 50,9 | 15061 | 49,1 |
| Korsten | 284 | 56,0 | 223 | 44,0 | 1237 | 52,8 | 1107 | 47,2 | 807 | 48,3 | 864 | 51,7 | 2328 | 51,5 | 2194 | 48,5 |
| Walmer | 519 | 47,8 | 567 | 52,2 | 124 | 58,8 | 87 | 41,2 | 146 | 49,5 | 149 | 50,5 | 789 | 49,6 | 803 | 50,4 |
| New Brighton | 52 | | | | 2175 | | | | 184 | | | | 3650 | | | |

Sources: G42-1876 Census Report, table 1
 UG32-1912 Census Report, vol.1, table XVII
 Gary Baines, "The Port Elizabeth Disturbances of October 1920".
 (MA, Rhodes University, 1988), 45
 AJ Christopher, "Race and Residence in Colonial Port Elizabeth",
South African Geographical Journal, 69, 1, 1987, table 3

TABLE 2: MARITAL STATUS IN PORT ELIZABETH, 1875 AND 1911**1875 (TOWN)**

| | EUROPEAN (15+) | | | | AFRICAN (20+) | | | | COLOURED (20+) | | | |
|----------------|----------------|-------|--------|-------|---------------|-------|--------|-------|----------------|-------|--------|-------|
| | Male | | Female | | Male | | Female | | Male | | Female | |
| | n | % | n | % | n | % | n | % | n | % | n | % |
| Married | 1402 | 43,7 | 1224 | 53,7 | 68 | 5,4 | 53 | 19,1 | 326 | 54,2 | 348 | 50,3 |
| Widowed | 114 | 3,6 | 284 | 12,5 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 1,1 | 26 | 4,3 | 99 | 14,3 |
| Single & Other | 1691 | 52,7 | 772 | 33,8 | 1202 | 94,6 | 222 | 79,8 | 250 | 41,5 | 245 | 35,4 |
| TOTAL | 3207 | 100,0 | 2280 | 100,0 | 1270 | 100,0 | 278 | 100,0 | 602 | 100,0 | 692 | 100,0 |

1911 (PE and Suburbs)

| | EUROPEAN | | | | NON-EUROPEAN | | | |
|---------------------|----------|-------|--------|-------|--------------|-------|--------|-------|
| | Male | | Female | | Male | | Female | |
| | n | % | n | % | n | % | n | % |
| Never Married (15+) | 3082 | 45,4 | 2359 | 36,1 | 3169 | 51,7 | 2175 | 40,6 |
| Married | 3408 | 50,2 | 3453 | 52,7 | 2682 | 43,8 | 2524 | 47,2 |
| Widowed | 289 | 4,3 | 711 | 10,9 | 267 | 4,4 | 632 | 11,8 |
| Divorced | 9 | 0,1 | 18 | 0,3 | 8 | 0,1 | 21 | 0,4 |
| Unspecified | - | - | 1 | 0,01 | 3 | 0,0 | 1 | 0,01 |
| TOTAL | 6788 | 100,0 | 6542 | 100,0 | 6129 | 100,0 | 5353 | 100,0 |

Sources: G42-1876, vol II, tables XI and XII
UG32c-1912 table XXXIII

of the men). It is very striking that after almost four decades of urbanisation and industrialisation no significant demographic change occurred in this respect. Just before the First World War 36% of European and 41% of non-European women respectively were still single, whereas 53% European and 47% of non-European women respectively were married. This introduces again the problem of the periodisation of Port Elizabeth history. Apart from the argument that the beginning of the so-called industrial period in South African history obviously did not bring about significant structural changes in the economy and the society of a non-mining centre like Port Elizabeth, it also raises the problem of evaluating continuity and change (or modernisation/progress) in the lives of the women in this society.

Early in 1870 the *Eastern Province Herald* characterised Port Elizabeth's economic life as follows:

... its *mercantile men* bustle about, as if their very present existence depended on their winning a race against time; and again life has become such a rush and struggle that one feels there is a certain degree of appropriateness in the words 'Liverpool of the Cape', as applied to this small town.²⁰ (my emphasis)

Approximately 30 years later Thomas Muir, Cape Superintendent General of Education, identified one problem for the progress of education in Port Elizabeth as "a large commercial element ... which absorbed a considerable number of the *boys* at an age when they were beginning to profit by education ..."²¹ (my emphasis). These two fragments of literary evidence confirm the dominating trend based on available quantitative data (table 3). The women in this society were living in a male-dominated commercial and semi-industrial environment into which they had made only the slightest inroads. As said above, it must still be argued to what extent this large-scale exclusion from the main employment sectors of the "Liverpool of the Cape" influenced the lives of wives, mothers, labourers and single women. There were definitely exceptions. If excluded from the mercantile hustling and bustling, the increasing residential functions supplied a large proportion of women with an assumed "natural" choice of employment outside the home, namely some form of domestic work.

