



**UNIVERSITY** *of the*  
**WESTERN CAPE**

## **From *Volksmoeder* to *Igqira*: Towards an Intellectual Biography of Dr Vera Bührmann (1910-1998)**

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirement for the awarding of the degree  
Master of Arts in History

**Name:** André Louis Landman

**Student Number:** 3524194

**Department:** History

**Institution:** University of the Western Cape

**Supervisor:** Prof. Andrew Bank

**Keywords:** Afrikaner nationalism; *amagqira*; Analytical Psychology; autism; biography; Cape of Good Hope Centre for Jungian Studies; Carl Gustav Jung; child psychiatry; cross-cultural psychiatry; Dietse Kinderfonds; German war orphans; Ossewa-Brandwag; racial ideology; Sir Laurens van der Post; South African War (1899-1902)

## **DECLARATION**

I, André Louis Landman, declare that ‘From *Volkmoeder* to *Igqira*: Towards an Intellectual Biography of Dr Vera Bührmann (1910-1998)’ is my own work, that it has not been submitted for any degree or examination in any other university, and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by complete references.

André Louis Landman

5 November 2019



## Acknowledgments

My sincere thanks are due to the following people:

- Prof. Andrew Bank, for his patient guidance and for the example of rigorous archival research he has set over many years;
- Mrs Sue Ogterop, for her expert librarianship, and for listening to my many stories about Vera Bührmann;
- Mr Johann Bührmann, who kindly made digital copies of photographs and letters in his possession available to me;
- Mrs Reinette (Biebie) van der Merwe, for permission to use images from the Bührmann *Familieboek*;
- ‘Anonymous’, who very generously made available to me transcripts of the many hours of interviews she conducted with Vera Bührmann;
- Mr Fred Borchardt, current President of the Southern African Association of Jungian Analysts, for allowing me access to the SAAJA historical archive; and
- the many archivists who willingly assisted me with physical and digital archival materials: Clive Kirkwood (University of Cape Town Libraries), Huilbrecht Lombard (University of the Free State), Zabeth Botha (Erfenis Stigting), Annette Kellner, Maryna Rankin and Evert Kleynhans (North-West University), Nicole Babcock (W. Bruce Fye Center for the History of Medicine, Rochester, MN), David Luck (Bethlem Museum of the Mind, Beckenham, England), and Nicolas Baldwin (Archive Service, Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children, NHS Foundation).

## Abstract

This biography of Dr Vera Bührmann is an intersectional and interdisciplinary investigation of an unusual Afrikaner woman who occupied several unusual places in South African society. Through rigorous archival research and a wide reading of English and Afrikaans secondary sources, I examine the mythology that has grown up around Dr Bührmann and expose contradictions and inaccuracies inherent within these myths.

I adopt a chronological approach but focus on certain key motifs. I dwell on her family background in order to demonstrate the depths of the Afrikaner nationalist tradition to which she was heir. I uncover the impact that physical anthropology had on her during her initial medical training at Wits and UCT in the 1930s. I highlight the intensity of her commitment to, and leadership roles in, the Ossewa-Brandwag and Dietse Kinderfonds, both extremist right-wing Afrikaner nationalist organisations.

Vera's marital crises reveal something of her 'human' side but are an important component of her story because she reinvented herself following her divorce in the early 1950s, furthering her medical qualifications as well as training as a Jungian analyst. I investigate the various fields in which she worked following her return to South Africa in late 1959 but focus on her cross-cultural psychiatry research with a Xhosa *igqira* in the 1970s and 1980s since much of the mythology that surrounds her is based on publications that flowed from that research. I engage critically with her published works and associated archival records and present evidence which shows that the view that she underwent a 'Damascus Road' experience with respect to her racial politics is unfounded. The racial politics of her ancestors and the ideology of the radical right-wing Ossewa-Brandwag remained with her throughout her life, despite attempts (by Vera and others) to camouflage it. In addition, I show that her use of Jungian depth psychology as a framework for cross-cultural psychiatry research contributed to the reification of apartheid racial politics.

This study draws attention to the many pioneering achievements of this remarkable woman but argues that a more nuanced approach to her legacy is needed in light of the evidence of her persistent racial prejudice.

## Table of Contents

Acknowledgments	I
Abstract	II
Introduction	1
Chapter 1. The Ancestors	12
Chapter 2. The Making of an Afrikaner Woman Doctor (1910-1936)	32
Chapter 3. Nailing Her Colours to the Mast: Vera's Involvement with Afrikaner Radical Right-Wing Organisations, 1940-1948	56
Chapter 4. A Decade of Change (1949-1959)	85
Chapter 5. Bringing Jung to Africa: Vera Amongst the <i>Amagqira</i> (1975-1995)	100
Chapter 6. Conclusion	141
Bibliography	146
Appendix 1. Genealogical information	159
Appendix 2. Publications by M. Vera Bührmann	160



## Table of Figures

Figure 1.1: Johannes and Johanna Bührmann and children, circa 1917.....	12
Figure 1.2: Map of Ermelo district showing De Emigratie, circa 1905.....	16
Figure 1.3: Hendrik Teodor Bührmann.....	20
Figure 1.4: Vera's mother, Johanna, in 1902 with her children during her parole in Durban during the Anglo-Boer.....	28
Figure 2.1: Vera (right) with her younger siblings, De Emigratie, circa 1915.....	35
Figure 2.2: Vera with her sisters Pat and Aletta, c. 1930.....	38
Figure 2.3: Vera on horseback, De Emigratie, circa 1938.....	40
Figure 2.4: Vera as a student at UCT, circa 1935.....	51
Figure 2.5: UCT Medical School class of 1935.....	53
Figure 3.1: George van Niekerk, Vera's husband.....	60
Figure 3.2: Vera in traditional <i>voortrekker</i> costume, circa December 1938.....	63
Figure 3.3: Vera examining German children, circa August 1948.....	78
Figure 4.1: Vera consulting at the Hercules Clinic, Pretoria.....	88
Figure 4.2: Google NGram graph.....	91
Figure 5.1: Vera Bührmann's publications 1952 to 1973.....	111
Figure 5.2: Vera Bührmann's publications 1977 to 1998.....	111
Figure 5.3: Lenye location where the homestead of Mongezi Tiso was located.....	119
Figure 5.4: Mr Mongezi Tiso.....	119
Figure 5.5: Vera Bührmann and Sir Laurens van der Post, Cape Town, 1991.....	138

# Introduction

‘Life-writing, whether of the famous or the obscure, is no doubt largely born of curiosity,’ wrote Peter France.<sup>1</sup> It was indeed curiosity that prompted this investigation into the life of the late Dr Maatje Vera Bührmann.

I had never heard of Vera (as she was almost universally known) until I took up a position in the Manuscripts and Archives Department (now Special Collections) of the University of Cape Town (UCT) Libraries in January 2007. A small collection of her papers is housed there.<sup>2</sup> Over the years, I had occasion to consult these papers in order to assist researchers with queries. In this way, I gradually became aware of Vera’s unusual story. From these papers, I learned of her pioneering work with autistic children in the 1960s and early 1970s. I learned of the cross-cultural psychiatry research she undertook, starting in 1975 when she was already well into her 60s. Although anthropological field work was not something new, an elderly white woman living in an old Volkswagen Kombi camper in a remote part of what was then a ‘homeland’ (Ciskei)<sup>3</sup> for weeks on end while observing the methods of a Xhosa *igqira* (healer) was an unusual occurrence in apartheid South Africa, particularly considering that this elderly woman was an Afrikaner. I discovered that during the mid-1980s she was one of the prime movers behind the establishment of what is now the Southern African Association of Jungian Analysts (SAAJA), an internationally accredited association that provides postgraduate training in Jungian psychotherapy for mental health professionals. Psychology was one of my undergraduate majors and, although Jung was never part of the formal curriculum, I had read much that he wrote and that has been written about him. This connection thus piqued my curiosity further.

The archival papers housed at UCT Libraries range from 1963 to 1996. The bulk of the materials date from the 1970s and 1980s and are mainly concerned with Vera Bührmann’s cross-cultural psychiatry research. As my curiosity grew, I delved deeper into parts of her life not covered by these papers. From my extended reading I learned that in the 1940s she had been a member of the

---

1 P. France, ‘From Eulogy to Biography: The French Academic *Eloge*’ in P. France and W. St Clair, eds., *Mapping Lives. The Uses of Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 83.

2 UCT Libraries, Special Collections, BC1164, The Vera Bührmann Papers. An online finding aid to this collection is available at <https://atom.lib.uct.ac.za/index.php/vera-buhrmann-papers>.

3 ‘Homelands’ were territories within South Africa set aside for designated black ethnic groups. Self-governing homelands became a central tenet of the ruling National Party’s policy of ‘separate development’.

radical right-wing Afrikaner organisation known as the Ossewa-Brandwag (OB). I discovered that after the Second World War she was an integral part of a child immigration/adoption scheme which hoped to bring 10 000 German war orphans to South Africa. Going even further back, I read of the roots of the Bührmann family in the old Transvaal Republic, and the part that the family – and the family farm – played in the South African War.<sup>4</sup> The more I discovered about the life and times of Vera Bührmann, the more my interest in her story grew. I found it curious that no ‘life’ of Vera Bührmann had been written. Her story, it seemed to me, was one which needed to be told.

My curiosity about Vera Bührmann thus had a long gestation period. During this process, many questions formed in my mind. Vera was born in 1910, less than a decade after the South African War ended in 1902. Her father fought on Boer side and her mother and several of her siblings were interned for a time in a concentration camp. How did these events shape the family’s fortunes and *weltanschauung*, and what effect did the legacy of the war have on Vera? How did an Afrikaner farm girl from Ermelo in what was then the Transvaal province (now Mpumalanga) come to study medicine at the University of Cape Town, a male-dominated, English-language university? How involved was she in the radical para-military Ossewa-Brandwag, an organisation tainted by ideological sympathy with Nazi Germany? What was her role in the Dietse Kinderfonds, the organisation which was formed to facilitate the adoption of German war orphans by Afrikaner families? How did she become a Jungian, and why did the analytical psychology of Carl Gustav Jung appeal to her to such an extent that she underwent a personal analysis and became an analyst? What led to her interest in the healing methods of an *igqira* (healer) in rural Ciskei at the height of apartheid, and what significance did her cross-cultural work have for her, personally, professionally, and politically? How was this work received, given the political climate in South Africa at the time? How did she get involved with well-known personalities such as Sir Laurens van der Post and wildlife conservationist Ian Player in the establishment of the Cape of Good Hope Centre for Jungian Studies (CGHCJS), the first Jungian training centre in South Africa?

---

<sup>4</sup> I have opted to use the term ‘South African War’ in this study to refer to the conflict between the two Boer republics (Orange Free State and Transvaal) and Britain that was waged between 1899 and 1902.



These were some of the questions I hoped to answer as I undertook my research into Vera's life, and they are addressed on many of the pages that follow. But as my work progressed, one question began to crystallise as perhaps the most important question I wished to answer: did Vera Bührmann abandon the radical right-wing Afrikaner nationalist ideology of her earlier years and become an exemplar of racial tolerance in her later life?

Why this particular focus? In published writings about Vera Bührmann, I found that two tropes recur frequently. The first is that she was a pioneer on many fronts. Typical of this trope is this claim by L. Gillis:

Vera Bührmann was an outstanding woman, psychiatrist and a pioneer in several fields ... Vera was one of the first women to become a psychiatrist in South Africa, one of the first child psychiatrists, and the first Jungian analyst in the country. She set up the Child Psychiatry Unit at Red Cross Children's Hospital in Cape Town and was the teacher and mentor of generations of registrars. She was also involved in the first school for autistic children in Cape Town and the main instigator and maintainer of the training of Jungian analysts and the Southern African Association of Jungian Analysts.<sup>5</sup>

Undoubtedly, the story of Vera's pioneering efforts as an Afrikaner woman in the areas adumbrated by Gillis in the quotation above deserves to be told in greater detail than is the case, and this study aims to do so.

But it is the second of the recurring tropes mentioned above that I found most intriguing and troubling: the narrative that Vera had transcended her Afrikaner nationalist past and had become a model of racial tolerance and respect for the 'other'. After the '1994 Moment', this narrative seems to have been appropriated more and more by those who held Vera in high esteem. In the same memorial edition of *Mantis* in which the above quotation occurs, several contributors, all ex-colleagues or students of Vera, gave expression to this theme. Gerwin Davis wrote, 'She [Vera] was one of the most liberal minded people I have known.'<sup>6</sup> Graham Saayman singled out 'an attitude of deep caring and respect for all creatures' as the quality 'that stands to salute a remarkable woman, who was a pioneer of her own generation and who left a rich and caring legacy for her country and the world.'<sup>7</sup> Lee

---

5 L. Gillis, 'A Tribute to Vera Bührmann', *Mantis* 10, 3, 1998, 26.

6 G. Davis, 'A Tribute to Vera Bührmann', *Mantis* 10, 3, 1998, 35.

7 G. Saayman, 'Vera Bührmann: Living in Two Worlds', *Mantis* 10, 3, 1998, 57.

Roloff described Vera as a role model for women world-wide.<sup>8</sup> This kind of eulogising is understandable in a memorial publication, but later publications pick up and expand on the theme. For example, writing in 2012, Astrid Berg described Vera as ‘a bridge builder far ahead of her time, showing the way by crossing multiple boundaries and opening herself up to the other.’<sup>9</sup>

Anthropologist Manton Hirst, reporting on a cross-cultural symposium held in Cape Town in 2007, wrote:

We are reminded of Vera Bührmann’s ability to transcend her own cultural background, with its Ossewa-Brandwag and nationalistic Afrikaner connections, and her enthusiasm for embracing otherness. It is an example we all should follow.<sup>10</sup>

One of the more puzzling examples of a variation of this trope was a statement by Frank N. McMillan III, a Texan whose family financed the library at the Cape of Good Hope Jungian Centre in the 1980s. In 2012, he wrote that the Centre had played ‘a profoundly critical role in the successful transition to the new postapartheid, multiracial South Africa.’<sup>11</sup> On what evidence, I wondered, was that statement based?

As I thought about such expressions of how Vera Bührmann was perceived and remembered in the light of all I was learning about her, I found myself thinking about another Afrikaner, a contemporary of Vera, a man who had undoubtedly transcended his Afrikaner cultural and nationalist roots and embraced otherness – Bram Fischer. In his biography of Fischer, Stephen Clingman writes:

Bram was a prototype. He came out of Afrikaner nationalism; he died belonging to the whole of South Africa. He never saw this as a betrayal of Afrikaner identity, but rather as its fulfilment, its extension towards a true meaning of the name ‘African’. *He was a white man able to undertake, in the course of his own life, the personal transformation that must accompany, if not herald, the political.* At a time when it would have been almost unimaginable to say so, instinctively and by conviction he understood that if whites were to have a meaning and future in South Africa, this was

---

8 L. Roloff, ‘Dr. Vera Bührmann – Psychotherapist and Psychoanalyst of Heart’, *Mantis* 10, 3, 1998, 37; L. Roloff, ‘Vera Bührmann’, *Journal of Analytical Psychology* 44, 1999, 139.

9 A. Berg, *Connecting with South Africa. Cultural Communication and Understanding* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2012), 4.

10 M. Hirst, ‘Cape Town August 2007. Promoting Dialogue Between Jungian Analysts and African Traditional Practitioners in South Africa’, *Curare*, 32, 1+2, 2009, 145-49.

11 Frank N. McMillan III. *Finding Jung. Frank N. McMillan Jr. A Life in Quest of the Lion* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2012), 71.

the kind of change they would have to undergo. And so he took it on – a story of identity, its retention and extension, into the marrow of his own life (emphasis added).<sup>12</sup>

Bram Fischer was able to point to a specific event that precipitated his ‘personal transformation’ – his first handshake as an adult with a black man left him ‘overcome by an instinctive feeling of revulsion,’ prompting ‘a depth of self-inspection he had never before undertaken.’<sup>13</sup> The far-reaching repercussions of that self-inspection are now a matter of historical record. Could Vera, I wondered, similarly point to an event which had sparked a process of self-reflection from which a political change flowed? It would be reasonable to expect a political transformation of the kind attributed to her to be accompanied by, or predicated on, such a personal, inner transformation. Was she able to change her life ‘within’, as Fischer was able to, and thus move beyond race and nationalism? If she did, then she truly would be a role model, a female ‘prototype’ worthy of emulation not only because of her professional achievements but because of her personal transformation. Such a role model would prove invaluable to many Afrikaner women in post-apartheid South Africa who are seeking ‘to rescue their identities from the moral abyss that apartheid and its official ending tipped them into, and to re-infuse their selves with moral worth.’<sup>14</sup> But did she?

To answer this question, I use archival materials to excavate those layers of Vera’s life that go deeper than the superficial tributes and external symbols of celebration in which much of the mythology surrounding Vera is perpetuated. These archival sources give substance and content to the shadows and silences in the record of Vera’s life. The major archival collections consulted are discussed below.

The Ossewa-Brandwag archive held by the University of the North-West, and the Dietse Kinderfonds collection, held by the National Archives in Pretoria, were extensively used in Chapter 3, in which Vera’s early political life as a member of the radical Afrikaner right is examined. The strongly pro-German Ossewa-Brandwag was a significant threat to both the government and mainstream Afrikaner political parties during the war years (1939-1945). Vera remained a member long

---

12 S. Clingman, *Bram Fischer. Afrikaner Revolutionary* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1998), 456-57.

13 Ibid, 51.

14 Christi van der Westhuizen. *Sitting Pretty. White Afrikaans Women in Postapartheid South Africa* (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 2017), 4.

after it became apparent that it had ceased to be a threat or even relevant in South African politics. Traces of her involvement, and that of other family members, remain in the archive. The Dietse Kinderfonds was spawned by members of the Ossewa-Brandwag and other radical right-wing movements after the Second World War in order to give effect to a plan to bring German war orphans to South Africa. The meticulously maintained archival records not only reveal the racist *raison d'être* of the organisation but provide a comprehensive account of Vera's role in it, a role that continued for more than a quarter of a century after she became involved in 1947. Materials from radio broadcasts on the Dietse Kinderfonds held by the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC Radio Archives. A78/62) were also helpful in understanding the work of the Dietse Kinderfonds.

Two archival collections were extensively consulted in preparing Chapter 5. First, the Vera Bührmann Papers at UCT Libraries provided invaluable insights into Vera's activities in South Africa from the 1960s on. In particular, these archival records contributed to an appraisal of her work amongst the *amagqira* and its supposed transformative effect on her, on which much of the mythology surrounding Vera is based. These records also contain personal reflections, records of dreams, and correspondence which allowed me a unique glimpse into the inner world of Vera Bührmann not previously accessed by anyone who has written about her. Second, the unprocessed archive of the Southern African Association of Jungian Analysts was made available to me. These records provided me with detailed information regarding the establishment of the Cape of Good Hope Centre for Jungian Studies, a project she took on in collaboration with Sir Laurens van der Post, Dr Ian Player, and others in the mid-1980s.

Other archival collections also proved useful; the H.T. Bührmann Collection (that of her grandfather) and the J.R. Bührmann Collection (pertaining to her father), both housed at the National Archives in Pretoria, were consulted in preparing Chapters 1 and 2, and several archival repositories in England supplied me with digitised materials pertaining to Vera's activities in the United Kingdom in the 1950s (Chapter 4).

One particular source used in this study needs an explanatory note. During the course of my research, I had occasion to speak to or correspond with several of Vera Bührmann's family members. It became apparent that a certain reserve I sensed in them had to do with the fact that while Vera was

still alive (circa 1994-1995) a woman who had come to know Vera through the Southern African Association of Jungian Analysts undertook to write her biography, with Vera's consent and cooperation. The would-be biographer solicited materials from family members and spent a great deal of time and effort interviewing not only Vera but many family members as well.<sup>15</sup> However, nothing came of the project, and in time both the biographer and the family's archival materials she had been entrusted with disappeared. This experience understandably made family members reluctant to part with further family memorabilia or memories. Unfortunately, the passage of time had also erased the memory of the would-be biographer's name and whereabouts, frustrating my attempts to trace her. But eventually I did. She was no longer resident in South Africa and, in answer to my question about the family materials she had been given, maintained that she had returned them. She did, however, provide me with a set of electronic files containing everything that she had written up based on her work with Vera.

I have chosen to identify her as 'Anonymous' in this study. I have approached this source with some caution, choosing to limit myself to materials which Anonymous provided only if they appeared to me to reveal Vera's *ipsissima verba*, i.e., the very words Vera used. The transcripts specify clearly when 'V' is speaking.<sup>16</sup> Apart from that, only materials that are verifiable from other sources have been referenced. Anonymous's own interpretations and narrative sections have been avoided (they tended strongly towards hagiography in any case).<sup>17</sup> In this study, quotations from this unusual source are referenced as follows:

Anonymous, 'Transcript of Interview with Vera Bührmann', undated (A~1.Ver; Vera's Philosophy and Lifestory).

---

15 She went as far as interviewing someone in London who had known Vera during the 1950s.

16 In textual criticism, the principle of *lectio difficilior* suggests that 'difficult' readings are more likely to be authentic than less difficult alternatives. Ernst Würthwein, *The Text of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1957), 80. A similar principle can be applied in this case. There are many instances in which words attributed to Vera are critical of the interviewer, dismissive, or curt, such as when she asks, 'Why do you want to know this?' and 'What has that got to do with my biography?' in answer to a question. The fact that such instances are kept in the transcripts suggests authenticity in the transcription.

