

BLANK VERBEELD*, OR THE INCREDIBLE WHITENESS OF BEING: AMATEUR PHOTOGRAPHY AND AFRIKANER NATIONALIST HISTORICAL NARRATIVE¹

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*As ek van verbeelding praat,
Dan glo maar ek preek van 'n paradijs,
Waarheen net 'n engel te perd kan reis...*
(C.Louis Leipoldt, *Die Huisgenoot*, August 1919)²



Foto Mei. S. Bayske.] Een Alhinkafferkind. [Johannesburg.

Figure 1

* White imag(in)ed. The verb *verbeeld* (imagine) shares the same prefix as '*vertaal*' – 'to translate'. 'Beeld' may be also be rendered 'image' in English (the Afrikaans '*uitbeelding*' is the most 'correct' term to describe rendering something into visual form). My play on words, then, draws on scholarly critiques of positivist approaches to photography, and the growing body of historical research on nineteenth and twentieth century constructions of photography as transparent records of a prior reality. If trans-lating involves no simple transference of meaning from one language to another, *verbeeld* likewise involves *verbeelding* (imagination), transformation and change.

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2 "When I speak of imagination, then believe that I preach of a paradise/that only an angel on horseback can reach..."

In October 1917 the recently launched Afrikaner nationalist monthly *De Huisgenoot* (The Home Companion) published a winning picture by one Miss S. Buyske as part of its regular Kodak photo competition. A man and woman are seated against the backdrop of a rural landscape. Hands carefully support the two small children on their laps. Parents and their offspring look directly, solemnly, perhaps proudly at the camera. The former are certainly dressed as for a serious occasion: her pleated, white shirt and elaborate headscarf draws my eye. But light variously reflects from, is absorbed by the children's exposed bodies. The portrait's caption - "Een Albinokafferkind" (an Albino-caffir-child) - funnels meaning into the intended focal point: the freakish whiteness of a native child (Fig.1).

My collection of family photographs includes a fading snapshot of maternal great grandparents, probably taken in the 1930s, now carefully reproduced to imitate its sepia tones. It shows an elderly couple placed in open countryside, in a traditional pose of man and wife. He sits stiffly on a straight-backed wooden chair. She, wearing a severe dark dress, stands solidly, formidably, behind. Where is whiteness in this picture? Perhaps it is located in that part of the image I first found strange: why did my forebears choose this empty space as background for their portrait? I understood more when my mother, joking that my sister had dubbed the picture "Laat Vrugte" (Late Fruit), reminded me that they had received a smallholding as part of the Dutch Reformed Church's rehabilitation scheme for landless whites. This was their farm at Marchand in the northern Cape - my great grandparents posed, proudly, in front of cultivated land. Hardly empty, this space was indeed *blank** (Fig. 2).

Would another photograph, printed in *Die Huisgenoot* some eighty years ago, also have been kept, privately, by successive generations? This couple also has the serious expressions appropriate to formal portraiture. Land does not feature within this frame: they pose against what seems to be a studio photographer's patterned backdrop. Like my forebears and the strangely white child's father, the old man wears a suit, although he stands to face the camera. Seated on her chair, his wife's flowery dress is somewhat less severe than that of my great grandmother. But why does he stand with hat in hand? It is this stance of deference that catches my eye - here, perhaps, that whiteness lies. The caption explains that Mr and Mrs Byneveld's portrait was taken shortly before his death - the text emphasises the widow's impecunious circumstances. Her husband's bared head was a respectful plea from the grave for charity towards his wife: contributions could be sent to the local women's society in her village. Although the words were never mentioned in this text, it was as *arm* (poor) and *blank* that Mrs Byneveld qualified for help (Fig.3).

This paper examines how *arme blanken* - those people claimed as members of the *volk* and anxiously perceived as living on the peripheries of whiteness

* Afrikaans has two words for the English 'white': 'wit' and 'blank'. The latter carries historical connotations of racial purity, the sanctity of 'whiteness' and the weight of publicly legislated racism that the English 'white' (and the Afrikaans 'wit') do not convey.



Figure 2

- were photographed during the early decades of Afrikaner nationalist mobilisation. A number of historians have researched the ways in which concerns about the ‘poor white problem’ were articulated in print in the first decades of the twentieth century or have discussed Afrikaner nationalist strategies for dealing with those apparently unemployable ‘Afrikaners’ unable or unwilling to adjust to economic pressures.³ However, little research has been done on visual responses to a growing *armblankedom*, or indeed on any photographic representations of poorer or working class ‘whites’.⁴

3 Public discussion of ‘white’ poverty as a social problem date from the 1880s and mostly appeared in the Dutch Reformed Church’s journals – the DRC also issued an open letter on ‘Our Poor Whites’ in 1893. From 1892 (in private correspondence) the English liberal politician John X. Merriman, then treasurer and head of the Agricultural Department in the Cape, also discussed perceived links between white impoverishment and African settlement in towns. See A. Whyte, ‘John X. Merriman, the Poor White and the Problem of the “Clean-living Native” in the Cape of Good Hope’ (MA thesis, Michigan State University, 1988.) In the period I examine, Afrikaner nationalists were not alone in their efforts to articulate the ‘problem’ of growing ‘white’ poverty. In 1919 for example, liberal historian W.M. MacMillan published a treatise on its rural origins. See also R. Morell (ed.), *White But Poor: Essays on the History of Poor Whites in Southern Africa, 1880-1940* (Pretoria, 1992).

4 A rare exception is Michael Godby’s brief analysis of photographs that appeared in the published volumes of the Carnegie Inquiry into ‘white’ poverty (1932). (M. Godby, ‘The Evolution of Documentary Photography in South Africa as shown in a comparison between the Carnegie Inquiries into Poverty, 1932 and 1984’ in J-E. Lundstrom and K. Pierre (eds.), *Democracy’s Images: Photography and Visual Art After Apartheid* (Uppsala, 1999).



Mnr. en Mevr. Byneveld.

Hierdie portret is geneem kort voor die dood van die man van mevr. Byneveld. Sy lyk lyna nog net soos sy op hierdie portret is.

Figure 3

Buyske and the women's society sent their pictures to a magazine aiming to fashion a popular Afrikaner nationalist culture. Hofmeyr correctly argues that those attempting to reach an Afrikaans readership could not assume that people had a "strong sense of themselves as Afrikaners" at a time when "the 'traditional' Afrikaner community was itself crumbling". She describes the range of projects launched to cultivate a stronger and more clearly defined ethnic identity – Afrikaans popular magazines featured prominently amongst these. Such endeavours amounted to "a redefinition of everyday life" as Afrikaans.⁵ Launched in 1916, *Die Huisgenoot* was an important addition to a growing number of publications that articulated the gendered ideals of a racialised Afrikaans domesticity. The magazine proved successful at attracting loyal readers: by 1927, it would boast 25 000 subscribers. Its pages were packed with 'Afrikaans' poetry, stories, *volksgeskiedenis* (people's history), reports on

⁵ I. Hofmeyr, "'Building a Nation from Words': Afrikaans Language, Literature and Ethnic Identity, 1902-1925" in S. Marks and S. Trapido (eds.), *The Politics of Race, Class and Nationalism in Twentieth Century South Africa* (London, 1987), 110-111.

(mostly women's) philanthropic activities – and numerous pictures. Indeed, the extent to which popular participation in this project took place through photography is striking.

As yet, historians have paid virtually no attention to the specific ways in which Afrikaner nationalists combined word and image in their attempt to build a shared 'Afrikaner' culture. My work begins to explore the emergence of an Afrikaans and nationalist 'imagewor(l)d'⁶ in the 1910s and 1920s, decades during which numbers of entrepreneurs, politicians and members of a range of cultural and philanthropic organisations participated in the construction of a racially and ethnically circumscribed 'Afrikaner' identity.⁷ How did Afrikaner nationalists racialise the subjects of their photographs (particularly, 'poorer' people) as variously within and outside the sphere of *blank*? It is that often bland space within which those who created and/or consumed images of native 'others' simultaneously created racialised images of themselves and those they claimed as *eie* (own) that I have chosen to examine.

“Armed with Kodak”: Snapshots in *Die Huisgenoot*, 1916-c.1926 **(a) Amateur photography in the construction of *volkgeskiedenis***

In its first issue *De Huisgenoot*⁸ announced a monthly competition, explaining that it aimed to make visible the country's beauty “niet alleen in woord, maar ook in beeld” (not only through words, but also through images). Elaborating on the possibilities for photographic creativity, *De Huisgenoot* explained:

Laat een ieder, die eigen genomen foto's heeft van mooie natuurtaferelen, historiese gebouwen en monumenten, enz., enz., een afdruk aan ons kantoor... inzenden.
(Let everyone with their own photo's of pretty nature scenes, historic buildings and monuments etc. etc. send a print to our... office).⁹

6 Here I draw on Deborah Poole's notion of an “image world” – with which she stresses “simultaneously the material and social nature of both vision and representation. Seeing and representing are ‘material’ insofar as they constitute a means of intervening in the world...”; social because they “occur in historically specific networks of social relations”. Drawing on the art historian Pollock, Poole argues that “the efficacy of representation relies on a ceaseless exchange with other representations”. The “image world” is formed by “a combination of these relationships of referral and exchange among images themselves, and the social and discursive relations connecting image-makers and consumers” (D. Poole, *Vision, Race and Modernity: A Visual Economy of the Andean Image World* (New Jersey, 1997), 7). My own word play (image-world/imageword) seeks to emphasise the interaction of word and image.

7 The exact extent to which Afrikaner nationalists were successful in reaching a broad audience falls outside the scope of this study. But while a nationalist ‘print culture’ emerged from around 1905 and was well established by the middle 1920s, nationalist ideas were certainly communicated with uneven success, particularly in rural spaces and to urbanised working class families. (See Hofmeyr, ‘Building a Nation from Words’; L. Kruger, ‘Gender, Community and Identity: Women and Afrikaner Nationalism in the “Volksmoeder” discourse of *Die Boerevrou*, 1919-1931’ (M.A., University of Cape Town, 1991); M. du Toit, ‘Women, Welfare and the Nurturing of Afrikaner Nationalism: A Social History of the Afrikaanse Christelike Vroue Vereniging, c. 1870-1939’ (Ph.D., University of Cape Town, 1996).

8 The magazine was first called *De Huisgenoot* and published, on balance, more Dutch than Afrikaans. By 1918 the dominant language was Afrikaans and the title was changed to *Die Huisgenoot* to reflect this. The Transvaal-based monthly *Die Brandwag* (The Sentinel) had already published in Afrikaans from 1910. *Die Huisgenoot*'s change of title reflected a growing consensus to assert Afrikaans as the written as well as the spoken language of the *volk*.

9 *De Huisgenoot*, May 1916.

The competition fast became one area of enthusiastic reader participation. Indeed, while the magazine readily published efforts to write Dutch/Afrikaans poetry and short stories, it had no letter page. For the first seven years of its existence, it apparently employed no official photographer although pictures were evidently often provided by *Die Huisgenoot's* staff or other contributors and accompanied their articles.

De Huisgenoot intended to establish “een grote kring van medewerkers... die hun ogen open zullen houden in alle delen van het land, om te zien of daar niet iets is, dat van algemeen belang is voor al de lezers van ons maandblad” (a large circle of contributors... who would keep their eyes open in all parts of the country, for things of general interest to all our readers.) Ever since the invention of techniques for the multiple printing of photographic images, ‘imagined communities’ had been bolstered through their circulation and exchange.¹⁰ Apparently, *De Huisgenoot's* editors saw the combined potential of mass-produced box cameras and modern printing techniques. Via their snapshots, readers could be drawn to participate in the discursive spaces of Afrikaner nationalism.¹¹ Indeed, many readers now used hand-held cameras to insert pictures of themselves and their surroundings into this ‘Afrikaans’ space. Large numbers of photographs sent in by readers (mostly with the name and hometown or farm of the sender noted below) graced the pages of the magazine. The fairly wide brief given to prospective participants certainly elicited a range of images - those judged best were frequently grouped together on the *Fotografie Wedstrijd* (Photography Competition) page, but a larger selection, usually reproduced in the approximate sizes of Kodak snapshots, was scattered somewhat arbitrarily through columns of print.¹²

A comprehensive analysis of how fast-growing practices of Kodak-style ‘amateur’ photography interacted with nationalist efforts to articulate the meaning of ‘Afrikaans’ and ‘Afrikaner’ would explore how and to what extent readers’ choice of subject and framing were shaped by genres of photography already established in southern Africa, and by newer trends in hand-held, amateur snapshotting. It would also involve careful analysis of the regular lessons in the craft of popular photography published on the competition page, and pay close attention to meanings made through the juxtaposition of (mostly captioned) pictures and their interplay with adjacent written text.