A fully-fledged analysis and assessment of women's roles in the local economy of Port Elizabeth cannot be presented here. A few remarks, however, must be made to shed some light on it, even if the census categories are not always clear and enlightening. For almost 40 years even European women (ignoring now all other possible category differentiations) could not make any progress in the two dominant employment sectors: commerce and industry/manufacturing. Surely, the reason was not a lack of formal educational opportunities. The well-known (and still existing) Collegiate Girls' High School had started in 1873 and a great number of church schools were operating all over town. In the 1875 census as many as 865 white female as against 935 white male scholars under 15 years of age were recorded. By 1911 it was estimated that 1812 European girls attended formal, established schools,²² which was exactly half of the current enrollment in those schools. In March 1912 the South End Evening School was teaching shorthand and typing to 34 students

20. 31 May 1870, Editorial (no heading).

21. Cape Archives Depot (CAD), 3/PEZ 1/1/1/20 PE Town Clerk, Council Minutes, April 1902 December 1904, p. 149: "Education in PE" (unidentified and undated newspaper cutting).

22. Central Archives Depot, Pretoria, JUS 97, file 1/566/11 PE Annual Report, 1911, p. 3.

TABLE 3: EMPLOYMENT IN PORT ELIZABETH, 1875 AND 1911**1875**

| | EUROPEAN | | | | | NON-EUROPEAN | | | | |
|---------------------------|----------|-------|--------|-------|-------|--------------|-------|--------|-------|-------|
| | Male | | Female | | Total | Male | | Female | | Total |
| | n | % | n | % | | n | % | n | % | |
| Professional | 155 | 3,0 | 58 | 1,4 | 213 | 8 | 0,3 | 3 | 0,1 | 11 |
| Domestic | 170 | 3,3 | 1571 | 38,3 | 1741 | 174 | 5,5 | 871 | 41,6 | 1045 |
| Commercial | 1566 | 30,1 | 39 | 0,9 | 1605 | 162 | 5,2 | 3 | 0,1 | 165 |
| Agriculture | 85 | 1,6 | 41 | 1,0 | 126 | 178 | 5,7 | 28 | 1,3 | 206 |
| Industrial | 1087 | 20,9 | 144 | 3,5 | 1231 | 287 | 9,2 | 285 | 13,6 | 572 |
| Indefinite/Non-productive | 2133 | 41,1 | 2250 | 54,8 | 4383 | 2313 | 74,1 | 907 | 43,3 | 3220 |
| TOTAL | 5196 | 100,0 | 4103 | 100,0 | 9299 | 3122 | 100,0 | 2097 | 100,0 | 5219 |

1911

| | EUROPEAN | | | | | NON-EUROPEAN | | | | |
|--------------|----------|-------|--------|-------|-------|--------------|-------|--------|-------|-------|
| | Male | | Female | | Total | Male | | Female | | Total |
| | n | % | n | % | | n | % | n | % | |
| Professional | 533 | 5,1 | 354 | 3,5 | 887 | 89 | 0,7 | 38 | 0,3 | 127 |
| Domestic | 200 | 1,9 | 5319 | 51,9 | 5519 | 823 | 6,7 | 7286 | 65,3 | 8109 |
| Commercial | 3218 | 30,6 | 295 | 2,9 | 3513 | 2821 | 22,9 | 14 | 0,1 | 2835 |
| Agriculture | 222 | 2,1 | 7 | 0,1 | 229 | 805 | 6,5 | 21 | 0,2 | 826 |
| Industrial | 2631 | 25,1 | 609 | 5,9 | 3240 | 4014 | 32,7 | 81 | 0,7 | 4095 |
| Indefinite | 136 | 1,3 | 42 | 0,4 | 178 | 72 | 0,6 | 9 | 0,1 | 81 |
| Dependants | 3531 | 33,6 | 3614 | 35,2 | 7145 | 3632 | 29,6 | 3690 | 33,2 | 7322 |
| Unspecified | 29 | 0,3 | 15 | 0,1 | 44 | 39 | 0,3 | 12 | 0,1 | 51 |
| TOTAL | 10500 | 100,0 | 10255 | 100,0 | 20755 | 12295 | 100,0 | 11151 | 100,0 | 23446 |

Sources: G42-1876, vol II, tables I and II

UG32d-1912, table XXI

(gender and race unknown) with a total registration of 45 males and 15 females (race and ages not mentioned).²³

A closer look at the breakdown of the available statistics, unfortunately only for 1875, reveals something of women's role in the local economy. The domestic sector was the main employer for both white and non white women, 38% and 42% respectively. Even more significant, this meant that 85% and 73% of these economically active women respectively were employed in this sector. A few select categories from the latter (table 4) show the majority of women either being wives (and some would have been mothers), general domestic servants and house keepers. It is not clear from the census report what the exact status of white hotel and boarding house keepers was.

