

# Swimming Upstream: From 'Poor-Whites' to 'Coloureds' along South Africa's Lower Orange River

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## Introduction

The water from the Orange River provides a lifeline to the arid regions of South Africa's Northern Cape and southern Namibia's Karas Region. For centuries, this perennial river has been a locus point for transhumance pastoralism and small-scale farming alike. During the twentieth century, South Africa's colonial and apartheid governments focused heavily on using the Orange River's water as a basis for planned settlement policies, first of so-called 'poor-whites', and then of 'Coloureds'. If consolidating control over the peripheral parts of the empire meant facilitating permanent settlement of loyal constituents, then the Orange River was key to controlling this arid region.

Unlike the upper reaches of the Orange River – such as Kakamas, Keimoes, Upington, etc. – where land is flatter, soil quality is higher, and irrigation is easier – the same cannot be said of the Lower Orange River, where Namakwaland meets Namibia. Here is a stark, rough landscape, where unforgiving mountains abut right up to the river waters, leaving little space for irrigation development without expensive land flattening and contouring operations. Road networks have historically been weak, in part due to the peripheral nature of this region, but also due to the landscape as well. Even in spots more forgiving to irrigation works, stark differences between high-water floods and low-water droughts could damage infrastructure and destroy crops.

Colonial planners and citizens alike were puzzled by the presence of perennial water, yet they were unable to easily capture it for economic and/or political gain. Some, such as the Catholic Bishop at Keetmanshoop – who was in charge of Namibia's Homsrivier Mission Station at the banks of the Orange – reflected that: "There may soon come the time when arrangements are made that the billions of gallons of the Orange River water running useless into the Ocean could be used for cultivation. Thousands of poor people without work could make a living."<sup>1</sup> The Bishop was not the only commentator who be-

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1 Western Cape Archives & Records Service, Cape Archives Buro (KAB) Archives of the Department of Agricultural Credit & Land Tenure (ACLT) 26 File 3588 (vol. 4): Bishop Kleeman, RC Mission Keetmanshoop to Secretary for Lands – 16 June 1934.

lieved this, as from the formation of the Union of South Africa in 1910, the South African government placed distinct emphasis on using the Orange River waters to secure this troublesome riverine border and meet political goals. This often led to conflict with indigenous Nama, Herero, and Coloured residents, who had long used the river for their own purposes and ascribed cultural and ancestral importance to the nearby lands.

This paper considers political and economic transformations along the south bank of the Lower Orange River, from the formation of the Union of South Africa in 1910 until the end of apartheid in 1994; emphasis is placed on the lands stretching from Pella in the east to Vioolsdrift in the west. Over the course of the twentieth century, economic and policy priorities concerning river planning and river settlement changed dramatically, both concerning the beneficiaries of these schemes – be they so-called ‘poor-whites’ or ‘Coloureds’ – as well as the types of irrigation projects to be pursued – be they private smallholding/homesteading arrangements to grow vegetables or fodder or else large-scale, export-driven, cash crop plantations. Ultimately, these considerations were bound to evolutions in colonial and apartheid ideology and legislation.

It is argued that over this period, Orange River irrigation and settlement policies gradually shifted from a system of racially-exclusive welfare-oriented planning based on smallholding towards a deeply neoliberal model based on large-scale export fruit production, particularly of dates and grapes. Whites were able to transition from smallholding production of lucerne and vegetables into cash crops (or else get bought out by larger companies), meanwhile the consistently insecure land tenure of Coloureds in this area meant that they found themselves trapped in smallholding, as neoliberal shifts in late-apartheid agricultural policies meant that state investment into improving small-scale or communal agriculture would only be approved if economic returns could be expected. So-called ‘poor whites’ were allowed to operate at a loss until they were no longer poor; meanwhile these colonial and apartheid-era subsidies were never extended towards Coloureds.<sup>2</sup> While the majority of these lands are now occupied by Africans in the post-apartheid era, structural inequalities remain, and little has been done to bridge these economic gaps. Ultimately, transformations which began in the late-apartheid years continue up to the present.

## From Syndicates to ‘Poor Whites’, 1910–1940

With the formation of the Union of South Africa in May 1910, the new government very quickly took steps to survey and sell off farmland on the periphery of the self-governing dominion. This decision was taken, in part, to ease pressures coming from Anglo-Boer War veterans. Furthermore, the speed at which highly remote arid farmland along the Lower Orange River was surveyed implies that geopolitical goals were also central; the Union sought to formalise the occupation of its boundary with German South West

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2 A complete picture of these transformations would necessitate presenting the South Bank (Republic of South Africa, or RSA) and the North Bank (Namibia) in tandem, but this would render the article well above the desirable length. So, the Namibian material will be presented in a separate article in the future.

Africa (SWA). At the behest of their German neighbours, the Cape Colony increasingly cancelled the grazing rights held by Nama along the south bank of the Orange River, on grounds that some of these Nama were refugees fleeing the German Genocide.<sup>3</sup>

While the Richtersveld, Steinkopf, and Pella reserves were already demarcated and recognised under the Mission Stations and Communal Reserves Act of 1909 – which legally granted residence to ‘Coloureds’ in these areas – most of the lands neighbouring and in-between were unsurveyed state lands, with grazing being rented out to White or Coloured farmers on an ad-hoc basis. In February 1912, seven farms bordering the Orange River – located in-between Pella and Steinkopf – were officially offered for sale by the Union government: Goodhouse, Abbasas, Houniams, Witbank, Garganab, as well as Marten and Krapohl Islands (located in the flow of the Orange River).<sup>4</sup> Within a few years, Kabis, Ramansdrift, and Guadom would also be surveyed, along with Hartebeesrivier, Hoogoor, and Kambreek-Zandfontein (see Figure 1).

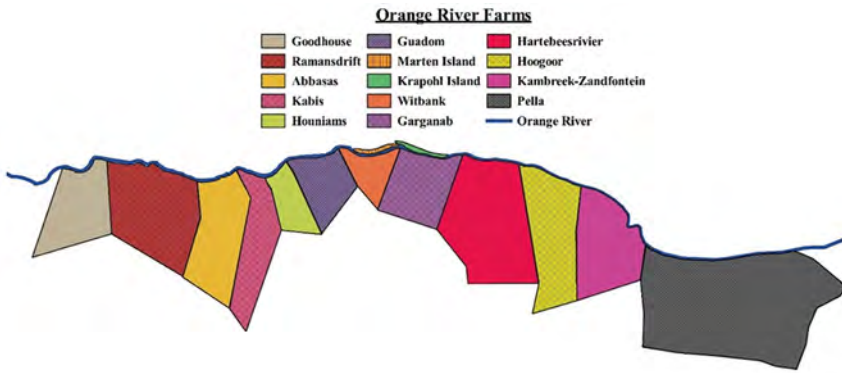
Goodhouse, Witbank, Garganab, and Marten & Krapohl Islands were swiftly purchased by the Oudtshoorn Land Development Co. Ltd., a syndicate made up of South African and English investors and managed by a German-born South African speculator, Charles (Carl) Weidner.<sup>5</sup> These farms were recognised as those with the best potential for irrigation agriculture, and the syndicate expressly mentioned that they sought to grow lucerne and other stock feeds to sell to the German South West Africa market. Inland grazing areas were to be used for ostrich breeding, which was very profitable in South Africa at the time.<sup>6</sup> Weidner was able to scoop up the recently evicted Nama, Damara, Herero, and Coloured lessees, who became his new tenant labour force.<sup>7</sup>

In many ways, Weidner and the Oudtshoorn syndicate were following on the heels of concessionary politics on the German side of the Orange River, where overseas investors purchased the irrigation farms Aussenkjer (to the west) and Stolzenfels (to the east): both immensely profitable corporate farms today. While most syndicate and concession politics in this area during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries implied speculation par excellence, the situation was slightly more complicated. While the Orange River potentially allowed for irrigation agriculture at fairly large scales, the lack of rail infrastructure and poor road networks meant that without either large-scale private investment or governmental infrastructure subsidies, little could be done with these farm holdings on a commercially-viable scale. Only Goodhouse, with its slightly less mountainous terrain, would reach profitability after large-scale land flattening operations allowed for the planting of

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- 3 National Archives of South Africa: Pretoria (NASA) Archives of the Department of Native Affairs (NTS) 7658 File 5/382: Acting Secretary for Native Affairs to Secretary for Lands ‘Unsettled Condition of Southern Portion of German Protectorate: Grazing Permits’ – 4 September 1911.
  - 4 KAB ACLT 25 File 3588 (vol. 1): Department of Lands: Government Notice no 184 – 9 February 1912.
  - 5 KAB ACLT 25 File 3588 (vol. 1): Secretary for Lands, Notice re: Sale of Orange River Farms and Islands – 26 April 1912.
  - 6 KAB ACLT 25 File 3588 (vol. 1): ‘Sale of Land in Namaqualand’, *Cape Times* – 4 May 1912. KAB ACLT 25 File 3588 (vol. 1): ‘An Oudtshoorn Scheme’, *Cape Times* – 12 September 1912.
  - 7 Johnny Damara, Weidner’s foreman, previously had grazing rights on Garganab. See NASA NTS 7658 File 5/382: Civil Commissioner, Namaqualand to Secretary for Lands ‘Cancellation of Exclusive Grazing Rights’ – 3 August 1911.

citrus (Figure 2). Weidner was allegedly exporting 600,000 oranges and lemons annually during the early 1930s.<sup>8</sup>

Fig. 1: Farm Parcels on the Orange River's South Bank (Cartography by the author).