17 Judging by letters Vera wrote to her brother Dolf during this period, Anonymous was very taken with the Bührmann family generally, not just Vera. In a letter dated 25 August 1994, Vera tells Dolf that he had made a very positive impression on Anonymous, but that she (Vera) wasn't keen to have her biography written (this perhaps had as much to do with her would-be biographer's importunity as modesty). 'I really don't have the energy or inclination for this business,' she states. In a letter dated 10 October 1994, Vera describes Anonymous as 'full of admiration for the Bührmanns' and follows this up on 30 January 1995 by saying '[Anonymous] is, in fact, in love with our family' (my translation; my thanks to Mr Johann Bührmann for providing me with copies of these letters).

The information in parentheses comprises the electronic file name plus the title which Anonymous had given to that section or chapter.

Apart from Vera's own words as reported in the transcripts of her interviews with Anonymous, I have opted not to use oral sources, although I spoke to several of Vera's family members and colleagues informally regarding Vera. My decision was based on the realisation that in order to answer the fundamental question I was asking I would need to base my study primarily on documentary rather than anecdotal evidence.

The biographical method I have employed in this study is that of story-teller. I endeavour to tell the unusual story of this remarkable person using a blend of chronological and thematic elements rooted in a density of detail which is aimed at providing the reader with a vivid sense of place, person (inner and outer) and circumstance (political as well as private).

Since the 'biographical turn' in historical studies, the legitimacy of biography as historical method no longer needs justification; it is no longer regarded as history's 'unloved stepchild.'<sup>18</sup> In fact, as Jacobs and Bank note, 'Biographies and autobiographies are far and away the most popular genres of nonfiction in post-apartheid South Africa. Some 800 biographies or autobiographies have been published in English in the 28 years since the liberalisation of apartheid and freeing of Nelson Mandela in February 1990.'<sup>19</sup> Of course, contemporary biographies include many narrow foci, such as 'sporting heroes, lawyers, doctors, businessmen, journalists, photographers, artists, musicians, actors, and directors.' Excluding these categories as well as Afrikaans works, Jacobs and Bank classify 'serious' biographies into four 'constellations' – political biographies (the individual-as-leader), social history biographies (the individual-as-exemplar), literary biographies (the individual-as-vessel-of-self) and critical studies biographies (the individual-as-fragmented-subject). 'In South African life histories,' they state, 'the political overshadows the rest.'<sup>20</sup>

---

18 D. Nasaw, 'Historians and Biography', *American Historical Review*, June 2009, 573-78; Daniel R. Meister, 'The Biographical Turn and the Case For Historical Biography', *History Compass*, 16, 1 2018; <https://doi.org/10.1111/hic3.12436>. Prue Chamberlayne, Joanna Bornat and Tom Wengraf, 'Introduction; the Biographical Turn' in Prue Chamberlayne, Joanna Bornat and Tom Wengraf, eds. *The Turn to Biographical Methods in Social Science. Comparative Issues and Examples* (London: Routledge, 2000), 1-30.

19 Nancy J. Jacobs and Andrew Bank, 'Biography in Post-Apartheid South Africa: A Call for Awkwardness', *African Studies* 78, 2, 2019, 165.

20 Ibid, 166.

In a survey of biographical writing which includes life histories written in Afrikaans as well as portrayals of Afrikaners in English, Lindie Koorts begins by tracing the nexus between Afrikaner historiography and biographical writings.<sup>21</sup> Early Afrikaner biographical and autobiographical writings told stories of heroes based on the Great Trek and the South African War, the two events that shaped Afrikaner mythology in the early twentieth century.<sup>22</sup> In the apartheid era, biographies ‘were particularly uncomplicated’; in the face of world-wide condemnation of apartheid, they attempted to tell a ‘story of Afrikaner nationalism that sought to glorify and defend their subjects, and lauded their “achievements” in setting up racialised structures that promised to “solve” South Africa’s complicated race “problem”’.<sup>23</sup> Given the gendered nature of Afrikaner society during this period, biographies of or by Afrikaner women are largely missing.

Koorts differentiates between ‘non-palatable’ and ‘palatable’ Afrikaner subjects in the post-apartheid era. Immediately after 1994, more and more biographies and autobiographies appeared about political figures, but now the subjects or authors were mainly black South African struggle icons (the Struggle now assumed the position of national myth), both male and female, as well as some biographies about white activists, including some Afrikaner leaders who had been critical of Afrikaner nationalism, such as Bram Fischer and Beyers Naudé.<sup>24</sup> Struggle biographies of white Afrikaner women activists are rare.<sup>25</sup> Life histories by or about Afrikaner literary figures who had been critical of apartheid also proliferated at the time.<sup>26</sup> These biographies of ‘anti-apartheid Afrikaners’ attempted to show that Afrikanerdom was not as monolithic as previously portrayed. ‘This new cast of characters represented a safer and more acceptable narrative for Afrikaners, one that could establish Afrikaners

21 Lindie Koorts, ‘Palatable and Unpalatable Leaders: Apartheid and Postapartheid Afrikaner Biography’ in Binne de Haan, Hans Renders and Jonne Harmsma, eds. *The Biographical Turn: Lives in History* (Abingdon, Oxon, New York, NY: Routledge Press, 2016), eBook (no page numbers).

22 Examples include H.B. Thom’s biography of Gert Maritz and D.W. Krüger’s biography of ZAR president, Paul Kruger.

23 Lindie Koorts, ‘Palatable and Unpalatable Leaders’.

24 S. Clingman, *Bram Fischer. Afrikaner Revolutionary* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1998); Colleen Ryan, *Beyers Naudé. A Pilgrimage of Faith* (Cape Town: David Philip, 2005).

25 But see Stephanie Kemp, *My Life: The Making of an Afrikaner Revolutionary in the South African Liberation Struggle* (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, 2017). See also Jane Tayler, ‘With Her Shoulder to the Wheel: The Public Life of Erika Theron (1907-1990)’, (DLitt et Phil thesis, Unisa, 2010).

26 Women subjects featured more prominently in this category, for example, J.C. Steyn, *Die 100 Jaar van MER* (Kaapstad: Tafelberg), 2004, and Elsa Joubert’s autobiographical trilogy, *'n Wonderlike Geweld* (Tafelberg, 2005), *Reisiger* (Tafelberg, 2010), and *Spertyd* (Tafelberg, 2017).

as a people with a conscience, who had a place in a new dispensation.’<sup>27</sup> Biographies about Afrikaner political leaders, tainted now by their apartheid baggage, were avoided.

She identifies yet another ‘turn’ in Afrikaner biography which resulted in a shift away from apartheid denialism towards ‘Afrikaner’s own discomfort with apartheid.’<sup>28</sup> Afrikaner leaders of the past were now re-examined, and an attempt was made to provide a more sympathetic, humanised portrayal of such subjects. This started in roughly 2012, with the publication of *The Last Afrikaner Leaders* by Hermann Giliomee. In 2013, Annette Jordaan published *Lothar Neethling – ’n Lewe Vertel*, in which she tells the story of her adopted brother, General Lothar Neethling (incidentally one of the German orphans selected by Vera to be brought to South Africa for adoption) who was accused of using his position as head of the South African Police’s forensic laboratory to manufacture poisons for use on enemies of the apartheid state. Her aim, she writes, is not to defend him, but to present a more complete picture of Neethling than the media portrayal of him.<sup>29</sup> Two years later, Koorts’s own biography of D.F. Malan continued this ‘warts and all’ yet sympathetic approach.<sup>30</sup> Her objective was to

drill deeper into South Africa’s uncomfortable, yet increasingly nuanced relationship with the past by, among other things, demonstrating that apartheid was instituted and upheld by human beings with whom we share a common humanity – and inhumanity.<sup>31</sup>

A similar note is sounded by Richard Steyn in his 2018 biography of South African War general and statesman Louis Botha:

As hindsight makes apparent, many of the politicians of a century ago were victims of demographic, economic, social and cultural forces they could not fully comprehend, nor indeed were even aware of. Understanding Louis Botha and his generation in this way, and granting them a humanity they did not always see fit to extend to other races, ought to make white South Africans, in particular, wiser and less judgemental about our common past.<sup>32</sup>

---

27 Lindie Koorts, ‘Palatable and Unpalatable Leaders’.

28 Ibid. See Hermann Giliomee, *The Last Afrikaner Leaders. A Supreme Test of Power* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 2012).

29 Annette Jordaan, *Lothar Neethling - ’n Lewe Vertel* (Pretoria: Litera, 2013), ii.

30 Lindie Koorts, *D.F. Malan and the Rise of Afrikaner Nationalism* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 2015).

31 Lindie Koorts, ‘Palatable and Unpalatable Leaders’.

32 Richard Steyn. *Louis Botha. A Man Apart* (Cape Town: Jonathan Ball, 2018), xv-xvi. Other examples of South African War subjects revisited include Martin Meredith, *Afrikaner Odyssey: The Life and Times of the Reitz Family* (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, 2017).



It is of course neither possible nor desirable in an introduction to a study such as this to provide a complete survey of the ‘life history industry’<sup>33</sup> in South Africa. The works by Jacobs and Bank and Koorts show that biographies come in many guises, even if they do reflect wider currents in society and academia. Where, then, does this biography of Vera Bührmann fit into this complex picture? In terms of Jacob and Bank’s taxonomy, this study of Vera Bührmann links most closely with their literary biography constellation, with its focus on interiority. Although neither subject nor author is an ‘artist, writer, or musician,’ the biography is largely concerned with the representation of self and makes use of available archival sources to excavate layers of Vera’s inner world, unearthing in the process some unsettling contradictions between the outer and the inner person.

This is an intersectional and interdisciplinary investigation of an unusual woman who occupied several unusual places in South African society. Its interdisciplinary scope, coupled with fresh insights gleaned from archival records, lends a measure of uniqueness to this study, which is enhanced by a reading of both English and Afrikaner secondary sources. By investigating Vera’s role in the OB and the DKF, it augments existing knowledge in areas such as the gendered nature of Afrikaner nationalism, but contributes new insights by exploring the unique role one woman played within an extreme right-wing organisation, and how this affected her. By investigating Vera’s novel application of Jungian psychotherapy as a paradigm to explain the healing methods of an *igqira*, it augments the substantial body of existing anthropological knowledge but sheds new light on the role played by minor and often untrained actors in this arena. By investigating Vera’s relationship to Jungian psychology, and the establishment of the Jungian Centre which it ultimately led to, it contributes new knowledge to the history of psychology in South Africa, where the analytical psychology of Carl Gustav Jung has largely been ignored.<sup>34</sup>

---

33 Nancy J. Jacobs and Andrew Bank, ‘Biography in Post-Apartheid South Africa’, 165.

34 In a recent history of psychology in South Africa, Jungian psychology is mentioned only in passing; see C. van Ommen and D. Painter, eds. *Interiors: A History of Psychology in South Africa* (South Africa: University of South Africa Press, 2008).

## Chapter 1. The Ancestors



**Figure 1.1:** Johannes and Johanna (Nonna) Bührmann and children, circa 1917. Back, standing: Louis, Johanna (Pat), Hendrik (Hein), Aletta (Let), Willem (Wim). Front: Johannes (Dolph), Johannes with Hermanus (Boet), Johanna with Henriëtte (Jet), Vera, Maatje Steenkamp (Maat, Johanna's sister). Source: *Bührmann Familieboek* (used with permission).

Some seven years before the photograph above was taken, as 1909 was drawing to a close, an air of cautious optimism could be noted amongst certain sections of the settler population of South Africa. A mere decade earlier, the two Boer<sup>1</sup> republics had gone to war with the British Empire and had lost their independence after three years of bitter fighting. Following the signing of the peace treaty at Vereeniging on 31 May 1902, the Orange Free State and Transvaal had become British colonies under the governorship of Alfred Milner. Milner had embarked on a programme of aggressive Anglicisation, hoping to further suppress the Boers and forestall future uprisings. But his attempts at cultural domination had failed. Within a few short years, the two conquered territories had been granted self-government. And now, as 1910 approached, a new era beckoned – that of union with the two other British colonies at the foot of Africa, the Cape and Natal. Protracted negotiations, involving complex

---

1 The term 'Boer' (literally farmer) is used here to describe the emigrants of predominantly Dutch origin who left the Cape and Natal colonies in the 1830s and trekked into the hinterland of South Africa to escape British domination, settling in what became the two Boer republics, the Oranje Vrystaat (Orange Free State) and the Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek (ZAR, also known as the Transvaal Republic).

issues of politics, race, and culture culminated in the passing of The South Africa Act in August 1909. The Union of South Africa would soon come into being. A celebrated Boer general, Louis Botha, would be its first prime minister.<sup>2</sup>

On their farm De Emigratie, situated some 30 kilometres south-east of Ermelo in the south-eastern Transvaal, Johannes Bührmann and his wife Johanna (Nonna) would have shared the general optimism of their compatriots. Like many Boers, Johannes revered and trusted General Botha, having fought under his command during the war. In fact, the couple had named one of their children Louis, in honour of the general. De Emigratie, which had been largely destroyed during the conflict, was showing signs of recovery. The couple had further cause to celebrate the dawn of 1910 – the birth of their eighth child was imminent.

But Johannes and Nonna's joyful expectations gradually turned to dismay. Nonna's labour failed to progress normally. By early January, she was in deep distress. The child was lying in a transverse position. The family doctor was summoned. Unable to turn the child, he recommended the drastic step of 'vivisection';<sup>3</sup> the only way to save Nonna was for the baby to be dismembered inside her and removed piece by piece! Shocked and enraged, Johannes chased the doctor from the house and enlisted the help of a local midwife. Anxious hours followed during which the lives of mother and child hung in the balance. Somehow, though, the midwife managed to turn the baby, and, on 6 January 1910, Nonna delivered a girl.

At the time, the pianist and composer Vere Bosman di Ravelli<sup>4</sup> was a guest of Johannes Bührmann on De Emigratie. According to family lore, di Ravelli played the piano in the *voorkamer* (lounge) throughout Nonna's birthing ordeal. The soothing strains of Mozart, in concert with the midwife's ministrations, wrought the miracle that saw mother and daughter survive the potentially fatal situation. In honour of his role he was appointed the child's godfather, and she was given a

---

2 Lord Leconfield, 'The Formation of the Union, 1901-1910' in E. Walker, ed., *The Cambridge History of the British Empire. Volume VIII. South Africa, Rhodesia and the High Commission Territories* (Cambridge: The Syndics of the Cambridge University Press, 1963), 660.

3 Anonymous, 'Transcript of Interview with Vera Bührmann', undated, (A~1.VER; Vera's Philosophy and Lifestory).

4 J. Bouws, 'Bosman, Jan Gysbert Hugo,' in *Standard Encyclopaedia of Southern Africa Volume 2 Bac-Cal* edited by D. J. Potgieter (London: Nasionale Boekhandel, 1970), 433. Born Jan Gysbert Hugo Bosman in 1882, di Ravelli had left South Africa in 1899 to study and work in Europe. He returned to South Africa in 1905 and left again in December 1910. When he returned to South Africa in the mid-1950s, he and Vera renewed their acquaintance. He died in 1967.

feminised form of his name. Although she was officially named Maatje Vera, the name Maatje appears to have been dropped from an early age; she was known throughout her life as Vera. Throughout her professional life she signed her name ‘M. Vera Bührmann’. In this study, I refer to her simply as Vera, usually without her surname.

‘A life begins long before it starts, emerging from other lives before returning to them again,’ Stephen Clingman writes.<sup>5</sup> In Vera’s case, this is indubitably so. The farm De Emigratie had been in the Bührmann family for 45 years by the time she was born there in 1910. For many decades it was the epicentre of the Bührmann family, and to this day is farmed by descendants of those early generations. Vera’s identity as an Afrikaner is as rooted in the soil of De Emigratie as it is in the momentous events that preceded her. The pioneering spirit of her emigrant grandfather, the devastation that befell her parents and siblings during the South African War, the vicissitudes and hardships of the pre-Union days – these are all part of the ‘surrounding history and ethos’ that shaped the tradition to which Vera was heir, a tradition of fervent Afrikaner nationalism which, as will become clear, stayed with her throughout her life. It is thus necessary for the telling of Vera’s story that, in this opening chapter, we take a ‘long view’ of her ancestry, since the people and events that preceded her, the place and circumstances of her birth, and the political milieu into which she was born are integral to understanding the ‘path and trajectory’ of her life.<sup>6</sup>

This account therefore begins midway through the nineteenth century, with the arrival in South Africa of Vera’s grandfather, Hendrik Theodor Bührmann, the *stamvader* (ancestor) of the Bührmann family in South Africa.

## Vera’s Grandfather, Hendrik Theodor Bührmann

In June 1848, a Dutch cargo ship, the *Animo*, docked at Delagoa Bay in what was then Portuguese Mozambique. On board was Johan Smellekamp,<sup>7</sup> a supercargo<sup>8</sup> employed by merchants in Holland

---

5 Stephen Clingman, *Bram Fischer*, 1.

6 Loc. cit.

7 On Smellekamp, see C.J. Uys, ‘Smellekamp, Johan Arnold’ in D.J. Potgieter, ed., *Standard Encyclopaedia of Southern Africa Volume 10 Sle-Tun* (London: Nasionale Boekhandel, 1974), 5.

8 ‘An officer on a merchant ship in charge of the commercial concerns of the voyage.’ Meriam-Webster. ‘Supercargo’, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/supercargo> (accessed 28 September 2019).

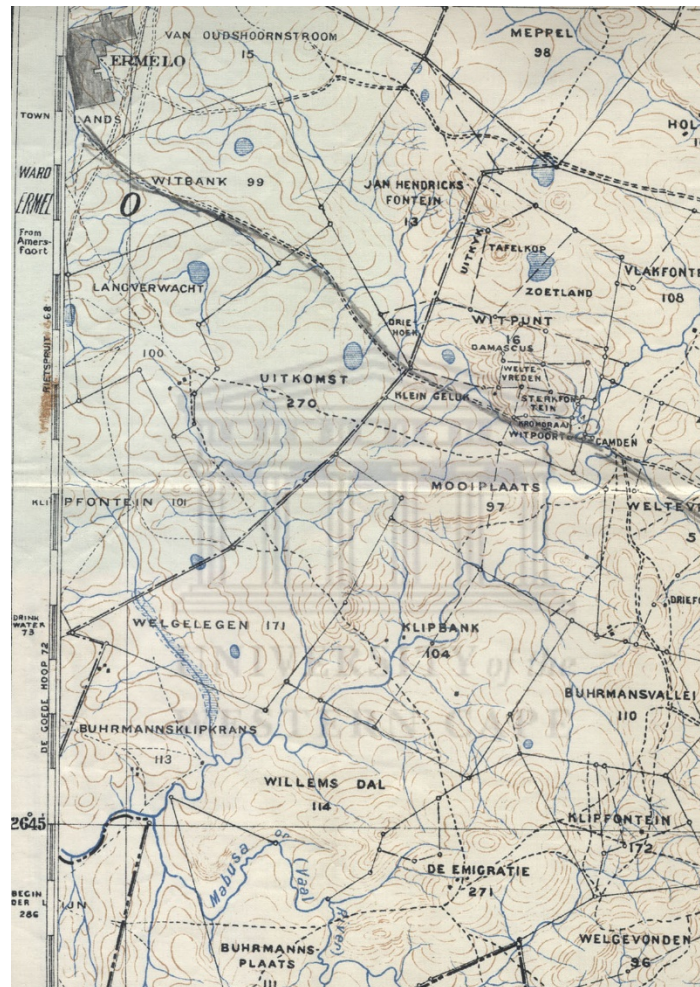
interested in expanding their trade ties with the Dutch emigrants in South Africa. Accompanying him on this voyage was a friend of his, a 26-year-old Hollander named Hendrik Theodor Bührmann.