The relatively low or even nil visibility of women in the commercial and industrial sectors is illustrated by table 5. In the former they almost totally disappeared by being not even 3% of the employment numbers in this man-made world of "rush and struggle". At first glance a somewhat better trend prevailed in the industrial/manufacturing sector: women accounted for almost 24% of the employees. This, however, included 286 washerwomen who were basically supplying a non-manufacturing service. With them excluded, only 9% of all women found employment in this sector, and then almost all of them within the dressmaking and related occupations. Possibly this was the local beginning of a similar trend in, for example, late 19th and early 20th century France whereby half of the women were doing home-based industrial, i.e. manufacturing, work.²⁴ To what extent these economic roles overlapped is unknown. Most probably some dressmakers were also washerwomen. In Bethelsdorp, for example, women worked on the salt pan, tapped aloe juice, did some dressmaking/sewing and also occasional wage labour outside the settlement. This depended on many variables: the weather, availability of cash, absence of the men, availability of child labour and access to land.²⁵

In spite of the ambiguity and uncertainty of some of the census report categories it is clear that a number of women were occupationally totally invisible. In the 1875 report 1337 white women were recorded as of "no stated occupation", 503 (37,6%) of them being above 15 years of age. This number most definitely excluded the 1205 enumerated as "wives and others in household office" in the domestic sector. If we subtract the enumerated 21 scholars above 15 years of age from 503, it meant that there were 482 white women who were neither scholars, wives or employed in Port Elizabeth eking out a living in an unknown way. For the non-white women we have slightly lower figures: 710 were of no defined occupation of whom 264 (37,2%) were above 15 years, with only seven scholars in the same age category. Thus, 257 non-white women above 15 years were neither wives, nor scholars nor productive residents in this society.

Visibility of women in the other male-dominated employment sector, the professional one, was equally low. From a total of 213 white people counted here, 58 were women: 18 involved in church involvements (nuns, sisters of charity), 39 in education and one in a government structure. The world of the legal and medical professions, the press, central and local government, engineering, artists and photographers was a male one. For the non-white

23. CAD, SGE 2/333 Superintendent General of Education, inspectors' reports, 1912, School inspection form, 4 and 6 March 1912.

24. Laura Frader, "Women in the industrial capitalist economy" in Renate Bridenthal, Claudia Koonz and Susan Stuard (eds.), *Becoming visible - Women in European history* (Boston, 1987), p. 324.

25. For some discussion of the economic life of the settlement see Appel, *Bethelsdorp 1828-1945*, ch. 4 and 5.

**TABLE 4 SELECT CATEGORIES OF WOMEN EMPLOYMENT IN THE DOMESTIC SECTOR,
PORT ELIZABETH 1875**

| | EUROPEAN | NON-EUROPEAN |
|--------------------------|----------|--------------|
| Wives | 1205 | 470 |
| General domestic servant | 213 | 335 |
| House-keeper | 40 | 8 |
| Hotel-keeper | 37 | - |
| Nurse | 36 | 16 |
| Boarding house keeping | 17 | - |
| Cook | 17 | 40 |

Source: G.42-1876, vol II, tables I and II

**TABLE 5: WOMEN EMPLOYMENT IN THE COMMERCIAL AND INDUSTRIAL SECTOR,
PORT ELIZABETH, 1875**

COMMERCIAL

| | EUROPEAN | NON-EUROPEAN |
|--------------------------------|----------|--------------|
| Shopkeeper (unspecified) | 32 | 2 |
| Commercial traveller, salesman | 5 | - |
| Ship servant, stewardess | 2 | 1 |

INDUSTRIAL

| | | |
|---------------------------------------|----|-----|
| Milliner, dressmaker | 68 | 7 |
| Washerwoman, laundry keeper | 42 | 244 |
| Seamstress | 31 | 29 |
| Tailor | 1 | - |
| Hatter | 1 | - |
| Musical instrument maker, dealer, etc | 1 | - |
| Fishmonger, curer | - | 1 |
| Soapboiler | - | 1 |
| Fellmonger, wool scourer | - | 1 |
| Salt worker | - | 2 |

Source: G42-1876, vol II, tables I and II

residents of Port Elizabeth professional occupations were virtually non-existent: only eight men and three women (two midwives and a teacher) were recorded here.