With the outbreak of the First World War, most of the English capital within the Outdshoorn Syndicate pulled out, leaving Weidner (the only South African in the group) as the majority shareholder of a deeply indebted and undercapitalised company. When the war concluded, in 1922 Weidner transferred ownership of the farms to his new fully-South African company, Namaqua Irrigation Estates, Ltd.,<sup>9</sup> which sought to survey, demarcate, and sell off 108 subdivided erven of Witbank, Garganab, and M&K Islands (hereafter referred to collectively as W-G-M&K) to poor whites from the Northern Cape to be future residents of the 'Gariepdale' irrigation settlement.<sup>10</sup>

Constant problems with floods during the mid-1920s – as well as a general lack of working capital – meant that at this stage, Gariepdale would not come to fruition. However, Weidner's schemes along the river to settle poor whites were concurrent with a growing, large-scale push in South Africa to settle whites on government-subsidised irrigation estates. During the late 1910s and early 1920s, unemployment amongst (white) South Africans increased dramatically; this was in part caused by the closure of low-grade gold mines, restrictions on diamond mining, and a glut of WWI veterans seeking work.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, declines in other rural industries – such as ostrich breeding, which declined two-thirds between 1913–1918 – called into question the feasibility of finding well-paying employment on farms.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, between 1911 and 1921, at least 70,000 whites migrated out of rural areas, often seeking work in towns and cities, which caused

8 Birkby 1936: pp. 34–35

9 KAB ACLT 25 File 3588 (vol. 2): Namaqua Irrigation Estates Ltd.: Memorandum of Association – 29 September 1922.

10 KAB ACLT 25 File 3588 (vol. 2): Managing Director, Namaqua Irrigation Estates, Ltd. to Minister for Lands, Pretoria – 20 September 1924.

11 Visser 2018: pp. 40–61

12 Le Roux 2013: p. 42

fear amongst white politicians of possible 'moral degeneration' caused by urban white poverty.<sup>13</sup>

*Fig. 2: Goodhouse farm, photographed by Weidner in June 1918 (NAN ADM 38 File 349 (vol. 1)).*



13 Tempelhoff 2006: pp. 7–8

In the Northern Cape itself, livestock diseases coupled with persistent droughts impoverished large swathes of the white farming community during the first two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, leading many to either switch to transhumance pastoralism or else to abandon farming completely and move to towns.<sup>14</sup> Similar processes were affecting Black South Africans, as Tswana in the Northern Cape also saw an increase in outmigration from reserves. On a broader scale, between 1929–1933 the confluence of the global Great Depression and immense drought in southern Africa brought issues of white poverty to the forefront, epitomised by the *Carnegie Commission of Investigation into the Poor White Question in South Africa*, which ultimately argued that without governmental intervention into this arena to alleviate white poverty, South Africa's racial hierarchy could dismantle.<sup>15</sup>

During these years, state welfare for whites was greatly expanded. It was often framed as a way to combat racial mixing, such that certain forms of labour (such as roadbuilding and railway maintenance) would be increasingly allocated to whites during times of economic turmoil.<sup>16</sup> Resources were also allocated to state interventions into rural agricultural settlements, particularly towards agglomerations of irrigated smallholdings. Government departments often worked with the Nederduitse Gereformeerde (NG) Kerk's *Algemene Armsorg* charity division to facilitate settling poor whites on irrigation schemes.<sup>17</sup> While many of these poor white irrigation schemes were located in more fertile and rain-heavy regions, there was already a history of using the Lower Orange River for smallholding irrigation, as the Kakamas scheme (downriver from Upington) was developed by the NG Kerk between 1898 and 1913, at which point it was officially recognised by the government as a so-called '*blanke arbeidskolonie*' (labour colony for whites).<sup>18</sup> By 1921, over 3,000 'poor whites' were resident at Kakamas.<sup>19</sup> For the government, irrigation schemes were to also a way to promote 'denser settlement in the rural areas', facilitating influx control, as well as monitoring alcohol consumption.<sup>20</sup>

For these reasons, during the Great Depression, the Minister of Irrigation travelled along the Lower Orange River, planning a number of irrigation settlements for poor whites from the Northern Cape and southern Namibia. This included Buchuberg Dam (upriver from Upington), Beenbreek (in Namibia near Velloorsdrift), and Vioolsdrift/Noordoewer (on either side of the Orange River west of Goodhouse).<sup>21</sup> The dam and weir works would employ a large amount of 'poor whites' in short-term construction service, and then some would be able to take up full-time farming on the irrigation parcels.

Vioolsdrift (on the south bank) was already inhabited – since the early 1920s – by a few dozen poor white settlers, renting the Crown land from the government and engaging in petty irrigation farming with hand-dug furrows. With the coming of economic troubles

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14 Snyman 1989

15 Magubane 2008

16 Seekings 2007

17 Visser and Du Pisani 2012

18 Roos 2011: p. 58

19 Visser and Du Pisani 2012: p. 108

20 Tempelhoff 2006: p. 9

21 Van Vuuren 2012: pp. 117, 195

foreshadowing the Great Depression, the settlers explicitly called on the Union Government to form and fund a so-called '*arbeidskolonie*' to provide a solution to the '*Arm Blanke Kwessie*' (Poor White Dilemma).<sup>22</sup> Between 1929 and 1933, the settlement was expanded significantly with government support; an intake weir was constructed about 10km upstream, and a canal was built running along both banks, measuring over 33km in total.<sup>23</sup> The Noordoewer portion was a completely new settlement, however, and it eventually housed 47 settlers.

While there was some interest during the late 1920s and early 1930s by poor white settlers in Weidner's 'Garijepdale' scheme, the Great Depression meant that Namaqua Irrigation Estates, Ltd. lost most of its Cape Town and London investors, officially being liquidated in March 1932.<sup>24</sup> Weidner personally bought all of its Orange River landholdings, hoping to sell them back to the government for a profit once the budget for more poor white settlements returned. Upon obtaining the deeds of sale, he contacted the NG Kerk, offering to sell to the church his W-G-M&K Scheme to form a work colony, which the church estimated could house as many as 200–250 families.<sup>25</sup> The church hoped that the government would cover the expenditure for the irrigation improvements, while the church would buy the land and oversee the project; however, it appears that the government was not willing to enter into such a partnership, seeking to make poor white settlements either fully-private or fully-government funded.

Weidner failed to sell the farms to the church, and he increasingly fell into debt, as the drought and Great Depression stretched on much longer in the Northern Cape and southern Namibia than in other parts of the world. Even the once-profitable Goodhouse suffered, such that in 1936 he offered the government a package of farms including Goodhouse.<sup>26</sup> By 1937, there was finally the political push in the Northern Cape to obtain additional Orange River farmland to plan an irrigation settlement, and the Department of Irrigation was tasked with evaluating the cost of building the weirs, canals, and pump schemes necessary for a settlement.<sup>27</sup> While it would be possible to purchase all the farms as far as Goodhouse, upon investigation, they recommended that only the upriver farms – Witbank, Garganab, and M&K Islands – be purchased from Weidner, as these contained much more alluvial soil and would be cheaper to irrigate. The farms further upriver (Hartebeesrivier, Hoogoor, and Kambreek-Zandfontein) were in private hands, operating as sheep farms.