For example, the formal poses of studio family photographs persisted alongside the idiom of informal *kijkjes* (the Dutch for snapshot is the diminutive)

10 For discussions of how (as Poole puts it), mass-produced cartes de visites “helped to shape feelings of community or sameness among metropolitan bourgeoisies, aspiring provincial merchants, and upper- and middle-class colonials scattered around the globe” (112), see D. Poole, *Vision, Race and Modernity*; J. Tagg, *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographs and Histories* (Massachusetts, 1988) and S. Lalvani, *Photography, Vision and the Production of Modern Bodies* (New York, 1996.)

11 In South Africa, *The Cape Times Weekly* which specialised in illustrated material had begun to print the occasional photograph amongst its lithographs in 1895 – from 1898 most images were photographic prints. Two short-lived magazines published in Dutch between 1898 and 1900 (*Het Afrikaansche Familieblad and Ons Tijdschrift*) had printed occasional photographs. Between 1903 and 1910, the Cape-based *De Goede Hoop* had inter-leaved printed text with photographs (mostly attributed to local professional photographers). *Die Brandwag*, the Transvaal-based popular magazine launched in 1910, included photographs similarly placed on separate pages and also placed others within columns of typeface. However, they did not have a photography competition or otherwise encourage readers to post snapshots.

12 The Kodak Company established a factory in Cape Town in 1913.

tive for ‘look’) into family life that the reasonably affordable hand-held cameras made possible and that Kodak promoted. Family snapshots were scattered across articles on ‘Afrikaans’ culture – sometimes, verbal description specifically prompted readers to view portraits or snapshots as a visualised typology of ‘Afrikaner’.¹³ That the House Companion - intent on cultivating a particular notion of family - harnessed familial photography to its cause is hardly surprising. After all, by the 1910s the Kodak company was urging those who bought its cameras to focus on “the ordinary and domestic”.¹⁴ In Europe and North America, photography was rapidly becoming “the family’s primary instrument of self-knowledge and representation – the means by which family memory would be continued and perpetuated...”.¹⁵ Claims for the camera as the dominant technology for familial self-representation amongst Afrikaans-speakers during the 1910s and 1920s or that combinations of image and word were crucially shaping ‘Afrikaans’ identity could easily be questioned. Many ‘Afrikaners’ could probably not afford their own camera and many could not read or did not participate in a ‘reading’ culture. But the many snapshots posted to *Die Huisgenoot* – from cities, towns, villages and distant farms - attest to photography’s attraction and familiarity to the community of readers that this relatively inexpensive magazine was helping to create.¹⁶

Another established photographic genre that *Die Huisgenoot* promoted was the framing of “natuur-taferelen” (scenes of nature). Editors’ suggestion that contributors should wander “met de kodak gewapend door’t veld of langs’t strand van de zee... en’t mooie wat men daar ziet op de gevoelige plaat op te vangen” (armed with kodak in the *veld* or along the beach... and capture the beauty they see on the sensitive plate)¹⁷ was readily compatible with Kodak’s emphasis on the camera as an accessory for leisure activities. However, readers’ numerous snapshots of leisurely excursions probably drew more direct inspiration from the picture products of local, professional photographers.¹⁸ Submissions to the competition that drew editorial praise also included such obvious images from the colonial repertoire as pictures of ‘native life’

13 For example, a studio portrait captioned “Een Afrikaanse dochter” (An Afrikaans girl/daughter) and a snapshot captioned “’n Afrikaanse Boer en sij Vrouw met hul drie Honde” (An Afrikaans Farmer with his Wife and their three Dogs). *Die Huisgenoot*, Jan. 1917, Dec. 1919.

14 In *Kodak and the Lens of Nostalgia* (Virginia, 2000) West argues that from 1888 to 1900 the Kodak company’s extensive advertising cast the camera as an accessory for activities of leisure. After 1900 and with the invention of the Brownie camera, advertisements began to focus on “the importance of home and the preservation of domestic memories” although the “promotion of snapshot photography as leisure activity” still dominated. West argues that in the middle 1910s the context of war prompted a more exclusive focus on snapshots celebrating “family unity”.

15 M. Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative and Postmemory* (Cambridge, 1997), 6-7.

16 Hofmeyr discusses Afrikaner nationalist efforts to create ‘leeslus’ (a love of reading) amongst those Afrikaans-speakers they targeted as ‘Afrikaner’ – this was a constant topic of discussion in *Die Huisgenoot*. At the subscription price of 5-6p. per issue (during the 1910s and 20s) the magazine was also fairly affordable. While Hofmeyr concedes that the extent of working class Afrikaners’ reading could easily be exaggerated, she speculates that poorer people intent on self-improvement bought the magazine (Hofmeyr, ‘Building a nation from Words’, 111; *Die Huisgenoot*, May 1917, May 1919, 18 Nov. 1927).

17 *De Huisgenoot*, May 1916.

18 Kodak only began to advertise in *Die Huisgenoot* during the 1920s, and it is not clear whether the often colourful, painted advertisements placed in American magazines during the early 1900s and 1910s were available in South Africa. Stockists of Kodak products may have used the company’s poster advertisements in their establishments and at least some of Kodak’s magazines and other publications were available by the 1920s – one Kodak guide to amateur photography was also translated into Dutch.

and hunting expeditions. Perhaps Buyske was a ‘Kodak girl’ who responded to Eastman’s celebratory images of young women as consumers of a simplified technology. However, her prize-winning picture drew on local, racialised propensities for recording ‘freakishness’.¹⁹

Many amateur ‘landscape’ photographs published in *Die Huisgenoot* also resembled the popular, locally produced framings of known or newly encountered surroundings now routinely attached to everyday communications between numbers of family members and friends.²⁰ But some also diverge from the established postcard aesthetic. At a time when substantial numbers of Afrikaans speakers lived on farms and rural villages and when many Afrikaans town or city dwellers had *platteland* roots, scenes of farming life and photographs of farmland were often sent to the magazine. These contributed to the elaboration of (and Kodak cameras enabled a popular participation in) a discourse that associated *grond* (land) with Afrikaner that was also articulated in popular prose and poetry.²¹

But it is a particular strand of popular photography that I have chosen to unravel in this paper. Like other cultural nationalist publications, *Die Huisgenoot* was determined to teach Afrikaners ‘their’ history – photographs would also play an important role in this endeavour. From the very beginning, the magazine’s pages were arranged so as to prompt readers to identify ‘Afrikaans’ domesticity with *volksgeskiedenis*. For the first few years of its existence, the cover showed a family seated on their farmhouse stoep or in their living room. The magazine (held by the mother or father, its name inscribed boldly across the drawing) completed the circle of *huisgenote*.^{*} On the frontispiece - where the title was elaborated as “Een tijdschrift voor Afrikaners” (A magazine for Afrikaners) - was the photographic portrait of a famous, usually deceased Boer leader, poet or churchman, complemented by a biography inside. Hand-drawn, decorative lines were often used as frames, invoking both honorific traditions of patriotic remembrance and those associat-

19 Snapshots in *Die Huisgenoot* were fairly often accredited to women. Whether the Kodak Company’s advertising successfully targeted South African women remains unclear, but from the 1890s its advertising campaigns had centered on “Kodak girls”. According to West the company portrayed snapshot photography as mainly a woman’s hobby and profited by associating “the revolutionary simplicity of its roll film and camera with the modern freedoms represented by the New Woman”. Between 1892 and 1920, the Kodak Girl often appeared outdoors, on her own and never in the company of a man. She was also an eternal amateur, “frozen at a liminal, intermediate stage of womanhood” and “reassuringly dependent on corporate expertise” (West, *Kodak and the Lens of Nostalgia*). Judging by her careful framing, Buyske could also have been a serious amateur. In fact, advertisements for darkroom materials in the *South African Photographic Journal* sometimes featured women – but the feminine still signified technological simplicity. In the June 1910 edition, the “Noctana girl” used the “simplest gaslight paper” and proclaimed: “simplicity means success”.

20 *Die Huisgenoot*’s regular reminders that postcards should not be submitted for the competition confirm that participants were familiar with contemporary, mass-produced, commodified images. Archived postcards (Cape Archives, Jeffrey Collection 8887 and 8866-8893) also suggest that middle-class Afrikaans families collected and exchanged postcards in the early 20th century. Many of these were locally produced cards that rendered towns and villages into the commodified picturesque and bore the authoritative inscription of commercial photographer’s names.

21 Postcards only rarely featured farms, and were more likely to show rural villages or river banks and other scenic places. Captions often located “Natuur taferelen” (Scenes of nature) featured in *Die Huisgenoot* on farms. It is often difficult to distinguish such snapshots from a more generalised, colonial ‘landscape’ photography, and perhaps they should also be seen as a variation on this theme. See A. Coetzee, *’n Hele Os vir ’n ou Broodmes: Grond en die Plaasnarratief sedert 1595* (Cape Town, 2000) for an exploration of the Afrikaans “plaasroman” (farm novel) as point of entry into a fascinating discussion of Afrikaner identity and a discourse of *grond* (roughly, ground/earth) within the broader context of South Africa’s colonial history of land dispossession.

* ‘Huisgenoot’ (plural: ‘huisgenote’) translates as ‘home/house companion’ or as ‘family member’.

ed with familial portraiture.²² The succession of images and text was clearly meant to suggest that every 'Afrikaans' family shared in a *volksgeskiedenis*. The extended family of volk included ordinary 'Afrikaners' as well as famous leaders.²³

Photographic portraits printed in *Die Huisgenoot* were also not only of great leaders. The magazine made liberal use of photographs in publicising the notion of 'ordinary', elderly people as valued participants in *volksgeskiedenis*.²⁴ Early features on "Die skakels of bande met die Verlede" (Links or ties with the Past) or "Een Getuige van Oude Dagen" (A Witness to Old Days) honoured the old for their store of memories: "Veel kon zij vertellen ... de droeve, bloedige dagen heeft zij met de andere Voortrekkers doorgemaakt"(She could tell much... she experienced the grievous, bloody days together with the other Voortrekkers).²⁵

The particular combination of words and image in an obituary from 1918 helps explain why photographs invariably accompanied such efforts. Under the heading "Hulle kom nie Weer...!" (They come never More...!), the writer reflected on the passage of time as a cycle of dying and regeneration:

Net soos die weinige glinsterende groot sterre, een vir een, aan gindse gesigseinder verdwijn, so val een na die ander skakel wat ons aan die verlede bind, weg. En soos die sterre dan weer aan die teenoorgestelde sij hul verskijning maak, so is daar ook nou skakels wat die vorige se plek inneem, en ook 'n verlede maak vir die toekoms!²⁶

(Just like the few, glimmering, great stars which vanish one by one below the far horizon, so, one after the other, the links that bind us to the past fall away. And in the exact same way that the stars then reappear on the opposite rim, so there are also now links that replace the previous ones, and also make a past for the future!)

22 *Die Huisgenoot* was drawing on a fairly long-established practice - photographic portraits to honour and commemorate national heroes had already circulated in the Free State after the 1881 Anglo-Boer war, for example printed sheets with numbers of oval-shaped portraits, flags and other patriotic symbols (Cape Archives, AG 206). Similar compilations of oval-framed portraits of the ZAR *volksraad* were printed (ACC197, in box AG372-424). Other archived photographs from the nineteenth century Transvaal are of republican presidents (AG 204, 205). Very likely such commemorative portraits drew inspiration from the royal cartes-de-visites and other photographic memorabilia that circulated in the Colony from at least the 1870s - these included portraits of British, but also of Dutch and French royalty (see Album 4 of the Cloete Family Album, South African Library.) Dutch magazines published from the Colony or the Transvaal during the late 1890s had regular features on "Onze Groote Mannen" (Our Great Men) that included photographic portraits. Printed sheets with portraits dating from the South African War are reproduced in A. Malan, *Oorwinning Sonder Roem, 'n foto album van Herinnerings aan die Anglo-Boere oorlog, 1899-1902* (J.P. van der Walt, 1999). Photographs of Boer generals from this war also survive in (albeit pro-British) albums (Cape Archives, AG280, AG282; 288; 293; 295).