As already mentioned, almost 40 years of urbanisation, commercial expansion and early industrialisation brought about no changes in the Port Elizabeth occupational structure. In spite of the lack of occupational detail in the 1911 census report it is obvious that a very strong continuity with the preceding era existed. Of the five employment sectors (professional, domestic, commerce, agriculture and industrial/manufacturing) white males still dominated commerce and industry (86%). The only sector where white women were indeed very visible was the domestic one, where 81% were employed. In spite of existing educational facilities not even 15% were in the professional and industrial sectors. An even stronger trend applied to non-white women: 98% of them were employed in the domestic environment and there was no meaningful influx into other new job opportunities. It is, however, possible that the exact enumerating categories (in the original survey) could introduce a more sophisticated analysis than the one presented here. It is clear that even in the developing urban and peri-urban areas, namely Korsten and Walmer, women did not, or were not allowed to, exploit new job opportunities. In both these areas 1677 men worked in the commercial and industrial sector as against only 49 women. The only urban area where women were numerically highly visible was the municipality: 4695 white and 3897 non-white women recorded in the domestic sector there, as well as 1270 non-white in Korsten.

It must be assumed that a combination of variables prevented a significant proportion of women to move into some "respectable" or "white blouse" occupations. According to the 1911 census report only 320 white women in the municipality and 24 in Walmer respectively were enumerated in the professional sector. The precise nature of these job opportunities are unknown, however. For non-white women, as for their male counterparts, this sector was virtually inaccessible. Only in the municipality and Korsten 33 women were recorded as employed in this way. The only other significant influx into the expanding range of occupational opportunities were the 576 white women in the municipal area recorded in the industrial sector. In the whole Port Elizabeth census district 609 white women were employed thus, but then again there were 2631 men. One example of the demand and opportunity for women to move into the new developing manufacturing jobs was an advertisement in January 1890 by the well-known biscuit baker John Pyott for six "respectable Girls". Another one was the Brooker's Rising Sun Matches Factory (founded in 1885) where in 1902 at least six of the total staff of 28 were women.²⁶ Thus in Port Elizabeth, as in Britain, a similar trend prevailed: domestic service of some kind still remained the single largest employer of all women. The dominant ideology of gender roles emphasized their almost complete captivity to domesticity, meaning proper feminine roles.²⁷

There is no obvious reason to believe that the upper and middle class family relations in Port Elizabeth were defined differently from Britain, viz by contemporary English middle class ideology.²⁸ "Proper" gender roles were constructed and conceived of as the fundamental of a well-controlled family life. There is no extensive evidence on this. Two

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26. *Port Elizabeth Advertiser*, 1 January 1890; H.E. Meyer, "The match industry in Port Elizabeth", *Looking Back X*(3), September 1970, p. 93, photograph.
 27. Lewis, "Women and society", pp. 136-137; Walker, "Women and gender: An overview", p. 11; S.G. Checkland, *The rise of industrial society in England, 1815-1885* (London, 1971), p. 317.
 28. Erlank, "Writing women", p. 75; Jacklyn Cock, "Domestic service and education for domesticity" in Walker, *Women and gender*, pp. 87-88.

fragments do, however, suggest that in some families the education for domesticity and femininity was not doubted. As a young girl Jessie Lovemore (1859-1953/4) of the farm Bushy Park was sometimes sent to her aunt, Lizzie Ogilvie, in Port Elizabeth

for my good, to learn the ways of girls and to play with dolls, instead of climbing trees and running races with my brothers. My Aunt was ... well versed in the proper way to encourage girls to play and learn. She would read stories to us while we learned to sew, making dolls' clothes, and threading beads for pincushions and penwipers. Sometimes, dressed in our best, she would take us out 'calling' on her friend ...²⁹

Socially acceptable behaviour was indeed important for all girls and women. On the request of her father, the well-known local merchant William Savage, Maria returned from Southampton to Port Elizabeth in October 1874. A young man, George Tapscott, whom she had befriended during the voyage, stayed on for a while as her company. Her father was very quick to remind her not to go riding with George "unless chaperoned by a brother, 'for people would talk' ".³⁰

What happened in the colonial Christian community at Edendale (Natal) is most probably a valid reflection of a similar frustrating contradiction for many Port Elizabeth women:

Church and Sunday school provided opportunities for communal female interchanges to occur. Women's space created an arena for female solidarity, although at the same time it constituted a formidable means of social control for any woman who might balk at the constraints.³¹

Again, a fully-fledged study of the different forms of independence and their roles as active agents in the local society awaits to be done on the Port Elizabeth women.