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- 22 KAB ACLT 483 File 10797 (vol. 1): 'Petisie Opgetrek deur die Bewoners van Vioolsdrift, "Groot-Rivier" Namakwaland' – 9 October 1924.
  - 23 National Archives of Namibia (NAN) Division of Water Affairs (WAT) 91 File WW:77/4: Director of Works, Windhoek to Secretary for SWA 'Vioolsdrift Irrigation Project' – 19 October 1933.
  - 24 KAB ACLT 25 File 3588 (vol. 2): Magistrate, Springbok to Sec-L, Pretoria – 14 March 1932.
  - 25 KAB ACLT 26 File 3588 (vol. 3): A.D. Luckoff, (NG Kerk) to Minister of Lands – 29 October 1932.
  - 26 KAB ACLT 26 File 3588 (vol. 4): C. Weidner to Sec-L – 18 July 1936.
  - 27 KAB ACLT 26 File 3588 (vol. 4): 'Proposed Garganab to Hom Irrigation Scheme: South Bank, Orange River: Preliminary Report' – 10 May 1937.

## 'Poor White' or 'Coloured'? Conflicting Priorities, 1940-1960

In August 1937, Weidner finally sold the W-G-M&K scheme to the Government, which potentially opened the door to another poor-white workers' colony. However, there was an increasing recognition that irrigation projects along the Lower Orange River (i.e., along the shared border with Namibia) were becoming far more complicated and expensive than originally envisioned. In 1939, the Chairman of the Land Board recommended that 800–1,000 morgen (700–865ha) of this purchased land (most of the alluvial portions) be brought under irrigation, even though he believed that the scheme would not prove profitable and that it was likely to fail in many of its main goals. He ultimately felt that it was a good idea as a means to provide short-term work for poor whites in Namakwaland, but the combined risks of droughts and floods would likely make it a more extreme version of the Vioolsdrift/Noordoewer scheme, which 'yielded a nil return for all the expenditure involved, which was all written off'.<sup>28</sup>

The large expenses involved, as well as South Africa's entry into the Second World War in late 1939 and mobilisation of troops (many of whom were 'poor whites'), meant that the political will to build the irrigation settlement (both among the government and the beneficiaries) fell by the wayside. During these years as state lands, however, the farms were not unoccupied. When he owned these parcels, Weidner actually did very little farming (irrigation or livestock), and for the most part he leased out the grazing to 'Coloureds' from the Northern Cape and southern Namibia; upon selling the farms to the Department of Lands, he transferred their grazing contracts to the government.<sup>29</sup> The proximity of Pella, Steinkopf, and the Richtersveld Reserves meant that the majority of both permanent tenants and seasonal farm labour either came from or had family in these communal areas. Furthermore, the Bondelswarts Reserve in Namibia was only located about 100km north of the river.

The names of the 'Coloured' tenants resident on Weidner's former properties give testament to the complexity and diversity within the 'Coloured' classification and identity in the Northern Cape.<sup>30</sup> Some family surnames of the residents – such as Julie, Brand, Carelse, and others – were common among self-identifying Coloureds at the time, while other surnames – such as Witbooi, Rooi, and Damara – often were more common amongst Nama and Hereros. Klinghardt, in his ethnographic and historical investigation of Pella, found that the 'Coloured' identity there was diverse, and many registered Coloureds acknowledged numerous sub-identities and ancestries: about 60% of Pella identified primarily as Coloured or Baster, 25% as Herero, and 15% as Nama.<sup>31</sup> Most of the Nama identified as descendants of the Bondelswarts, who alongside the

28 KAB ACLT 27 File 3588 (vol. 5): Acting Chairman of Land Board to Minister of Lands and Irrigation 'Proposed Diversion Scheme to Irrigate Krapohl and Marten Island and Adjoining Land on the Farms Witbank and Garganab on the Orange River' – 28 November 1939.

29 KAB ACLT 27 File 3588 (vol. 5): C. Weidner to Inspector of Lands, Upington (lvL) 're: Garganab, Witbank, and Two Islands' – 31 January 1940.

30 KAB ACLT 269 File 3588/8 (vol. 1): lvL 'Lys van Name van Bewoners van Witbank en Garganab' – 17 November 1947.

31 Klinghardt 2005: pp. 14–15

Herero fled German South West Africa during the Genocide.<sup>32</sup> Indeed, some contemporaneous observers at the time noted the heterogenous African populations on these Orange River farms,<sup>33</sup> and many of these so-called 'Coloureds' were resident on these farms as tenants for more than two decades at least.<sup>34</sup>

In late-1943, the Department of Irrigation commissioned a study to look into how to use the W-G-M&K scheme during the post-War period. When they released their report in May 1944, they stated that the entirety of Weidner's former properties should be used as a Coloured irrigation settlement, and neighbouring farms should be purchased for grazing land for Coloureds as well.<sup>35</sup> It was recommended that preference be given to demobilised Coloured soldiers, and it was estimated that up to 600 families could be settled on the scheme.<sup>36</sup>

Upon publishing the report, they received daily requests from Coloured farmers who wished to trek to the Orange River to construct the irrigation works and get on with farming. Additionally, they also received numerous requests from people with Nama, San, and other surnames who sought settlement on the so-called 'Coloured' scheme, leaving technocrats at the Department of Lands in a quandary as to who can be settled on the scheme.<sup>37</sup> Many government officials did not realise the complexity of the Coloured identity in Namakwaland: namely that there were historical affinities between most groups in the region, and many saw deep connections to these farmlands on the south bank of the Orange River. Indeed, during early-1922, the famous and controversial Griqua political leader A.A.S. le Fleur travelled from Goodhouse up to Pella inspecting each farm, and he actually met with Weidner in hope of purchasing the Oudtshoorn Syndicate's lands to create a sort of Messianic homeland for Coloureds, Basters, Nama, and all who were currently employed or renting grazing on these lands.<sup>38</sup> Divisions between 'Native' and 'Coloured' along the Orange River were not as stark as officials believed.

Agricultural Inspectors from the Uppington office of the Department of Irrigation toured the farms in late 1944. They found that the majority of the Coloured residents were either former tenants of Weidner, or else families evicted from upriver irrigation settlements – such as Keimoes and Rooikop – which were expanded to accommodate returning white soldiers. The Coloured residents were making decent progress with establishing hand-dug furrows and procuring their own cement to build a diversion weir; as

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32 Ibid.: 68

33 KAB ACLT 27 File 3588 (vol. 5): P. Eksteen (Pofadder) to J.G. Olivier 'Bosluis: Basters en Grond' – 10 November 1941.

34 KAB ACLT 27 File 3588 (vol. 5): IvL to Provinsiale Verteenwoordiger, Dept. van Lande, Kaapstad (PV, DvL) 'i/s Weidner Plase' – 5 February 1940.

35 KAB ACLT 27 File 3588 (vol. 5): Irrigation Commission Report 'Krapohl and Marten Islands, Lower Orange River' – 12 May 1944.

36 KAB ACLT 27 File 3588 (vol. 5): Sec-L to Minister of Welfare and Demobilisation – 22 May 1944.

37 KAB ACLT 27 File 3588 (vol. 5): IvL to PV, DvL 'Rapport i/s Witbank/Krapohl/Marten' – 19 June 1944.

38 NASA Archives of the Justice Department (JUS) 106 File 2/1221/11 (vol. 3): Affidavit, Abram Watt – Witbank: 12 June 1922.

the settlement was only a recommendation, rather than a declaration, no government assistance had yet been granted, as opposed to what 'poor-whites' had received.<sup>39</sup> As these farms were now officially state lands, it was technically possible for Coloureds to get tenancy agreements to rent grazing or to use the alluvial lands. Most of those who got the rental contracts were demobilised Coloured soldiers, who constructed the flood channels for small-scale vegetable and lucerne production (see Figure 3).<sup>40</sup>

*Fig. 3: Remnants of some of the 1940s irrigation furrows at Witbank (Photo by the author, 2022).*



During 1943 and 1944, South Africa's Irrigation Commission visited Witbank and other purchased farms on a number of occasions, and the Upington officials were largely impressed by the progress made by demobilised Coloured soldiers and other residents. They recommended in 1944 that the scheme be expanded and officially allocated for Coloureds.<sup>41</sup> In 1946, the Cape Land Board recommended the purchase of the remaining farmland between Witbank and Goodhouse to plan a larger irrigation and grazing scheme for Coloureds.<sup>42</sup> By early-1949, Goodhouse, Ramansdrift, Abbasas, Kabis, Hou-

39 KAB ACLT 5 File 3588 (vol. 6): A.J. Ferreira & S. Damon 'Tour to Witbank: Proposed Coloured Settlement along the Orange River' – 11-13 November 1944.