23 Similar pictures also circulated outside the pages of the magazine in the fast-growing number of popular publications constructing a *volksgeskiedenis* (Hofmeyr, 'Building a Nation from Words', 111-121).

24 The versatile Gustav Preller, a key figure in the construction of 'Voortrekker' history, launched a project to record the stories of 'real' Voortrekkers for posterity soon after the South African War. In writing that was first serialised in the Transvaal newspaper *Het Volk* and later published in book form, Preller pictured not only Trekker leaders but also 'ordinary' people as heroes and martyrs of the Trek - and survivors who could tell the tale. (I. Hofmeyr, 'Popularising History: The Case of Gustav Preller', (University of the Witwatersrand, African Studies Seminar, 1987), 26). The extent to which this history was a twentieth century construction is reflected in the fact that the word 'voortrekkers' was itself coined at this time and replaced the older 'emigranten').

25 *Die Huisgenoot*, Aug. 1918; Oct. 1916.

26 *Die Huisgenoot*, Jan. 1918.

En so gebeur dit dikwels dat oue vaders en moeders die eeuwige rus ingaan, sonder dat die teenwoordige geslag iets van hul weet—ja, sonder dat ons dankie gesê t vir die roemrijke Voortrekkers-geskiedenis wat hul vir ons gemak het!



Louis Jacobus Nel.

Op die plaas „Middelburg,” bij Middel-Rust, twee uur van die historiese dorpie Weenen, is op 26 Junie

Figure 4

‘Jean Bossau’²⁷ went on to invoke the words of a religious lament, apparently assuming its familiarity to readers: “Daar is een tijd van komen/Daar is een tijd van gaan/dat hebt ge meer vernomen, maar hebt ge dat verstaan?” (There is a time to be born/There is a time to die/Of this ye have taken heed/But have ye understood?) He warned that the elderly makers of *voortrekker* history often left this life unknown and unthanked by present generations. A photograph then introduced his particular subject, “Louis Jacobus Nel”.

He sits on a wooden garden bench. His eyes, shadowed by deep brows, look straight at the invisible presence of the camera – or perhaps into a middle distance of his own contemplation. A white beard reaches to his chest, a walking stick rests diagonally against one thigh and arm. His stocky body, clad in a dark ensemble, is squarely seated, hands at ease on widely planted knees. This in spite of his position towards the edge of his seat – for a young boy stands on the

27 This was apparently the *nom de plume* of a contributor from “Niekerkfontein, P.K. Mooirivier, Natal”. *Die Huisgenoot* published contributions from dedicated enthusiasts for *volksgeskiedenis* who probably posted their efforts to the magazine but were not directly involved in the publication – the line between ‘ordinary’ readers who occasionally posted a snapshot or a poetic effort to *Die Huisgenoot* and more specialised writers was therefore somewhat blurred.

wooden slats at his side. The boy's expression is equally serious – or perhaps his frown and down-turned mouth edge into unhappiness. His small hand does not touch that of his father who stands behind, another stolid, solemn presence with his wide shoulders, his short dark hair, and his neatly trimmed beard. The former's bare legs and feet speak of childhood near to the old man's propped up *kierie*. Father and son's light-coloured clothes also contrast against the dark old-man's garb of Louis Jacobus Nel. The three figures pose in what seems to be a private garden – shrubbery, a tree, a bare-bricked wall (Fig. 4).

Nel, of course, was a star that had set in the Afrikaner firmament. Below the picture, Bossau informed his readers of Nel's recent death at 91, then detailed "Oom Groot Lewies"'s participation in *Trekker* history, the Boer war (and, for good measure, the 1914 Rebellion). The narrative celebrated him as witness to and participant in central episodes of the nation's past. Bossau invoked well-known verbal tropes of *Trekker* history in a text that also commented on the photograph itself. His use of image and words in order to establish a particular relationship between his audience and 'history' merit closer attention.

The eyes of a reader browsing through *Die Huisgenoot* would probably have moved, or returned, from this photograph to the heading with its announcement of "their" permanent departure. Perhaps she or he would also have paused at the verse lamenting the mysterious, incomprehensible cycle of life and death. Bossau certainly presents the photograph incontrovertibly as *memento mori*.²⁸ In so doing he draws powerfully on deeply rooted familial and personal photographic practice. A number of scholars have considered the ways in which photography has been imbricated in acts of remembrance. As Hirsch writes in her analysis of Barthes' meditation on "Photography" and on the death of his mother in *Camera Lucida*, the "puncture or punctum" of a picture as "time itself" involves desire and loss being read onto its opaque surface. Hirsch reflects on the ways in which Barthes "makes photography – taking the picture, developing it, printing and looking at it, reading it and writing about it – inherently familial and material, akin to the very processes of life and death" and on his definition of loss as "central to the experience of both family and photography".²⁹

In her discussion of family photographs and "memory-work", Kuhn makes a similar point about the camera's purported ability to seize a moment in time: "Why should a moment be recorded, if not for its evanescence? The photograph's seizing of a moment always, even in that very moment, assumes loss. The record looks towards a future time when things will be different, anticipates a need to remember what will soon be past."³⁰ Of course, this ability to 'seize the moment', making manifest that which is lost, hinges on the indexicality of the photographic process. The idea of the photograph as chemical trace, "a physical,

28 My use of this phrase in the context of photography refers to Sontag as quoted in L. Wells, ed., *Photography: A Critical Introduction* (London 2000), 245.

29 Hirsch, *Family Frames*, 5. Hirsch's particular interest is to explore photographs associated with the holocaust - hence her fascination with Barthes' preoccupation with photographs as emanations of a past reality - with familial photography and death. For discussions of photography's early association with death, see also *ibid.*, 19-20; L. Wells, *Photography: A Critical Introduction*, 244-6; West, *Kodak and the Lens of Nostalgia*, 136-142.

30 A. Kuhn, *Family Secrets: Acts of Memory and Imagination* (London, 1995), 42. Kuhn uses the word "memory-work" to refer to a specific, personal practice of photographic interpretation and of generating memories and associations and draws strongly on the 'phototherapy' work of inter alia Jo Spence.

Mevr. Martha Hooldt, die nog flink allerlei werk kan verrichten en nog zonder bril lezen, had vijftien kin-



Vier Zusters.

deren, negen dochters en zes zonen. Zij woont tegenwoordig bij haar tiende kind, Mevr. M. Bekker, Zwakfontein, Dordrecht.

Figure 5

material emanation of a past reality”, would still be “both burdensome and fascinating” to late twentieth century theorists, and the camera’s status as “sworn witness” of the appearance of things” remained largely unquestioned in 1918.³¹ “It is precisely the indexical nature of the photograph” writes Hirsch, “its status as relic, or trace, or fetish - its ‘direct’ connection with the material presence of the photographed person - that at once intensifies its status as harbinger of death and, at the same time and concomitantly, its capacity to signify life...”³²

In the course of his story, Bossau calls on the evidentiary power of the picture as proof that his subject was there in the living flesh, “’n sterk, welgebouwde man” (a strong, well-built man). He ends by explaining that this portrait of “oom Lewies” was his last, taken shortly before his death. “So het hij altijd in die omgang gelijk, - pijp in die onderbaadjiesak, laaste knoop van die onderbaadjie los, en sij kierie” (Thus he always looked in daily life – pipe in his pocket, the

31 Hirsch, *Family Frames*, 6; Wells, *Photography: A Critical Introduction*, 16. Here, Wells quotes the photographer Elizabeth Eastlake in a discussion on nineteenth century ideas of photography that showed the world “without contrivance or prejudice”.

32 Hirsch, *Family Frames*, 19.

last button of his waistcoat undone, and his walking stick). In Bossau's presentation, photography's ever uncanny ability to "summon its content from wherever and whenever to us" was rendered poignant by death's finality.³³ The ancestral visage was flanked by images of childhood and manly prime: one was no more, the others who had lost him would one day become 'past'. While an avuncular nickname emphasised the personal and familial in prose, the picture may well have resembled family portraits in readers' own collections. Bossau's public usage of an image that was probably first intended for 'private', familial use relied on recognition of such origins and that readers would identify with this signifier of personal loss. Removed from the "multiplicity and mutuality of looking, the relational network composing all family photographs"³⁴ the portrait was yet presented so as to intimate a desire for connectedness between the living contemplating the photographic portrait and the one-never-to-return whose eyes almost met theirs. Here, the space of the familial was claimed as *volk* and readers prompted to identify with a collective loss.

The metaphor for the cyclical passing of time - for death and regeneration - that Bossau employed in his opening paragraph ("Thus there are also, now, links that may replace what went before") may serve to illuminate his particular project. Here the photographic artefact with its peculiar status as indexical trace was presented as a tangible link with a shared past. Through this process of *verbeelding* (image-ing/imagining) Bossau presented an absence, a loss: his project was indeed to create a link in the present that made "a past for the future".

An impulse to commemorate the as yet living aged was reason for publishing two portraits respectively of one "Martha Roodt" and of her "Vier zusters" (Four Sisters) in 1917. In both photographs, the subjects pose against similar cloth backdrops probably mounted in the open. Perhaps a traveling photographer had visited their eastern Cape farm. Faint trees or leaves float on the faded surface of the reproduced prints and bare ground touches the hems of the women's long dresses. In the first picture, an elderly, black-clad woman is seated on a straight-backed chair, her arm crooked somewhat stiffly around the young child on her lap. Next to her stands a girl, perhaps a granddaughter. Her posture is equally stiff, her expression almost as serious as that of her grim-faced elder. In the other portrait the latter's four sisters face the camera with attentive eyes and contemplative expressions. The older siblings form a pair in front - their bodies are covered in similar layers of dark cloth, their heads in tight-fitting caps, half-gloves and tapering fingers rest on their laps. Each variously hold a comfort for their advanced years: a book, and (identified as such in the accompanying text) a snuff-box. The bare hand of a younger sister rests on one rounded shoulder. The seemingly more recent fashions of the siblings standing behind accentuate the others' advanced age (Fig. 5).³⁵

33 I am drawing on Kozloff as quoted in Wells (*Photography: A Critical Introduction*). Kozloff suggested that painting alludes to its content whereas the photograph "summons it..." and seems "to emanate directly from the external" (27). As Wells explains, Kozloff discusses the particular power and attraction of photography - unlike (for example) Susan Sontag, he does not himself attribute an inherently referential relationship to photographs and a prior reality.

34 Hirsch, *Family Frames*, 3.

35 *De Huisgenoot*, Nov. 1917.

Why were these portraits deemed interesting to “onze lezers” (our readers)?³⁶ In contrast to Bossau’s writing, the accompanying text did not insert the pictures into a historical narrative. The writer simply suggested that “de gezonde leven op ons wijen open veld” (healthy living on our wide-open *veld*) helped explain the sisters’ great age and liveliness. The chosen title, “Een Sterk Geslacht” (A Strong Generation/Gender) made clear the portraits’ intended meaning – to convey the physical tenacity of the very old, the rooted strength of a vanishing generation of women. Indeed, the photographs were traces of the as yet living and the dead. While Mrs Roodt still did “allerlei werk” (all kinds of work), one of the pictured sisters no longer lived.³⁷ The very action of printing such portraits in *Die Huisgenoot* enfolded them in the front cover’s images of familial togetherness (where *ouma* and *oupa* invariably formed part of the family circle) and the various visual-verbal texts elaborating on the meaning of being ‘Afrikaans’– and asserted the subjects’ place in a shared history. Indeed, on the same page as the portraits, a college student’s poem (one of numerous readers’ verses printed in the magazine) happened to proclaim that whilst wandering in the lonely *veld* and seeing lonely heroes’ graves, a voice reminded him to “vergeet nooit jou ver-lee” (never forget your past). A joke about a farmer’s naive attempt to have the government lay a railway line at his front door reminded readers of rural Afrikaners’ difficulties and desires in a modernising age.