Bührmann's father had been born in 1786 in Bramsche, a small German town in the district of Osnabrück. At some point the family had relocated to Amsterdam, where Hendrik was born in 1822. Not much is known about his early life. Before emigrating, he was employed as a clerk in a bookshop, and, although he seems to have had no formal tertiary education, he appears to have been well-read and intelligent. He was certified by the Dutch Reformed Church as a catechism teacher.<sup>9</sup>

It is not clear what motivated Bührmann's relocation to South Africa. Some have proposed that his friend Johan Smellekamp had persuaded Bührmann to act as arbiter in the disputes that had arisen amongst Boer groups in the Transvaal.<sup>10</sup> Others suggest a simpler objective: Bührmann aimed to get rich in the Transvaal.<sup>11</sup> Whatever his motives, Bührmann disembarked at Delagoa Bay in August 1848 and shortly thereafter travelled to Ohrigstad with the Portuguese trader João Albasini,<sup>12</sup> ostensibly to assume the role of *schoolmeester* (schoolmaster)<sup>13</sup> within that community. However, he immediately reneged on this undertaking and pursued his own economic and political interests. Within a short time, he had assumed a role of some importance in the region.<sup>14</sup>

- 
- 9 Biebie de Villiers, 'Historiese Oorsig' in D. de Villiers and B. de Villiers (van der Merwe), eds., *Bührmann Familieboek. H.T. Bührmann en sy Nageslag* (Cape Town: Private Publication, 2005), 5-7. See also M.J. Swart, 'Bührmann, Hendrik Teodor (Theodor)' in D.W. Krüger, ed., *Dictionary of South African Biography Volume II* (Pretoria: HSRC, 1972), 97-99.
- 10 Marius Swart, 'Bührmann, Hendrik Teodor (Theodor)', 98. For an account of the schisms and disputes that plagued the Boers in the Transvaal, see Hermann Giliomee, *The Afrikaners. Biography of a People* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 2003), 159-92, and A.P. van der Merwe, 'Die Voorgeskiedenis van die Republiek Lydenburg' (MA dissertation, University of Pretoria, 1940).
- 11 De Villiers suggests that the family had suffered a financial setback which may have been the reason the young Hendrik relocated to South Africa; Biebie de Villiers, 'Historiese Oorsig', 6. See also G.A. Kooy, *Een Eeuw Boerenlewen in Zuidoost-Transvaal* (Wageningen, H. Veenman & Zonen N.V., 1965), 60.
- 12 The Portuguese trader and adventurer João Albasini had a long association with the Boers. In mid-1848, he made the journey to Delagoa Bay with two wagons to meet the boat on which Smellekamp was travelling, probably to trade ivory and skins for ammunition and other merchandise; J.B. de Vaal, 'Die Rol van João Albasini in die Geskiedenis van die Transvaal' in A. Kieser et al., eds., *Archives Yearbook for South African History* (Pretoria: Government Printer, 1953), 16. A few years after his arrival, Bührmann purchased an agency from Albasini, which substantially contributed to his varied business activities. Van der Merwe names Hendrik Bührmann amongst the earliest inhabitants of Lydenburg, 'who, on the corner of Office Street and Bührmann Street, operated his little shop and little agency' (my translation); Biebie van der Merwe, 'Voorgeskiedenis', 68.
- 13 In July 1848, the *Volksraad* (legislative council) of Ohrigstad had written a letter to Smellekamp which they meant for him to convey to 'De Hollandsche Handel- en Redery-Maatschappij te Vlaardingen'. The letter was a plaintive appeal for a *leeraar* (minister) and *goede onderwijzers voor de jeugd* (good teachers for the young) to be sent out from Holland. Smellekamp wrote back to say that Bührmann would immediately be sent to them to take on the role of *schoolmeester* (school master). Bührmann consequently travelled to the Ohrigstad area with Albasini supposedly to attend to the educational needs of the settlement; S.P. Engelbrecht, *Geskiedenis van de Nederduits Hervormde Kerk in Zuid-Afrika Deel I* (Amsterdam en Pretoria: J.H. de Busy, 1920); also A.P. van der Merwe, 'Onderwys en Onderwysers in Lydenburg' in Munisipaliteit van Lydenburg, *Lydenburgse Eeufeasgedenboek, 1850-1950* (Munisipaliteit van Lydenburg, 1950), 134-52.
- 14 M.J. Swart, 'De Emigratie', *Historia*, 4, 1, 1959, 55-59.

In 1849, Bührmann married Margharetta Magdalena Marè, who died during the birth of their fourth child in 1855. In 1857, Bührmann married the widow Johanna Jacoba Neethling, who had two children from her first marriage. From this union, a further seven children would be born, including Vera's father, Johannes.<sup>15</sup> In 1865, Bührmann and several other families moved from Lydenburg to the Highveld region of the eastern Transvaal, where he established the farm De Emigratie. He lived there until his death in 1890.



**Figure 1.2:** Surveyor-General's 1905 map of Ermelo district showing De Emigratie (bottom right). Source: UCT Libraries, Government Publications (used with permission).

What sort of man was Vera's grandfather? Although his family and friends held him in 'the highest esteem and even admiration,'<sup>16</sup> this appraisal of his character was by no means universal. Several reasons can be or were put forward in support of such negative assessments of Bührmann. In the first

<sup>15</sup> See Appendix 1 for genealogical information.

<sup>16</sup> Biebie De Villiers, 'Historiese Oorsig', 11 (my translation).

place, Bührmann had joined the Boer community ostensibly to serve as schoolteacher but failed to fulfil this obligation. Given the community's desperate need for teachers, this would have represented a moral failure in the eyes of his adopted countrymen. Secondly, his self-serving political machinations would have further alienated many of them from him. Ambitious, opinionated, tactless, and with an exaggerated sense of self-importance, Bührmann repeatedly played established Boer leaders such as Potgieter and Pretorius off against each other, further fuelling the feuds and disunity that characterised this period in the history of the Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek (ZAR).<sup>17</sup> He was consequently accused of fomenting dissension amongst the Boer leaders.<sup>18</sup>

The most extensive analysis of Bührmann's political contribution to the ZAR is that by historian Marius Swart,<sup>19</sup> who describes Bührmann as a controversial figure whose personality was partly to blame for history overlooking him. His youth, coupled with an exaggerated sense of calling and ambitions that were often unrealistic, set him on a collision course with many of the established Boer leaders. As another historian put it, Bührmann 'played a prominent but perhaps irresponsible role in public affairs.'<sup>20</sup>

Bührmann's political ambitions might have been thwarted, but, if his motive for relocating to the ZAR was to accumulate wealth, he certainly succeeded. His diverse enterprises (he was 'a trader, money-lender, farmer, speculator, auctioneer, postal official, agent, chief assizer and copyist')<sup>21</sup> made him a very rich man. Bearing in mind that the young Hollander had arrived in South Africa with only two suitcases and had borrowed the money for the voyage, how are we to account for the inordinately large fortune he amassed in a short space of time?

Part of his financial success was no doubt due to Bührmann being 'unusually talented,' far more so than his less educated and less sophisticated Boer contemporaries. He was an astute businessman with an eye for opportunities, an entrepreneur.<sup>22</sup> De Emigratie (on which he operated a store and a post office) was situated on the main route between Transvaal and Natal, enabling him to

---

17 A.P. van der Merwe, 'Voorgeskiedenis', 72, note 1, 77.

18 G.A. Kooy, *Een Eeuw Boerenlewen in Zuidoost-Transvaal*, 60.

19 Marius Swart, *Hendrik Teodor Bührmann, Sy Rol in die Transvaalse Republiek* (Cape Town: HAUM, 1963). His 1956 doctoral dissertation, on which the 1963 monograph is based, ran to more than 600 pages.

20 T.R.H. Davenport, *South Africa. A Modern History* (London: Macmillan, 1991), 82.

21 Marius Swart, 'Bührmann, Hendrik Teodor (Theodor)', 98 (my translation).

22 Biebie De Villiers, 'Historiese Oorsig', 12.

extend his business ventures, such as the agency which he purchased from João Albasini in 1853. A born speculator who had a clearer understanding of the potential value of land than his contemporaries,<sup>23</sup> Bührmann used his position as master of deceased estates to buy up property from such estates at reduced prices, progressively augmenting his land-holdings.<sup>24</sup>

But it wasn't only business acumen that contributed to Bührmann's financial success. Land was easy to acquire 'for the white citizen.'<sup>25</sup> It was often merely a case of staking a claim to a piece of unoccupied land, registering the claim with a local magistrate, and then having the land inspected later, after which title deeds were drawn up. Such a system was clearly open to abuse, especially by officers of the state. Bührmann was one such officer of the state who appears to have benefitted unfairly from his privileged position:

The men in a position to accumulate land were often also officers of the state, and were thus in a position to ensure that their rights or titles were validated and to have inside knowledge of the land market. In the absence of alternatives, the state also rewarded services rendered to it in land and granted farms to officials in lieu of salaries. An example of accumulation through these means in the Lydenburg area was provided by H. Bührmann (Landdroos from 1849-1851, Secretary to the Volksraad and subsequently a member of that body) who by 1869 was the owner of eighteen farms.<sup>26</sup>

Bührmann was clearly not averse to 'milking' the system. Even the *Familieboek* acknowledges that, his entrepreneurial talents notwithstanding, his extensive land-holdings were in part due to the insider knowledge he had access to as an officer of the state.

Bührmann would have needed a sizeable labour force to work his extensive land-holdings and assist his large family. The question of the procurement of labour thus arises. The scarcity of labour was a perennial problem for the Boers, who exploited several questionable avenues for securing labour as they trekked into the interior of South Africa. One such avenue was the so-called 'black ivory' trade, a trade in African children.

---

23 G.A. Kooy, *Een Eeuw Boerenlewen in Zuidoost-Transvaal*, 62.

24 D.J. Erasmus, 'Re-thinking the Great Trek: A Study of the Nature and Development of the Boer Community in the Ohrigstad/Lydenburg Area, 1845-1877', (MA dissertation, Rhodes University, 1995), 81.

25 T.R.H. Davenport, *A Modern History*, 76.

26 Peter Delius, *The Land Belongs to Us: The Pedi Polity, the Boers, and the British in the Nineteenth-Century Transvaal* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 128.



To avoid being seen as condoning slavery, the ZAR had enacted the Apprenticeship Act in 1851. In terms of this Act, the *inboekstelling* (registry system, system of apprenticeship) allowed for the apprenticing of African children provided they had been obtained ‘legally’ or voluntarily. But the Act also allowed for the transfer of *inboekelinge* (apprentices, registerees), which resulted in a lucrative trade in child labourers. By the 1860s, according to missionary reports, *inboekelinge* were the main source of labour in the eastern Transvaal.<sup>27</sup> Bührmann benefitted from the system; he ‘owned’ 16 children<sup>28</sup> and, by some accounts, treated them harshly.<sup>29</sup> His approach to what Swart calls *naturelle-stamme* (native ‘tribes’) is worth quoting at length:

Bührmann maintained that the native tribes should settle in designated areas. By being allowed to move freely, disease was spread, and effective control could not be imposed. As far as he was concerned, they should also carry passes. Neither guns nor ammunition should find their way into their possession, and those found guilty of breaking this law should be severely punished. He also expected that they should pay tax on a regular basis. He investigated the Boer system of apprenticeship of servants and considered it laudable. To him it was nonsense that anyone would consider it to be slavery ... He wanted the natives to develop in their own areas and he accepted the responsibility of guardianship.<sup>30</sup>

A complex picture thus emerges: Bührmann was in many ways a remarkable man who was often his own worst enemy. A ‘life-long egotist,’<sup>31</sup> he was extremely ambitious, had grandiose political and material aspirations, and was not averse to exploiting the system for his own ends. He identified closely with the Boer *Weltanschauung* and endorsed their beliefs and practices towards the black inhabitants they encountered in the areas where they settled.<sup>32</sup> But there is another side to Bührmann that must be acknowledged. On a frontier lacking in sophistication and opportunities for cultural refinement, he was unusually well-educated. He was well read and subscribed to newspapers and

---

27 Fred Morton, ‘Captive Labor in the Western Transvaal after the Sand River Convention’ in E. Elredge and F. Morton, eds., *Slavery In South Africa: Captive Labor On The Dutch Frontier* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 167-86.

28 D.J. Erasmus, ‘Re-thinking the Great Trek’, 97. In a footnote (note 44, p. 119), Erasmus cites a letter written by *Landroest* Bührmann which explicitly states that children were being sold, not ‘apprenticed’ or any of the other euphemisms used to describe the practice. The number of child slaves reportedly owned by Bührmann during his Lydenburg days varies. Van der Walt and Erasmus put the number at 16, while Delius puts it at 18.

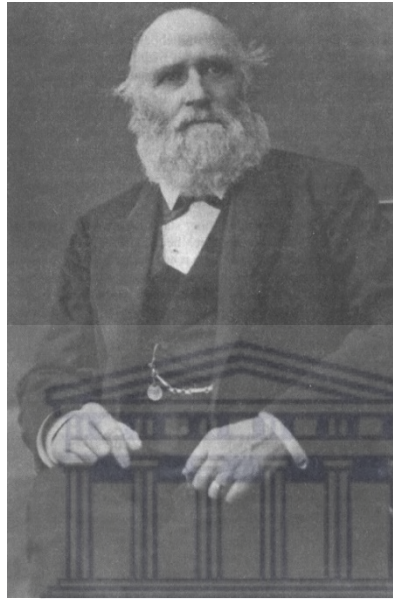
29 J.C. van der Walt, *Zululand True Stories* (Richards Bay: published by Dr J.C. van der Walt, 2009), 72.

30 Marius Swart, *Hendrik Teodor Bührmann*, 86, my translation.

31 *Ibid*, 13, 65.

32 As Eric Walker put it, the Boers ‘held as firmly as any politician in the Carolinas that there was a divinely appointed gulf’ between themselves and the black peoples they encountered. E.A. Walker, ‘The Formation of New States, 1835-1854’ in E. Walker, ed., *The Cambridge History of the British Empire. Volume VIII. South Africa, Rhodesia and the High Commission Territories* (Cambridge: The Syndics of the Cambridge University Press, 1963), 325.

academic texts from Holland, the land he always regarded as the cultural heart of the Boers. He valued education; family lore speaks of a substantial library that he built up, and of a grand piano that was taken by wagon from Delagoa Bay to De Emigratie.<sup>33</sup> His record keeping was meticulous. He taught his children to read and write, and encouraged the education of sons *and* daughters, an attitude not common at the time.<sup>34</sup> Whatever financial and political shenanigans he may have been involved in, he possessed some positive traits that benefitted his family and later generations.



**Figure 1.3:** Hendrik Teodor Bührmann, circa mid-1880s.  
Source: *Bührmann Familieboek* (used with permission).

### **Vera's Parents, Johannes and Johanna (Nonna)**

Vera's father, Johannes Rudolph Bührmann,<sup>35</sup> was just 22 years of age when he inherited De Emigratie after his father's death in 1890. Three years later, he married Johanna Magrietha Steenkamp, who was known as Nonna throughout her life.<sup>36</sup> In all, ten children would be born to the couple, over a period spanning almost 20 years.

33 G.A. Kooy relates an anecdote that illustrates Bührmann's well-stocked library. A serious problem facing the early inhabitants of the eastern Transvaal was a lack of firewood. One day, in the mid-1870s, H.T. Bührmann's son Hendrik found an odd black rock in a river. He took it home and showed it to his father. Bührmann consulted his Encyclopaedia Britannica and concluded that the odd black rock was coal. Young Hendrik's fortuitous find, coupled with his father's access to Encyclopaedia Britannica, solved the farmers' fuel shortage. G.A. Kooy, *Een Eeuw Boerenlewen in Zuidoost-Transvaal*, 39. On coal being discovered on De Emigratie, see also R.T.J. Lombard, *Ermelo 1880-1980* (Ermelo: Ermelo Town Council, 1980), 101.

34 The many letters from his children in the H.T. Bührmann Collection in the National Archives in Pretoria attest to their literacy and reflect the respect and affection with which they regarded their parents; National Archives, Pretoria, W73, H.T. Bührmann Collection.

35 Johannes Rudolph Bührmann \* 25 May 1868 † 26 June 1936 (b10 in the family register; see Appendix 1 for an abridged family register).

36 Johanna Magrietha Steenkamp \* 5 July 1871 † 16 November 1941.

Not much is known about Johannes as a child, or about his early education. In the 1870s, during the formative years of the Ermelo region, education was largely in the hands of the family, the church, and a few itinerant teachers.<sup>37</sup> At the age of 13, Johannes and his sisters, Dora and Anna, went to Stellenbosch to attend school for the period that their parents were abroad (1881 to 1883). His elder brother Willem accompanied their parents to Holland but returned early to pursue a theological education at Stellenbosch. He had to abandon this ambition, however, due to health problems, and took over the farm Uitkomst, originally part of De Emigratie.<sup>38</sup> It is probable that when his parents returned from Holland in 1883, Johannes returned to De Emigratie with them and became involved in the management of the farm, particularly in his father's declining years.

Johannes and his brothers were enterprising farmers. Merino sheep formed the economic backbone of their businesses,<sup>39</sup> but they also experimented with various crops. The Bührmann farms experienced something of a golden age between 1890 and 1899. The family of Johannes and Johanna also increased. Four children were born to the couple before the turn of the century. But those halcyon days came to an end with the outbreak of hostilities between Britain and the ZAR in October 1899. De Emigratie and those who lived there would not escape what has been described as 'the most terrible and destructive modern armed conflict in South Africa's history.'<sup>40</sup> The war eventually came to Ermelo and brought with it the devastation and deprivation that would ruin the two Boer republics.<sup>41</sup>

---

37 J.D. Venter, 'Ontwikkeling van die Onderwys in die Ermelose Distrik, 1862-1962', (MEd dissertation, Potchefstroomse Universiteit vir Christelike Hoër Onderwys, 1963), 31-32.

38 Theodora Christina Bührmann \* 30 March 1866 † 8 March 1950 (b9 in the family register); Anna Maria Bührmann \* 19 July 1870 † 16 December 1950 (b11 in the family register); Willem Hendrik Bührmann \* 5 August 1861 † 18 June 1913 (b7 in the family register). Willem had a distinguished war record. After the war he became a member of the Transvaal parliament and after Union in 1910 became a senator in the upper house.

39 The sheep were brought in from the Cape Colony. Wool was a leading export commodity both before and after the war of 1899 to 1902. Between 1910 and 1950, it was second only to gold as the most exported product from South Africa. F. Lilja, 'Inside the Enclosed Farm: Farmers, Shepherds, and the Introduction of New Technology in Cape Wool Farming, 1865-1950', *IRSH*, 63, 1, 2018, 63-89. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020859018000019>.

40 W. Nasson, 'The War for South Africa' in H. Giliomee and M. Mbenga, eds., *New History of South Africa* (Cape Town: Tafelberg Publishers, 2007), 206-23.

41 Apart from the material devastation resulting from the scorched earth policy of the British, the cost in human life was staggeringly high. Roughly ten per cent of the white population of the republics perished, some 6000 on the field of battle and approximately 27 000 in the concentration camps. The British lost almost 22 000 soldiers, and it is estimated that close to 7000 black people died in the camps. C. Reynolds, *Konsentrasiekampsterftes Gedurende die Anglo-Boereoorlog 1899-1902: 'n Genealogiese Databasis van Vroue, Kinders en Bejaardes van Suid-Afrika* (Pretoria: FAK, 2013), 14.

The causes and chronology of the conflict are well known and need not detain us.<sup>42</sup> The Bührmann men were called up for commando duty. In Ermelo, all but one house was flattened.<sup>43</sup> De Emigratie did not escape Kitchener's scorched earth policy; the old homestead and most of the herds and crops were destroyed. Nonna and her children were taken to a concentration camp in Standerton, from where they were later paroled and sent to relatives in Durban.

As one might expect, the war provided the setting for much family lore. One such storyline concerns the efforts of loyal servants who, despite the danger of being imprisoned or even shot if caught, hid some cattle from the British. These animals formed the basis of the herds that had to be rebuilt after the war. Of the sheep, however, only one ram survived.<sup>44</sup> A poignant – and largely apocryphal – story concerns the destruction of the piano which had been carted from Delagoa Bay to De Emigratie by H.T. Bührmann in 1851.<sup>45</sup> The piano had come out to South Africa at the time that H.T. Bührmann's mother had left Holland to join her son in South Africa. As the young narrator tells it, the English officer in charge of razing the homestead ordered that all the furniture be taken outside to be burnt, since the stone house would not take flame. After struggling to get the piano out, he asked permission to play it. Softly at first, and then in a rising crescendo, the most beautiful music the narrator had ever heard issued from the keys of the old piano. Then the English officer stopped playing; rising abruptly from the little stool on which he was seated, he ordered that the piano be

---

42 The centennial of the South African War resulted in a renewed interest in the conflict. In a historiographical review essay, Bill Nasson highlighted several interesting new perspectives that scholars adopted in analysing the conflict; see W. Nasson, 'Waging Total War in South Africa: Some Centenary Writings on the Anglo-Boer War, 1899-1902', *The Journal of Military History*, 66, 3, 2002, 813-28. For a comprehensive historiographical survey stimulated by the centennial, see F.R. van Hartesveldt, *The Boer War. Historiography and Annotated Bibliography* (London: Greenwood Press, 2000). For a selection of more recent works on the war, see W. Nasson, *The War for South Africa* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 2010), 340-45.

43 S.B. Spies cites Major Charles Burnett of the 18th Hussars, who noted that when they were in Ermelo from 12 to 16 September, they wreaked 'probably as much destruction as any column had previously done in so short a space of time, for on our departure only one house remained intact out of the many well-built residences in that pretty town.' S.B. Spies, *Methods of Barbarism? Roberts and Kitchener and Civilians in the Boer Republics January 1900-May 1902* (Cape Town: Human & Rousseau, 1977), 176.

44 Johann Bührmann, 'Pa-Rudolph se Verhale' in D. de Villiers and B. de Villiers (van der Merwe), eds., *Bührmann Familieboek. H.T. Bührmann en sy Nageslag* (Cape Town: Private Publication, 2005), 49-51. Louis, one of Johannes's sons, noted that a neighbour, H.N.F. Steenkamp, was released from commando duty to take care of the Steenkamp brothers' livestock. He also undertook to care for the livestock of the Bührmann brothers. 'As a result, after the war my father still had five cows', Louis writes (my translation). National Archives, Pretoria, A1500, J.R. Bührmann Collection.