40 Catherine Cloete, Witbank, January 2022, interview with B.C. Moore. Also see Western Cape Archives & Records Service: 'Tussen Bewaar Plek' (TBK) Division of Coloured Affairs (KUS) 2/139 File 12/8/B2 (vol. 2): P. Loxton (Goodhouse) to Minister David Curry – 17 January 1985.

41 KAB ACLT 5 File 3588 (vol. 6): Ferreira & Damon 'Tour to Witbank...' – 11–13 November 1944.

42 KAB ACLT 5 File 3588 (vol. 6): Cape Land Board 'Memorandum: Disposal of Krapohl & Marten Islands, and the Farms Witbank, Garganab, and Die Spruit' – 24 July 1946.

niums, and Guadom were purchased by the Government, and it was envisioned that the expanded scheme would focus on lucerne, cotton, and to a lesser extent sultana grapes for raisin production. The Secretary for Lands estimated that the 1,607 morgen (1,390ha) scheme could settle more than five hundred Coloured families.<sup>43</sup>

Between 1937 and 1949, virtually all the tenants and residents of the W-G-M&K scheme were Coloureds. However, the farms were technically Crown land, rather than allocated according to the Mission Stations and Communal Reserves Act of 1909, which meant that Coloureds had far less security over their tenancy rights. Amongst whites in Springbok and Pofadder districts – loyal supporters of the National Party (NP) – there was resistance to place the scheme within the 1946 Coloured Settlement Act, or even officially under the control of the Division of Coloured Affairs. Only Goodhouse fell into the latter category, yet even it was being leased out to a white settler, G. de Kock Maree.<sup>44</sup> He would eventually be elected to the Volksraad as representative for Namakwaland, and he allowed all the citrus trees sold by Weidner together with the farm to die of root-rot.<sup>45</sup> To most of the white settlers of Namakwaland, an unproductive Goodhouse was preferable to one operated by non-whites.<sup>46</sup>

By early-1948, there was increasing pressure being placed upon Coloured settlers across the Orange River farms. It was informally reserved for Coloureds, yet nothing was guaranteed by law. Officials in Springbok sought to curb any new settlement by Coloureds on the parcels, despite later acknowledgement by Coloured Affairs that most of these *intrekkers* [incoming residents] had nowhere else to go due to eviction from farms on grounds of mechanisation and decreased labour demands (such as jackal-proof fencing on sheep farms and increased tractor use on Upington plantations).<sup>47</sup> In February 1948, the Magistrate at Springbok was instructed to not issue any further grazing licences on the W-G-M&K scheme.<sup>48</sup> In 1949, the Government began granting grazing to whites on the Orange River properties in much larger numbers.<sup>49</sup>

The Division of Coloured Affairs, however, still sought to keep Goodhouse through W-G-M&K Coloured – deeming expansion of settlements necessary for the estimated 58,000 Coloureds in the Northern Cape. The recommendation for the expanded Coloured irrigation settlement was passed on to the Minister for Lands in Pretoria, who in late-1949 promptly rejected the project. Instead, he declared that these parcels, like many other

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- 43 KAB ACLT 27 File 3588 (vol. 7): Sec-L, 'Memorandum i/s Marten-Krapohl Eilande Besproeiingskema' – 23 September 1949.
- 44 TBK KUS 296 File 139 (vol. 1): Sekretaris van Binnelandse Sake (Sek, B-S) to Sekretaris, Staatsdienskommissie – 22 December 1955.
- 45 TBK KUS 296 File 139 (vol. 1): Senior Landboubeampte 'Verslag: Goodhouse Inspeksie' – 4 April 1956. TBK KUS 296 File 139 (vol. 2): Verantwoordelike Beampte, Landbounavorsingstasie Upington to Sekretaris van Kleurlingsake (Sek-KS) – 24 August 1960.
- 46 TBK KUS 296 File 139 (vol. 1): Kommissaris van Kleurlingsake (Komm-KS) to Sek, B-S 'Petisie en Memorandum: Goodhouse' – 17 May 1956.
- 47 TBK KUS 492 File 4/1/3/B2: Sek-KS 'Memorandum: Beskikbaarstelling van Grond vir Kleurling Nedersetting' – 3 October 1960. See also, Moore 2021a.
- 48 KAB ACLT 27 File 3588 (vol. 7): PV, DvL to Superintendent van Kleurlingnedersettings, Upington (Supt-KN) 'Marten & Krapohl Eilande en die Plaas Witbank' – 18 February 1948.
- 49 KAB ACLT 27 File 3588 (vol. 7): Sec-L 'Aansoek om Weiding op Witbank en Garganab' – 4 April 1949.

irrigation projects upriver, would be allocated to whites.<sup>50</sup> He mandated that all existing grazing/water contracts in the W-G-M&K Scheme held by Coloureds and other 'non-whites' should not be renewed. The Superintendent of Coloured Settlements visited the plots in February 1950, and he reported back that many of the older residents had already vacated the land, with most heading to Pella or the Richtersveld. There was a small influx of 'squatters' who were living amongst those who were legally resident until the conclusion of their last harvest (August 1950), at which stage they would be forced to leave.<sup>51</sup> The Springbok Magistrate was instructed to prevent anyone coming in to settle on the land.

With the rise of South Africa's National Party government after the 1948 General Elections, the government was increasingly divided on how to formulate land policy, especially concerning the settlement of Africans in peripheral areas. It would only come with the publication of the 1955 Tomlinson Report that a comprehensive homeland/reserve policy was made. Some, such as the Minister of Lands, sought to revive state welfare interventions on behalf of whites, and development was viewed as a zero-sum game – land allocated for Coloureds was viewed as land taken from whites. While the interventions were not targeting 'poor whites' anymore – most were not so poor – the viewpoint was analogous.

However, some within Coloured Affairs – and even the NG Kerk – saw the political pressures differently. NG Kerk Ministers from Pofadder and Springbok hoped that with the rise of the like-minded National Party, the reformed churches could take over the mission stations currently operated by the Roman Catholic Church, such as Pella. During the 1940s-1950s, Pella's mission education operations were expanding in the region, with new churches and schools opening throughout communal areas on both sides of the Orange River.<sup>52</sup> NG Kerk representatives from their Pofadder mission branch complained to the Government that Pella and its school should be closed down and transformed into either a government school or an NG Kerk school on grounds that the Roman Danger [*roomse gevaar*] in South Africa is 'a greater threat than the Communist Danger'.<sup>53</sup> They felt that Pella, like most Catholic Missions, was not run as a segregated community, and that Africans – whether within the seminary or outside of it – were permitted to reach the same levels as whites.<sup>54</sup>

The Government could not close down Pella, as it was formally recognised as a mission station farm under the 1909 legislation.<sup>55</sup> However, the NG Kerk at Pofadder called upon the Minister for Lands to keep W-G-M&K as a Coloured Settlement (particularly for Protestants) to counter the 'Roman Danger' and to shore up NP support for the long-

50 KAB ACLT 269 File 3588/8 (vol. 1): Asst. PV, DvL to Supt-KN 'Marten-Krapohl Eilande Besproeiingskema' – 2 November 1949.

51 KAB ACLT 269 File 3588/8 (vol. 1): Supt-KN to PV, DvL 'Marten-Krapohl Eilande Besproeiingskema' – 15 February 1950.

52 Pella R.C. Mission Archives: R. Bientz, O.S.F.S., *Dorsland: Heldhaftige Stryd van Pionier-Sendelinge in Namakwaland* (self-published pamphlet, 1982), p. 19.