Indeed, nostalgia for a “strong generation” grown old in the *veld*’s wide spaces was probably prompted by Afrikaner nationalism’s broader socio-economic context. At the turn of the century the South African war had destroyed many rural livelihoods and widened the gap between market-oriented farmers, small landowners and *bywoners* (sharecroppers). In the late 1910s, drought was the final blow that pushed many off the land. Many Afrikaner nationalist cultural entrepreneurs also had rural roots but made their living as town or city-based teachers, church ministers and lawyers. Nostalgia for the past extended to articles on ‘Afrikaans traditional’ artefacts that regularly prompted *Huisgenoot* readers to recognise everyday objects as tangible relics of a shared history.³⁸ Perhaps they were meant to ‘read’ items like the snuffbox in the portrait as Afrikaans antique. Certainly, the photographic traces of aged bodies were themselves valued as relics of a shared and venerable, rural past. Photographing assembled ‘generations’ also seems to have been a relatively new practice amongst Afrikaans speakers. It was only in the 1890s that nationalist-inclined publications had printed the first occasional example of familial portraits with captions that made them into a visual genealogy.³⁹

In 1920 the customary portrait on the magazine’s frontispiece itself honoured not a well-known leader but “Sarel Hendrik van Vuuren” and his wife “Johanna Magrieta van Vuuren”, a couple who qualified simply as “Ons Oumense” (our old people).

36 Ibid.

37 *De Huisgenoot*, Oct. 1917.

38 Ibid., July 1916; Aug. 1916; March 1919 (see also Hofmeyr, ‘Building a Nation from Words’).

39 Schoeman provides many examples of familial photographs of Dutch-Afrikaans origin, although none are specifically ‘generational’ portraits. See K. Schoeman, *The Face of the Country: A South African Family Album, 1860-1910* (Cape Town, 1996). Similar portraits were also occasionally published in other Dutch/Dutch-Afrikaans magazines, such as *Ons Tijdschrift*, Vol.2, 1897-8, “5 geslachten op een foto”; *Die Brandwag*, 15 July 1912 and *De Goede Hoop*, July 1914.



SAREL HENDRIK VAN VUUREN
en sij vrouw
JOHANNA MAGRIETA VAN VUUREN.

Figure 6

“[Hulle] sterwe uit, en met hulle heengaan verloor ons baie wat vir ons van onberekenbare waarde is” (They are dying out, and with their passing we lose much of immeasurable value), explained *Die Huisgenoot*. The photograph shows the couple seated on two straight-backed chairs, dressed in customary and old-fashioned black. His walking stick touches, and her wide skirt shadows bare earth. The elegant carving of their wooden chairs against the corrugated iron wall behind them was perhaps meant to suggest the *eenvoud* – the honest simplicity of the *Afrikaanse kultuur* that they personified. It was as *oude voortrekkers* that they qualified to grace the front cover (Fig. 6). That Sarel van Vuuren had few appropriate memories to offer mattered little. His cryptic comment (“Ja, nefie, dit was ‘n mooi geskiedenis gewees, maar dit was ‘n benouwde geskiedenis!’/ yes, nephew, it was a good history, but frightening!) signalled the biographer’s move into the bloody *Trek* massacre script via speculation on the memories of barbaric cruelties motivating this remark.⁴⁰ Rugg has pointed to the early “urge to imagine photography as memory and vice versa” (she cites its description in 1858 as “the mirror with a memory”) and the extent to which the “photographic era” has involved a blurring of the line

⁴⁰ *Die Huisgenoot*, Jan.1920.

between memory and photograph.⁴¹ In *Die Huisgenoot* the association of photographic image and purported *historic* memory participated in an intricate web of ‘memorising’⁴² and memorialising. Indeed, as nationalist artefact the power that this picture drew from its basis in familial photography was the technology’s status as mnemonic anchor to the frailty of human memory.⁴³ From the early years of ‘Voortrekker’ history’s construction, when oral history projects took place even as popular narratives were published and rendered into (frequently reproduced) paintings, old people had been prompted to tell the violent tales of trek massacres and battles as their own (and set their recollections of day-to-day existence within the larger drama of the *Trek*).⁴⁴ Here, these visceral, visual tropes were assumed to be Van Vuuren’s recollection as witnesses to history. The photograph - ‘memorising’ artefact, witness to their physical presence and reminder of time’s passing - urged the conservation of such memories.

Portraits of aged ‘voortrekkers’ also drew some of their meaning and power from relative proximity to photographs of ‘Trekker’ pageantry. Images taken at Dingaan’s Day commemorations often showed men and women – particularly young women – in dress popularised as typical of the ‘Trekker’ era. By the late 1910s numbers of people were annually participating in such costumed demonstrations of allegiance to the past. Snapshots posted to *Die Huisgenoot* – of a young woman who had won a small town “Voortrekker” dress competition, of small children in a miniature oxwagon - suggest the blending of familial memory-making and identification with the collectivity of *volk*.⁴⁵ Such images of youth performing a shared historical legacy subtly lent poignancy and authority to portraits of (to use Bossau’s metaphor) stars nearing life’s “far horizon” who were *of* history. As the biography accompanying the Van Vuurens’ portrait also emphasised, the old embodied *herinnering* (remembrance).

Portraits of the historic aged also appeared together with another genre of commemorative image scattered about *Die Huisgenoot*’s pages. When first announcing the amateur photography competition, editors had invited aspirant photographers not only to frame “tableaus of nature” but also to aim their lenses at “historic buildings and monuments”. Readers responded well to this oft-repeated suggestion which was reinforced by the magazine’s own frequent publication of examples. Most pictures were of memorials to Boer victims of the South African war’s concentration camps – *vrouwenmonumenten* (women’s monuments) built across the country in the context of Afrikaner nationalist mobilisation.⁴⁶ If all pho-

41 L.H. Rugg, *Picturing Ourselves: Photography and Autobiography* (Chicago, 1997), 23.

42 Kuhn, *Family Secrets*, 13. Kuhn suggests that our experience of “memories as peculiarly our own sets up a tension between the ‘personal’ moment of memory” and “the social moment of its making” or “memorising”.

43 In *Family Secrets*, Kuhn refers to the poignancy that family photographs often hold even for outsiders. It is in this respect that the relational network of looking suggested by Bossau’s photograph retains muted power. The small boy’s unhappy expression, the sight of bodies not quite touching, could mark the photograph’s personal meanings. They remain out of reach for viewers of this public print, severed from the familial interpretative context and the picture as “site of conflicting memories” - yet heighten the picture’s poignancy and familiarity as personal memento. See Kuhn for an interesting comparative context. She argues that “in all memory texts, personal and collective remembering emerge again and again as continuous with one another”. Her “memory-work” with a childhood photograph of herself dressed in a ‘coronation’ frock and her analysis of royal portraits occasioned by Queen Elizabeth’s coronation explore this idea.

44 See Hofmeyr, ‘Building a Nation from Words’; idem., ‘Popularising history: the case of Gustav Preller’.

45 *Die Huisgenoot*, June 1918; also Feb. 1918.

46 For example, “Monument vir die Vijf Burgers gesnuwel met die Jameson inval...”, *Die Huisgenoot*, Nov. 1918; “Onthulling van die Vrouemonument op Potchefstroom”, Jan. 1919; “Onthulling, Vrouemonument, Potchefstroom...”, March 1919; “Ds A.J. Louw by die Steenhoop, Bloedrivier, Dingaansfees 1920”, Feb. 1921.

tographs are *memento mori*, these pictures with their tight focus on memorial structures (usually no living person was included in the frame) constituted a mournful double inscription of loss. Moreover, even as they reminded visitors of the absent beloved, the stone monuments were meant to assert the permanence, at least, of collective commitment to their memory. Sending such snapshot *uit-beeldings** of history to *Die Huisgenoot* were also acts of public, politicised commitment to remembrance.⁴⁷ The pictures re-traced the monuments' memorialising function – and obituary portraits such as that of Nel also functioned as photographic cenotaphs. Like those photographs of stone structures (and like the stones themselves), the portraits were invested with belief that “the memory of the lost body finds expression in the marker...”⁴⁸ Moreover, both types of picture served to prompt *herinnering* that included people outside of the viewer's personal past.⁴⁹

In the early years of the *Fotografie wedstrijd*, 'historic' photographs contributed by readers were almost exclusively of monuments. But by the early 1920s, readers' photographic contributions also included numbers of aged individuals. Some amateur portraitists' subjects were explicitly named as participants in history. Photographers who snapped pictures of the elderly at Dingaan's Day celebrations and posted annotated images to *Die Huisgenoot* must themselves have identified their subjects with 'Trekker' history – although the magazine's staff could also have added captions such as “Twee oude voortrekkers” (Two old voortrekkers).⁵⁰ Many photographs were certainly of people who qualified for public exhibition simply because of age. J.D. Balt's photo of “Vijf Geslagte” (Five Generations) living on the farm “Bosman, Magaliesberg” showed members of the Grobler family, aged 3 to 85 – *Die Huisgenoot*'s readers were now submitting 'generational' portraits to the *Fotografie Wedstrijd*.⁵¹

The very act of sending a photograph of an elderly person or a visual 'geneological' record to *Die Huisgenoot* suggest a new consciousness of the public import of such portraits – that they were suitable for publication in the magazine's 'Afrikaans' textual spaces.⁵² Once placed within columns of print

* 'Uitbeelding' means *envisioning* but my wordplay here includes *out-visioning* – moreover, 'beeld' means 'image' as well as 'sculpture'.

47 Such photographs were certainly not pioneered at this time. For example, the album “Boer War Views, 1899-1902” has one of a gravestone with the small, inserted head-and-shoulders portrait of a British soldier (Cape Archives, Jeffreys Collection 298).

48 Rugg, *Picturing Ourselves*, 26.

49 See also Hirsch's interesting discussion of the relationship between photography, memory and mourning and of holocaust photographs as “sites of memory” (*Family Frames*, 19-23).

50 *Die Huisgenoot*, April 1918, July 1920.

51 *Ibid.*, March 1919.

52 Efforts beyond those of *Die Huisgenoot* – and involving the work of professional photographers – also stimulated such enthusiasms. A man who was featured on the magazine's frontispiece celebrated his century together with a hundred guests – moreover, strangers and relatives was reported to have ordered a large number of portraits (*Ibid.*, March 1920). A feature (13 March 1925) shows that historic old age was itself a reason for popular historical performance. “Ouma Linde”, whose fame as the widow of *Trekker* Andries Pretorius merited a birthday telegram from the Prime Minister, is pictured in a formal portrait but also shown seated amongst some of the 2000 guests at her open-air hundredth birthday celebration. Other photographs show the novelty of numerous motorcars parked in the *veld*. These pictures are framed in the new mode (introduced since 1923/4) of locally produced “current events” photography – at a time when the magazine also began to publish many syndicated photographs from overseas agencies. (Amateur photographers were now urged to take not only “historic” but also “aktuele” (current) pictures.) This revision of *Die Huisgenoot* followed international trends and suggests an interesting comparative context. In 1927 Siegfried Kracauer wrote of contemporary illustrated magazines that their “floods of photographs... sweep away the dam of memory”. (S. Kracauer, ‘Photography’ (transl.) *Critical Inquiry* 19, 1993). In *Die Huisgenoot*, amateur photographers' work – and their many photographs of the old – now appeared alongside the newly dominant genre of ‘news’ – particularly as the latter category also involved recording performances of ‘history’, complex juxtapositions between the ‘modern’ and ‘archaic’ (see below) resulted.