45 B. de Villiers, 'De Emigratie, 30 Mei 1901' in J. Ferreira, ed., *Boereoorlogstories: 34 Verhale oor die Oorlog van 1899-1902* (Pretoria: JL van Schaik, 1998), 100-02.

chopped up and set ablaze. As he marched away, the narrator noticed that he was crying, the first time she had ever seen a grown man cry.<sup>46</sup>

The cessation of hostilities in May 1902 meant that the survivors of the concentration camps had to be repatriated. Some families reunited, while others went in search of missing relatives. The process of rebuilding shattered lives and ruined farms could begin. On De Emigratie and the other Bührmann farms, the brothers tackled the rehabilitation of their businesses.<sup>47</sup> It was no easy task. 'Apart from the hardships of the veld and the concentration camps, years of work on the farm was undone. The Bührmann brothers lost almost all their livestock, their homes were destroyed, and they had to begin from scratch.'<sup>48</sup>

The victorious British authority, under Alfred Milner, immediately began aggressively pursuing its imperialistic agenda on all fronts. But the Afrikaner 'push back' was not long in coming. An early example of one form that this resistance took is the Christian National Education (NCO) movement initiated in opposition to the government schools with their programme of Anglicisation of Afrikaner schoolchildren.<sup>49</sup> These were *vrije* (independent) schools that received no funds from the administration. Tuition at these schools was in Dutch, contrary to the situation in state schools which allowed a maximum of five lesson-hours per week in Dutch.<sup>50</sup> One such NCO school was started on Willem Bührmann's farm Uitkomst, where the children from the region boarded during school terms.

What sort of man was Vera's father Johannes? In many ways, Johannes built on the foundations laid by his father. Like him, he was an industrious and successful farmer and businessman. He cared well for his large family, insisting on the education of his sons and daughters, many of whom achieved tertiary qualifications. That he was a brave and loyal soldier is beyond

---

46 Amongst the papers in the J.R. Bührmann Collection is a small bundle of hand-written notes on scraps of paper on which Johannes attempted to tabulate the quantum of war damages to be claimed from the British. On one page, under the heading *Voorkamer* (sitting room), he listed 'piano (Schiedmayer) £70'; National Archives, Pretoria, A1500, J.R. Bührmann Collection.

47 Only the farm Uitkomst, Willem Bührmann's farm, was spared destruction during the war because Dr A. Jurriaanse, a Dutch doctor who came to South Africa to support the Boers and remained throughout the war, had installed a field hospital there; see J.C. (Kay) de Villiers, *Healers, Helpers and Hospitals. A History of Military Medicine in the Anglo-Boer War* (Pretoria: Protea, 2008) volume I, 658-60, 696.

48 Biebie De Villiers, 'Historiese Oorsig', 24 (my translation).

49 The NCO movement gained ground rapidly throughout the country. Within a few years, there were 228 such schools in the Transvaal; Hermann Giliomee, *Afrikaners*, 270.

50 J.C. Steyn, *Tuiste in Eie Taal. Die Behoud en Staen van Afrikaans* (Kaapstad: Tafelberg, 1980), 183.

dispute. He served with some distinction during the South African War and was wounded twice.<sup>51</sup> He played an active part in public life, always motivated by the interests of the *volk* (the Afrikaner people). He was deeply involved in Afrikaner cultural affairs, particularly the promotion of the Afrikaans language. In later years, Vera recalled that he ‘collected’ artists and writers, that is, he sought out their company, and that these people often stayed as guests at De Emigratie.<sup>52</sup> As we have seen, one such guest was the pianist Vere Bosman di Ravelli, after whom Vera was named.

On a personal level, he was intelligent, sensitive, affable, and well-liked. He was also a man of integrity, as the following anecdote illustrates. It seems that the minister of agriculture, General Kemp, appointed Johannes Bührmann as an inspector during an outbreak of *brandsiekte*, a skin disease that affected livestock. Part of the work involved prosecuting farmers who tried to hide evidence of the disease. One such prosecution involved an eminent person. When General Louis Botha attempted to persuade Johannes not to prosecute this person, he resigned rather than be party to such unethical behaviour.<sup>53</sup>

In his later years he experienced several setbacks. In 1917 or early 1918, when Vera was just seven or eight years old, he suffered an injury to his leg, from which he never recovered. It deteriorated over time, hampering his mobility and affecting his mood.<sup>54</sup> Shortly thereafter, in March 1918, he suffered heavy financial losses as a result of a company of which he was a director going bankrupt.<sup>55</sup> The loss of De Emigratie and his other farms was only prevented by his three older sons coming together to buy him out. These two factors, his financial embarrassment and his physical impairment, led to him becoming increasingly isolated, withdrawn, and depressed.<sup>56</sup> These deeply unsettling changes in the family’s fortunes and in her father’s health would surely leave an imprint on young Vera’s childhood and later life.

---

51 He had been on commando twice before the war, once during a tribal uprising, and again during the Jameson Raid, but was not involved in any skirmishes on those occasions.

52 Anonymous, ‘Transcript of Interview with Vera Bührmann’, undated, (A~1.VER; Vera’s Philosophy and Lifestory).

53 Johann Bührmann, ‘Die Bührmanns se Skaapboerdery’ in D. de Villiers and B. de Villiers (van der Merwe), eds., *Bührmann Familieboek. H.T. Bührmann en sy Nageslag* (Cape Town: Private Publication, 2005), 64.

54 One account suggests that he injured his leg playing tennis, another that it happened aboard ship. In later years, Vera described her father as a ‘neurotic’ person, prone to depression.

55 On the Smithfield Cold Storage and Export Company of South Africa saga, which almost caused the loss of De Emigratie and other farms, see J. McKenzie, *A Man of His Time - Brigadier General Sir Duncan McKenzie* (Pietermaritzburg: Triple Creek Publishing, 2011).

56 National Archives, Pretoria, A1500, J.R. Bührmann Collection, L. Bührmann, ‘’n Lewenskets’ (‘A life sketch’); my translation.

Far less information is available about Vera's mother, Johanna (Nonna) Magrietha Steenkamp.<sup>57</sup> The *Familieboek* notes that she was three years younger than Johannes and came from the farm Welgelegen in the Middelburg district.<sup>58</sup> In later life Vera recalled that, as with most girls of her generation, her mother had very little, if any, formal schooling. An intellectual gap seems to have existed between her and Johannes, although he taught her to read and write after they were married.<sup>59</sup>

In the absence of specific information, we might draw speculatively on general characterisations of Boer women from this period. Based on the accounts of contemporary writers and travellers, a portrait emerges that is summed up by the historian Hermann Giliomee when he writes that the 'Afrikaner women of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries can only be described as very tough, very formidable and very resourceful.'<sup>60</sup> This image was enhanced significantly by the ordeals suffered by Boer women during the war of 1899 to 1902, and in this setting Johanna certainly seems to have lived up to Giliomee's characterisation. During the so-called 'conventional' phase of the war, Nonna took care of business on the farm while Johannes did military duty with the Ermelo commando. From a published series of letters that Johannes wrote to his young wife while on commando,<sup>61</sup> we learn that she proved to be a capable farm manager in his absence, and he frequently expresses gratitude to her for taking on these additional burdens.

Notwithstanding the sentimentality that enforced separation and the hardships of war must have induced, the letters reveal a bond of genuine affection between the young couple. For example, in a letter dated 13 February 1900 (the day before their seventh wedding anniversary), Johannes writes that he wants her to know that he has not forgotten the significance of the following day; how could he, he says, when it is his 'red letter day.' In the same letter he states,

---

57 \* 5 July 1871 † 16 November 1941.

58 D. de Villiers and B. de Villiers (van der Merwe), 'Familieregister van H.T. Bührmann en Sy Die [*sic*] Nageslag' in D. de Villiers and B. de Villiers (van der Merwe), eds., *Bührmann Familieboek. H.T. Bührmann en sy Nageslag* (Cape Town: Private Publication, 2005), 139.

59 Anonymous, 'Transcript of Interview with Vera Bührmann', undated, (A~1.VER; Vera's Philosophy and Lifestory).

60 H. Giliomee, 'The Rise and Fall of Afrikaner Women'. Talk given at Spier Estate, Stellenbosch, on 2 August 2003. Accessed 19 September 2017. <http://www.oulitnet.co.za/seminarroom/afwoman.asp>.

61 J.R. Bührmann, 'Briewe van JR Bührmann aan sy Famielie Tydens die Anglo-Boereoorlog, 1899-1902', *Die Kultuurhistorikus*, 17, 2, n.d., 5-38; for Part 2 see J.R. Bührmann, 'Briewe van JR Bührmann aan sy Famielie Tydens die Anglo-Boereoorlog, 1899-1902, Aflewering 2', *Die Kultuurhistorikus*, 40, 2, 2003, 5-35.

It [the war] has also taught me something else – what priceless gems we have in our partners. And a kiss from you – the value of that I have also learned. For that I would be prepared to ride for many hours through rain, storm and wind.<sup>62</sup>

He tells her that he had better stop writing in this vein otherwise he will desert!

But eventually the ‘total war’ reached Ermelo. Nonna and her young family witnessed the destruction of their home and the ruination of their labour. On 30 May 1901, they were rounded up by British soldiers and taken to a camp at Standerton. According to official sources, ‘Mrs Johanna Maghrita Buurman [*sic*]’ arrived at Standerton camp on 6 June 1901, along with her daughter Aletta, sons Hendrik and Willem, and a relative, Marie Katrina J. Steenkamp.<sup>63</sup> How long she stayed in the camp before being paroled to Durban<sup>64</sup> is unknown, but the conditions in the camp would have made any length of stay an ordeal. Pretorius notes that the location of the camp was poorly chosen: ‘the soil became a soggy morass during the rainy season, while the winters were bitterly cold.’<sup>65</sup> Van Heyningen concurs: ‘The cold, in this wet winter [1901], was intense. Many of the inmates had no warm clothing and Moffatt [the camp superintendent] was unable to satisfy the demand for blankets, let alone garments. ... It is hardly surprising that there was a “considerable amount” of sickness, mainly enteric and dysentery.’<sup>66</sup> Mortality rates amongst the children escalated in September and October 1901 due to a measles epidemic. Whether or not Johanna and her children were still there at that time is unknown.

Even though Nonna lost no children in the camps and may seem to have been better off in Durban amongst family members than those women who were interned for the duration of the war, the

---

62 J.R. Bührmann, ‘Briewe, Aflewing 2’, 28, 29 (my translation).

63 Elizabeth van Heyningen, ‘British Concentration Camps of the South African War 1900-1902’, [http://www2.lib.uct.ac.za/mss/bccd/Person/146134/Johanna\\_Maghrita\\_Buurman/](http://www2.lib.uct.ac.za/mss/bccd/Person/146134/Johanna_Maghrita_Buurman/). For a succinct overview of the controversies in the historiography of the concentration camps, see Elizabeth van Heyningen, ‘The Concentration Camps of the South African (Anglo-Boer) War, 1900-1902’, *History Compass* 7, 1, 2009, 22-43. The relative ‘Marie Katrina J. Steenkamp’ is in all likelihood Nonna’s younger sister, Maatje Catharina Jacoba Steenkamp (\* 24 June 1887 † 1964).

64 In an interview in 1978, Nonna’s son Louis states that she was sent to the camp at Volksrust, before being allowed, at own expense, to travel to Durban where her mother (‘Ouma Steenkamp’) lived, but there is no evidence to suggest that she was at the Volksrust camp. North-West University Library, Die Ossewa-Brandwag Argief, ‘Die Ossewa-Brandwag - Herinneringe van Mnr. L.C.R. Bührmann’. Band nr. 165, 1985. My thanks to Mr Evert Kleynhans, archivist at North-West University, for providing me with electronic copies of documents from the Ossewa-Brandwag archive.

65 Fransjohan Pretorius, ‘The Fate of the Boer Women and Children’ in Fransjohan Pretorius (ed.), *Scorched Earth* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 2017), 46.

66 Elizabeth van Heyningen, ‘British Concentration Camps’, [http://www2.lib.uct.ac.za/mss/bccd/Person/146134/Johanna\\_Maghrita\\_Buurman/](http://www2.lib.uct.ac.za/mss/bccd/Person/146134/Johanna_Maghrita_Buurman/).



mere act of dislocation would have been traumatic.

Deportation was an agony for women who had never been farther than the nearest town before the war. Their identity was bound up in the networks of kin and place, and they struggled to recreate them in these unfamiliar places.<sup>67</sup>

Van Heyningen also notes that post-war testimonies contain little information about the struggles that women faced when hostilities ended. ‘They say little about their health or the struggle to find their feet after the war.’<sup>68</sup> We can thus assume that Nonna, like thousands of other farm wives, struggled to ‘find her feet’ as she juggled the arduous task of assisting her husband in rebuilding the farm, and taking care of the family. In 1903 she gave birth to the first of her post-war children. The child was named Louis Christiaan Rudolph,<sup>69</sup> in honour of the Boer generals Louis Botha and Christiaan Rudolph de Wet. Two years later, she gave birth to another son, Johannes Rudolph.<sup>70</sup> A period of five years elapsed before her next child (Vera)<sup>71</sup> was born, although it is possible that she miscarried in the intervening period.<sup>72</sup> Two further children, Henriette Charlotte<sup>73</sup> (‘Jet’) and Hermanus Nicolaas Steenkamp<sup>74</sup> (‘Boet’), completed the family.



**Figure 1.4:** Vera’s mother, Johanna, in 1902 with her children during the period of her parole in Durban during the South African War. Back: Aletta, Hendrick, and Johanna (Pat). Front on chair: Willem. Source: *Bührmann Familieboek* (used with permission).

67 Elizabeth van Heyningen, *The Concentration Camps. A Social History* (Johannesburg: Jacana, 2013), 205.

68 Ibid, 317.

69 \* 14 March 1903 † 26 August 1985.

70 \* 28 August 1905 † 1 November 1999.

71 \* 6 January 1910 † 25 August 1998.

72 Anonymous, ‘Transcript of Interview with Vera Bührmann’, undated, (A~1.VER; Vera’s Philosophy and Lifestory).

73 \* 18 August 1911 † 12 December 1985.

74 \* 26 September 1912 † 2 September 1949.

## Conclusion

In this concluding section, we return to the premise made at the start of the chapter, that Vera's ancestors, particularly her father and grandfather, and the political milieu into which she was born, shaped her development. It was inevitable that this should be the case.

At the time of Vera's birth, Afrikaner nationalism was on the rise. The Afrikaner *volk* was in the process of forging a new identity, with new myths, new symbols, and new values. The process of building the *volk* can be said to have taken place along three axes: the development of the *taal* (a standardised Afrikaans language) and the creation of a body of Afrikaans literature, the establishment of Afrikaner commercial enterprises and institutions, and the formulation of a nationalistic history.<sup>75</sup>

Vera's father, Johannes, was heavily involved in all these areas.<sup>76</sup> With reference to the development of Afrikaans, for example, he served on the commission for the *Afrikaans-Hollandse Tijdskrif* alongside eminent language activists such as Gustav Preller, and, when Preller's Afrikaanse Taalgenootskap (ATG; Afrikaans Language Association, established in 1905) launched its illustrated magazine *Die Brandwag* in 1910, he served on the magazine's steering committee.<sup>77</sup>

Johannes was also concerned that the Afrikaner *volk* should shake off its subservient status in the economic arena and pursued this ideal, particularly in the agricultural sector, in which he played an active role. He was, for example, a founding member of the Afrikanerbeesstamboekvereniging (a stud book aimed at improving the pedigree of livestock). He was an ardent proponent of cooperatives as a mechanism to uplift his fellow farmers.<sup>78</sup> He travelled to Britain and Europe in 1908 to investigate co-operative markets for wool, although nothing seems to have come of the expedition. He was also very involved in the political life of the community. Despite the esteem in which he held General Louis Botha, he defected from Botha's South African Party with its conciliatory policies to B.J.M. Hertzog's

---

75 S. Hough, 'n Kritiese Ondersoek na die Afrikanerbees as Ideologiese Kulturele Fenomeen binne die Konteks van Afrikanernasionalisme' (MA thesis, Stellenbosch, 2010), 16-30.

76 On the role of 'cultural entrepreneurs' in shaping a nationalistic history, see Isabel Hofmeyr, 'Popularizing History: The Case of Gustav Preller', *Journal of African History* 29 (1988), 521-35.

77 On the relationship between Afrikaans and Afrikaner identity, see Isabel Hofmeyr, 'Building a Nation from Words: Afrikaans Language, Literature and Ethnic Identity, 1902-1924' in *The Politics of Race, Class and Nationalism* edited by Shula Marks and Stanley Trapido (New York: Longman, 1987), 95-123. Also J.C. Steyn, *Ons Gaan 'n Taal Maak*, (Pretoria: Kraal Uitgewers, 2014), 111.

78 D. de Villiers and B. de Villiers (van der Merwe), 'Samewerking' in D. de Villiers and B. de Villiers (van der Merwe), eds., *Bührmann Familieboek. H.T. Bührmann en sy Nageslag* (Cape Town: Private Publication, 2005), 69-71.

newly formed National Party with its founding slogan of ‘South Africa First’.<sup>79</sup> South Africa’s involvement in the First World War, and in particular the role of black South African soldiers serving abroad, seems to have crystallised in him a narrower nationalistic focus. He contested the Ermelo seat for the Nationalist Party in 1915 but lost to the South African Party candidate by 600 votes.<sup>80</sup>

It must be remembered that Vera’s parents embodied the very nationalistic history that Afrikaner culture brokers were attempting to codify at the time of her birth and in the two decades following it. Much has been written about the effect that the South African War had on the consciousness of the Afrikaner and its role in fostering Afrikaner identity and nationalism in the first four decades of the twentieth century.<sup>81</sup> The themes of suffering and British brutality, particularly as experienced by women and children in the concentration camps, were used by skilful cultural entrepreneurs in their attempts to forge an Afrikaner identity. Powerful imagery associated with the memorialisation of the war, together with events such as the 1914 rebellion, the growing phenomenon of poor-whitism amongst Afrikaners, the Great Depression, and the rise of fascism in Europe, created what Milton Shain referred to as ‘a perfect storm’ – a ‘set of contingencies’ which gave rise to a resurgent nationalism amongst Afrikaners, and with it, especially in the 1930s, a proliferation of groups on the radical right.<sup>82</sup> Vera grew up amidst the tumult of this developing storm.

The world into which Vera was born was thus replete with the spirit of Afrikaner nationalism. Her parents and older siblings, indeed the very land on which she grew up, bore the scars from which the myths of the emerging *volk* were being forged. And behind these everyday realities lay the legacy of her grandfather, Hendrik Bührmann, the patriarch. An event in 1965 sheds light on how his legacy was interpreted a century after he settled on De Emigratie.

---

79 Richard Steyn, *Louis Botha. A Man Apart* (Cape Town: Jonathan Ball Publishers, 2018), 183.

80 B.F. Schoeman, *Parlementêre Verkiesings in Suid-Afrika, 1910-1976* (Pretoria: Aktuele Uitgewers, 1977), 77.

81 See Albert Grundlingh, ‘The Anglo-Boer War in 20th-Century Afrikaner Consciousness’ in Fransjohan Pretorius (ed.), *Scorched Earth* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 2017), 230-49. As van Heyningen remarks, ‘More has been written about the legacy of the camps than the camps themselves’; Elizabeth van Heyningen, *The Concentration Camps*, 309. For an account of how the meaning of the camps and their legacy have been reshaped at various points in time, see Liz Stanley, *Mourning Becomes ... Post/Memory, Commemoration and the Concentration Camps of the South African war* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2008). See also Hermann Giliomee, ‘The Beginnings of Afrikaner Ethnic Consciousness, 1850-1915’ in Leroy Vail, *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa* (London: James Curry, 1989), 21-54.

82 Milton Shain, *A Perfect Storm: Antisemitism in South Africa, 1930-1948* (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball Publishers, 2015).

On New Year's Day, 1965, the Bührmann family gathered at De Emigratie for a double celebration. Apart from marking the centenary of the establishment of the farm, a young couple also used the occasion to get married. Marius Swart, author of the recently published *Hendrik Teodor Bührmann. Sy Rol in die Transvaalse Republiek*, was invited to address the family gathering. In his speech about Vera's grandfather, Swart repeated assertions made in his book that Hendrik Bührmann was a man ahead of his time; the frequent clashes between Bührmann and other Boer leaders were in his opinion largely due to this. But he also emphasised Bührmann's love for his fatherland, South Africa. Despite the fact that he was a Hollander, he loved South Africa as if he had been born and raised on its soil. Swart exhorted his *nageslag* (descendants) to show the same love for the fatherland that their ancestor had shown. Hendrik, he said, took every opportunity to correct misunderstandings and misperceptions that others (foreigners) had about South Africa. Singling out Bührmann's views regarding *voogdyskap* (guardianship) and *eiesoortige ontwikkeling* (distinctive development), which foreshadowed the policies of the ruling Nationalist government, he exhorted the *nageslag* to do the same, that is, correct misunderstandings held by those who did not have a proper understanding of South Africa.