53 KAB ACLT 27 File 3588 (vol. 7): M.J. van Schalkwyk (NG Kerk, Pofadder) to PV, DvL – 27 June 1951.

54 See Klinghardt 2005: p. 13. See also, Anderson 2020.

55 KAB ACLT 5 File 3588 (vol. 8): PV, DvL to M.J. van Schalkwyk 'Roomse Kerk Terreine te Pella en Witbanknederstelling' – 25 August 1951.

term.<sup>56</sup> A Coloured settlement appeared to them, the most feasible way to keep out 'communist influences', as well as the expansion of the Roman Catholics, whose policy, according to the NG Kerk 'is equalisation and the mixing of races'.<sup>57</sup>

While the Commissioner for Coloured Affairs was personally in agreement with this,<sup>58</sup> the Department of Lands would not budge regarding their official plans to make it a white settlement. At the same time, little was being done to actually develop the lands for this purpose. As crown lands owned by the state, the farms were being leased out for temporary and/or emergency grazing – mostly to whites, but occasionally to coloureds as well – but the lack of permanency for any of these licences meant that few had the incentive to continue to develop the irrigation infrastructure.<sup>59</sup> This meant that by the mid-1950s, most of the hand-built furrows and weirs were in dire disrepair, and little meaningful irrigation work could be performed. By May 1957, nearly all Coloureds had been removed from the state-purchased Orange River plots, with most irrigation farmers going to Eksteenskui, and stock farmers split between Goodhouse, Steinkopf, Pella, and the Richtersveld.<sup>60</sup>

At the same time, irrigation engineers from the Department of Planning visited the farms running from Witbank to Ramansdrift to finally plan the expansion of irrigation works to facilitate white settlement. They had already conducted a small investigation in December 1957, recommending that the scheme be put on permanent hiatus, as the lack of dams and flood control infrastructure upriver was exacerbating the fluctuation between floods and droughts.<sup>61</sup> In addition, nearly a decade of inactivity rendered most of the previous furrows and channels unusable – however, the farms would continue to be leased to whites for livestock grazing.

## Taming the Orange River: Dams and Development, 1960–1975

Between 1962–1963, the Republic of South Africa's Department of Water Affairs investigated the feasibility of large-scale infrastructural development along the Orange River to better utilise the waters for irrigation, urban household consumption, and hydropower. The entire project would bring over 360,000 morgen (311,000ha) of land under irrigation along the Orange River – most of it upriver from Upington.<sup>62</sup> Some of the proposed

56 KAB ACLT 5 File 3588 (vol. 8): M.J. van Schalkwyk and others to Komm-KS – 19 September 1951.

57 Ibid.

58 KAB ACLT 5 File 3588 (vol. 8): Komm-KS to Minister van Lande – 18 Sept 1951.

59 KAB ACLT 5 File 3588 (vol. 8): Streekvertegenwoordiger, DvL to Sekretaris, NG Kerk Pofadder 'Huur van Staatsgrond op die Plaas Witbank' – 20 June 1957.

60 KAB ACLT 5 File 3588 (vol. 8): IvL 'Jaarverslag: Afdeling Namakwaland en Calvinia' – 22 May 1957. KAB ACLT 5 File 3588 (vol. 8): N. Esterhuysen (NG Kerk Pofadder) to Streekvertegenwoordiger, DvL 'i/s Opsigterskap: Witbank en Garganab' – 12 June 1958.

61 KAB ACLT 5 File 3588 (vol. 8): Eerste Ingenieur, Afdeling Beplanning 'Memorandum: Beskikking oor Sekere Gronde Langs die Oranjerivier: Krapohl & Marten Eilande en Ander Plase' – 9 December 1957.

62 RSA Secretary for Water Affairs, *Report on the Proposed Orange River Development Project (1962–1963)*.

development projects were massive in scale – such as the Gariep Dam (formerly H. Verwoerd Hydroelectric Dam) and the Fish-Sundays Tunnel – bringing the total construction cost for the scheme to minimum R300 million. As well as numerous smaller dams, canals, pump schema, and other infrastructure works downriver, The Orange River Development Project (ORDP) also included – buried deep within its budget – a canal and weir system to irrigate the Witbank-Garganab-M&K Scheme.

Unlike the Depression-era water infrastructure schemes, development schemes of the 1960s were not intended to simply provide work to poor whites but rather to utilise grand scientific and technological prowess to symbolise the compatibility of apartheid with the modern era.<sup>63</sup> As it relates to mid-twentieth-century dam building projects, Dubow has reminded us that these projects assuaged the increasing divisions between *verligte* and *verkrampste* [reformist and reactionary] divisions of white politics at the time, transforming apartheid from a seemingly backward political institution to one compatible with modern scientific, economic and infrastructural development.<sup>64</sup> While the Gariep Dam and the ORDP clearly held symbolic prestige – such that Pretoria's response to Sharpeville was made 'with concrete' – it did indeed regulate water flow along the Orange River to such an extent that larger scale irrigation schemes could be attempted.<sup>65</sup> No longer would irrigation schemes simply be of a 'poor white' homesteader nature. By 1970, the massive Gariep Dam started storing water, and by 1971 it was at 65% capacity.<sup>66</sup>

Furthermore, the ORDP existed within shifting apartheid-era agricultural policies, ones tied less to irrigation development as employment creation or poverty alleviation, but rather to raw profitability as well as stabilisation of other branches of the agricultural sector. The Orange River dams were to decrease the large differences in water height between flood season and dry season, facilitating year-round irrigation, with the focus increasingly on fodder crops – such as lucerne – and cash crops, like dates or grapes. The meteoric rise of the Karakul sheep industry in southern Namibia and the Northern Cape dramatically increased the regional demand for lucerne, as the high price of lambskin pelts on the European market motivated white farmers to exceed the carrying capacity of their farms, necessitating fodder as a supplement to increasingly scarce grazing.<sup>67</sup> It was not uncommon for white Karakul sheep farmers to have a brother or relative farming on irrigation parcels – such as at Noordoewer/Vioolsdrift – to provide lucerne fodder.

One of the most extreme versions of this relationship was that of Gert Niemöller, owner of Kambreek-Zandfontein farm, as well as Hoogoor to the west and Klein Pella to the south. During the 1950s, Niemöller invested the funds which he reaped from his mining operations into Karakul stud breeding on the flatlands of Klein Pella, eventually buying additional grazing space in Kenhardt district to accommodate his 6,000 stud ewes and ~7,000-8,000 other non-graded Karakuls.<sup>68</sup> Niemöller relied almost exclusively on artificial insemination to breed stud rams, hiring veterinary and genetics experts as his

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63 Sparks 2012

64 Dubow 2006: pp. 260–261

65 Christie 1984: pp. 167–168

66 Van Vuuren 2012: p. 202

67 On the Karakul industry, consult Moore 2021a, and Bravenboer 2007.

68 Ibid.: 184. Louise Niemöller, Pofadder, January 2022, interview with B.C. Moore.

farm managers in hopes to avoid the risks which inbreeding could have upon pelt characteristics.<sup>69</sup> The industrial nature of Niemöller's insemination operations meant that at any given point, he only used 4–7 rams for the 6,000 ewes.<sup>70</sup> Artificial insemination and oestrus monitoring necessitated two massive sets of kraals, measuring more than 1.8km each in length, and therefore fodder production was essential for Niemöller (see Figure 5).

*Fig. 4: Land levelling operations on Niemöller's farms, 1950s (Photo: GNPA, Pofadder).*



From the early 1950s, Niemöller began land levelling operations on sections of Kam-breek-Zandfontein, as well as to a lesser extent on Klein Pella, beginning with donkey-and horse-pulls, and later tractors (see Figure 4). Operations began with flood-channel irrigation for lucerne, as well as prosopis trees for making boskos; later – in the 1960s – some drip irrigation was implemented as well (see Figure 6).<sup>71</sup>

69 See Van Niekerk 1972: pp. 142–146.

70 R.G. Niemöller Private Archive, Pofadder (GNPA): L. Mundell, 'Carry on Kraaling', *Farmer's Weekly* (25 July 1973), pp. 14–19.