Figure 7

that often seemed to bear no direct relation to them, such images gathered meaning from adjacent pictures and words. Farmer's wife and great grandmother Mrs Jacob Venter's portrait (Fig.7) was surrounded by reports detailing women's philanthropic activity. Opposite the page, the solid weight of her dark-clad body was also balanced by (and gathered meaning from) a reader's snapshot of the small-town inauguration of a monument.⁵³ The Grobler family portrait appeared together with *kiekies* of excursions to waterfalls and of yet another *Vrouwenmonument* inauguration. Surrounding text described a traditional Cape Dutch kitchen.⁵⁴ Thus juxtaposed, amateur photographs of assembled family or of elderly persons also became images of 'Afrikaans' bodies. Within the general emphasis on artefacts valued as links to an Afrikaner past, this was an aesthetic of the historic aged. These were pictures of 'archaic' bodies, memorial portraits that portrayed 'memory'

53 *Die Huisgenoot*, June 1921.
 54 *Ibid.*, March 1919.

embodied in living flesh.⁵⁵ These were familial, soon-to-be ancestral faces increasingly familiar to readers learning about (and helping to create) their collective past.

b) 'Historical' photographs of poorer whites

In the same edition of *Die Huisgenoot* that printed yet another reader's portrait of "Vier Geslagte" (Four Generations), the annual editorial about *Dingaandag* invoked the *Voortrek* to remind readers of a pressing problem: poverty amongst Afrikaans 'whites'.⁵⁶ Even as hordes of savages had threatened to overwhelm the *voortrekkers* (so explained the editors), a vast sea of blackness threatened to swallow growing numbers of impoverished and inadequately employed *volksgenote*. Programmes that dealt with this growing crisis had to build Afrikaner history and culture.⁵⁷

From 1916 Afrikaans women's philanthropic societies had also used *Die Huisgenoot* to communicate with members and the wider public on designated pages. Monthly reports chronicled ethnically and racially specific social welfare practices. Letters warned against class division amongst Afrikaners. Failure to recognize poor whites as of "eigen blood" (sharing the same blood) and their treatment as a lower class would erode difference between black and white.⁵⁸ On one such page in 1916, together with letters and reports detailing efforts to help "onze armen" (our poor), a portrait showed some twenty elderly men and women. The caption explained that these were residents of an old age home and asked for contributions to its upkeep. This was only one of many photographs exhibiting the recipients of (and deserving candidates for more) racialised charity.⁵⁹

In some cases, *volksliefdadigheid** met *volksgeskiedenis*. It was in the context of concern about increasing Afrikaner poverty that the portrait of Mr and Mrs Byneveld described in the introduction to this paper was published (Fig. 3).⁶⁰ But the amateur historian who sent this portrait to *Die Huisgenoot* on behalf of a women's society in 1921 did not only write of poverty. He also emphasised the couple's 'voortrekker' credentials. That this strategy should have been followed to convince readers to claim the couple as their own is not surprising. After all, numbers of amateur photographers were now sending the magazine pictures of

55 I am here drawing on Hayes, who discusses "the fabrication of historical memory" with regards to the ethnographic photography of Native Commissioner 'Cocky' Hahn and refers to Walter Benjamin's "argument about the uses of the archaic in the construction of modernity" (P. Hayes, 'Northern Exposures: The Photography of C.H.L. Hahn, Native Commissioner of Ovamboland, 1915-1946' in W. Hartmann et al (eds.), *The Colonising Camera. Photographs in the Making of Namibian History* (Cape Town, 1998)).

56 Dingaan's Day, or 'Geloftedag' (the Day of the Vow), was celebrated on December 16 and was a focal point of nationalist mobilisation and the popularisation of Trekker history.

57 Ibid., Nov. 1919.

58 Ibid., Aug. 1918. Also June 1923.

59 Opposite this page, for example, youth complements age – young children from the "Kinderhaven" (Child Haven) in Johannesburg are shown being fed by nurses. A steady selection of photographs showing pupils of industrial and house-keeping schools or children from orphanages appeared in *Die Huisgenoot*. The meanings constructed in such images, and their interplay with other genres of photographs in the magazine are crucial for a broader consideration of how poorer whites were pictured and indeed how 'race' was visualised.

* People's philanthropy, or welfare efforts by and for members of the volk.

60 *Die Huisgenoot*, May 1921.

sien; en die vijf stekke op die regterarm is nog almaal sigbaar. Daar is 'n paar wonde aan die liggaam, en



MEVR. KLASINA, MARIA JOHANNA VAN DALE (gebore le Roux)
Foto deur] gebore 6 Julie, 1830. [Eric Stockenström.

die ander in die regterbeen. Die ou heldin het mij die eer gegee om haar af te neem; en op haar portret sal

Figure 8

aged individuals. But in 1916, when articles in the newly established magazine were first emphasising the importance of the elderly as links to a shared past, popular historian Erik Stockenström already published “Die Tragiese Loopbaan van ‘n Voortrekkersvrou” (The Tragic Career of a Voortrekker woman), complemented by his picture of “Mevr. Klasina Maria Johanna van Dale”.⁶¹ The portrait shows a small, elderly, bareheaded woman in a simple dress seated in an empty room – at least, no decoration or other furniture is visible within the frame. Her body leans towards the viewer over the open book upon her lap, her shadowed eyes are sharply on the camera (Fig. 8).⁶²

A month later, Stockenström published another portrait of an “historiese dame” (historical lady). “Mevr. Bezuidenhout” seems to regard the camera somberly, with a bodily stillness different from Van Dalen’s latent energy (Fig. 9). The corrugated iron wall of (the story made this clear) her “armsalige” (poverty-stricken, pitiful) shack frames her figure. Perhaps it is the grey, subtly monoto-

61 Stockenström would publish *Die Boervrouw: Moeder van haar Volk* (The Boerwoman/wife: Mother of her Nation) in 1921.

62 *Die Huisgenoot*, Aug. 1916.



Figure 9

nous background that, together with black fabric enveloping the old woman's entire body except her face and hands that contribute to a seeming atmosphere of stillness and sadness. The image of her dressed in dark Sunday best, hands uncertainly folded on her lap, form an implicit contrast to an obituary on the opposite page with its oval-frame portrait of Mrs General Joubert, another, but famous, "sterke voortrekkersvrouw" (strong voortrekker woman).⁶³

Stockenstrom was intent upon establishing his subjects' Afrikaner credentials through historical narrative. His detailed account of an "Afrikaanse burger" (Afrikaans citizen) and his family's strenuous defense "tot die bitter einde teen Hottentotse troepe" (to the bitter end against Hottentot soldiers) was followed by the convoluted explanation that Stockenstrom's needy subject was related to survivors of this massacre. Placed within the national past in visceral language reminiscent of 'Trekker' memories of violence (although the episode referred to was that of the 1814 Slagtersnek rebellion),⁶⁴ Mrs Bezuidenhout merited aid from fellow Afrikaners. In Stockenstrom's purportedly verbatim chronicle, massacres by

⁶³ Ibid., Sept. 1916.

⁶⁴ Stockenstrom was drawing on an already well-established mythology around this event as discussed below.

Zulu warriors had also left Van Dalen bereft of her father, with multiple assegai wounds and a pious, fatally ill mother. This tale blended into memories of her subsequent itinerant and impoverished existence (“...ik moes maar rondswerwe en bij ander mense woon...”/I had to move from place to place, living with other people...). She eked out an existence on salt pans and diamond fields until, old, she moved to dismal city lodgings where her crippled son begged for their survival. As Stockenstrom remarked, “’n klein kamertjie in ‘n akelige ou gebou in Johannesburg – siedaar die woning van die historiese persoon!” (a tiny room in an awful building in Johannesburg – behold the dwelling of this historical person!)

In *Die Huisgenoot*’s imagewor(l)d, portraits were sometimes explicitly referred to as imbued with evidence of the innate qualities of character. Commenting on a photograph probably contributed by a reader, *Die Huisgenoot*’s editors had emphasised how General De Wet’s features were inscribed with his ability to lead: “Zoals men opmerkt is’t haar van de oude boere-generaal grijzer geworden, doch ligt nog steeds diezelfde vastberaden trek op zijn gezicht, die de man van moed en karakter kenmerkt” (one will notice that although the venerable Boer general has become more grey, yet his face still has that determined look that marks a man of courage and character).⁶⁵ But visual evidence of a nobility honed by participation in violent, tragic events was particularly evoked by writer-photographers in order to claim elderly, impoverished people as members of the *volk*. If history was inscribed upon her body (“die vijf steke op die regterarm is nog almal sigbaar”/the five cuts on her arm are all still visible), Van Dalen’s photograph was record of heroic *voortrekker* identity:

Die ou heldin het mij die eer gegee om haar af te neem; en op haar portret sal die lesers dadelik bespeur, dat daar iets trefvends, iets edels is in die gesig van die sesentagjarige voortrekkersvrou – ‘n dogter van Suid-Afrika...⁶⁶
(The old heroine did me the honour of allowing me to take her picture; and readers will immediately notice from her portrait something striking, something noble about the face of this eighty-six year old voortrekker woman – a daughter of South Africa...)

The object in Mrs van Dalen’s hands was (as Stockenstrom made sure to mention) her hymnbook – more evidence that she refused to forsake her piety even in the midst of poverty.

Stockenstrom also emphasised that Mrs Bezuidenhout’s facial features told of the “onveinsde deugde, hoffelikheid en gasvrijheid van die Afrikaanse voorgeslag” (deep honour, courtesy and hospitality of previous Afrikaans generations). In this respect, he was both depending on the deeply held notion of the camera as a machine that offered a “mechanically transcribed truth” and appealing to long popular beliefs that photographic portraits could reflect an individ-

⁶⁵ *De Huisgenoot*, June 1916.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

ual's personality and character, indeed his or her moral qualities.⁶⁷ During the nineteenth century, English and European middle classes had embraced the camera as a visual technology of the self – with photographic portraits elaborately coded to “symbolically evoke the bourgeois cultural ideal”. As Lalvani explains, the “body was raised to the visibility of a text, its signs deciphered to disclose the moral qualities residing therein... in bourgeois portraiture, it (was) especially the arrangements of heads, shoulders, and hands – ‘as if those parts of our body were our truth’ that g(a)ve evidence of the discursive power of physiognomy”. Indeed, if the bodies portrayed were crucially gendered, the discourses of physiognomy also functioned as class signifiers. “(C)ulturally sophisticated” poses reminiscent of an earlier, aristocratic portraiture were read as distinct from the “blunt frontality with which the criminal, the insane, the poor... and the colonial subject” were “forced to confront the camera’s gaze” in an age when the camera also became a pervasive tool of control and surveillance.⁶⁸

Even a cursory glance through albums in South African colonial archives suggests a more complex and diverse codification – at the very least, that nineteenth century and early twentieth century settler photographs from a Dutch-Afrikaans cultural context had often failed to conform to the clear dichotomies suggested by Lalvani. Some studio photographers in the larger towns and cities had certainly been careful to couch subjects in the sideways turn of the body derived from “the cultivated asymmetries of aristocratic posture” characteristic of middle-class portraiture in Britain.⁶⁹ However, many portraits show men and women facing the camera squarely. Judging by the outdoors setting of some examples, the latter style may have been more typical of farming families using the services of traveling photographers.⁷⁰ Even so, commissioned portraits often made use of the requisite studio props. In the mid-1910s, the empty spaces behind Van Dalen, and the monotonous wall framing Bezuidenhout may have been meant to contrast to such carefully arranged spaces – Bezuidenhout’s hands may also have spoken to viewers of vulnerability and need.

Over the next few years occasional pictures of *historiese persone* contributed by philanthropic organisations or by individual readers presented Afrikaners whose impoverished circumstances were noted with regret or with requests for assistance. It is the physical presence of these men and women that holds my eye, demanding interpretation. The deferential, even submissive postures of these “aristocrats of the Voortrek” strain against the surrounding prose accounts of participation in a heroic past. For example, Mrs Byneveld was pictured twice in a story that detailed her poverty, her calm hospitality, “interrezante” (interesting) tales about the trek and ended with an appeal for funds. She first appears in chiaroscuro, her face emerging from deep shadow. Doleful and dramatic, this picture differs to some extent from most portraits of elderly people – studios were usually well lighted, and amateurs preferred to take their pictures in strong

67 Tagg, *The Burden of Representation*, 40; Lalvani, *Photography, Vision and the Production of Modern Bodies*, 48.

68 Lalvani, *Photography, Vision*, 66.

69 Tagg, *The Burden of Representation*, 35.

70 For examples, see the as yet uncatalogued ‘Hopkins’ collection of cabinet photographs in the South African Library; also Schoeman, *The Face of the Country*.