Swart's exhortations were a call to defend the racial policies under apartheid, policies that had been foreshadowed by Vera's grandfather and passed on to his descendants. That was the legacy of Hendrik Bührmann that loomed large over his descendants. It was a concrete legacy, as evidenced by some of the original buildings that were still to be seen on De Emigratie, and the gravestones that bore the names of the generations that had gone before. Sitting in the audience, Vera might not have known her grandfather, but she certainly knew what kind of man he was, and what he stood for. She knew what being born into the Bührmann family meant. She knew what she would later refer to as 'the tradition'. Even though she was born long after the end of the South African War, the long shadow it cast was equally inescapable. 'As the experience of children of Holocaust survivors warns us, the children of traumatised victims do not escape the consequences either,' writes Van Heyningen.<sup>83</sup>

---

83 Elizabeth van Heyningen, *The Concentration Camps*, 318. On the politicisation of the trauma associated with the camps, see also J. Snyman, 'The Politics of Memory: Vestiges of Trauma' in C. van der Merwe and R. Wolfswinkel, eds., *Telling Wounds. Narrative, Trauma & Memory: Working Through the SA Armed Conflicts of the 20th Century*:

‘A life begins long before it starts.’ The farm on which she was born, the family into which she was born, and the time of her birth are all layers in the ‘personal archaeology’<sup>84</sup> of Vera’s life. These layers were foundational; they created the parameters of the tradition within which her life would unfold. Some Afrikaners born into similar situations, like Bram Fischer, were able to redefine those parameters. The major thrust of this study is to find out if Vera was able to redefine them as well, as some have suggested that she did.



---

84 *Proceedings of the Conference Held at the University of Cape Town, 3-5 July 2002* (Stellenbosch: Van Schaik, 2002).  
Stephen Clingman, *Bram Fischer*, 2.

## Chapter 2. The Making of an Afrikaner Woman Doctor (1910-1936)

This chapter covers the first 26 years of Vera's life (1910 to 1936). It follows her academic development from the informal primary education she received on De Emigratie through her university training at, first, the medical school at Witwatersrand University (Wits) in Johannesburg in 1930 and 1931, and then the medical school at the University of Cape Town from 1932 to 1935. The chapter ends with her first medical posting shortly after the death of her father in 1936.

Given the dearth of contemporary sources, and the temporal distance that separates the writer from the events described, it necessarily limits itself to core aspects of Vera's childhood, particularly her relationships with her parents and siblings, and her relationship with black servants on De Emigratie. In reconstructing her childhood and youth, it has been particularly important to adopt a critical attitude towards Vera's late-life recollections as related to Anonymous in the interviews that were conducted with her, as well as to accounts of her childhood and youth found elsewhere, such as family records (sparse as they are).

Two areas, in particular, invite critical consideration. The first is the manner in which Vera cast her life story as one of intense trial and physical suffering, particularly during her childhood and youth. While there is much evidence to support this version of events, it must be remembered that her late-life reconstruction would have been coloured by her psycho-analytic rereading of her childhood. My narration of Vera's childhood thus moves between her late-life retelling and what is verifiable from other sources. A second core theme that has suffered in the retelling of her childhood has to do with family relationships with black servants on De Emigratie. As will become evident in a later chapter (Chapter 5), Vera had good reason to cast her youthful relationship with blacks on De Emigratie in a better light than was the case. To balance this, I use social historian Charles van Onselen's excellent insights about the extent to which alleged respectful and kind treatment of farm servants served to mask patriarchal and paternalist racial attitudes and behaviour on South African farms like De Emigratie in the early to mid-20th century.

## **‘The Core of My Whole Life’: Childhood Ordeals**

Vera’s difficult birth, recounted at the end of Chapter 1, proved portentous, foreshadowing a childhood that, while not characterised by extremes of physical neglect or abuse, was nevertheless beset by difficulties and hardships, some of which plagued her throughout her life. The three most significant childhood challenges she experienced are discussed below: difficulties with her mother and aunt, loneliness, and frequent illnesses. These three factors combined to create what can be seen as the core narrative underpinning her late-life oral memoir as told to Anonymous in 1994-1995.<sup>1</sup>

At some point during the first year of her life, Vera was placed in the care of her mother’s younger sister, Maatje Catharina Jacoba Steenkamp (\* 24 June 1887 † 1964). Maatje, who was 16 years younger than Nonna, had come to live with her sister after the death of their mother. She was one of the children incarcerated with Nonna in the Standerton camp (see Chapter 1). It is probable that she remained on De Emigratie until she married Hendrick Rudolph Neethling in 1922 when she was 35 years old. The reason for Maatje taking over the care of the infant is not clear. It may be that Nonna was not physically able to care for her. At the time of Vera’s birth, Nonna was already 39 years old. The ordeal of her pregnancy followed by Vera’s difficult birth, added to her many other duties and responsibilities in the large household, may well have made it physically untenable for her to deal with the demands of a young child. And she would soon be pregnant again; another child was born a mere 18 months after Vera.

Whatever the reason, Vera was placed in the younger woman’s care, and became known as ‘*Ta’ Maat se kind*’ (Aunt Maat’s child) in family circles. In later life, Vera recalled that her aunt took good physical care of her, and clearly favoured her over her younger siblings.<sup>2</sup> But she felt that being ‘*Ta’ Maat se kind*’ created significant psychological difficulties for her, not just in childhood but throughout her life. She remembered feeling caught between ‘two mothers’: ‘I was always yearning for my real mother,’ she recalled.<sup>3</sup> In one poignant early anecdote, Vera remembered having a little chair which she would place beside her mother’s chair whenever she could, and she would hang on to

---

1 See the explanatory note in the Introduction on Vera’s late-life interviews with ‘Anonymous’, an acquaintance who had undertaken to produce an authorised biography of Vera.

2 Anonymous, ‘Transcript of Interview with Vera Bührmann’, undated (A~1.Ver; Vera’s Philosophy and Lifestory).

3 Ibid.

her mother's legs as she sat next to her. Her mother was seen as a 'soft, comfortable' body. Her aunt, on the other hand, was experienced as a 'hard, virgin' body. 'It was just the soft, mothering, intuitive thing that she lacked ... but she did the expected, good thing,' Vera said of her aunt. One of the 'good' things was reading to Vera every night.<sup>4</sup>

In later life, employing the terminology of an analytical therapist, Vera described Ta' Maat as a 'devouring' mother, a term used to describe a mother who, amongst other things, is overly possessive and dependent. In a letter addressed to 'Robert' (Dr Robert Hobson, her analyst) dated 17 July 1965, she identifies a 'shadow' side of herself: her aunt's excessive adoration and dependence was met with 'my angry defensive and withholding attitude.'<sup>5</sup> At the time that she wrote this letter, she was experiencing an existential crisis (see Chapter 5). She was beset with feelings of disenchantment and boredom with her work at the University of Cape Town and Groote Schuur Hospital, and doubted her efficacy as a therapist and lecturer. She did not relate well to anyone who treated her as 'precious,' reacting with 'repugnance, anger and hostility.' She found it particularly difficult to meet the demands placed on her to lecture and give talks and had started refusing such engagements because they placed her under an obligation 'to *know*, to study, to work' (her emphasis) when what she really wanted was to resign from her various positions and start a flower farm. Now well into her fifties, she traced this 'real shadow' aspect of her personality back to being '*Ta' Maat se kind*'.

The second hardship Vera recalls having experienced as a child was loneliness. The primary cause was the fact that at the time of her birth her siblings were all much older; the eldest child, Aletta, was 16 years old, and the child immediately before Vera was five when she was born. The two children that came after her were born a mere year apart and formed a close bond from which she felt excluded (see Figure 2.1). Vera thus felt isolated from her much older siblings and the two that came after her. Being favoured by Aunt Maat also contributed significantly to her loneliness, because it set her apart from her younger siblings who were often treated harshly by her adoptive 'mother'.

---

4 Ibid.

5 UCT Libraries, Special Collections, BC1164, The Vera Bührmann Papers, B12, Correspondence, M.V. Bührmann to Robert [Hobson] 17 July 1965.





**Figure 2.1:** Vera (right) with her younger siblings, De Emigratie, circa 1915. The younger two were close in age, leaving Vera isolated from them and from her much older siblings. Source: *Bührmann Familieboek* (used with permission).

The most significant childhood difficulty that Vera had to deal with was illness. Her childhood was punctuated with a number of serious – at times even life-threatening – bouts of illness. One of her earliest memories, when she was still sleeping in a cot in Ta’ Maat’s room (thus presumably aged two or three), was screaming while being wrapped in wet sheets to break a fever. This was followed by a bout of measles and pneumonia at the age of four from which it was thought that she might not recover. But it was the debilitating abdominal pains she suffered from in early childhood that were the most persistent and puzzling. The family doctor could never explain the pains, so it was presumed that she was simply ‘her father’s child,’ that is, neurotic like Johannes. But to Vera they were very real, so real that in her late life interviews with Anonymous she described these pains as the ‘core of my whole life.’<sup>6</sup> It was only shortly before she was due to leave for university in 1930 that the cause of her abdominal pains became known. Early in 1930 she had suffered an attack so severe it was again thought she would die. An operation for suspected appendicitis was performed, unnecessarily as it turned out, but it finally revealed the cause of her problem: she suffered from a congenital condition known as intestinal malrotation. Her organs were simply not where they were meant to be.<sup>7</sup>

6 Anonymous, ‘Transcript of Interview with Vera Bührmann’, undated (A~1.Ver; Vera’s Philosophy and Lifestory).

7 ‘Malrotation of the midgut loop, better defined as an anomaly of mixed rotation or of complete rotation, occurs when the proximal midgut fails to rotate around the mesenteric vessels during the second stage of rotation. The distal midgut does rotate 90 degrees in a counterclockwise direction, however, with the result that the jejunum and ileum remain to the right of the superior mesenteric artery and the cecum is situated in the sub-pyloric region.’ M. Feldman, L.S. Friedman, and L.J. Brandt, eds. *Sleisenger and Fordtran’s Gastrointestinal and Liver Disease: Pathophysiology, Diagnosis, Management* (Philadelphia: Saunders/Elsevier, 2010), 2077.

Complications arising from this condition meant that throughout her adult life she suffered protracted attacks of severe abdominal pain, usually accompanied by hallucinations and incessant vomiting. A number of acute episodes resulted in further surgeries in 1946, 1971, and 1987.<sup>8</sup>

Her difficult birth, coupled with her frequent illnesses and brushes with death, appear to have created within the family the belief that she was endowed with some higher purpose. Vera came to share this notion. After each emergency, she experienced feelings such as ‘God doesn’t want me yet’ or ‘God is throwing me back.’<sup>9</sup> Having cheated death so often, she felt she was meant to survive in order to fulfil some larger purpose. That purpose, she believed, was to do ‘something that would decrease the suffering.’<sup>10</sup> And so, the *plaasnooi* (farm girl) determined that one day she would practise medicine. Her extensive childhood experience with illness and pain seems to have sensitised her to the suffering of others, and no doubt informed her decision to become a doctor. In time she would become acutely aware of the devastation that mental illness caused among close family members and would extend her ‘purpose’ to the alleviation of mental illness as well.

Gradually, then, these hardships crystallised in a core personal narrative associated with Vera’s decision to study medicine. Her future vocation was foreshadowed by childhood games in which her dolls ‘were my sick children ... I was a rather lonely child and I had a family of dolls and I was constantly playing doctor, patient with them.’<sup>11</sup> But her exposure to illness on the farm went beyond childish games. For example, when farm workers were ill, Vera would go to their huts to find out what was wrong. She would then discuss the symptoms with her mother, and together they would determine the treatment.<sup>12</sup> De Emigratie also saw its fair share of illness amongst friends and family. The German artist Erich Mayer, for example, spent a long time on the farm recuperating from health problems he suffered

---

8 Anonymus, ‘Transcript of Interview with Vera Bührmann’, undated (A~1.Ver; Vera’s Philosophy and Lifestory). For the 1987 episode, see SAAJA Archives, Minutes of a Meeting Held at the Johannesburg Inn on 8 November 1987.

9 Anonymus, ‘Transcript of Interview with Vera Bührmann’, undated (A~1.Ver; Vera’s Philosophy and Lifestory).

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid.

whilst interned during the First World War.<sup>13</sup> Other family members also recuperated there at various times, and Vera assisted with their treatment.

Life on a big farm served as a training ground for a future doctor in other ways. The slaughtering of animals, for example, was a common event. The sight of dismembered carcasses and pools of blood, which might elicit queasiness in others not used to these aspects of farm life, desensitised Vera to the extent that from a young age she dissected snakes and other small creatures. She was driven by ‘curiosity to know about the body. I even read up in the Encyclopaedia Britannica – that was my first handbook.’<sup>14</sup>

## Family Ties

It is not possible, given the dearth of available sources, neither is it necessary for the purpose of this study, to dwell in detail upon mundane aspects of Vera’s early family life. Nevertheless, some pertinent general impressions emerge from such sources as are available. We have already noted in the previous chapter the far-reaching influence her male ancestors (her grandfather and father) would have exercised on her. Vera remembers Johannes being away from the farm often, pursuing his business and other interests. Much of the child rearing was in any case left to the women. She grew up in a highly gendered social milieu in which a patriarchal, male-dominated family structure was considered normative, and would have regarded and treated her father accordingly. This is not to say that there was not genuine affection and respect between her and Johannes. Neither was she blind to his faults; she recalled his ‘neurosis,’ his tenseness and mood changes, and the conflicts that arose because his inherent intellectualism was often at odds with Nonna’s lack of education.<sup>15</sup> Her relationship with her mother exhibited many of the complexities that are common in mother-daughter relationships, such as an inability to speak about intimate matters.<sup>16</sup> As indicated previously, Vera always felt that there was an emotional distance between her and Nonna, brought about by being ‘*Ta Maat se kind*’. Nevertheless,

---

13 Anonymus, ‘Transcript of Interview with Vera Bührmann’, undated (C1PARE~1. Parents) See also T. Diederling, ‘Prisoners of War and Internees (Union of South Africa)’ in U. Daniel, P. Gatrell, O. Jantz, H. Jones, J. Keene, A. Kramer, and B. Nasson, eds., *1914-1918 Online. International Encyclopedia of the First World War* (Berlin: Freie Universität, 2014). DOI: 10.15463/ie1418.10685 (accessed 20 September 2017).

14 Anonymus, ‘Transcript of Interview with Vera Bührmann’, undated (A~1.Ver; Vera’s Philosophy and Lifestory).

15 Ibid.

16 Ibid.

she remained a loyal daughter, leading to somewhat contradictory statements about their relationship. At times she expresses her disappointment at Nonna ‘not having time for me’ but on occasion recalled that ‘she really was a wonderful mother ... I grew up in a fairly supportive family.’<sup>17</sup> The difficulties she experienced as a result of being the child of ‘two mothers’ has already been introduced and will be returned to at a later point in her story.

Vera’s relationship with her siblings was determined to a large degree by the unusual position she occupied in the family. She was the eighth of ten children; the children born before her were considerably older than her, while, as noted, the two that came after her found companionship in each other. Yet many of her siblings, particularly those older than her, would play an important part in her life, and it behoves us to make mention of them, albeit briefly.

Three sisters preceded Vera, one of whom, Johanna Jacoba, died before reaching her second birthday. Johanna Magrieta was ten years older than Vera, and Aletta Elizabeth Isabel Maria, the eldest child in the family, was already 16 years old when Vera was born (see Figure 2.2 below).<sup>18</sup> Johanna Magrieta, known as Pat, studied education at Columbia University in the United States, specialising in education for special needs children. But it was Aletta who played the most significant part in Vera’s life, as will be seen below when Vera’s university education is discussed.



**Figure 2.2:** Vera (middle) with her sisters Pat (left) and Aletta, c. 1930. Source: Mr Johann Bührmann, private collection.

---

17 Ibid.

18 Johanna Magrieta (\* 22 Nov 1900 † 29 June 2001); Aletta Elizabeth Isabel Maria (\* 21 April 1894 † 13 Nov 1979).

Vera had four older brothers, three of whom (Hendrik, Louis and Johannes) continued with farming. The fourth, Willem, however, opted for a career in the economic sector rather than in agriculture. He was driven from a young age by a precocious desire to advance the economic interests of the Afrikaner *volk*. He studied economics in the United States and, following his studies, occupied various posts in America, inter alia that of assistant trade commissioner. He returned to South Africa in late 1929. He was a founding director of Volkskas (Koöperatief) Beperk in 1934, and in time was instrumental in establishing many other leading Afrikaner financial institutions and companies.<sup>19</sup> In addition, he served as chairman of the National Housing Council, and the Native Housing Commission. Vera always felt a great debt of gratitude towards her older brothers, because they kept De Emigratie from being lost to the banks and enabled her dream of becoming a doctor (about which more shortly). This is an important dynamic in her relationship with her brothers, since it may have been instrumental in influencing decisions she later took, as we shall see in the next chapter.

Vera and her siblings were ‘enthusiastic patriots.’<sup>20</sup> Like their father, they were all actively involved in Afrikaner nationalist political and cultural organisations. Vera described her sister Aletta as a ‘precocious’ and ‘very gifted’ person. She had studied at Stellenbosch and become a teacher. She was interested in politics from a young age. She joined the National Woman’s Party and occupied several leading positions, including editing the party’s journal, *Die Burgeres*. She was a fierce campaigner for white women’s right to vote; on one occasion she faced off over this issue in a public forum with the illustrious poet and ideologue, C.J. Langenhoven, who was an ardent opponent of the white women’s suffrage movement.<sup>21</sup> Vera’s brothers were active members of the Afrikaner Broederbond (AB), as well as members of some of the more radical organisations such as the Ossewa-Brandwag (OB) and the New

---

19 See G. Verhoef, ‘Afrikaner Nationalism in South African Banking: The Cases of Volkskas and Trust Bank’ in S. Jones, ed., *Financial Enterprise in South Africa since 1950* (Palgrave Macmillan, London), 115-53. G. Verhoef, ‘Die Stigting van Instellings as Werktuie in die Ekonomiese Opbouing van die Afrikaner sedert die Anglo-Boere Oorlog’, *Tydskrif vir Geesteswetenskappe*, 46, 2, 2006, 211-19. Dan O’Meara, *Volkskapitalisme: Class, Capital and Ideology in the Development of Afrikaner Nationalism, 1934-1948* (Johannesburg: Ravan, 1983).

20 Mr. Johann Bührmann, private communication (my translation).

21 Archive for Contemporary Affairs, University of the Free State, PV32 A.E. van der Merwe Collection.

Order.<sup>22</sup> Vera played a prominent part in the women's structures of the OB, and was an integral part of the work of the Dietse Kinderfonds (DKF), roles which will be considered in more detail in Chapter 3.

## Farm Life



**Figure 2.3:** Vera on horseback, De Emigratie, circa 1938. She was an accomplished rider. Source: Mr J. Bührmann, private collection.

Vera and her siblings were afforded a great deal of freedom; such chores as were expected of them were usually not onerous. Vera was comfortable with the realities of farm life, such as the slaughtering of animals. Wild animals and reptiles were also an ever-present source of danger: snakes, for example, were commonplace, and it was known that there were venomous snakes living in the spaces underneath the farmhouse, though no-one was ever bitten. Despite the hazards, and her own frailty, she was an outdoors enthusiast. She was 'an avid and elegant horse rider.'<sup>23</sup> Although most of the labour on the farm was undertaken by servants, her brothers were expected to assist at times, and she participated where she could in the work of the farm. She proved to be particularly adept at certain aspects of wool production. After the sheep had been sheared, she would classify the wool, separating out inferior fibres from the rest. During winter, her brothers would drive the livestock to a winter-

22 Serfontein lists 'I.C.R' [sic] (Louis) and H.T. Bührmann as *broeders* (brothers); J.H.P. Serfontein, *Brotherhood of Power. An Exposé of the Secret Afrikaner Broederbond* (London: Rex Collings Limited, 1979), 257, 258. Willem Bührmann (Wim) is listed as a founder member of the Christiaan de wet Fund, the reserve fund which was established in the early 1950s to finance the affairs of the Broederbond; *ibid*, 137. In earlier years he had been a member of the New Order.

23 Mr J Bührmann, private communication (my translation).

grazing pastures on a farm in the lowveld, and would spend the long, cold winters there. Vera sometimes accompanied them during these periods of isolation on the remote pastures. She refers to her childhood on the farm as ‘a relaxed kind of existence,’<sup>24</sup> which chafes against her autobiographical recollections pertaining to her illnesses and other hardships.

The available sources that discuss the black servants that worked on the farm are limited, and include the *Familieboek*, Vera’s reminiscences recorded by Anonymous, and some of Vera’s own writings. These sources are predictably biased, describing the relationship between the white landowners/employers and their black workers using terms such as ‘respect’ and ‘esteem’. The *Familieboek* would have us believe, for example, that from the time of grandfather H.T. Bührmann, black people played a ‘particularly honourable and valued role’ in the family’s history.<sup>25</sup> In response to a question from Anonymous regarding her father’s attitude to his servants, Vera replied:

No, my father’s attitude was very enlightened and a strong memory I have is of the black people coming to him in connection with their problems with each other and they would sit sometimes – well always for hours – but sometimes for days sorting out these familial problems – all kinds of problems on the farm. And then there was an old bone-thrower who also very often came and say and talked to my father – we brought coffee and so there was a real, you know, we grew up with a feeling of great respect for the black people.<sup>26</sup>

As Vera recalled, the white and black children played together freely on the farm. Sometimes her brothers played pranks on some of the servants but were never allowed to disrespect them or be rude to them.<sup>27</sup> The white children often visited the homesteads of the servants, and even ate food there. A by-product of this early cross-cultural socialisation was a high measure of bilingualism and exposure to aspects of black cultures. Vera often remarked in her writings that she was fluent in Zulu and had a heightened appreciation for black culture because she had grown up with Zulu-speaking children. Yet her later life recollections of inter-racial harmony, as we shall see in Chapter 5, were closely related to her rebranding of herself as an empathetic cross-cultural psychiatrist in the late apartheid years.