71 Louise Niemöller, Pofadder, January 2022, interview with B.C. Moore.

*Fig. 5: Delivering grass and lucerne from Niemöller's irrigated parcels on Kambreek-Zandfontein to his Karakul kraals on Klein Pella, 1960s (Photo GNPA, Pofadder).*



*Fig. 6: Niemöller's lucerne on Kambreek-Zandfontein, 1960s (Photo GNPA, Pofadder)*



Niemöller's irrigation operations show the increased emphasis placed by the government and individual farmers on using irrigation as a means to stabilise stock farming in the area; regulating the flow of the Orange River was part of these efforts. It was not only white commercial farmers who were called upon to build a 'fodder bank' to protect livestock from potential future droughts. One of the first main proposals which Coloured Affairs made for Goodhouse farm was to use Weidner's old irrigation furrows to transition from citrus production – now eradicated by disease – to lucerne production for Coloured stock farmers in other Northern Cape reserves. The Department of Agricul-

tural-Technical Services (LTD) estimated that about 450 tonnes of lucerne could be produced on Goodhouse annually.<sup>72</sup>

Ultimately, nothing could come of some of the Goodhouse projects, on grounds that most officials within the LTD and Water Affairs were busy with making soil surveys and planning the upriver dams; Goodhouse was left in limbo and remained leased out to whites.<sup>73</sup> Besides these technical challenges, there were further legal considerations affecting what to do concerning the Orange River state lands. From the late 1950s, there was an increased desire to incorporate Namibia into all Orange River development schemes, partially for pragmatic reasons, and partially to facilitate the incorporation of Namibia as a fifth province of the Republic of South Africa.<sup>74</sup> Furthermore, just after the ORDP's development plan was approved, Namibia's Odendaal Commission report was completed, laying the groundwork for a homeland system for South West Africa.<sup>75</sup> While the majority of the Odendaal Report concerned the more populous northern communal areas, it did also propose the purchase of six farms along the Lower Orange River to be allocated to the SWA Coloured Council as an irrigation settlement.<sup>76</sup> From the earliest days of these proposals, staff within Namibia as well as the Northern Cape held the possibility that there could be a trans-riverine Coloured settlement, including the recently-evicted W-G-M&K scheme.<sup>77</sup>

In this context – ongoing investigations by the ORDP and the Odendaal Commission – Coloured Affairs made another formal application to the Cabinet in 1962, asking for W-G-M&K and other Orange River state lands to be returned to Coloured occupancy. The Secretary argued that the relative success of Eksteenskuil further upriver gave credence to the skill of Coloureds to build irrigation works. This time, surprisingly, the Cabinet provisionally agreed, reversing the 1949 decision that the scheme should be reserved for whites.<sup>78</sup> So long as the matter is handled carefully such that the white tenants are not rushed off, the farms could be returned to Coloureds; however, proposals to purchase Niemöller's farms were not approved, as this would be too costly. This was still not put into law, however, as the farms still remained simply state lands, and there were no plans yet to resettle those Coloureds who were evicted a decade before, despite petitions from the former residents themselves.<sup>79</sup>

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- 72 TBK KUS 296 File 139 (vol. 2): LTD, 'Memorandum: Voorgestelde Ontwikkeling van 'n Voerbank op die Plaas Goodhouse' – 16 May 1960.
- 73 TBK KUS 296 File 139 (vol. 2): Direkteur van Waterwese to Sek-KS 'Voorgestelde Ontwikkeling van 'n Voerbank op die Plaas Goodhouse, Namakwaland' – 26 August 1960.
- 74 See KAB ACLT 5 File 3588 (vol. 8): Minister van Lande 'Memorandum: Beskikking oor Gronde Langs die Oranjerivier wat vir Besproeiingsdoeleindes Aangekoop is' – 5 February 1958.
- 75 NAN AP 4/1/13: Report of the Commission of Enquiry into South West African Affairs, 1962–1963 (1964).
- 76 Ibid.: 109. For more on the failed SWA Orange River Coloured Settlement, see Moore 2021b.
- 77 NAN Archives of the Local Authorities Board (PLA) 25 File 25/2/2 (vol. 1): Direkteur, Afdeling Waterwese to F.H. Odendaal, Voorsitter, Kommissie vir SWA – 12 June 1963. NAN Executive Committee: Odendaal Liaison (LUKS) 1 File 2: Notule van die Skakelkomitee i/s Besluite oor SWA Aangeleenthede – 3–4 August 1964.
- 78 TBK KUS 492 File 4/1/3/B2: Sek-KS 'Memorandum: Witbank-Garganab' – 28 August 1962.
- 79 TBK KUS 492 File 4/1/3/B2: W.A. van Rooyen (Eksteenskuil) to Inspekteur van Lande – 14 March 1964.

Like the case of Goodhouse, the white community in the Northern Cape remained opposed to any further expansion of Coloured settlement. Maree, now a member of the Volksraad and still a lessee of Goodhouse and Ramansdrift, argued that rather than W-G-M&K, more efficient use of the Richtersveld and Steinkopf reserves would suffice. Given the decision of South West Africa to make a Coloured settlement on the north bank – which never actually came to fruition – Coloured Affairs rejected Maree's appeals, on grounds that it was more desirable to have both sides of the river as a unified Coloured settlement.<sup>80</sup> However, it was decided that the transferral of the farms from the Department of Lands to Coloured Affairs would only happen (1) once technicians from the ORDP were able to do soil surveys on the farms, and (2) only in conjunction with the SWA Administration.<sup>81</sup>

These delays meant that W-G-M&K and the neighbouring farms up to Goodhouse remained just as state lands, still not allocated to Coloured Affairs. With that being said, Coloureds began to trek back into Witbank and the neighbouring areas. Catherine Cloete, a long-time resident of Witbank whose family was evicted to Pella in the early 1950s, recalled that her family came back to Witbank in 1968 '*sonder toestemming*' [without permission], as the farms were still being rented out to whites, despite being approved in principle for Coloureds.<sup>82</sup> During the late 1960s and early 1970s, Witbank was primarily a stock farm, and little irrigation works were performed. Many residents earned a living by going across to the Namibian side to assist with the harvests from the Homsrivier Roman Catholic mission farm, which was only ceased in the late 1980s.<sup>83</sup>

The 1960s and early 1970s saw a change in how the Orange River was envisioned by government planners; no longer was riverine irrigation merely a means of poverty alleviation and racial upliftment on a small-holder basis. The flow of the Orange was improved and regulated such that pump-based irrigation was facilitated (though the great floods of 1974 and 1988 would show that complete control was far from attainable); and larger scale operations could be better attempted. Improved road and transport networks – such as the tarring of the N7 and N14 roads – made transition to export and cash crops possible. Niemöller himself experimented with Medjool date production on his farms, eventually importing more than 4,000 seedlings from Arizona in 1978, making Klein Pella farm the largest date producer in the Southern Hemisphere.<sup>84</sup> Nearly the entire harvest remains for overseas export.

80 TBK KUS 492 File 4/1/3/B2: Sek-KS to Minister van Kleurlingsake 'Beskikbaarstelling van die Witbank-Garganab Gronde en Drie Plase Oos daarvan vir Kleurling Nedersetters' – 21 August 1964.

81 TBK KUS 492 File 4/1/3/B2: Minister van Gemeenskapsbou, Openbare Werke & Kleurlingsake to Adjunk-Minister vir Aangeleenthede van SWA – undated, likely September 1964.

82 Catherine Cloete, Witbank, January 2022, interview with B.C. Moore.

83 Katrina Pieters, Homsrivier Farm, Karasburg District, September 2021, interview with B.C. Moore.

84 GNPA: R.G. Niemöller, 'Die Dadelbome van Klein Pella' – undated.

## A 'South African Moshav'? Profitability & Oversight in Neoliberal late-Apartheid: 1975–1994

While the government was more amenable to Coloured settlement on these farms, it was not willing to grant the sort of subsidies which it had for 'poor-white' settlements at Vioolsdrift/Noordoewer, Kakamas, and elsewhere. Although the government was previously willing to aid worker colonies at a loss – to the extent that 'poor whites' were no longer poor – land rights as welfare provision was no longer an option for an increasingly neoliberal economy. Economic sustainability, short- and medium-term financial returns, and resource management was now the order of the day.

In 1963, the South African Parliament passed the Rural Coloured Areas Act, which laid down the procedure for governance of Namakwaland's Coloured Reserves: once gazetted as a '*landelike kleurlinggebied*' (Rural Coloured Area), a given farm or territory would fall under the administration of an elected Coloured council (*Raad*), which would oversee daily affairs. Unlike Homelands, Coloured Areas were never granted self-determination or allowed to govern on a communal basis. By law, all land allocation within Namakwaland's Coloured areas were on a basis of '*ekonomiese eenhede*' (economic units), whereby land – whether irrigated or grazing – was to be subdivided into smallholder parcels and allocated on a usufruct basis to particular upstanding farmers. The size of a given 'economic unit' was calculated by the government based on how much land would be needed to maintain a given 'Coloured Lifestyle'; such that an economic unit for Whites, Blacks, and Coloureds may be three very different amounts.<sup>85</sup>

In the early 1970s, the government began the process of subdividing the Coloured reserves and officially gazetted them as *landelike kleurlinggebiede*. Steinkopf and Goodhouse were gazetted in 1974, and the former was subdivided into 45 economic units over the following few years, such that only about half of Steinkopf's stock farmers actually obtained plots.<sup>86</sup> The rest were left landless, with some given temporary grazing on Goodhouse until further plans could be made. Apart from the Church lands, Pella was surveyed and incorporated in 1976, removing the Catholic Church from decision-making powers and devolving these to an elected council under the oversight of white administrators within the Department of Coloured Affairs.<sup>87</sup>

As for the farms stretching from Abbasas to W-G-M&K, in the mid-1970s these were still simply state lands leased to whites. While there were some Coloureds residing (technically illegally) at Witbank, they had no legal or usufruct rights to any of these farms. In 1974 and 1975, the Coloured Council at Pella made numerous requests to have the farms

85 Concerning (Namibian) debates as to what a Coloured 'economic unit' should entail, see NAN Archives of the Department of Agricultural Credit and Land Tenure (LKG) 51 File 7/3/3/27: Notule: Eerste Vergadering van die Interdepartementele Komitee belas met die Ondersoek na die Stigting van 'n Landelike Gebied vir Kleurlinge – 13 February 1974.