Some available evidence does suggest that the freedom of choice to join a missionary institution or a church and thus create some space for themselves for religious and social expression did not mean the beginning of an independent women's culture. Unfortunately, all examples for this study come from the Bethelsdorp settlement where, as is generally known, the resident missionary was virtually an "overlord" of both church and secular matters. As a matter of fact, this very dominant and the dominating position was only legally changed by the early 1870s by the London Missionary Society's Institution Act (no 12/1873), but afterwards he still retained some of his secular influence, if then only informally. Thus, by the 1820s the power of entrance to or expulsion from the settlement as well as discretion and judgement on church discipline were vested (almost) totally in A. Robson, the resident missionary at the time. In October 1827 complaints were raised about some Bethelsdorp women who had misbehaved (apparently related to liquor) in Port Elizabeth. Robson was adamant: "It is entirely contrary to my inclination that any young females enter the bay".³²

29. "Stories from the memoirs of Mrs. Charles Allen ...", *Looking Back* III(2), June 1963, pp. 6-7.

30. M.E. Ball (ed.), "Extracts from the diary of Maria Savage 1874/1875", *Looking Back* 12(?), 1972, pp. 45-47.

31. Meintjies, "Family and gender" in Walker, *Women and gender*, p. 145.

32. CAD, Acc. 559 Bethelsdorp missionary institution, 1819-1857, A. Robson to Armstrong, 23 October 1827.

He did not explain why he singled out the young women. The next month he sent three Bethelsdorp "corporals" (assistants) to Port Elizabeth to bring back all the unemployed persons "belonging to" the missionary institution.³³ It is uncertain how many of them were women, but Robson was certainly trying to control the movement of some of his female flock, even if it were under the well-intended cloak of the temperance movement. In May 1828 he intervened harshly in the lives of two women residents. Both had had extra-marital affairs with two married residents, resulting in the disruption of family peace. Consequently Robson transported the two women to the Port Elizabeth magistrate requesting him to put them under a labour contract with an employer living at a far distance from Bethelsdorp. Their moral choices were wrong: "... therefore ... in order to prevent a similar [?] evil in others (they must) be made examples of."³⁴ A third example illustrated the high-handed way in which Robson defined the powerlessness of the women in the settlement. By September 1830 Kaatjie Plaatjes was pregnant with an illegitimate child, the father being Windvogel Ruiters. It is unknown whether the pregnancy was altogether her own free choice, but she did expect assistance from Ruiters in raising the child. What exactly that was, is also unknown, but from Robson's letter she obviously preferred Ruiters at least to live together with her. But again, being a (voluntary) member of the settlement did not create an escape route from social control. Robson put it unequivocally: "Cohabitation being contrary to the regulations of this Institution ...", their bans were published. But all of a sudden Kaatjie decided not to marry Windvogel anymore.³⁵ Unfortunately, it is not known if she was indeed allowed to make her last choice. The very limited access this author was allowed to the minutes of the early 20th century Bethelsdorp Congregational Church³⁶ confirmed the above arguments about church members (men and women) who on the one hand found different avenues for self expression but on the other sometimes paid a high price of social control, if not subjugation, for that very freedom of choice.

Even from the limited evidence presented here it is clear: most or many Port Elizabeth women, as their counterparts elsewhere, were structurally victims of a male-dominated and male-regulated society. But at least once a voice was raised against too crude an ideology of domesticity. Reporting on a speech delivered at a lecture on cooking in one of the schools early in 1905, one of the local newspapers protested

that some of our city fathers have rather revolutionary ideas concerning female education. The ideal wife, as set forth at the meeting, is one who can cook and keep house ... We should be the last to deny that an ideal wife should be able to cook and keep house, but we do demur at making these matters the important part of school education that the speaker would make them ... Moreover, the day is past when it was agreed that woman's duty was to be the house-wife, and only that. She has to be trained when a girl so that on reaching womanhood she can be the companion of man and of woman, so that she can contribute her quota to the Truth ... Let a girl learn to cook, by all

33. CAD, Acc. 559, Robson to Capt. Evatt, 8 November 1827.

34. CAD, Acc. 559, Robson to J.G. Aspeling, 20 May 1828.

35. CAD, acc. 559, Robson to J. Hudson, 1 September 1830.

36. Bethelsdorp Congregational Church, Minutes of "Diakens vergadering", 30 July 1913 to 24 November 1923. This minute book and some other documents (partially fragmentary) were kindly put at my disposal by the resident minister, Rev. Alberts, during October 1986.

means, but do not let us accept the doctrine that this accomplishment is one of the chief accomplishments of a woman.³⁷