Mnr. J. A. C. Weidemann, Aberdeen.
 Hy het op 13 Jan. ll. sy vyf-en-neentigste verjaardag
 gevier, en is nog taamlik sterk.
 (Foto A. Weidemann, Aberfeldy, O.V.S.)

Figure 10

natural light. Even in *Die Huisgenoot*'s small print, the portrait – with its lack of detail and a scarcely visible face - approaches an iconic quality, emphasised by the caption (“Ou Moeder Byneveld”/Old mother Byneveld) as if extreme old age, the half-light between life and death – maternal ancestry itself - has been recorded.⁷¹ In the second picture, Mr Byneveld and his almost-widowed wife stand and sit in a proximity that resembles many middle-class portraits of married couples. But his bared head, the hand-held hat, his awkwardly positioned feet, the way she holds her folded hands high in front of her chest suggest a certain deference, perhaps even discomfort (Fig. 3).

How would readers of *Die Huisgenoot* have understood these images? By the early twentieth century and particularly with the advent of Kodak portrai-

71 See Wells, *Photography: A Critical Introduction* for an analysis of Dorothea Lange's 'Migrant Mother' photograph. Wells suggests that it could achieve “iconic status” as “a universal symbol of motherhood, poverty and survival” because Lange chose a frame that excluded detail. Compared to Byneveld's picture, the studio portrait of “Ouma Linde” (see footnote above) is even more explicitly in an iconic mode. Her entire body (and head) is shown shrouded in black - only her lined face and hands (holding what is surely meant to be recognised as the family bible) are visible against this darkness. The background has been painted out to form a softly textured, deeply shadowed space in a style reminiscent of the work of seventeenth century Dutch painters. Given the public context of Linde's birthday celebrations, this is almost certainly a portrait that would have been printed for a popular audience.

ture, middle-class codes of ‘pose and posture’ that signalled individual worth and propertied selves may have evolved significantly from such nineteenth century conventions as had been encouraged by colonial studio and traveling photographers. Frontispiece portraits such as that of *Trek* leader Piet Retief’s granddaughter showed her leaning against a table, hands and shoulders arranged in a conventionalised display of class confidence.⁷² But the corrugated iron ‘backdrop’ of the frontispiece portrait of “Our Old People” (Fig. 6) had signalled the wider inclusiveness that Afrikaner nationalism’s performances of history sought, and most Kodak portraits dispensed with the studio props symbolic of middle-class status. The snapshot of Mrs Venter echoed an older style of portraiture in the still formality and symmetry of her pose (perhaps, amongst fast-proliferating informal *kiekies*, such poses were themselves beginning to be recognised as part of an aesthetic that honoured ‘age’ and ‘memory’). But she had her picture taken in strong sunlight wearing a dark dress, her hands were at rest upon an apron, her chair positioned on bare earth or cement and against a bare brick wall (Fig.7).

This was also a genre of photography within which one A.Weideman sent *Die Huisgenoot* a picture of his father or grandfather seated in (seemingly) the corner of a bare backyard, wearing an ill-fitting jacket and holding a walking stick so positioned that it merges with the broomstick propped against a wall (Fig.10).⁷³ Even so, old Mr Weideman wore his hat on his head and Mrs Venter faced the camera squarely - the postures of physical deference in the portraits of most needy ‘voortrekkers’ are striking. (Van Dalen’s portrait is an interesting exception to this pattern – if she was a subject presenting herself for help, hers was not quite a bodily posture signalling humble respect for her betters.) Perhaps Bezuidenhout and the Bynevelds were simply told to pose by well-off philanthropists, hence the atmosphere of deference. But all look straight into the lens of the camera – and towards an imagined audience of benefactors? Perhaps these were all, with different degrees of assent or submission, performative collaborations seeking to express both respectability and need within conventions that would ‘speak to’ Afrikaners of a passing era’s paternalist relations between *bywoner* and *boer*.

Where, however, was whiteness in these pictures? The terms of Afrikaner nationalist philanthropy were clear – only *blanken* (and mostly Afrikaans speakers) qualified. From the perspective of charitable nationalist sponsors, portraits of the deserving poor therefore had to picture individuals recognised as such. But while the problems posed by *arme blanken* were often discussed in *Die Huisgenoot*, impecunious individuals whose photographs were printed in the magazine were never named as *blank*. Instead, they were somehow included in that blank, bland category of racialised self-identification that also encompassed the numerous other photographs of properly ‘Afrikaans’ persons in *Die Huisgenoot*. Perhaps no special markers of whiteness were needed for portraits in which race was self-evident. Were these photographs simply a visual complement to contemporary warnings that class should not make for distance

72 However, she does not position her hands so as to hide their size – in this respect, her portrait contrasts to those of many middle-class women (but may well resemble many older Dutch-Afrikaans portraits). Thanks to Patricia Hayes for pointing out this detail.

73 *Die Huisgenoot*, July 1921.

and difference amongst Afrikaners? Still, this was a period in which poverty was increasingly associated with possibilities for *bloedvermenging* (miscegenation) and when charitable nationalist societies were intent on ‘rescuing’ *arme blanken* from proximity to “gekleurde” (coloured) neighbours.⁷⁴

Whether or not the whiteness of the poor needed special emphasis, a closer look at the narrative that anchored many ‘historical’ portraits reveals one important marker that structured the general expanse of *blank*. In the popular literature of the 1910s, the *Trek*’s drama revolved around struggles against ‘die kaffers’ (the caffirs). Claiming people as ‘voortrekker’ implicitly identified them as other-than-black: as white. Indeed, an explanation of how visual markers of whiteness were established also requires discussion of how racialised ‘others’ were framed, and of ‘their’ place in *Die Huisgenoot*’s popular historical photography.

c) **Black *verbeeld*: race, racism and the meaning of *armblank* in the image-wo(r)ld of Afrikaner nationalism**

I began this paper with a description of a portrait from *Die Huisgenoot*’s competition pages memorable because it represents a contradictory overlap of different photographic genres. Miss Buyske’s photograph is interesting for the apparently respectful framing of its subjects (Fig.1). Here, an African family is seated on chairs against a somehow eerie reverse imitation, as ‘real’ farmscape echoes the artificial backdrop of a painted landscape favoured in many contemporary studio photographs in which props also functioned to affirm, celebrate (or express aspirations towards) middle-class status. The strangeness of the figures in the landscape also relates to a certain resemblance to western religious paintings of the holy family. That this is a deliberate reference is certainly suggested by *Die Huisgenoot*’s comments about the image:

De foto vant’t Albinokafferkind is genomen op de plaats van de heer Hendrik Muller te Cvferfontein (sic). De ouders zijn heel trots op hun blank kind en hun uitleg is, dat God hun’t blanke kind gaf en dat’t zwarte hun eigen kind is.

(The photograph of the Albino-kaffir-child was taken on the farm of Mr Hendrik Muller of Cverfontein (sic). The parents are quite proud of their white child and they explain that God gave them their white child while the black one is their own.)

The photographer’s choice of subject clearly relates to a fairly common urge on the part of ‘white’ South African photographers to record ‘freaks of nature’, in this case the impossibility of whiteness in a “kafferkind”. Her work gestures

74 For example, Rompel-Koopman’s book *Verloren en Herwonnen Levens* (Lives lost and won), published in 1917, told the sad tale of an Afrikaner woman found living with an Indian shopkeeper. For Afrikaans women’s organisations’ efforts to extract ‘white’ Afrikaans-speakers from “gemengde” (racially mixed) neighbourhoods, see Du Toit, ‘Women, Welfare and the Nurturing of Afrikaner Nationalism’.

towards a validation of this black family by positioning them within the ‘honorific’ conventions of middle-class portraiture whilst translating their personal narrative (that theirs is a god-given child) into visual form (a native nativity).⁷⁵ Perhaps (if we push a little at the limits of historical probability) a photographic print was also given to the family. It is certainly not hard to imagine that this picture, with its definite resemblance to portraits from “The Black Photo Album”, ca. 1900, collected by South African photographer Mofokeng, could have been a valued possession. For Mofokeng, such photographs are “(i)mages of people in a state of contemplation, self-dramatisation – or – maybe – at a moment of conflict – confrontation”.⁷⁶ But the portraits he presents are carefully annotated with information provided by their owners who treasure these as *seriti/is’thunzi* (shades of the past).⁷⁷ Mofokeng records names and histories of personal achievements, particularly of mission-related pasts and prosperous farming histories.

By contrast, in Buyske and *Die Huisgenoot*’s reproduction and contextualisation of a ‘black family’, the figures are rendered anonymous, indeed are heavily racialised. The symmetry of light and dark (cloth against skin) in the picture itself structured and contained the ambiguity of ‘colour’ that was its *raison d’être*. An example of the endless innovation displayed by Afrikaner nationalists for neologisms involving ‘kaffer’ (“Albinokafferkind”) further anchored its meaning.⁷⁸ The picture’s juxtaposition to other visions of landscaped whiteness and colonial triumph – a tranquil Bloemfontein park with pristine swans, a tall rock formation with a couple striking a leisurely pose at the highest point - also contribute to this anchoring. The private meanings that those photographed could have made with Buyske’s composition of figures and farmscape also differ crucially from the possibilities for snapshots from my own family album. My great grandparents’ picture (Fig. 2) speaks to their descendants of pride in cultivated land. This man’s bare feet, angled uncertainly towards the edge of the frame, provides a counterpoint to his companion’s meticulous clothing and suggests vulnerable limits to selfpresentation. Skin touches grass and earth ... which of course, was legislated white in the year of 1917, four years after the Union of South Africa passed the Natives’ Land Act.

75 An interesting comparative perspective that also evokes many ‘familial’ photographs from the South African context is provided by Hirsch in her introduction to *The Familial Gaze* (Hanover, 1999) where she discusses contributions to this volume “focusing on formal portraits of nursemaids, nannies, servants or slave women (mostly black) holding white infant children on their laps” (p.xiv). In the same volume Laura Wexler discusses an image of a slave, or recently freed servant woman photographed holding her employer/owner’s baby. This is an image relating “to a long symbolic tradition, that of the Madonna and Child” but that are “weirdly skewed rendition(s) of the Christian story”: “Motherhood may be what the genre marks as woman’s great accomplishment, but sitting for the camera as the white woman sat, in the pose that the white woman held, holding, in fact, the white woman’s baby, within the iconographical space and actual society that claimed for white women exclusive right to occupancy, the slave or servant brings into existence not her own family’s precious keepsake, but a monument of doubleness and double entendre... particularly poignant in response to the tradition invoked” (255-6).

76 S. Mofokeng, ‘The Black Photo Album’ in *Anthology of African and Indian Ocean Photography* (Paris, 1999), 70.

77 Mofokeng actually uses these words when discussing his own relationship to the photographs he collected. One title he has given to the series of photographs is “Chasing Shadows”. As he explains, the words *seriti* and *is’thunzi* are not really equivalents for the English ‘shadow’: “in African languages its meaning is the exact opposite... this word cannot be easily be given a single meaning. In everyday use it can mean equally aura, presence, dignity, confidence, strength, spirit, essence, prestige or wellbeing. It can also express the experience of being loved or feared. A person’s *seriti/is’thunzi* can be positive or negative and exert a powerful influence...” (Mofokeng, ‘The Black Photo Album’, 72).

78 As with other Germanic languages, Afrikaans lends itself to the construction of new word combinations – the obsessive combination of ‘kaffer’ with a variety of nouns fill three closely printed pages of the *Woordeboek van die Afrikaanse Taal* (Dictionary of the Afrikaans Language) and suggests the extent to which many ‘white’ Afrikaans speakers participated in constructing a minutely racialised worldview.



'n Halfbeskaafde Basoetoe-Bruilof.

(Van 'n foto deur H. D. Viljoen, Kaallaagte.)

No. 3 en 4 is Laer en sij bruid. Laer het dié naam gekrij omdat hij gebore is in 1899, toe sij vader as agterrijer van mnr. Viljoen saam op kommando was. Hij is nou al sewe jaar die werf-Kaffer van mnr. Viljoen. Die trouwpartij is opgemaak met kraalornamente, in allerlei patrone op eg Kaffer-manier vervaardig.