86 TBK KUS 2/139 File 12/8/B2 (vol. 1): Direkteur-Generaal (Kleurlingsake), Departement van Binne-landse Aangeleenthede (DG-KS-DvBA) to DG, Departement van Waterwese, Bosbou en Omgewingsbewing 'Goodhouse, Afdeling Namakwaland: Besproeiing uit die Oranjerivier' – 1 July 1981.

87 NASA URU 6757 Minute no. 235: 'Inclusion of the Rural Coloured Area of Pella in the Rural Coloured Areas Act, 1963' – 3 April 1976.

allocated to their envisioned *gebied* as grazing lands, as the subdivision of Pella into economic units rendered – like Steinkopf – a large number of small-scale farmers landless.<sup>88</sup> While the Department of Planning and Environmental Affairs was in favour of this, they recommended that the once the rental contracts of the whites expired, the farms should be left to sit for at least five years to allow the grazing to regenerate, as many of the white tenants had overstocked the pastures.<sup>89</sup> Despite this, the Department of Agricultural Credit and Land Tenure – who officially controlled the W-G-M&K scheme – allowed the white tenants to remain until 1 January 1981.

In the early 1980s, in response to the subdivision of Steinkopf into economic units, the Raad requested that Coloured Affairs (now a division of the Department of Interior Affairs) finally get moving with planning the long-awaited Goodhouse irrigation scheme. They contracted the agricultural consultants Loxton, Hunting, & Vennote to investigate the feasibility and plan a scheme. Based on work which the consultants studied in Israel and then attempted to implement with the Keiskamma Project in the Transkei, they advocated for a 'South African Moshav System' (see Figure 7) which would be a vertically-integrated production and marketing scheme, focused around a 'central unit' which would serve the small-farmers for sales, water provision, fertiliser, training, and crucially, white oversight.<sup>90</sup> Small-holders would get about 10ha of usufruct rights, and the profits from their parcels would support the central unit; the planners didn't decide if the central unit would operate as a separate for-profit entity or as a cooperatively owned operation. Some of the costs of the scheme would be drawn from the Kleurling Ontwikkeling-Korporasie's share of Namakwaland diamond revenue.<sup>91</sup> The government advocated for lucerne production with rotary pivot spray irrigation as well as avocados with drip irrigation.<sup>92</sup>

Upon receiving the consultants' reports and Coloured Affairs' recommendations, the Steinkopf Raad immediately protested. As a good share of the funds were to come from the *landelike gebied*'s own coffers, they questioned the high costs, arguing that flood irrigation was cheaper to implement, and it had been done this way on all the 'poor-white' settlements before them. Furthermore, they saw the central unit not as a tool for the farmers, but as a means of whites taking over governance of the farm. They wrote: 'You must remember, these Steinkopf people have been here a long time – this is their land – the state has to come here, get them, and give them recognition for what they have,

88 KAB Regional Representative: Community Development (CDC) 574 File 13: Komm-KS to Sek-KS 'Moontlike Beskikbaarstelling van die Witbank-Garganabskema' – 5 September 1975. KAB CDC 574 File 13: Sekretaris van LkGb, Pretoria to Sek-KS – 29 March 1976.

89 KAB CDC 574 File 13: Sekretaris van Beplanning en die Omgewing, Pretoria to Sek-KS 'Moontlike Beskikbaarstelling van die Witbank-Garganabskema en Inlywing daarvan as Landelike Kleurling-gebied' – 16 June 1976.

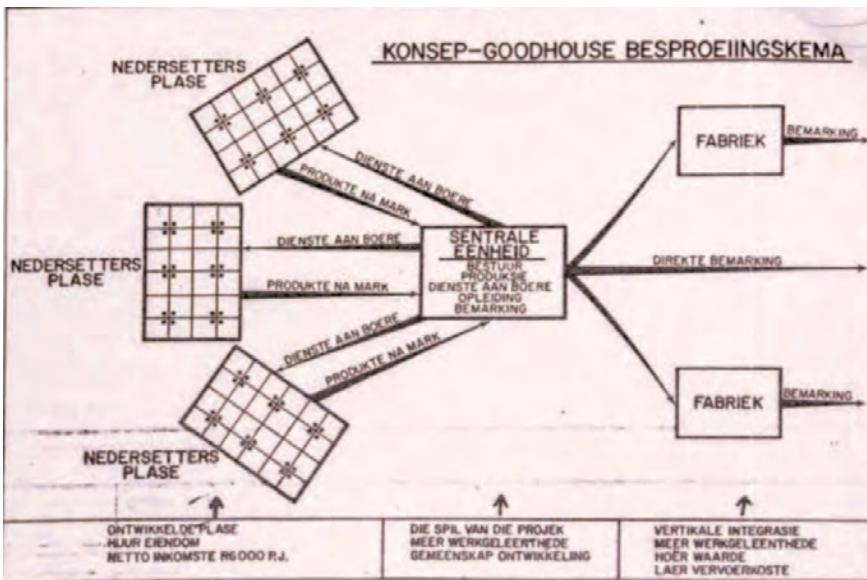
90 TBK KUS 2/139 File 12/8/B2 (vol. 1): Loxton, Hunting, en Vennote to DG-KS-DvBA 'Besproeiingspotensiaal te Goodhouse' – 27 May 1981.

91 TBK KUS 2/139 File 12/8/B2 (vol. 1): DG-KS-DvBA to Sekretaris van die Tesourie – 15 June 1981.

92 TBK KUS 2/139 File 12/8/B2 (vol. 1): DG, Landelike Gebiede en Nedersettings (DG-LGN) 'Memorandum: Kommentaar op die Konsepplan van die Goodhouse Besproeiingskema' – undated, likely December 1981.

rather than just some prize.<sup>93</sup> Indeed, residents of Steinkopf during those years were unhappy with most of what the state had done within their communal areas. The subdivision into economic units had made small-scale farming impossible, while those who had actually obtained the plots still lacked the capital and state support to compete with white stock farmers.<sup>94</sup> They likely viewed this proposed Goodhouse Moshav as a step in the same direction.

Fig. 7: Schematic of the proposed Goodhouse 'Moshav-Stelsel' (Photo: TBK KUS 2/139 File 12/8/B2 [vol. 1]).



Coloured Affairs declared that 'not a drop of water will be made available to Goodhouse or Steinkopf without scientific planning'. The Director-General arrogantly declared that the Raad was made up of 'a few unenlightened people who think that they know more about evapotranspiration, irrigation economics, engineering, water management, land use, and marketing than the specialists who have already had success in Swaziland, Angola, Transkei, Ciskei, Paraguay, and South Africa'. He concluded stating that profitability must be prioritised, and therefore only the most qualified farmers could participate; 'irrigation at Goodhouse is not a welfare undertaking'.<sup>95</sup>

93 TBK KUS 2/139 File 12/8/B2 (vol. 1): Raadsekretaris, Steinkopf to DC, DvBA 'Kommentaar op Memorandum: Voorgenome Besproeiingskema: Goodhouse' – 1 April 1982.

94 Mentioned in: TBK KUS 2/139 File 12/8/B2 (vol. 2): DG, Departement van Plaaslike Bestuur, Behuising, en Landbou 'Memorandum: Steinkopf: Ekonomiese Eenhede' – 6 September 1985.

95 TBK KUS 2/139 File 12/8/B2 (vol. 1): DC-LGN to Voorsitter, Steinkopf Bestuursraad 'Besproeiingsontwikkeling by Goodhouse' – 28 April 1982.