A wide-ranging discussion and analysis of womanhood in late 19th and early 20th century Port Elizabeth cannot be presented now. There is, however, evidence available indicating that a number of women did indeed achieve some "accomplishments", some of which obviously elevated them above the socially constructed level of "the ideal wife" and at the same time made an inroad, even if limited, into a man-made commercial and business world. The particulars in table 6³⁸ reflect a part of this process by means of which they indeed became at least partially "active agents, controlling their own fate".³⁹ As far as could be ascertained the estate accounts as well as the valuation rolls are under-utilised sources for the social history of Port Elizabeth. Even without going into some technical and legal issues, it is clear that some women were indeed visible as property owners in various parts of the town. More meaningful conclusions will, however, only be possible after much more thorough and comparative research. The varying amounts of the residue are most probably an indication of the heterogeneity of womanhood in this town. On her death in December 1889 Eliza Allen left her husband Edward, a "poor working carpenter", and three minor daughters only £60. One of her two wooden cottages was bought from her estate by Edward for £60; at least he could afford that! At the other end of this spectrum was the widow Mary Martyn of South End who died in December 1879. The substantial part of her assets was raised by the selling of her property in Baakens Street for £1129 as well as a number of cottages (location unmentioned) for £410. It may be assumed that she rented out all those cottages, thus enjoying a regular (monthly/weekly) income. Some of the other women mentioned in table 6 were also part of the local landlord/landlady class. The widow Arabella Kay had £181-13-4 entered into her estate account as an asset, deriving from rent. Another example was £9-10-0 in Susan Dickinson's account. To what extent Sarah Wynne was an exception as a woman property owner by 1914 is unknown. All her properties were in North End, a well-known working class suburb. The average valuations of the four in Princes, the four in Cawood and the six in Perkin Streets suggest them to be working class houses which were rented out. On the other hand, from the valuation rolls it is clear that the amount of £1850 refers to a double storey house and plot, also in Princes Street, which was most probably her private residence.

Apart from becoming visible as members of the landlord/landlady class, a closer scrutiny of the estate accounts and valuation rolls reveals that some of these women had also accumulated substantial sums of cash. On her death in July 1870 an amount of £312 as cash was entered into Helen Phillips' account of assets. At least some of it, maybe most of it, must have been generated by the income from her dairy, because after her death the latter, together with her furniture, were sold for £104-10-6 and entered separately into the account. When Lucretia Kent died in February 1880, she had a savings account of £137-12-11 as well as cash amounting to £452-7-3. For Sarah Wynne access to cash was obviously no problem.

37. *Eastern Province Herald*, 7 April 1905 ("Educational notes"), cutting in SGE 1/491 Miscellaneous Letters Received, Port Elizabeth.

38. CAD, MOOC Master of the Supreme Court (Cape Division), series 13/1/- are the estate accounts. In some cases there is more than one account for the same estate. 3/PEZ 6/1/1/- are the PE Municipal Valuation Rolls. The concepts for the different kinds of structures used in the valuation rolls have been retained here in the table. There are also PE Divisional Council valuation Rolls in 4/PEZ 7/1/1/-.

39. Lewis, "Women and society", pp. 138-139.

TABLE 6: PROPERTIES AND OTHER ASSETS OF SOME PORT ELIZABETH WOMEN, 1870-1914

| NAME | DATE | PROPERTIES | VALUATION £ | LIABILITIES £ | ASSETS £ | RESIDUE £ | SOURCE |
|--|-------------|--|--|------------------|-------------|--------------|-----------------------------|
| Helen S Phillips | † 3.07.1870 | | | 22-4-11 | 421-11-1 | 399-6-2 | MOOC 13/1/269, nr 3 |
| Mary Martyn (widow) | 126.12.1879 | Unspecified in Baakens Street; Some cottages | | 239-13-11 | 1546-6-0 | 1305-12-1 | MOOC 13/1/377, nr 41 |
| Arabella B Kay (widow) | 122.01.1880 | Unspecified in North End | | 808-4-10 | 1896-13-4 | 1088-8-6 | MOOC 13/1/404, nr 91 |
| Lucretia S Kent (married to John Kent, Havelock Street) | 123.02.1880 | | | 151-3-6 | 715-0-2 | 563-16-8 | MOOC 13/1/383, nr 96 |
| Eliza A Allen (married to Edward J Allen) | 129.12.1889 | Plot, 2 cottages in Campbell Str | 140 | 99-9-6 | 160-0-0 | 60-10-6 | MOOC 13/1/609, nr 48 |
| Susan Dickinson (Richmond Hill) | 118.01.1900 | Unspecified | | 151-10-3 | 1065-1; 9 | 913-11-6 | MOOC 13/1/971, nr 162 |
| Alice A Crooks | 1914 | 3 plots, Webber Str, South End; Dwelling + plot, Webber Str; Dwelling, Webber Str | 175 400 350 | | | | 3/PEZ 6/1/1/1/359 |
| Athena Gervais | 1914 | Dwelling Shop Dwelling 3 rooms (all these in Kinsleys Kloof) | 175 100 400 45 | | | | 3/PEZ 6/1/1/1/359 |
| Sarah A Wynne (North End) | 1914 | 4 Dwellings, Princes Str fenced land, Cawood Str; 4 Dwellings, Cawood Str 6 Dwellings, Perkin Str; Dwelling, Geard Str; Dwelling + ground, Princes Str | 2475 150 1400 1650 700 1850 | | | | 3/PEZ 6/1/1/1/367 |