---

24 Anonymous, ‘Transcript of Interview with Vera Bührmann’, undated (A~1.Ver; Vera’s Philosophy and Lifestory).

25 Johann Bührmann, ‘Pa-Rudolph se Verhale,’ 54 (my translation).

26 Anonymous, ‘Transcript of Interview with Vera Bührmann’, undated (A~1.Ver; Vera’s Philosophy and Lifestory).

27 Anonymous, ‘Transcript of Interview with Vera Bührmann’, undated (C5~1.LIF; Life on a Farm).

If family history is to be believed, then, black servants on De Emigratie lived in a mutually beneficial and harmonious relationship with their white employers. However, this is an all-too-common version of the reality of black-white relations on white-owned farms constructed by white farmers. As Charles van Onselen and many others have shown, words such as ‘respect’ and ‘honour’ serve to conceal a more insidious reality, a form of paternalism that found fertile ground ‘in the world of the pre-capitalist countryside.’<sup>28</sup> Paternalism comprised ‘a set of social practices predicated on quasi-kinship relationships that are powerfully informed by notions of patriarchy.’ Thus, it was not uncommon for farmers to speak of their workers as *my mense* (‘my people’) or even *my volk* (‘my kin’).

A common feature of this type of paternalism was cross-cultural socialisation of the type that may have taken place in Vera’s case. But this early socialisation ‘seldom survived the transition into adulthood as the values associated with the secondary and tertiary structures of the dominant group slowly penetrated the otherwise enclosed universe of the farm.’<sup>29</sup> As white children grew older and went to school in the towns, these early bonds usually lost their intensity and the structural and systemic advantages accruing to the white children eventually led to a rupture in the quasi-equality of childhood inter-racial relations. A striking illustration of this in Vera’s case is the fact that, once she left the farm, she was ‘entitled’ to the services of a female worker from the farm who would work for her for a period of time before returning to the farm, at which point another black woman would be made available. Despite the upheaval and dislocation, the servants were reportedly keen to work for her because of Vera’s fluency in Zulu and her understanding of black people and their culture.<sup>30</sup>

The juxtaposition of the received narrative (that black workers were valued and honoured, some to the point of being ‘part of the family’) with Van Onselen’s paradigm of patriarchal paternalism (usually involving violence or the threat of violence) is introduced to highlight the fact that Vera’s autobiographical account of the black-white relations of her childhood cannot be taken at face value.

---

28 Charles van Onselen, ‘The Social and Economic Underpinnings of Paternalism and Violence on the Maize Farms of the South-Western Transvaal, 1900-1950.’ (University of the Witwatersrand: African Studies Seminar Paper No. 291, 1990), 38. For a full biographical case study of one black sharecropper’s experience of white patriarchy and paternalism, see C. van Onselen, *The Seed is Mine: The Life of Kas Maine, a South African Sharecropper 1894-1985* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1996).

29 C. van Onselen, ‘The Social and Economic Underpinnings of Paternalism,’ 20.

30 Personal communication, Mr J. Bührmann, 26 September 2016.



Since a great deal of her later work relies on this line of reasoning to lend credibility to it,<sup>31</sup> it behoves us to bear in mind the obfuscation of the reality of race relations that was achieved by this form of paternalism with its suggestions of social intimacy and even equality. As Van Onselen put it, ‘the tired old theme of having “grown up with the natives” or “knowing them”” served the purpose of allowing white farmers to support segregationist policies while denying that racial disharmony was at the root of their willingness to maintain systemic discrimination.<sup>32</sup> Even though this paternalistic dynamic sometimes led to genuine bonds of friendship between white farmers and black workers, it was always based on white supremacy. There is no reason to suspect that Vera’s own attitude to the black servants she encountered on De Emigratie was any different. What needs to be established is if she persisted with it later on in life, particularly when she was creating a name for herself as someone who had embraced the Other.

## Schooling

Although she had attended a ‘finishing school’ in Stellenbosch, Ta’ Maat was not a trained teacher. Nevertheless, she provided Vera and her two younger siblings with their primary education on the farm. This was not an unusual situation at the time. Although there was a move towards centralised education in the Transvaal following Union in 1910, many *eenman* (one man) schools on farms and in far-flung places continued to exist, especially in sparsely settled areas such as the Ermelo district. Such teachers were generally untrained and unpaid. Instruction was in Dutch and was permitted up to Standard 4 level.<sup>33</sup> Thereafter the children had to be sent to a state school. At the age of 11, Vera was accordingly admitted to Standard Five at the Laerskool van der Merwe, a transition she found difficult.<sup>34</sup>

She moved into the girls’ hostel when she went to high school in Ermelo in 1923. This high school began humbly in 1914 with five teachers and 78 pupils. It was housed in rooms that had been

---

31 In publications relating to her work with the *amagqira* (discussed in Chapter 5), Vera often makes claims to the effect that much of her childhood was spent in close contact with blacks. The impression created by such statements belies the reality of white-black relations on farms and is designed to enhance the credibility of her work, especially amongst foreign readers.

32 C. van Onselen, ‘The Social and Economic Underpinnings of Paternalism,’ 18.

33 Venter, ‘Ontwikkeling van die Onderwys,’ 124.

34 Anonymous, ‘Transcript of Interview with Vera Bührmann’, undated (A-1.Ver; Vera’s Philosophy and Lifestory).

part of the old Uitkomstskool. But it soon established itself as one of the top high schools in the Transvaal. In 1921, a new building had been opened. By the time Vera started attending in 1923 it had an enrolment of over 400, and Afrikaans had replaced Dutch as the medium of instruction.<sup>35</sup> Perhaps because she was always one of the youngest children in her classes, she regarded herself as a poor student. Nevertheless, she matriculated in 1926 without having to repeat a year.

At 16, with school behind her, Vera was considered too young to apply for university. She spent the next three years helping her brother Louis on the farm. In any case, the family's financial position was such that there simply was no money for university. Vera would have to wait for Willem's return from the United States in 1929 before a plan could be made for her to attend university. She used the period between matriculating and going to university to improve her English. This was a very necessary exercise, given the fact that the only medical schools in South Africa at that time, situated within the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) in Johannesburg and within the University of Cape Town (UCT), were English language institutions. One of the highlights of this period between high school and going to university was a vacation in George as a guest of sister Aletta and her husband. During this vacation she accompanied Aletta on a trip to Cape Town by train. At the age of 17 or 18, Vera got her first glimpse of the ocean.

### **Wits Medical School, 1930-1931**

Vera enrolled at Wits medical school in Johannesburg in the second quarter of 1930, the delay being due to another of her many bouts of illness. At the time the medical faculty at Wits was one of only two in South Africa. The university itself was still in its infancy, having been established less than a decade earlier (1922) with six faculties (Arts, Science, Commerce, Law, Medicine, Engineering) and three departments (Education, Veterinary Science, and Music). The establishment of a medical faculty at Wits had been opposed by many who felt that the medical profession in South Africa would be unable to absorb its graduates. But these fears proved groundless. By the time Vera arrived there in 1930, Wits had produced 96 medical graduates.<sup>36</sup> Together with UCT, Wits medical school began

---

<sup>35</sup> Venter, 'Ontwikkeling van die Onderwys,' 149, 162.

<sup>36</sup> Bruce K. Murray. *Wits: The Early Years. A History of The University of The Witwatersrand Johannesburg and its Precursors 1896-1936* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1982), 184.

supplying more and more of the medical practitioners being registered in South Africa.

Her new surroundings, and the dominance of the English language on campus were bewildering to Vera. We gain a sense of her disorientation and ‘culture shock’ from the following testimony:

I travelled by train to the station and then I got, instead of a taxi, I got one of these old-fashioned hansom cabs and arrived at this very posh place with a horse cart ... at this women’s residence where there was this rather sergeant-like lady warden ... And then with the initiation ceremonies where we were told to do all kinds of things I passed out and that was a shock – for me but also for her because apparently, she didn’t tell the girls that I had recently recovered from a very serious illness and that I was not to participate in this very strenuous initiation ceremony ...<sup>37</sup>

All tuition was in English; as an Afrikaner Vera was part of what Murray described as a substantial minority group at Wits – Jews and Afrikaners made up less than 20 per cent of the student body in 1930. Most of the Afrikaners were from farming families and came from areas outside Johannesburg.<sup>38</sup>

Alfred Plaut, who would be one of Vera’s lecturers when she trained as a Jungian therapist in London in the 1950s (more on this in Chapter 4), started as a third-year medical student at Wits in 1934. His description below would no doubt fit Vera’s experience as well:

There were twenty to thirty students in my year, only five of them women. The class was divided into three socially and racially distinct groups, those of English-speaking stock, the Afrikanders of Dutch, Scandinavian or Huguenot origin, and Jews whose parents had emigrated mainly from Eastern Europe ... Our teachers were mainly native English speakers, some of Scottish descent, the majority had qualified “overseas”, a magical word in the South Africa of that time.<sup>39</sup>

Only four out of 80 students in her residence were Afrikaners. The *plaasnooi* from Ermelo had to make many adjustments in her new, predominantly English ‘home’:

This lady warden was very critical of the girls who couldn’t speak English properly and we had to wear some special dresses for the evening meal and I naturally did not have anything very posh and some of the [other] Afrikaners also ... so we stuck out like sore thumbs.<sup>40</sup>

---

37 Anonymus, ‘Transcript of Interview with Vera Bührmann’, undated (A~1.Ver; Vera’s Philosophy and Lifestory).

38 Bruce Murray, *Wits, the Early Years*, 317.

39 Fred Plaut, *Between Losing and Finding. The Life of an Analyst* (London: Free Association Books, 2004), 29.

40 Anonymus, ‘Transcript of Interview with Vera Bührmann’, undated (A~1.Ver; Vera’s Philosophy and Lifestory).

At the time, there were no black medical students, although debates regarding the training of black medical students in South Africa were on-going. There was consensus that more medically trained personnel were needed to treat the black population, but there was no consensus on the question of whether black medical students should have their own training institutions or be trained at either Wits or UCT. Further, if they were to be trained at Wits or UCT, whether they should have separate facilities and classes on the campus. As the so-called 'Loram Report' made clear in 1928, neither Wits nor UCT had any legal right to exclude students on the basis of colour. The two universities were not averse to the training of black medical students, but as resolutions adopted by the two university councils cited in the Loram Report make clear, they insisted that such training would have to take place in separate buildings and classes. The Loram Report accepted their rationale and recommended that black students should do their clinical medical training at Wits, in a separate 'non-European branch of the existing medical school.' Despite this, the universities dragged their feet on the issue for so long that for the duration of her medical training, all Vera's fellow students would have been 'European'.<sup>41</sup> (When Vera started at Wits in 1930, only one Coloured student had been admitted to Wits, in 1926. Only by 1935 would black students be admitted to the medical faculty in any numbers.<sup>42</sup> A similar situation obtained at UCT; at the time of the Loram Report only three Coloured students had graduated from the university, in Arts).

There were also academic adjustments Vera had to make in her new environment. For example, the first year of the medical degree consisted mainly of general science courses in physics and chemistry, the so-called pre-clinical courses. When Vera realised that what she had been taught at school was an inadequate preparation, she anxiously sought help from a science teacher at a nearby high school. Without this extra-curricular assistance, she might not have passed the year. Soon, however, she found her bearings and, with a single-mindedness that was characteristic of her, got on with her studies.

---

41 Union of South Africa, *Report of the Committee Appointed to Inquire into the Training of Natives in Medicine and Public Health* (Pretoria: Government Printer, 1928). The inquiry was headed by Dr C.T. Loram of the Native Affairs Commission.

42 Bruce Murray, *Wits. The Early Years*, 304-06.

The hurdle of the first year successfully negotiated, she moved on to the second year, which was the start of medical training. It was in this year that she came under the influence of ‘the man who put the medical school, and indeed the University, truly on the map’ – Raymond Dart.<sup>43</sup> She recalled:

At Wits I was largely influenced by somebody whom you must have heard about a lot because he is world renowned – Dart – an archaeologist [*sic*], a man who described the first diggings of human remains so he is a very important internationally known man for his research in archaeology and the development of human beings.<sup>44</sup>

Vera’s recollection of Dart dates from a period six decades after the events, and thus reveals the lasting impact he made on her. It is not surprising that she fell under Dart’s spell. By 1931, when she would have taken his second-year anatomy class, he was already something of a celebrity in the wake of the fame that attached to him following the discovery of the Taung skull. As Bruce K. Murray, the pre-eminent historian of Wits University, relates:

Dart was undoubtedly one of the truly great and colourful characters in the history of Wits. He had an explosive nature, was full of verve and vigour and new ideas, and certainly given to histrionics. A showman, as well as very emotional, in his time he put on some dazzling performances in Senate. As the occasion demanded, he could be angry and sarcastic, earnest and emotional, or gentle and persuasive. His lectures, notably his first lecture to second year students, were very often showpieces, and he became enormously popular among the students.<sup>45</sup>

Whatever starry-eyed effect Dart’s ‘personality and energy’<sup>46</sup> may have had on the impressionable second-year medical student, it is the intellectual impact he must have made that is of interest to this investigation. In this regard, to use the words of Dubow, it is ‘the other Raymond Dart’ that is significant: Dart the iconoclast, the ‘precocious controversialist’ with ‘impetuous and maverick qualities’, the Dart who was a mixture of good science and bad science.<sup>47</sup>

In the first three decades of the twentieth century, physical anthropology, with its emphasis on racial types, held sway in the South African academic context. Originally restricted to the museum environment, the appointment of Raymond Dart to Wits and Matthew Drennan to UCT ensured that it

---

43 Ibid, 179.

44 Anonymous, ‘Transcript of Interview with Vera Bührmann’, undated (A~1.Ver; Vera’s Philosophy and Lifestory).

45 Bruce Murray, *Wits, The Early Years*, 181.

46 Alan G. Morris, ‘Biological Anthropology at the Southern Tip of Africa: Carrying European Baggage in an African Context’, *Current Anthropology*, 53, Supplement 5, April 2012, S152-S160.

47 Saul Dubow, ‘Human Origins, Race Typology, and the Other Raymond Dart’, *African Studies*, 55, 1, 1996, 1-30.

eventually found a foothold in their respective medical schools. Palaeoanthropology became increasingly influential, which led to ‘the flowering of typology in South African physical anthropology.’ Dart was also strongly influenced by Grafton Elliot Smith, whose cultural diffusionist views included the notion that the essence of civilisation happened once, in Egypt, and that all cultural complexities derive from that source.<sup>48</sup> Although Dubow casts Dart as ‘not explicitly a racist,’ he nevertheless illustrates that Dart operated comfortably within the assumptions underpinning the white supremacist thinking of the time.

Assumptions of intrinsic racial difference and notions of superiority and inferiority are so embedded in Dart’s lifework that it is impossible to assess his contribution to anthropological knowledge in isolation from this fact.<sup>49</sup>

Between the two world wars, some politicians attempted to bring about a rapprochement between the two white ethnic groups in South Africa (Afrikaners and English-speaking South Africans). Racial typologies and cultural diffusion were amongst the scientific ‘evidence’ that they appropriated in this quest. Although the ideological core of apartheid as it crystallised after 1948 was supplied by *volkekundiges* and based on the *ethnos* theory imported from Europe, the deterministic biological and cultural views of anthropologists of the Dartian tradition were certainly invoked in support of racial discrimination and segregation.<sup>50</sup>

Vera’s acknowledgement of Dart’s impact and influence on her is an important one in the context of this study. The nationalistic and racial legacy Vera inherited and adopted has been established in the previous chapter and expanded on in this chapter. The harsh reality of frontier racial attitudes and practices endorsed by her grandfather may have ‘mellowed’ somewhat and taken on the form of patriarchal paternalism in the following generations, but the underlying assumptions remained

---

48 Alan Morris, ‘Biological Anthropology’, S155.

49 Saul Dubow, ‘Human Origins’, 11.

50 Alan Morris, ‘Biological Anthropology’, S159-60. For more on how politicians, such as Jan Smuts, used science to further political and ideological agendas, see Saul Dubow, ‘White South Africa and the South Africanisation of Science: Humankind or Kinds of Humans?’ In P. Bonner, A. Esterhuysen, and T. Jenkins (eds), *A Search for Origins. Science, History, and South Africa’s ‘Cradle of Humankind’*, (Johannesburg, Wits University Press, 2007), 9-22. On *volkekundiges* and apartheid, see R. Gordon, ‘Apartheid’s Anthropologists: The Genealogy of Afrikaner Anthropology’, *American Ethnologist*, 15, 3, August 1988, 535-53. See also A. Bank, ‘Fathering Volkekunde: Race and Culture in the Ethnological Writings of Werner Eiselen, Stellenbosch University, 1926-1936’, *Anthropology Southern Africa*, 38, 3-4, 2015, 163-179. A. Bank, “‘Broederbande’ [Brotherly Bonds]: Afrikaner Nationalist Masculinity and African Sexuality in the Writings of Werner Eiselen’s Students, Stellenbosch University, 1930-1936’, *Anthropology Southern Africa*, 38, 3-4, 2015, 180-97.

constant. It is entirely reasonable to suppose that the principles of racial typology and cultural diffusion as exemplified in the Dartian tradition of physical anthropology would have been enormously influential in cementing these racial views and would have confirmed whatever biases or presuppositions she held in the matter of other races. The question that remains to be answered is whether or not these biases and presuppositions persisted over the course of her life.

### **UCT Medical School, 1932-1935**

At the end of 1931, Vera returned to De Emigratie for the summer holidays, having passed all her second-year subjects, a remarkable achievement. Unfortunately, the family's financial position had deteriorated to such a point that it seemed probable that her medical studies would have to be aborted, or at least postponed. This was averted by an offer from her brother-in-law, Aletta's husband, Daan. He and Aletta had been transferred from George to Cape Town in 1931. He proposed that Vera transfer to the medical school at UCT. She could live with him and Aletta at their home in Rondebosch, thus saving on the cost of living in residence. Apart from the money she would save by living with Daan and Aletta, her brothers also once more came to her aid. In a letter to Pat, dated 24 April 1932, Vera's brother Rudolph writes, 'I am happy that Vera is in the Cape and that it will cost us so much less. I am still waiting for the emergency loan money to see her through the year. We will support her under any circumstances. I know she is a success.'<sup>51</sup>

But the decision to pursue her studies at UCT, despite the reduced costs, proved to be a double-edged sword. As Vera described it:

At the end of my second year my brother-in-law, my eldest sister Let's husband, Daantjie, asked me if I would care to come and live with them, it would save money ... What he didn't say was – which I naturally found out afterwards – was that he was really asking me to become a companion for my sister because he could see that she was not coping well.

Stating that her sister 'was not coping well' was an understatement. Her sister's mental health was deteriorating to such an extent that Vera 'had to take over more or less the care of the family' (meaning the care of Aletta's two young sons). The reality was that her brother-in-law's offer was somewhat

---

51 My translation. My thanks to Mr J. Bührmann for making this letter available to me.

disingenuous. Aletta was gravely ill for much of the time that Vera was in Cape Town completing her medical studies, and her family suffered greatly as a result. Vera bore the brunt of the disruption this created in the family. ‘I sacrificed so much for her,’ she recalled, and described her years at UCT as extremely traumatic.

A particularly harrowing illustration of what she endured concerns a series of events that took place in December 1933. The family had been unable to find help for the seriously ill Aletta in South Africa. Vera was prevailed upon to accompany her to Austria, ‘where Freud was the “king”,’ in the hope that there, in the cradle of psychoanalysis, Aletta would find the treatment she needed. But the fraught expedition never got further than Frankfurt. Aletta’s condition deteriorated to such a degree that further travel became impossible. Not knowing what else to do, Vera left her stricken sister in their hotel room, and went in search of assistance. Since there was no South African foreign mission in Germany, she made her way to the British Consulate. The consulate staff were at first reluctant to assist her, because she was South African, not British. Eventually, however, she succeeded in persuading them to summon a doctor from a nearby hospital. Her ailing sister was admitted to a psychiatric ward, and Vera stayed in a room near her. That night, which she described as her Gethsemane, the young medical student swore an oath that she would do all she could as a doctor to alleviate the distress and suffering that patients and their families endure because of mental illness.<sup>52</sup>

It would be quite some time before the pair could return to South Africa. Aletta’s condition was largely unchanged; she was eventually admitted to Valkenberg Hospital, where she would in time respond positively to treatment, leaving Vera with a lasting sense of gratitude towards the hospital. Throughout these ordeals, Vera took on the responsibility of looking after Aletta’s children as well as keeping up with her courses. She completed and passed all the required courses in the requisite time. That she managed to complete her studies under these conditions is a testament to her intelligence, resilience, and single-mindedness.