The Steinkopf council was of the impression that with Goodhouse, the Coloureds would finally get their Vioolsdrift or Kakamas. There weren't many 'poor-whites' anymore, but there were still a lot of landless 'poor-Coloureds' in need of state help. But South African agriculture and water policy had passed them by. The Lower Orange River was now a 'State Water Control Area' [*Staatswaterbeheergebied*], which levied much higher water extraction rates than in the worker colony days of the 1930s. These levies were also structured in such a manner to dissuade small-holding, as well as the planting of lesser value vegetables or lucerne; hence the general shift along the Orange River towards export of grapes and dates.<sup>96</sup> The Raad was stuck in a quandary: they would not receive state aid for communal farming on the land; they did not have the capital investment or international connections to run Goodhouse like Niemöller ran his farms; and a 'Moshav System' would give up all elected Coloured oversight of the operations. So, in 1983, the Raad declined the Moshav offer, and they tried to make it on their own on a communal basis.<sup>97</sup>

*Fig. 8: Old irrigation furrows at Goodhouse (Photo by the author, 2022).*



This did not faze the government officials much, as they had recently concluded – without alerting the Steinkopf Raad – that the consultants' report on Goodhouse was overestimating the potential profit from the scheme, so it was quietly scrapped from the budget. All irrigation schemes would have to be approved on a 'merit basis', and Coloured

96 See RSA Government Gazette no. 7912 (13 November 1981).

97 TBK KUS 2/139 File 12/8/B2 (vol. 1): Raadsekretaris, Steinkopf to Hoofdirekteur (Wes-Kaapland), DvBA 'Goodhouse Besproeiingsprojek' – 27 April 1983.

projects would be granted the same priority as ones serving white communities.<sup>98</sup> The Department of Local Authorities – who took over Coloured Affairs – was willing to look into renovating the W-G-M&K furrows from the 1940s alongside some Coloured farmers who wanted to return to Witbank, but the item was constantly scrapped from budgets.<sup>99</sup> This meant that during the mid-1980s, it was up to Coloured residents to fix the furrows and level the land themselves, which was undertaken at a small scale during these years, only to be destroyed by the great flood of 1988.<sup>100</sup> Ultimately, during the 1980s up to the end of apartheid in 1994, the majority of agricultural operations from Witbank up to Goodhouse was small-scale livestock farming, as the capital needed to repair or build the irrigation infrastructure was not available. Coloureds were not able to tap into the sort of subsidies and assistance which ‘poor-whites’ received decades before.

## Conclusion: Surface Waves and Deep Currents

Despite finally getting the lands from Goodhouse to W-G-M&K more or less under their control by the 1980s, Coloureds along the south bank of the Orange River were not able to make full use of the river water which flowed by. While government officials tried to control livestock numbers on Witbank – occasionally removing sheep and goats to other pastures farther away – by 1983 there were no more evictions from the farms under study. Land tenure had become a bit more secure. Yet, the decades-long governmental investigations into irrigation on Goodhouse and Witbank were effectively abandoned during these late-apartheid years. Coloured leaders hoped to have their own sort of ‘poor-Coloured’ small-holder homesteader scheme, like the ‘poor-whites’ had earlier in the century. Unsurprisingly, the apartheid government was not willing to fund such a scheme of racial and community upliftment for Coloureds.

This was not simply a matter of apartheid ideology, however. Deep structural economic changes had occurred along the Orange River during these years. Small-scale vegetable production was not needed as much anymore, as the decline of the Karakul sheep industry in the early 1980s shrunk the resident farm worker population even more than technological changes did decades before. Declining sheep numbers reduced demand for lucerne production, and more commercial irrigation farmers converted their lucerne fields to export cash crops, such as grapes and dates. At Klein Pella, Gert Niemöller received investment capital from the South African state-owned Nywerheidsontwikkelingskorporasie to increase Medjool date production on his farm after 1988, as there was less need for lucerne, eventually selling the whole operation to the multinational corporation Karsten Boerdery.<sup>101</sup> Even at the former ‘poor-white’ irrigation scheme at Vioolsdrift/Noordoewer – where the export of lucerne to Namibian farmers was even more cru-

98 TBK KUS 2/139 File 12/8/B2 (vol. 1): DG, Departement van Omgewingsake to Hoofdirekteur (Wes-Kaapland), DvBA ‘Goodhouse, Namakwaland: Besproeiingskema’ – 19 October 1982.

99 TBK KUS 2/139 File 12/8/B2 (vol. 2): Hoof-Direkteur, Departement van Plaaslike Bestuur, Behuising en Landbou ‘Memorandum: Grond te Witbank’ – 3 May 1985.

100 Catherine Cloete, Witbank, January 2022, interview with B.C. Moore.

101 Louise Niemöller, Pofadder, January 2022, interview with B.C. Moore.

cial than at other locations – table grape production (primarily exported to the European Union) increased from 5ha in 1985 to 167ha in 2013, mostly replacing lucerne fields.<sup>102</sup>

In many ways, the improvement of water and road infrastructure along the Orange River brought a peripheral region into better connection with large metropolitan areas. Road connections allow the export of valuable cash crops to Cape Town and overseas markets. Yet, these interconnections are a two-way street. Fruit and vegetables grown cheaply in the Western Cape could be more easily brought to supermarkets in Springbok and Pofadder, supplementing worker rations and diminishing the need for locally grown produce. If we consider this alongside apartheid-era discussion about small-holder agriculture along the Orange River, we can see how it would be – without large amounts of state intervention – increasingly an anachronism.

By the 1980s, the Orange River was no longer South Africa and Namibia's peripheral frontier, but rather a place closely tied to regional and global markets. While small-holder agriculture – as proposed for Witbank and Goodhouse – could make impacts with vegetables, fodder, and locally sold produce, there is no such thing as a small-scale date or grape producer along the Orange River. With the coming of the new government in 1994, the community at Witbank enlisted the help of the Northern Cape-based Surplus Peoples' Project, who helped raise the funds so that the community could buy Witbank, Garganab, Marten & Krapohl Islands, and Hartebeesrivier farms. They are now owned by the Witbank Gemeenskap and managed by its elected Raad. Yet, despite finally obtaining the title for the land, little can be done by the community to produce the sort of cash crops which Klein Pella and Noordoewer can. These require intense capital investment and international marketing connections which local Coloured communities under apartheid were either not given or were not allowed to make. For these reasons, the hand dug furrows at Witbank have mostly stood still, apart from a small paprika project which the post-apartheid government helped fund; the same could be said for most of Goodhouse (see Figure 8).<sup>103</sup> Most residents are looking for assistance to bring the irrigation works and furrows under production again.

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102 Aussenkjer Plase (Pty) Ltd. 1985, and Orange-Senqu River Commission 2014.

103 Benny Cloete, Goodhouse, January 2022, interview with B.C. Moore.

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## Archival Abbreviations

- KAB Western Cape Archives & Records Service: Cape Archives Buro
- ACLT Archives of the Department of Agricultural Credit & Land Tenure
- CDC Archives of the Regional Representative: Community Development
- TBK Western Cape Archives & Records Service: 'Tussen Bewaar Plek'
- KUS Archives of the Division of Coloured Affairs
- NASA National Archives of South Africa: Pretoria
- JUS Archives of the Justice Department

- NTS** Archives of the Department of Native Affairs  
**NAN** National Archives of Namibia  
**LKG** Archives of the Department of Agricultural Credit and Land Tenure  
**LUKS** Archives of the Executive Committee: Odendaal Liaison  
**PLA** Archives of the Local Authorities Board  
**WAT** Archives of the Division of Water Affairs  
**GNPA** R.G. Niemöller Private Archive, Pofadder

### **Abbreviations in Footnotes**

- DG-LGN** Direkteur-Generaal, Landelike Gebiede en Nedersettings  
**DG-KS-DvBA** Direkteur-Generaal (Kleurlingsake), Departement van Binnelandse Aangeleenthede  
**IvL** Inspekteur van Lande  
**Komm-KS** Kommissaris van Kleurlingsake  
**Sec-L** Secretary for Lands, Cape Town  
**Sek, B-S** Sekretaris van Binnelandse Sake  
**Sek-KS** Sekretaris van Kleurlingsake  
**Supt-KN** Superintendent van Kleurlingnedersettings  
**PV, DvL** Provinsiale Verteenwoordiger, Dept. van Lande, Kaapstad