According to the valuation roll she paid annual municipal taxes on all her properties (as listed in the table) on 7 July 1914 amounting to £102-16-3. But again, without comparative examples not much can be said about this, except that some women were not that affluent. On her death in November 1909 Johanna Moss' liabilities exceeded her assets with £4-16-10 according to the first estate account, and according to the second her estate owed the Colonial Orphan Chamber still £1-17-0. Furthermore, she owned a cottage in Wyndham Street in Rufane Vale, a labouring class area in South End. This had a mortgage bond of £150, although its municipal (and divisional) valuation was only £100.⁴⁰ The only evidence of Mary Jane Bollen's assets on her death in October 1909 was a statement by the Post Office Savings Bank of a balance of £1-13-11. This amount was paid out to her husband.⁴¹

In a totally different way some women accomplished a degree of visibility by making statements about different social issues, even if it meant they had to address or approach a male-dominated institution. In Port Elizabeth, as elsewhere, increasing urbanisation and the resulting demand for wage labour intensified all forms of interaction. This was compounded by the emergence of a strong racial segregation ideology in all urban areas, part of which were white dominated efforts, including municipal regulations, to control social space. By the late 1980s racial segregation had already been partially enforced in Port Elizabeth by the establishment of municipally controlled townships ("locations"). In this urbanising and increasingly ideologised environment quite a number of women lodged complaints with the town council against the behaviour of blacks. In June 1896 as many as 203 women, residents on the Hill (a more or less upper middle class and partially professional area), submitted a petition venting their disgust, using strong expressions: "loafing of half dressed Kaffirs"; "we are subject to being jostled" (on the pavements); "unsavory contact" (with such people) (the blacks are smoking) "vile smelling Tobacco" and "expectorate" (on the pavements) "much to the detriment of our dresses and olfactory nerves".⁴² On 11 November 1898 a "Ladies Petition", signed by "landowners, tenants and residents" of Richmond Hill (a generally middle class area), complained about the "continual nuisance" caused by the residents of the Native Strangers Location (one of the municipal "locations").⁴³ Among other objections there was a financial one. Because of this "nuisance" many ladies refused to rent accommodation in that area with a resulting loss to the landlords/landladies. Approximately two weeks later a delegation from them, with Mrs. Meyer as spokesperson, was allowed into a meeting of the town council to put their case.⁴⁴ A few months later, in March 1899, a group of women living in the Richmond Hill area again submitted complaints to the town council about the "disgraceful" behaviour of the black people and requested the council explicitly to relocate the Native Strangers Location.⁴⁵

How these voices of protest, emanating from the supposed "ideal women" and "angels

40. CAD, MOOC 13/1/1933, No. 10 and 13/1/2062, No. 50.

41. CAD, MOOC 13/1/1791, No. 18.

42. CAD, 3/PEZ 2/1/1/1/102 Letters received, "Memorial", 8 June 1896 (with original signatures).

43. For a short history of this and the other townships see Gary Baines, "The origins of urban segregation: Local government and the residence of Africans in Port Elizabeth, c 1835-1865", *South African Historical Journal* 22, November 1990, pp. 61-81 (map, 68) and A.J. Christopher, "Race and residence in colonial Port Elizabeth", *South African Geographical Journal* 69(1), 1987, pp. 3-20.

44. CAD, 3/PEZ 2/1/1/1/127, No. 46, 11 November 1898; 3 PEZ 1/1/1/18 Town council minutes, 30 November 1898, p. 335.

45. CAD, 3/PEZ 1/1/1/18, 29 March 1899, p. 447.

of the house",⁴⁶ should be interpreted is not clear. More research on the emergence of womanhood as a social identity in Port Elizabeth is needed. Maybe it could be seen as examples of white women "helping to perpetuate a hierarchical, racist order",⁴⁷ although as women they, like their counterparts in many other countries, were not enfranchised. Effectively their protestations and petitions came to nothing. The town council just referred it either to their Location Committee or the magistrate, requesting the latter to take some steps.⁴⁸ Furthermore, the high cost of expropriation had already, by the mid 1890s, prevented any further removals (started in the mid 1880s) from the Native Strangers Location and ultimately individual titles were granted to the residents.⁴⁹