Figure 11

If this was a variation on the theme of *plaas* in emergent 'Afrikaans' photography, another portrait from 1919 visualised propertied space and black subjectivity in even more circumscribed fashion (Fig.11). The bridal pair and their two companions posing in this picture stand in front of a wall and stiffly face the camera. It is impossible to tell whether they felt themselves put on display or participated freely in this photographic moment. Their expressions are solemn and finery has certainly been assembled with care - all are richly dressed in beadwork and embroidered clothes and hold a number of objects (umbrellas, walking sticks, cloth or *karos*, an enamel container) in their hands. The picture is set amongst several poems – in one, Louis Leipoldt speaks of limits to creative thinking: “As ek van verbeelding praat/Dan glo maar ek preek van ‘n paradijs/Waarheen net ‘n engel te perd kan reis...” (When I speak of imagination, then believe that I preach of a paradise/to which only an angel on horseback can ride...).⁷⁹ H.D. Viljoen from the appropriately named Kaallaagte* and credit-

⁷⁹ *Die Huisgenoot*, Aug. 1919.

* The farm's name refers, approximately, to a bare or naked (in the sense of open and unsheltered) plain.

ed with taking the portrait provided this information about his subjects:

No. 3 en 4 is Laer en sij bruid. Laer het die naam gekrij omdat hij gebore is toe sij vader as agterrijer van mnr. Viljoen saam op kommando was. Hij is nou al sewe jaar die werf-Kaffer van mnr. Viljoen. Die trouwpartij is opgemaak met kraalornament, in allerlei patrone op eg kaffer-manier vervaardig.⁸⁰ (No. 3 and 4 are Lager and his bride. Lager was thus named because he was born when his father accompanied Mr Viljoen on commando as his agterrijer. He has already been Mr Viljoen's yard-caffir for seven years. The wedding party wears decorative beadwork, made in a variety of patterns in the authentic caffir manner.)

The photographer's verbalised *ver-beelding*⁸¹ thus narrowed the meaning he attributed to this picture to the unambiguous confines of a racist world of propertyed Boer masters and black servants, framing his subjects firmly as attractively exotic but well-tamed and loyal blacks. In *Die Huisgenoot's* placing, the portrait (captioned "'n Halfbeskaafde Basoetoe-Bruilof" /A Half Civilized Basotho Wedding) is also implicitly contrasted with sentimental *kiekies* of civilised, Afrikaans domesticity.⁸²

Viljoen was bringing at least two recognisable strands of a racialising visual discourse to bear on the domestic space of his own *agterplaas* (backyard) - a discourse through which the meaning of 'native' (more accurately, 'kaffer') was being refined. The first strand had strong roots in nineteenth century colonial photography - but the photographs of 'native life' that numbers of Afrikaans speakers now took were probably most directly influenced by the visual possibilities suggested by commercial postcards.⁸³ From the start *Die Huisgenoot*, which published occasional articles on *ekspedities* to exotic locations, was enthusiastic about such efforts.⁸⁴ On one page which celebrated, variously, a hunter in east Africa posed triumphantly on top of his dead elephant, the receding lines of an East London railway bridge and a photograph of women in Nyasaland preparing maize meal, *Die Huisgenoot* singled out the latter effort to record 'native' life for special praise. "Zo 'n foto te maken, vooral wanneer men op reis is, geeft later een bron van genot..." (to take such a picture, especially when traveling, later provides much pleasure....)⁸⁵ In the late

80 *Die Huisgenoot*, Aug. 1919.

81 See my discussion of the title of this paper for an explanation of this word play.

82 Ibid. Miss C. Euvrard from "Noord-Melsetter, Suid-Rhodesie" contributed her snapshot of a pet duiker and its adoptive human family. The even more sentimental portrait of 'Klein Jantjie en die Suikerpot (Little Jan and the Sugar Pot) also appeared.

83 As long ago as the 1850s, studio photographers in southern Africa had marketed portraits of native subjects for inclusion in private albums. Later, sets of stereoscopic cards had continued this tradition and from the early 1900s, hefty books such as *The Essential Kafir* (1904) were published by the likes of Dudley Kidd. See also Geary, 'Different Visions? Postcards from Africa by European and African Photographers and Sponsors' in C. M. Geary and V-L Webb (eds.), *Delivering Views: Distant Cultures in Early Postcards* (Washington, 1998) on postcards produced and circulated in South Africa.

84 *Die Huisgenoot*, Sept. 1916.

85 Ibid., June 1917.

1910 and early 1920s, numbers of *Wedstrijd* participants sent photographs in this amateur ‘ethnographic’ vein, often with written descriptions about strange customs appended to their pictures.⁸⁶

The second strand of visual discourse that Viljoen articulated was perhaps related to nineteenth century photographic practices of ‘native’ portraiture, which had sometimes included pictures of deposed chiefs or otherwise politically interesting and subdued subjects.⁸⁷ But immediate inspiration was probably drawn from the magazine’s own emphasis on ordinary, elderly people as ‘historic’ – and the bit-parts given to ‘loyal’ blacks in prose historical narratives. *Die Huisgenoot* did not specifically encourage their readers to take pictures of black *historiese persone* but many did so on their own initiative. In 1916 already J.S. De Leeuw of the Free State village Clarens, otherwise a prolific photographer of Drakensberg rock formations, sent the magazine a picture deemed interesting by *Die Huisgenoot* because it showed an “oude Kaffer” (old caffir) who had (accidentally, innocently) witnessed the murder of *Trek* leader Piet Retief at Dingaan’s kraal.⁸⁸

A steady stream of similar contributions were posted to *Die Huisgenoot*, particularly from the early 1920s.⁸⁹ Amateur photographers evidently derived satisfaction from inserting black people into the *Voortrekker* narrative or otherwise identifying them as historically interesting. These old people were, indeed, also witnesses to important events of *volksgeskiedenis*. But accompanying written comments often differed markedly from captions to the portraits of *oude voortrekkers* as well as their frequent prose companion pieces on black savagery. First and most obviously, contributors explicitly inserted the individuals photographed into the Afrikaner nationalist past as servants. Moreover, such descriptions were often firmly extended into a present of servitude on Afrikaner land. An “interessante ou aia” (interesting old ayah) who remembered when her “baas en nooi” (master and mistress) were murdered by black savages lived on her current employers’ farm and still did meticulous needlework.⁹⁰ De Leeuw mentioned that his witness to history lived in “veroverde grondgebied” (conquered territory/land).⁹¹ The caption to the portrait of the recently deceased servant of a famous Boer leader described him as “by uitstek ywerig en getrou” (very industrious and loyal).⁹² If captions to rare pictures of former slaves sometimes detailed the scars they bore, others blandly reassigned individuals their former status (“Een oude slavin”/An old slave woman).⁹³ Old “Ai Rosie”, a young “Boesman” (Bushman) woman when captured by the photographer’s grandfather, had looked after all the family’s children.⁹⁴ None of these old people, some

86 For example, “’n Buitengewone groot Lipornament”, *Die Huisgenoot*, Oct. 1918; “Maketees-meide”, May 1918, “Drie Zoeloemeiden in Feestkostuum”, March 1918, “’n Kaffer-Paalhut van Twee Verdiepings op Kwaggashoek... S-Rhodesie”, Sept. 1919.

87 B. Harris, ‘Photography in Colonial Discourse: The Making of “the Other” in southern Africa, c. 1850-1950’ in Hartmann et al (eds.), *The Colonising Camera*, 23.

88 *Die Huisgenoot*, Sept. 1916.

89 For example, *ibid.*, Nov. 1916, March 1921; Nov. 1920; Oct. 1923; March 1924; 18 Dec. 1925.

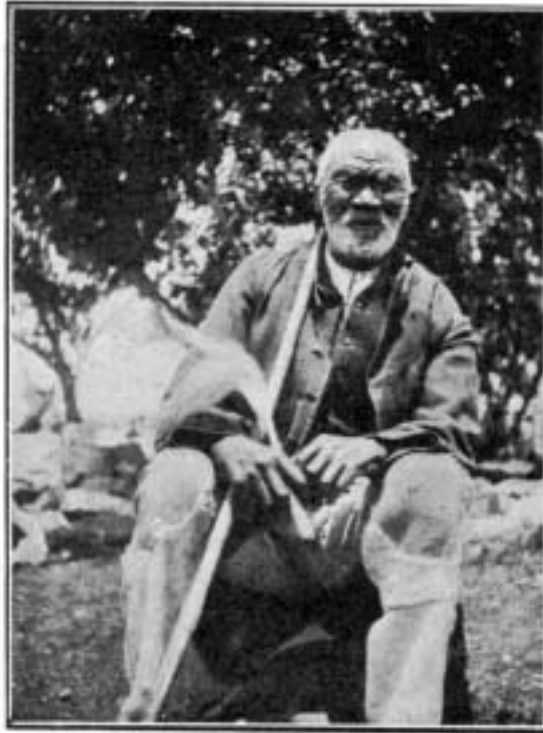
90 *Ibid.*, June 1924.

91 *Ibid.*, Sept. 1916.

92 *Ibid.*, Nov. 1920.

93 *Ibid.*, 26 Feb. 1926; Nov. 1916.

94 *Ibid.*, 19 Feb. 1926. This photograph was placed together with a discussion about research on ‘Bushman’ rock paintings.



Ou Andries, 100 jaar oud.
 Hy was agterryer van Andries Pretorius en was o.a.
 ook op Boomplaat. Hy woon nou in die Vredefortse
 distrik.
 (Foto dr. A.M. Moll, Johannesburg.)

Figure 12

of whom wore threadbare garments (“Ai Rosie” was commended for mending her own clothes until she died) were ever photographed for their poverty.

To what extent did the photographs themselves resemble portraits of those presented as aged *voortrekkers*? Again, photographers preferred their subjects to pose outside. Some were pictured sitting down, but few sat on the wooden or wicker chairs in which their betters were made comfortable. A number of snapshots are of individuals standing in a yard or on a pavement, perhaps suggesting a more cursory interaction in preparation for the photograph. Even so, some of the men (fewer of the women) photographed as *agterryers* or as servants from a chiefly lineage exhibit a confident bodily posture similar to many portraits of elderly *voortrekkers* (Fig. 12). The “old slave woman” (simply named “Soes” in *Die Huisgenoot*) was photographed standing on a pavement or possibly inside a yard, her hand touching an old, whitewashed stone wall that might well have dated from times when slavery was legal, perhaps in a gesture of uncertainty (Fig.13). It is difficult to read her expression.⁹⁵ Another portrait from the coastal village of Mossel

⁹⁵ Ibid., Nov. 1916.



Figure 13

Bay shows an unnamed woman ambiguously described as an “ou aia uit die slawetyd” (old ayah from the time of slavery) sitting near a thatched hut or cottage, wearing a white apron and scarf with a dark dress. Her head is slightly bowed, one hand holds her other wrist while the latter, right hand seems to press into the flesh above her knee, seemingly in a gesture for support or self-protection (Fig.14).⁹⁶

Such photographs of exoticised ‘native life’ and of ‘historicised’ native subject-ivity outlined the circumference of whiteness in *Die Huisgenoot*. Africans and former slaves were constructed as simultaneously black and as servant subjects (as non-citizens) in this visual-verbal discourse. In this racial dichotomy – inscribed through *Voortrekker* mythology - blackness was either constructed as savageness or as servitude and landlessness. Beyond the frame of these portraits, captions referred to (or implied the presence of) a *baas* or *nooi* – landowner and master/mistress. In the interplay of verbal and photographic portraits of black, landless servants and of old people described as ‘voortrekkers’ (or simply as having reached a ripe old age on

96 Ibid., 7 March 1924.

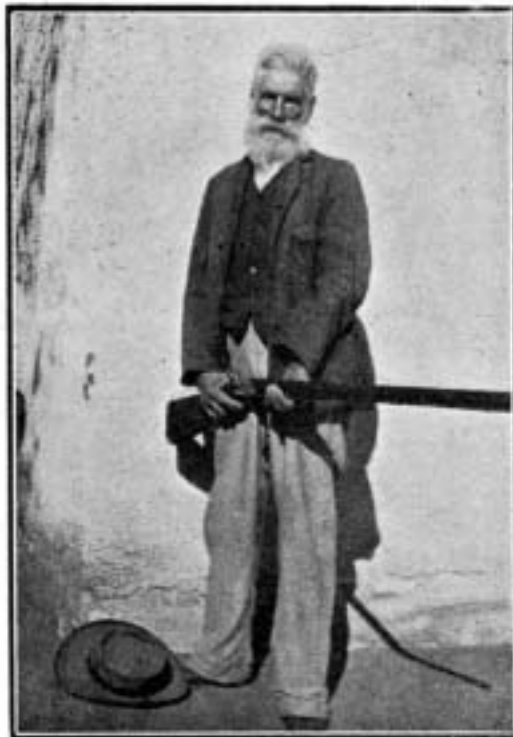


'n Ou Aia uit die Slawetyd.
Sy is 105 jaar oud.
(Foto P. D. du Toit, Mosselbaai.)