Domestic issues aside, what can be said about the medical school at UCT to which Vera transferred? It was the oldest in the country, having grown piecemeal from humble beginnings as part

---

52 Anonymus, ‘Transcript of Interview with Vera Bührmann’, undated (A~1.Ver; Vera’s Philosophy and Lifestory).



of the South African College. In its earliest phases, students had to complete their training abroad. It was only in 1920 that the fully-fledged medical school was inaugurated, offering a six-year training programme with four sets of professional examinations. Before Groote Schuur Hospital was completed in 1938, the New Somerset Hospital and the Peninsula Maternity Hospital served as teaching hospitals, and trainee doctors were briefly exposed to mentally ill patients at Valkenberg Hospital. Like its sister institution at Wits, the medical school at UCT, and, indeed, the entire medical profession at the time, was dominated by white males, many of whom were Scots.<sup>53</sup>



**Figure 2.4:** Vera as a student at UCT, circa 1935. Source: Mr Johann Bührmann, private collection.

It is telling to note that one of the two UCT instructors Vera mentions as having had a lasting influence on her was Matthew Drennan, professor of anatomy, and UCT's less colourful version of Raymond Dart.<sup>54</sup> Dubow records that Drennan 'placed even more stress than [Dart] on the processes of racial differentiation and divergence,' and was 'dourly contemptuous of the Bushmen he studied, regarding them as anatomical curiosities or living fossils' and 'morphological Peter Pans.'<sup>55</sup> Six

---

53 For the early history of UCT's medical school, see Howard Phillips, *The University of Cape Town, 1918-1948: The Formative Years* (Cape Town: UCT/UCT Press, 1993), 84-104.

54 The other was Prof. Crichton, professor of obstetrics and gynaecology.

55 Saul Dubow, *Scientific Racism in Modern South Africa*, 47, 51.

decades after her initial training, it was the two men who taught her anatomy through the filter of physical anthropology that Vera recalled as having been most influential in her medical training.

As alluded to earlier, in comparison with the experiences of women in other parts of the world, women in South Africa (white women, that is) encountered few obstacles in gaining entry to undergraduate medical training. Legal discrimination against them became more pronounced once they qualified, a situation that obtained until the South African Society of Medical Women, which was established in the 1950s, challenged the marriage bar.<sup>56</sup> Once in training, however, many female students found themselves ‘the objects of strident male prejudice and opposition.’ This manifested in various forms, ranging from crude gender-based jokes to patronising teachers who treated their women students as immature and incompetent.<sup>57</sup> To what degree Vera suffered discrimination based on her gender is not known. As was the case at Wits, as an Afrikaner woman at a predominantly English, male dominated institution, she would have been at a double disadvantage. Add to this her domestic situation as outlined above, and it becomes clear that the four years at UCT must have been extremely trying. Asked about her experience of the social side of university life, she recalled:

My uni[versity] experience was that I was a student and not a socialite and that changes one’s experience entirely – and then I had the big responsibility of my sister and her two children so my uni[versity] experience was very different from what many others would describe as their wonderful uni[versity] years.<sup>58</sup>

These difficulties notwithstanding, Vera stayed the course, never having to repeat a single subject. At the end of 1935, an official at UCT rubber-stamped her academic transcript card with the words ‘Eligible for degree.’ At the age of 25, the farm girl from Ermelo who grew up doctoring her dolls became Dr Maatje Vera Bührmann.

For a period of four months following her graduation, Vera did a brief ‘housemanship’ at the Peninsula Maternity Hospital in Cape Town. She hoped that it might result in an offer of a permanent position. But that was not to be. In May 1936, she travelled back to De Emigratie, unsure of what the

---

56 Liz Walker, ‘The South African Society of Medical Women, 1951-1992: Its Origins, Nature and Impact on White Women Doctors’, (PhD thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, 1999).

57 Ibid, 87-90. See also Liz Walker, ‘Conservative Pioneers: The Formation of The South African Society of Medical Women’, *Social History of Medicine*, 14, 3, 2001, 483-505.

58 Anonymous, ‘Transcript of Interview with Vera Bührmann’, undated (A-1.Ver; Vera’s Philosophy and Lifestory).

future held. To add to her dejection, her father's health was failing. Back in Ermelo, she assisted Dr Juriaanse, the family doctor who had so often attended to her when she was growing up, in his surgery as needed.



**Figure 2.5:** UCT Medical School class of 1935. Vera is standing in the middle of the middle row. Note the small number of female students – only 6 women in a class of almost 40 students. Source: UCT Libraries, BUZV Collection (used with permission; my thanks to archivist Clive Kirkwood for alerting me to this photograph).

Early in June 1936, a small group of family members accompanied the ailing Johannes on a trip to the Kruger National Park, something he had always wanted to do. When they returned from the trip Vera received news by telegram that she had secured a position as a general practitioner for the South African Railways in Delmas,<sup>59</sup> a small farming town to the east of Johannesburg, some 200 kilometres north-west of De Emigratie. Amidst her excited preparations to take up the position, Johannes died.

<sup>59</sup> It seems that when the incumbent 'Railway doctor' died, the good citizens of Delmas were given a choice: either a male Jewish doctor or an Afrikaner woman doctor. As Vera put it, 'They didn't want a Jewish doctor.'

Shortly after his funeral, and with a heart heavy with sadness, the young, newly graduated doctor made her way to the town of Delmas to begin her professional career.

## Conclusion

There are many reasons why the writing of biography is an ‘awkward’ undertaking, as Nancy Jacobs and Andrew Bank point out in a recent publication.<sup>60</sup> Part of that awkwardness arises from the fact that historians and biographers ‘well know that they cannot represent the past “as it actually was”.’ But this is equally true of someone retelling their *own* past (autobiography):

How can we know what someone was like – what they felt and thought – in their twenties without rewriting their lives for them? What someone says in 1990 about himself or herself in 1935 is taken to be true because the same person is doing the talking. Historians rarely ask if the experience is described with the insights of 1990 or 1935.<sup>61</sup>

In (re)writing Vera’s childhood and youth in this chapter, these tensions are evident. In her late-life interviews with Anonymous, Vera, then 84 years old, looked back at her childhood and young adult self and constructed an early-life narrative which, to adapt an expression one relative claimed Vera often used, consisted mostly of *smart en verdriet* (‘suffering and grief’). But it was 84-year-old Vera who placed the triple childhood hardships of a ruptured relationship with her mother, loneliness within the family, and debilitating, often life-threatening, illnesses at the very ‘core’ of her story. It was 84-year-old Vera who felt these hardships had repercussions throughout her life. Her autobiographical reminiscences also contain evidence to the contrary. That she experienced some hardships as a child and youth from illness is verifiable from other sources, but there is evidence that she remained close to her mother, and that she experienced a warm and supportive relationship with some of her siblings, especially her brothers. Her sister’s illness during her UCT days was no doubt a very trying experience; despite that, Vera did well academically. The awkward conclusion is that I (we) will never know ‘for sure’. I will never know whether there is any ‘truth’ in the account of di Ravelli’s piano playing during her ‘miraculous’ birth; perhaps Vera’s psychoanalytic training introduced this ‘hero’s

---

60 Nancy J. Jacobs and Andrew Bank, ‘Biography in Post-Apartheid South Africa: A Call for Awkwardness’, *African Studies* 78, 2, 2019, 165-82.

61 Ibid, 177, citing Luise White.

birth' trope into her autobiography. The same is true for the other hardships discussed above.

I am on surer ground when I reject her late-life retelling of a childhood of semi-equality with black children because other sources confirm the falsification, and, as will become evident in a later chapter, there were very obvious reasons why she wished to reinvent her childhood narrative.

In late life Vera, who perhaps saw herself as a 'wounded healer', looked back at her young self and saw a child whose experiences created within her the *smart en verdriet* which propelled her on her path to a medical career. Whatever the truth of that, what is certain is that all the while she was growing up, her *volk* in a very real sense was struggling with its own *smart en verdriet* and striving to assert itself in a world still reeling from the Depression and hurtling rapidly towards another world war. When she graduated in 1935, Shain's 'perfect storm' was gathering momentum, not just in South Africa but in Europe, too. In just a few years events would unfold in which Vera would be swept up, caught up in the maelstrom of the Afrikaner radical right in ways which the young newly-graduated doctor probably never anticipated, but for which in many ways she had been prepared throughout her young life. The legacy of her own family, the legacy of the Afrikaner *volk*, and even the race-based medical education she had so recently received in the lecture halls and laboratories of Dart and Drennan, all fitted her for the role she would soon adopt, that of an ardent adherent of one of the most radical of the many right-wing groups that proliferated in South Africa during the 1930s and 1940s, the Ossewa-Brandwag

## Chapter 3. Nailing her Colours to the Mast: Vera's Involvement with Afrikaner Radical Right-Wing Organisations, 1940-1948

'Packaging the past into 10-year units may be little more than a historical contrivance,' Saul Dubow writes, but concedes that it is a useful one, since 'people commonly think of decades as meaningful spans of time, whether in their personal lives or as a way of making sense of broader political rhythms.'<sup>1</sup> This 'historical contrivance' seems a useful one to employ at this point in Vera's story. Although this chapter covers a period somewhat longer than a decade (mid-1936 to 1948), its focus is on the 1940s, and specifically Vera's involvement in Afrikaner radical right-wing organisations during that period. The 'broader political rhythms' of that tumultuous decade, internationally and in South Africa, affected her personally, professionally, and politically, and profoundly shaped her life and work in the decades that followed.

In 1936, Vera was 26 years old, and a newly qualified medical doctor; by the end of the 1940s she would have reached roughly the mid-point of her life. In the 'normal' course of events, one would have expected these to be years in which she established herself professionally and socially, and indeed, in this regard this period began predictably enough. Shortly after the death of her father in June 1936, she took up her first medical post in Delmas; other posts followed – in Pietermaritzburg, Springs, and Pretoria. In October 1939, she married George van Niekerk, about whom very little is known. As the 1940s approached, it appeared that her life course might be a more-or-less 'conventional' one, in which she would take on the role of wife and possibly mother, compelled to adapt or even sublimate her professional aspirations in conformity with the societal norms that obtained at the time.

But these were not normal years, internationally or in South Africa. European facism was on the rise. By mid-1936, when this chapter begins, Hitler's Third Reich was growing in assertiveness. The Italians had invaded Abyssinia. The Spanish and Sino-Japanese wars were about to commence. The probability of a global conflict loomed on the horizon.

---

1 S. Dubow, 'Introduction: South Africa's 1940s' in S. Dubow and A. Jeeves, eds., *South Africa's 1940s: Worlds of Possibilities* (Cape Town: Double Storey, 2005), 1.

In South Africa, the 1930s were ‘a time of political uncertainty, massive rural poverty, drought and heightened Afrikaner nationalism.’<sup>2</sup> It was especially poverty that was ‘the furnace that fired extremism’ amongst Afrikaners.<sup>3</sup> Radical right-wing organisations (the ‘shirt movements’ – Greyshirts, Blackshirts, Orangeshirts, Brownshirts) proliferated. Modelled on German national socialism, they combined anti-Semitism with anti-British and anti-capitalist inclinations. They splintered Afrikaner nationalism, leading to friction between the extremist groups and D.F. Malan’s *Gesuiwerde Nasionale Party* which had emerged in the mid-1930s as the forerunner in providing hardline republican-minded Afrikaners with a political home following the Hertzog-Smuts alliance. This fragmented landscape was further complicated by the advent of the Ossewa-Brandwag in February 1939, which garnered increasing support after the controversial entry of South Africa into the Second World War on the side of the Allies eight months later. As the 1940s dawned, South Africans found themselves not only at war with Germany, but with themselves. As had been the case in the South African War and the First World War, South Africans were divided on the question of whether or not to support the British Empire in battle. Lines had to be drawn; sides had to be chosen.

Vera, too, chose to nail her colours to a mast. This she did emphatically, aligning herself firmly with the Afrikaner radical right. During the 1940s (and beyond), she was closely associated with two radical right organisations, the Ossewa-Brandwag (OB) and the Dietse Kinderfonds (DKF). She was seemingly an OB member throughout its existence (1939 to 1954).<sup>4</sup> Her work with the DKF, an organisation established to facilitate the adoption of German war orphans by Afrikaner families, began in 1947 and would continue until 1973, when the fund was dissolved.

Why focus on Vera’s involvement in these two organisations during the 1940s? Two reasons will suffice. First, because it is during this turbulent decade that Vera’s political beliefs come most strongly to the fore. The 1940s were years in which everything her upbringing and training had fitted her for crystallised in a strong show of support for the Afrikaner radical right, an action that would

---

2 Milton Shain, *A Perfect Storm*, 76.

3 Ibid, 86.

4 The latest evidence that can be cited is a letter to her brother in 1949 in which she acknowledges the leadership of Hans van Rensburg, the commandant-general of the Ossewa-Brandwag. M.V. Bührmann to Rudolph Bührmann, 20 February 1949 (my translation). My thanks to Mr Johann Bührmann for making this letter available to me.

have repercussions long after the decade closed. It will be remembered that a key concern of this study is whether Vera experienced a personal transformation that allowed her to ‘transcend her own cultural background’ and embrace ‘otherness’. A political transformation, as was pointed out in the Introduction, cannot be divorced from a personal transformation. Understanding the nature of these two organisations, and her role in them, allows us as clear a picture of her political convictions as is possible, and shows that she would have needed to transcend these right-wing ideologies if the perception of her as a role model of racial transformation is at all plausible.

Secondly, the legacy of her work for these two organisations, particularly the DKF, became a source of personal embarrassment and regret in later life. As Werner van der Merwe has noted, had the DKF succeeded in its original mission of bringing 10 000 orphans to South Africa, it would have gone down in history as one of Afrikanerdom’s greatest achievements.<sup>5</sup> Even despite its modest achievements, many viewed it as a great success, and still do. But as we shall see, Vera came to view it differently. In every extant curriculum vitae drafted by her, there is no mention of her involvement in the DKF’s mission. In order to understand why her radical right involvements of the 1940s haunted her in later life, it is necessary to interrogate her role in these two organisations in some depth.

The rest of this chapter consists of two sections. In the first, we look briefly at aspects of Vera’s ‘conventional’ life – her developing medical career and family life in the period 1936 to 1948. This serves as backdrop to the next section, which examines her participation in the ethno-exclusivist world of the OB and the DKF during what was arguably the most momentous decade of the twentieth century.

## **Medical Career and Marriage (1936-1948)**

### **Delmas (1936-1937)**

In July 1936, shortly after her father’s funeral, Vera packed her possessions into her car. Accompanied by her dog McDougal, she left De Emigratie to take up a position as a general practitioner in the

---

5 Werner van der Merwe, *Vir 'n 'Blanke Volk': Die Verhaal van die Duitse Weeskinders van 1948* (Johannesburg: Perskor, 1988), Voorwoord. (Werner van der Merwe was one of the German children who were brought to South Africa; he wrote extensively about the DKF. In later life, he resorted to his original surname, Schellack.)



employ of the South African Railways in the small town of Delmas, some 75 kilometres south-east of Pretoria. Where she lived (or practiced) is not clear. In an interview with Anonymous, she stated only that she lived in a flat attached to a hotel.<sup>6</sup> The *Register of Medical Practitioners, Interns and Dentists for the Republic of South Africa* for 1937 and 1938 does not contain an address, recording only that she was in Delmas during this period.

Delmas was a young town in 1937, having been established a mere 30 years before.<sup>7</sup> It was situated on an important railway junction; many people in the town were railway employees, hence the need for a ‘railway doctor’, the position Vera now occupied. The railway was the *raison d’être* for many of the small towns scattered across South Africa. Typically, the station master, headmaster, bank manager, doctor, and *dominee* (minister) were the leading figures in these towns.<sup>8</sup> It seems that the town’s attorney and his wife took the new doctor under their wing. It was at a social occasion in their home that she met her future husband, George Ivan van Niekerk (see Figure 3.1), who worked at the Delmas branch of Standard Bank.<sup>9</sup>

Vera’s patients in this small farming town included rural residents and townfolk, blacks and whites. No doubt the eighteen months she spent as a general practitioner in Delmas provided her with many opportunities to hone her medical skills as she attended to her patients, often visiting them in their homes. When she had to travel out of town to see patients, McDougal frequently made the trip with her. The fledgling doctor soon learned, though, that people were willing to exploit her; Vera recalled inconsiderate patients who thought she ought to be at their ‘beck and call’ for even the most minor complaints. According to some of the anecdotes she related to Anonymous, she also had her share of dealing with serious or life-threatening medical situations.

Vera did not remain in Delmas as a general practitioner for long, though. As noted in the previous chapter, she had an interest in working with patients suffering from mental illness. When she heard from a family friend that there was an opening at Fort Napier, the psychiatric hospital outside

---

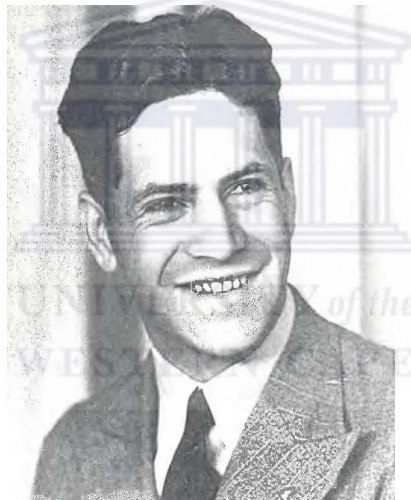
6 Anonymous, ‘Transcript of Interview with Vera Bührmann’, undated, (E1~1.DEL; Leaving the Nest 1. Delmas).

7 P. Raper, *Dictionary of Southern African Place Names* (Johannesburg: Lowry, 1987), 134.

8 Transnet, ‘Railway Country. 150 Years of Rail in South Africa’, <http://www.transnetfreightrail-tfr.net/Heritage/150years/150YearsRail.pdf>, accessed 10 November 2017.

9 Anonymous, ‘Transcript of Interview with Vera Bührmann’, undated, (E1~1.DEL; Leaving the Nest 1. Delmas).

Pietermaritzburg in what is now KwaZulu-Natal, she applied and was accepted. By this time, her romantic relationship with George van Niekerk had blossomed and they were contemplating marriage. Vera now had a difficult choice to make. In line with the stipulations of the ‘marriage bar’, married women in the Union were not eligible for public service or had to resign from public service upon marriage.<sup>10</sup> If she married George, she would not be eligible for a government post. If she accepted the Fort Napier position, their marriage would have to be postponed. She opted to take the post; it was too exciting an opportunity to pass up. ‘There is this horse in me that responds to a new challenge. It is the pioneering spirit with which I am imbued,’ she recalled in reference to her decision to postpone her marriage in favour of gaining experience with psychiatric patients.<sup>11</sup> Once more she packed her possessions into her car and headed off, this time to a mental asylum on the outskirts of Pietermaritzburg.



**Figure 3.1:** George van Niekerk, Vera’s husband, circa 1940. Source: Mrs Glenda Raad.

### **Fort Napier, Pietermaritzburg (1938-1939)**

Built in 1880 on Town Hill in Pietermaritzburg, the Natal Government Asylum (NGA) was ‘the chief site of detention in the region for whites, Africans and Indians, men and women, who were certified insane.’<sup>12</sup> In 1927, the abandoned barracks at Fort Napier, originally a military fort strategically

---

10 This restriction would be temporarily relaxed during the war years, but it was not until the late 1950s that the ‘marriage bar’ ceased to be in effect.

11 Anonymous, ‘Transcript of Interview with Vera Bührmann’, undated, (E1~1.DEL; Leaving the Nest 1. Delmas).

12 J. Parle, *States of Mind: Searching For Mental Health in Natal and Zululand, 1868-1918* (Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2007), 83.

located on a hill overlooking Pietermaritzburg, were handed over to the Union government to accommodate the overflow of patients from the NGA. Unlike asylums and mental hospitals elsewhere in the Union, black and white patients were housed at Fort Napier, albeit in different wards.