Although the multiple social identities of Port Elizabeth women cannot be discussed here, some fragments of evidence suggest or indicate an emerging collective social identity in different groups or organizations. By early 1870 the Ladies Benevolent Society was prepared to assist the poor in whatever possible way.⁵⁰ In January 1893 the Methodist South End Ladies Association was officially thanked for their contribution to the completion of the South End parsonage.⁵¹ Continuing a long tradition of sensitivity about public decency, or indecency, Mrs. John Mackay and Mrs. Helen Macintosh, on behalf of the Women's Christian Temperance Union, in May 1899 lodged a complaint with the town council about "certain representations of the partially nude female figure ... disgracing" the streets at the time. Seeing that they would like to guard the "morals ... of our young men", they found it totally unacceptable that groups of boys and "half grown lads" kept watching these posters. They requested the council to remove these "disgraceful posters" and to prevent any future display of them. The council, one could almost say (a)pathetically, referred the issue to the magistrate.⁵² Early in 1911 the South End Nursing Committee petitioned the town council for preventative measures against tuberculosis. The best answer they got was that notifications of this health problem as well as regular visits by the "Inspectors" were receiving attention.⁵³ During the early 1900s the Redhouse Ladies Vigilance Committee, probably prompted by the Zwartkops Rowing Club, mobilised interest and requested donations for "the cleansing of the Village". Some of them also did some "urgent duties" during the flu epidemic of 1918.⁵⁴

Initially a very small number of women found some real visibility as a partial escape route from a life of domesticity, even if they had to pay a price for that at the beginning. Existing memoirs⁵⁵ indicate the first intrusion by women into the formerly male-dominated

46. For the latter concept see Lewis, "Women and society", p. 139.

47. Deborah Gaitskell, "Introduction", *Journal of Southern African Studies* 10(1), October 1983, p. 12; for Tajfel's concept of "social identity" see Walker, "Conceptualising motherhood", p. 424.

48. See the abovementioned town council minutes.

49. Christopher, "Race and residence", p. 10.

50. *Eastern Province Herald*, 22 March 1870.

51. Cory Library, Rhodes University, MS 16887, Minute book of Wesleyan Trust Board: Minutes of Quarterly Trust Properties Committee, 19 January 1893.

52. CAD, 3/PEZ 2/1/1/1/129, No. 21, 30 May 1899; 3/PEZ 1/1/1/18, 31 May 1899, p. 490.

53. CAD, 3/PEZ 1/1/1/23, 1 March 1911, p. 149; 3/PEZ 1/2/1/16 Health and location committee, 27 March 1911, p. 125.

54. A. Grylls and T.J. Kohler, "The story of the Zwartkops Rowing Club", *Looking Back* 13(4), December 1973, p. 104.

55. "Mrs Lochhead remembers", *Looking Back* VII(2), June 1967, pp. 43-47. This is a version, edited by the staff of this journal, of the memoirs of Mrs Lochhead, daughter of Mrs Frank Brown. The whole text is totally undated. In an appendix to this, also J.J. Storey writes in an unidentified and

leisure world of cycling by the 1890s. Most significantly, the woman named as the first female cyclist in Port Elizabeth is identified as the wife of Frank Brown, her first or petname not being mentioned once. She started doing it, "tandem in front of her husband". After a while a "lady's bicycle" was imported for her. But in spite of creating this new social space outside the narrowly defined domestic world, she was always "modestly attired" in a skirt reaching down to her ankles. A few times the Brown family cycled to Humansdorp, staying over one night along the road. But in a society very much influenced by Victorian middle class ideology "her venture was considered so scandalous that decent citizens pulled down their blinds to spare themselves the horrid sight!" Partially, thus, her visibility was clouded. The pejorative relationship established between female cycling and indecency is very clear. What is not so clear, is how wide-spread this attitude was. But according to Storey⁵⁶ some change did come eventually to Port Elizabeth: "Finally, victory was hers. Silly prejudice died, and eventually we always had 15 to 20 ladies at our Club runs to Hunters' Retreat ...".

This article has tried to make women in late 19th and early 20th century Port Elizabeth (more) visible and has obviously had limited and ambiguous results. The fragmentary evidence and the scope of a single article have left out (but not intentionally ignored) many issues that are receiving attention in the historiography of women. Consequently, a meaningful conceptualisation and discussion of womanhood could only be based on extensive research and sophisticated interpretation. From the evidence presented here, however, it is clear that varying degrees of visibility did exist. As elsewhere, Port Elizabeth women may not be seen "as an undifferentiated 'class' or social group".⁵⁷ Some became almost invisible in the socially constructed world of domesticity. Others achieved some visibility, for example, as property owners, entrepreneurs, social leaders and critics, and members of sport clubs. Evaluating continuity and change, particularly for women, in Port Elizabeth as a non-mining, predominantly male-dominated commercial centre entering an increasingly modernizing 20th century South Africa is thus a much more complicated problem than is usually accepted.

undated newspaper cutting about early cycling in PE during the "Nineties".

56. See reference 55.

57. Gaitskell, "Introduction", p. 15.