Figure 14

their farm) the space of 'blank' was implicitly associated with having land. In fact, it is interesting that those old people who were described as living in reduced circumstances in the poor part of town and as deserving of charity were claimed as participants in a history that derived much of its drama from the struggle over land. In the mythology of Retief's murder and the other 'massacres' claimed as the personal past of poor 'historical persons', innocent blood established an essentially agricultural nation's natural right to land. Claiming a person as 'voortrekker' simultaneously meant ascribing him or her a racialised identity and a hero's role in the conquest of the 'open, free *veld*' as the Afrikaner's own.

But how thorough or how stable were such attempts to demarcate difference? For all the obvious contrasts, similarities between some photographs of black 'historically' interesting subjects and of poorer *volksgenote* suggest possibilities for unease, for the perception of fissures in the familial portraiture of *volk*. Baker argues that "(p)erceived as itself a device to register the 'fixation' of phenomena and objects, photography has always had an uncanny ability to exceed, erode, and unfix such static visual



Nicolaas Bezuidenhout,
 kleinseun van Frederik Bezuidenhout, wie se dood in
 1815 die aanleiding vir die Slagtersnekse Opstand was.
 (Foto Pieter Koch, Elsenburg, K.P.)

Figure 15

certainties”.⁹⁷ In *Die Huisgenoot*’s collectivity of images, the crucial distinctiveness between other and self, of typology as *van-self-sprekend**, was sometimes undermined by the medium’s “referential excess”. In a picture from 1922, a grey-bearded man looks into strong sunshine – ill-fitting trousers that spill over his shoes counteract the threadbare dignity of a jacket and waistcoat. Sharp shadows trace the rifle held, somewhat clumsily, in his large hands. His hat lies at his feet, marking the corner of the whitewashed wall where he stands. This was (so explained the caption) another Bezuidenhout, grandson of Frederik Bezuidenhout whose death in 1815 had sparked the Slagtersnek Rebellion. No other information was provided with the picture – besides acknowledgement of the photographer. Dress and bodily posture may have suggested relative poverty and deference to readers. However, this was of seemingly incidental interest to both the photographer and indeed *Die Huisgenoot*, who made no charitable gesture towards Bezuidenhout (Fig.15).⁹⁸

97 G. Baker, ‘Photography between Narrativity and Stasis: August Sander, Degeneration and the Decay of the Portrait’, October 76, 1996, 74.

98 A year later, however, the portrait of ‘Tom Matuluwana’, son of “n vroeere Kaffer-kaptein” (a former Caffir-Captain) and servant to another Slagtersnek family would be published (*Die Huisgenoot*, Oct. 1923).

Would readers of *Die Huisgenoot* ever have thought that this man and for that matter that other Bezuidenhout photographed by Stockenstrom in 1916 exhibited postures of deference and uncertainty similar to those of some ‘historic’, black servants – or even that the *agterryers* sometimes looked more self-assured? Would this picture have spoken to them of poverty’s difference... of *armblank*? (In the Afrikaans now being standardised, the separate words *arme blanke* joined in one compound - emphatic of a difference beyond shared skin colour).

Since the late nineteenth century, Afrikaner nationalist historians had fashioned the frontier quarrel that became known as the Slagtersnek Rebellion into an act of heroic resistance, but also presented families with blood ties to people of indigenous descent as unquestionably white.⁹⁹ If *Die Huisgenoot*’s collaborative project involved the structuring of snapshot photography into clearly racialised dichotomies, photographs could also produce possibilities for disruption in the dominant “narrative of social placement”.¹⁰⁰ Thus Bezuidenhout’s placing of his hat (sign of his respectability and of respect for his betters) at the liminal space of the wall’s corner might be read as suggestive of a certain ambiguity to his place in ‘history’, of limits to claiming poorer ‘whites’ as *eie* (own) – even to the clear assignation of *blank*.

Conclusion

Afrikaner nationalist discursive practices were crucially visual as well as verbal. From its launch in 1916, *Die Huisgenoot*’s redefinition of everyday life as Afrikaans involved an interplay between word and image. The magazine’s photographic project played an important and hitherto unrecognised role in encouraging readers’ active participation in the articulation of an intensely racialised Afrikaner identity. Amateur photography drew people from across South Africa to contribute to a public, familial visualisation of *volk*. Photography’s indexicality – its status as conveyer of truth and the poignancy of portraits as relics of the beloved – made this a versatile technology for memory-making and the construction of ‘Afrikaner’ selves. By the early 1920s, *Die Huisgenoot*’s own presentation of ‘ordinary’ people as valued personifications of a shared past was complemented by many reader-photographers’ contributions of portraits of the elderly.

The specific dynamic encouraged by *Die Huisgenoot* - of amateur photographs incorporated into an explicitly ‘Afrikaans’ textual space - is also interesting for the way in which such snapshots accrued specific meaning in a publicly shared space. This fluidity between ‘private’ visual practices centered on

99 See J.A. Heese, *Slagtersnek en sy Mense* (Cape Town, 1973).

100 Baker, ‘Photography between Narrativity and Stasis’, 98. Baker’s complex analysis of Sander’s oeuvre offers more possibilities for comparison and theoretical elaboration than can be addressed in this paper. He argues that a conception of “photographic meaning as necessarily torn between the forces of narrativity and those of stasis” is crucial for an exploration of “the politics and material underpinnings of its representational strategies” (73-4). He proceeds to show how the cyclical narrative that Sander sought to establish in his carefully archived and arranged typology of Weimar society and the careful comparisons intended through this portraiture are subverted by a disturbing series of resemblances - “an excess that begins, within Sander’s typology, to figure a deeper uncanniness beyond the logic of its... narrative...” (98). My analysis of Bezuidenhout’s portrait also draws on Baker’s discussion of Sander’s 1928 portrait of the “Unemployed Man”.

notions of ‘family’ and publicly circulating images raises intriguing questions. Of course, almost from the inception of photographic practice, the use of pictures – including the ways in which single or multiple copies circulated – worked against any clear distinction between ‘public’ and ‘private’ or ‘personal’, and by the middle 1910s the homely consumption of commercially produced images had long been a feature of the southern African visual economy. But Afrikaner nationalist initiatives in the age of Kodak cameras created a particular imbrication of publicly circulated and personally produced imagery. While the Home Companion was constructed as familial space and meant to be consumed at home, its pages also constituted a shared, public space that asserted a collective identity. Moreover, it would seem likely that many snapshots printed in the magazine were often still kept in personal collections. As readers perused the pages on which new meanings were created through a variety of visual and verbal juxtapositions – as they recognised themselves and their surroundings in *Die Huisgenoot*’s visual typologies – so the significance of those images in personal collections may also have subtly shifted.

With what accuracy could one claim the existence of a specifically Afrikaans and nationalist imagewo(r)ld during the 1910s and early 1920s? While its contributors often seemed to create a largely discreet ‘verbal’ discourse, *Die Huisgenoot*’s textual spaces were crucially participant in strands of colonial visual discourse that originated and still circulated far beyond this particular (linguistically, politically circumscribed) public domain. The pages of *Die Huisgenoot* show how, in the newly constituted Union of South Africa, cultural-political groupings participated in a wider visual economy. They demonstrate how images and modes of visual representation circulating within and beyond southern Africa could be incorporated into localised modernities and national(ist) identities.

In this respect, the particular production of, variously, *blanke* and of black subject-ivities through combinations of words and pictures in *Die Huisgenoot* is worth considering within a wider colonial and southern African context. A number of studies have emphasised the extent to which the visual construction of ‘modern bodies’ involved anthropometric photography from the late nineteenth century, as well as a parallel colonial visual discourse of deposed, captive, sometimes decapitated African leaders.¹⁰¹ While Schoeman showed photographs that “[recorded] images of other races living in the country... for ethnological purposes or when they seemed otherwise interesting or picturesque to the photographer” Hayes and Rassool have also emphasised the extent to which racial anthropology, celebrated as a confidently South African science, involved not only the camera as a scientific tool but also the specular, public circulation and consumption of images from the mid-1920s and particularly in the 1930s.¹⁰²

Pictures contributed by *Huisgenoot* readers sometimes resemble certain of the photographic colonial genres noted by these scholars – as, for example, in

101 See Hartmann et al (eds.), *The Colonising Camera*.

102 Schoeman, *The Face of the Country*, 11; P. Hayes and C. Rassool, ‘Science and the Spectacle: /Khanako’s South Africa, 1936-37’ in W. Woodward et al (eds.), *Deep Histories: Gender and Colonialism in Southern Africa* (Amsterdam, 2001 forthcoming).

the many snapshots purported to record ‘tribal’ ways of life. But the accumulating racism of the repetitious assignation ‘kaffer’ did not involve images that derived from an anthropometric gaze. Indeed, between 1916 and 1926 a ‘scientific’ typology of races was hardly ever evident in the magazine.¹⁰³ Instead, reader-photographers were often intent on incorporating ‘black’ people into a shared past. In this web of memorising and memorialising ‘blacks’ were loyal servants, workers on (implicitly white-owned) farms with *agterryer* or slave pasts.

Perhaps that photograph of the “Albinokafferkind” was framed by Buyske, and intrigued *Die Huisgenoot*’s editors because here was a creature void of colour. The symmetry of contrast - the weight of words - sought to anchor that blank space to its appropriate place. Race was not strange in the logic of this imagewor(l)d - yet ‘kaffer’ had to be spelt out with local specificity, the Afrikaans contours of *blank* implicitly confirmed. Integral to the genre of nationalist photography concerned with *volksgeskiedenis* was an attempt to represent poorer Afrikaans speakers as members of the *volk* by situating them within a mythology of the Afrikaner’s tragic, heroic conquest of land. The portraits were evidence of suffering and nobility - revealed the true identity of those who might otherwise be simply dismissed as poor. Very soon, Afrikaner nationalists would start spelling out the whiteness of those photographed for their poverty or as labourers.¹⁰⁴ In the narrativity of hindsight – perhaps also in the “optical unconscious” of *Die Huisgenoot*’s reader-photographers - portraits of impoverished ‘historical persons’ already contain the kernels of anxiety provoked by class and colour in the *verbeelding* of the *volk*.¹⁰⁵

103 Perhaps an article on Eugen Fischer’s ethnographic study of ‘Rehoboth-Basters’ (8 May 1925) signals the arrival in its pages of a new discursive strand – the accompanying photographic portraits were head-and-shoulder frontal and profile shots typical of racial anthropology. It accompanied a series of photographs of “Die Opstand van die Rehoboth-basters” (The rebellion of the Rehoboth Basters) similar to Hahn’s panoramic photographs of native subjugation (see Hayes, ‘Northern Exposures’).

104 In 1925 – under the new Pact (National Party/Labour coalition) government, the Department of Labour launched a journal in which efforts to teach workers identified as ‘White’ and ‘Blank’ (the journal was bilingual) the skills of modern farming were often presented via photographs. In 1929, the Carnegie Commission of Inquiry’s research into the causes of the ‘poor white problem’ would include a photographic project that also labeled numerous poor people from the South African platteland as ‘armblank’.

105 Walter Benjamin’s term is adopted by Baker (1996) in his discussion of *unheimlichkeit* (the uncanny) in Sander’s photographs. See Baker, ‘Photography between Narrativity and Stasis’.