In his series of articles on the history of mental health services in South Africa, Minde wrote: 'As the place had stood derelict for a number of years, the grounds were in a wild and neglected condition. ... The buildings were in a dilapidated, ruinous state.'<sup>13</sup> Fortunately for Vera, by the time she arrived there in 1938 conditions had improved somewhat: 'The grounds were cleared, lawns, shrubs, and trees planted, fruit and mealies grown in large quantities, and a dairy herd, oxen, pigs, and even donkeys were raised. Recreational amenities for patients and staff were developed, and modern methods of treatment introduced.'<sup>14</sup>

Vera described herself as having 'little psychological sophistication – very basic' when she started at Fort Napier; this description could equally be applied to the practice of psychiatry generally, although progress was being made in some areas in the treatment of mental illness. This period in the development of psychiatric medicine was characterised by the use of physical treatments (as opposed to the custodial era that preceded it), such as cardiozol and electroshock for manic-depressive psychoses and schizophrenia, and the use of insulin-induced coma for the treatment of schizophrenia. Insulin coma therapy was hailed as something of a miracle cure, although by today's standards it would be considered barbaric.<sup>15</sup> It was found that a period of lucidity followed after a patient was brought out of the coma, and Vera noticed that they were amenable to counselling during these periods. 'I found that the relationship that I developed with them during that period was very healing,' she recalled. Gradually these lucid periods would become longer and longer, and many patients

---

13 M. Minde, 'History of the Mental Health Services in South Africa. Part V. Natal', *SAMJ*, 49, 1 March 1975, 325.

14 Loc cit, 325.

15 'The treatment involved placing psychotic patients in hypoglycemic coma through administration of dangerously large doses of insulin, which removed glucose from their bloodstreams. Shortly after receiving their doses, patients would begin to grimace and jerk, sweating profusely as they lost consciousness ... After remaining in death-like comas ranging anywhere from a few minutes to several hours, they would be lifted back to consciousness with a sugar solution.' D.B. Doroshov, 'Performing a Cure for Schizophrenia: Insulin Coma Therapy on the Wards', *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 62, 2, April 2007, 213-43.

experienced full recovery from their symptoms. The family of one grateful patient presented Vera with an expensive cutlery set to thank her for the positive change that they saw in their relative.<sup>16</sup>

Apart from gaining valuable experience working with psychiatric patients, Vera enjoyed the social activities available to her at Fort Napier. She was on good terms with the superintendent, Dr A. S. van Coller, and made friends with some of her colleagues, particularly Dr Morris Ginsberg and his wife.<sup>17</sup> There were many recreational facilities to enjoy. But all along the dogs of Europe had been barking.<sup>18</sup> In September 1939 the simmering hatred erupted, and the world was again at war. Vera and George decided that the time had come to marry. Given the government bar on married women in public service, she resigned her post. After having worked there for 20 months, Vera left Fort Napier. On 21 October 1939, she and George married on De Emigratie.<sup>19</sup>

### **Middelburg and Pretoria (1939-1948)**

George van Niekerk was a few weeks younger than Vera. Very little is known about him, or indeed about their married life. Because of the 'marriage bar' (which stipulated that married women in the Union could not be employed in government posts), Vera's career was now circumscribed to a large extent by her marital status. In addition, she had to follow George as he was transferred by his employer. At the time of their marriage he was employed at the Standard Bank branch in Middelburg, in what was then Transvaal (now Mpumalanga). He and Vera lived in Middelburg until 1943; thereafter, he was transferred to Springs, just east of Johannesburg. Due to personnel shortages occasioned by the war, the marriage bar was not as strictly enforced as previously. Vera found part-time work at a hospital in Nigel, and also worked with the Springs Town Council. It was during this

---

16 Anonymus, 'Transcript of Interview with Vera Bührmann', undated, (E2~1.FOR; Leaving the Nest 2. Pietermaritzburg).

17 In an undated draft of a 'Morris Ginsberg Memorial Lecture' delivered by Vera, she notes that she and Morris 'started our psychiatric careers more or less at the same time and met at Fort Napier, where we worked together very closely, especially when insulin therapy was introduced there.' Their paths separated at the beginning of the war. UCT Libraries, Special Collections, BC1164, The Vera Bührmann Papers, M.V. Bührmann, 'Morris Ginsberg Memorial Lecture', undated.

18 'In the nightmare of the dark/All the dogs of Europe bark/And the living nations wait/Each sequestered in its hate/'; W. H. Auden, 'In Memory of W. B. Yeats.'

19 According to Vera, the wedding took place on the family farm De Emigratie on 21 October 1939; Anonymus, 'Transcript of Interview with Vera Bührmann', undated, (A~1.VER; Vera's Philosophy and Lifestory). However, Vera's divorce file held in the National Archives in Pretoria gives the date as 10 March 1937; National Archives, TPD 5/982. Whether this discrepancy is the result of an administrative error at the time of her divorce, or if there is another explanation, could not be determined.

period (1944) that Vera completed the Diploma of Public Health (DPH), a three-month course at the University of the Witwatersrand. The couple stayed in Springs until 1947, when they were uprooted again, this time to Pretoria. Vera took a position at the health department of the Pretoria Town Council, working at maternity and child-care clinics in the city and surrounds. She remained in Pretoria until 1956. This period was interrupted by two trips abroad. In mid-September 1948, she left South Africa for the United States on an E. Mead Johnson grant and spent the next year attached to the Rochester Child Health Institute in Rochester, Minnesota, about which more later. The other trip abroad was immediately before her US trip; between June and early September 1948, Vera was in Germany with Schalk Botha of the DKF. This trip to Germany is the subject of the following section.

### **‘The German Thing’: Vera and the Radical Right<sup>20</sup>**



**Figure 3.2:** Vera in traditional *voortrekker* costume, circa December 1938. She was dressed to participate in the *eeufees* celebrations. Source: Mr J. Bührmann, private collection.

### **The Ossewa-Brandwag**

Figure 3.2 shows Vera dressed in the traditional costume of a *voortrekker* woman – bonnet, long white dress, shawl. It dates from circa December 1938. The occasion was the *eeufees*,<sup>21</sup> the centenary

---

20 The phrase ‘The German Thing’ in the title of this section derives from Anonymous’s notes on her interviews with Vera. Despite the many hours she spent interviewing Vera, her notes contain no reference at all to the OB, and Vera’s work for the DKF is dealt with in a cursory and clumsy manner. When it is spoken of, both Anonymous and Vera employ a circumlocution – ‘the German thing’.

21 The *eeufees* took place in 1938 to coincide with the centenary of one of Afrikanerdom’s most significant memorial days, Dingaan’s Day (or Day of the Vow), celebrated annually on 16 December to commemorate the victory of a small band of Boers over a much larger Zulu force at Blood River in December 1838. The ‘Great Trek’ was in fact a

celebration of the 'Great Trek'. Between August and December 1938, several ox-drawn wagons criss-crossed the country, their destination a *koppie* (small hill) outside Pretoria which was to become home to the Voortrekker Monument. In every city, town, and village, scenes of extreme nationalistic fervour played themselves out as the Afrikaner community embraced this symbolic re-enactment of the Great Trek. Most of the men, women, and children lining the streets, and those who followed the procession on foot or on horseback, were dressed in *voortrekker* regalia, like Vera.<sup>22</sup>

As a later OB publication said of the 1938 symbolic trek, 'What began as a pious gesture towards the memory of our ancestors ... simultaneously brought about a compelling awakening in the soul of their descendants.'<sup>23</sup> The 'awakening' occasioned by the *eeufees* had the desired effect of bringing politically divided Afrikaners closer together, at least at grass-roots level; fear that its galvanising effect would dissipate provided the impetus for the establishment of the Ossewa-Brandwag.<sup>24</sup>

Since the general history and ideology of the OB is well documented, only a brief account is necessary here.<sup>25</sup> The OB was launched in Bloemfontein in February 1939 with Colonel J.C.C. Laas as leader. Although it was touted as a 'cultural' organisation, established with the aim of keeping the

---

mythological construct, created by cultural entrepreneurs such as historian Gustav Preller. Preller's writings did much to turn the Great Trek into the 'key myth' of Afrikaner nationalism; I. Hofmeyr, 'Popularizing History: The Case of Gustav Preller', *Journal of African History*, 29, 3, 1988, 521-35. See also L. Thompson, *The Political Mythology of Apartheid* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 180-81. On the circumstances leading to the *eeufees* celebrations, see D. Mostert, ed., *Gedenkboek van die Ossewaens op die pad van Suid-Afrika, Eeufees: 1838-1939* (Afrikaanse Taal- en Kultuurvereniging: Hartenbos. National Press: Cape Town, 1940); G.D.J. Duvenage, *Die Gedenktrek van 1938. 'n Bedevaart en 'n Kruistog* (published by Prof. G. D. J. Duvenage, 1988), 19-28; A.P.J. van Rensburg, 'Die Simboliese Ossewatrek van 1938', *Historia*, 12, 1, 1972, 12-46.

22 The term *voortrekker* refers to Boers who moved away from the British-ruled Cape Colony in the mid-1830s and settled in the hinterland. By incorporating supposed elements of the 'everyday' *voortrekker* experience as part of the symbolic *eeufees* recreation (elements such as dress, horseback riding, social interactions, outdoor cooking, and camping), the organisers shrewdly ensured greater participation and identification with the 'values' of the *voortrekkers*, values which they held up as fundamental to the emerging *volk*. See R. Uys, 'The Lives and Deaths of Memorials: The Changing Symbolism of the 1938 Voortrekker Centenary Monuments' (MA thesis, University of the Western Cape, 2019), 17-43.

23 Anon. *Iets oor die Ossewa-Brandwag* (Pretoria: Voorligtingsafdeling, Ossewa-Brandwag, 1946), 106.

24 The name derives from the guards (*brandwagte*) that Hans van Rensburg organised to protect the ox-wagons (*ossewaens*).

25 The most comprehensive account available is C. Marx, *Oxwagon Sentinel: Radical Afrikaner Nationalism and the History of the 'Ossewabrandwag'* (Pretoria: University of Pretoria Press, 2008). The history department of the erstwhile Potchefstroom University (now North-West University) produced a history of the movement under the general editorship of P.F. van der Schyff titled *Die Ossewabrandwag: Vuurtjie in Droë Gras* (Potchefstroom: Potchefstroomse Universiteit vir Christelike Hoër Onderwys, 1991). Personal accounts by OB leaders include J.F.J. van Rensburg, *Their Paths Crossed Mine: Memoirs of the Commandant-General of the Ossewa-Brandwag* (South Africa: Central News Agency, 1956); J.F.J. van der Walt, *'n Volk op Trek, of, 'n Kort Geskiedenis van die Ontstaan en Ontwikkeling van die Ossewabrandwag* (Johannesburg: Kultuur en Voorligtingsafdeling van die Ossewabrandwag, 1944).

unifying spirit of the symbolic trek of 1938 alive amongst Afrikaners, its founders were all deeply committed to ridding Afrikanerdom of British domination, and swore an oath that they would not rest until Afrikanerdom had regained its freedom.<sup>26</sup> The Union's decision to enter the war against Germany on Britain's side 'encouraged the exclusivist turn in Afrikaner nationalism.'<sup>27</sup> Interest in the OB grew as a spirit of resistance to the war took hold. Within a very short space of time, it had taken on the proportions of a mass movement.<sup>28</sup>

The OB grew rapidly in spite of the erratic leadership of Colonel Laas, but when rumours surfaced that Laas was plotting a coup against Smuts, he was forced out of leadership by other Afrikaner leaders.<sup>29</sup> Towards the end of 1940, the more dynamic and charismatic J.F.J. 'Hans' van Rensburg took over the leadership. A new era had dawned for the OB. It reorganised and developed a more structured ideology, which Schellack summed up as follows:

In short, the OB advocated 'een God (dus Christelik), een volk (dus nasionaal) en een vaderland (dus republikeins)' ['one God (thus Christian), one people (thus nationalist) and one fatherland (thus republican)] ... In their proposed republican *gesagstaat* [authoritarian state] Afrikaners, as the true 'organic *volksgemeenskap*', would not allow 'foreign' elements to be part of the *volk*. For this purpose, all unassimilable elements (blacks, Coloureds, Indians and Jews) had to be removed from the nation. English-speaking South Africans who identified closely with Afrikaners, who in fact became Afrikaners, could in the long run be incorporated into the *volk*. The OB's vehement anti-Semitism was in line with the fascist spirit of the period.<sup>30</sup>

During the war years, the OB developed dualistically. Apart from its cultural programme, there was within its ranks a significant anti-war resistance movement. Many OB members and leaders harboured strong pro-German sentiments and, in some cases, pro-Nazi convictions.<sup>31</sup> Hans van Rensburg had

---

26 P.F. van der Schyff and J.J. Badenhorst, 'Vuurtjie in die Droë Gras' in P.F. van der Schyff, ed., *Die Ossewabrandwag: Vuurtjie in Droë Gras* (Potchefstroom: Potchefstroomse Universiteit vir Christelike Hoër Onderwys, 1991), 1.

27 Milton Shain, *A Perfect Storm*, 236.

28 On the role of the war as a focal point around which disaffected Afrikaner nationalists could unite, see C. Marx. 'The Ossewabrandwag as a Mass Movement, 1939-1941', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 20, 2, 1994, 200-02.

29 Milton Shain, *A Perfect Storm*, 240.

30 Werner Schellack, 'The Afrikaners' Nazi Links Revisited', *South African Historical Journal*, 27, 1, 1992, 181.

31 On purported links between the OB and Nazi Germany, see P.J. Furlong, *Between Crown and Swastika: The Impact of the Radical Right on the Afrikaner Nationalist Movement in the Fascist Era* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press; Hannover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1991). Also Werner Schellack, 'The Afrikaners' Nazi Links Revisited', 173-85.

spent time in Germany prior to the war and was a self-proclaimed admirer of Hitler.<sup>32</sup> As Shain notes, ‘many Afrikaners saw their salvation in a Nazi victory.’<sup>33</sup> The OB hoped that a German victory would lead to the establishment of the *gesagstaat* as imagined by it, and many were prepared to bring it into being by force if necessary. Its paramilitary wing, known as the *Stormjaers* (Stormtroopers), performed acts of sabotage, which a post-war OB publication justified by stating that war is ‘definitely not a “cultural” phenomenon and it cannot be fought solely with culture.’<sup>34</sup> On the streets, there were violent confrontations between anti-war factions and South Africans who supported the war effort.<sup>35</sup> Many OB members were interned as enemies of the state.<sup>36</sup>

As the likelihood of a German victory waned, so too did the fortunes of the OB and its hopes for an Afrikaner Christian Nationalist-Socialist *gesagstaat*. However, Van Rensburg refused to give up his vision, even after Germany’s defeat, which resulted in greater friction between the OB and the HNP. Their rivalry was temporarily suspended in order to present a stronger Afrikaner threat to Smut’s United Party in the 1948 general election. OB support of Havenga’s Afrikaner Party proved crucial to the unexpected outcome. In the post-1948 political landscape, the OB became increasingly irrelevant, and by 1952 it had disbanded. Nevertheless, its lasting influence is attested to by elements of OB ideology that were incorporated into apartheid policies.<sup>37</sup>

Colonel Laas boasted in 1939 that Afrikaners joined the OB ‘in the thousands even before the official inauguration, and in some districts the population has joined as one man.’<sup>38</sup> The Ossewa-

---

32 Milton Shain, *A Perfect Storm*, 163-64. Van der Merwe describes Hans van Rensburg as a ‘convert’ to national-socialism who was convinced that it could be successfully applied in South Africa; Werner van der Merwe, *Vir ’n ‘Blanke Volk’*, 8. But *contra* the stereotyping of Hans van Rensburg as a Nazi, see A. Venter, ‘Die Politieke Oortuigings van Hans van Rensburg (1898-1966): Kontinuiteit en Verandering’ (‘The Political Convictions of Hans van Rensburg (1898-1966): Continuity and Change’), *Tydskrif vir Geesteswetenskappe*, 48, 1, Maart 2008, 41-57.

33 Milton Shain, *A Perfect Storm*, 240.

34 Anon, Iets oor die Ossewa-Brandwag, 108.

35 See G.C. Visser, *OB: Traitors or Patriots?* (Johannesburg: Macmillan South Africa, 1976). See also A.M. Fokkens, ‘Afrikaner Unrest Within South Africa During the Second World War and the Measures Taken to Suppress It’, *Journal for Contemporary History*, 37, 2, 2012, 123-42.

36 Many future apartheid-era leaders were amongst those interned because of their OB affiliation, such as future prime minister, B.J. Vorster, and the head of his secret service, General Hendrik van den Bergh. See H. Giliomee, *The Last Afrikaner Leaders. A Supreme Test of Power* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 2012), 118.

37 The ideas of Geoff Cronjé are a notable example. Most of Cronjé’s ideas were formulated while he was a member of the OB. As Dubow remarks, ‘What stands out in his work is a particularly virulent brand of racism which is consonant with his support for the Germans during the war and his membership of the Ossewabrandwag.’ Saul Dubow, ‘Afrikaner Nationalism and the Conceptualisation of “Race”’, *Journal of African History* 33, 2, 1992, 229. J.M. Coetzee states, ‘In the judgment of Marks and Trapido, Cronjé’s books give “the most comprehensive theoretical statement” of apartheid we have.’ J.M. Coetzee, ‘The Mind of Apartheid: Geoffrey Cronjé (1907-),’ *Social Dynamics*, 17, 1, 1991, 1-35.

38 Cited in Milton Shain, *A Perfect Storm*, 237-38.



Brandwag would have appealed to ‘enthusiastic patriots’ such as Vera and her siblings, although it is not certain if all of them were members. Her brother Louis recalled that shortly after the OB had been established, he and other people from the Ermelo region met with Col. Laas at Amersfoort who asked him to take control of the movement in the region. Louis was sceptical at first, but eventually joined and rose to the rank of *hoofkcommandant* (chief commandant). He does not mention Vera (who was no longer living in Ermelo at the time) nor any of his other sisters, but notes that while his brothers Willem and Hendrik never joined the OB, his younger brother Johannes Rudolph became an officer of some standing in the movement.<sup>39</sup> Precisely when, or where, Vera joined is not known but since she was always associated with the Transvaal branch,<sup>40</sup> she probably joined early in 1940 after leaving Pietermaritzburg and settling with George in Middelburg.

What role did women play in the OB? The historian Charl Blignaut has published extensively on this topic, attempting to fill the lacunae in most of the standard works on the OB.<sup>41</sup> Drawing on Blignaut’s work and other sources, the following picture emerges regarding the role of women in the OB.

In general, gender roles in the OB were predicated on a form of biological determinism, the belief that the social roles appropriate to each gender were dictated by biological differences. As an article in the OB’s official newspaper (*Die OB*) put it, ‘The role of the man is not more valuable than that of the woman, only different; the two complement each other and together they form a whole –

39 North-West University Library, Die Ossewa-Brandwag Argief, ‘Die Ossewa-Brandwag - Herinneringe van Mnr. L.C.R. Bührmann’, Band nr. 165, 1985.

40 All references to Vera in OB documents place her in Section E (Transvaal).

41 C. Blignaut, ‘Volksmoeders in die Kollig: ’n Historiese-Teoretiese Verkenning van die Rol van Vroue in Die Ossewa-Brandwag, 1938-1954’ (MA dissertation, North-West University, 2012); C. Blignaut, ‘From Fund-Raising to Freedom Day: The Nature of Women’s General Activities in the Ossewa-Brandwag’, *New Contree: A Journal of Historical and Human Sciences for Southern Africa*, 66, July 2013, 121-50; C. Blignaut, ‘Doing Gender is Unavoidable: Women’s Participation in the Core Activities of the Ossewa-Brandwag, 1938-1943’, *Historia*, 58, 2, 2013, 1-18; C. Blignaut, “‘Kan die Vrou Haar Volk Dien deur Haar Huis?’” Afrikanerpolitiek en Vroue in die Ossewa-Brandwag, 1942-1954’, *Journal for Contemporary History*, 40, 1, 2015, 102-24; C. Blignaut, “‘Die Hand aan die Wieg Regeer die Land [The Hand that Rocks the Cradle Rules the Land]’: Exploring the Agency and Identity of Women in the Ossewabrandwag, 1939-1954’, *South African Historical Journal*, 67, 1, 2015, 47-63; C. Blignaut, “‘Skep Julle Kommando’s in Reddingslaers om! Een vir Almal, Almal vir Elkeen!’”: Die Ossewa-Brandwag se Maatskaplike Beleid van Sosiale Volksorg, 1943-1952’, *New Contree: A Journal of Historical and Human Sciences for Southern Africa*, 74, December 2015, 72-89 C. Blignaut, “‘Rebellie Sonder Gewere’: Vroue se Gebruik van Kultuur as Versetmiddel teen die Agtergrond van die Ossewa-Brandwag se Dualisties Karakter’, *SAJCH/SATK*, 30, 2, Dec. 2016, 109-31; C. Blignaut and K. du Pisani, “‘n Onselfstandige Gesin Beteken ’n Onselfstandige Volk’: Organiese Nasionalisme en die Amptelike Gesinsbeleid van die Ossewa-Brandwag’, *Historia*, 63, 2, 2018, 138-60. See also the audio-visual presentation featuring Blignaut: ‘Die Ossewa Brandwag en Haar Vroue’, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wt5QC3KHe1Q> (accessed 5 May 2019).

the family.’<sup>42</sup> It was within the family, the nucleus of the *volk*, that women could make their most telling contribution. The OB appropriated and adapted the *volksmoeder*<sup>43</sup> image to hallow the domestic realm. In the ‘cauldron of contending Afrikaner nationalisms before 1948,’ the *volksmoeder* symbol functioned as the ‘preeminent organiser of Afrikaner gender roles.’<sup>44</sup> Women achieved their highest calling by aspiring to the ideals of the *volksmoeder*, qualities such as ‘a sense of history, bravery, a love of freedom, the spirit of sacrifice, self-reliance, housewifeliness, nurturance of talents, integrity, virtue and the setting of an example to others.’<sup>45</sup>

Within the formal structures of the organisation, the women’s branch of the OB existed primarily to support the men’s branch. Initially, the work of the women’s branch was limited to fundraising, acting as symbolic inspiration for the OB, charity work (especially looking after the families of interned OB members), educating young girls, and organising cultural activities and festivals. In 1943, the women’s section was reorganised, largely by Geoff Cronjé,<sup>46</sup> a German-trained professor of sociology at the University of Pretoria whose obsession with racial purity has been well documented.<sup>47</sup> Under Cronjé, the OB women’s organisation was given a dual role: to continue supplying *hulpdienste* (support services) to the men’s structures of the OB, and to perform *vrouevolksorg* (care of the nation). In practical terms, *vrouevolksorg* meant that all women had a responsibility to promote the welfare of the *volk* through health care, child care, youth welfare,

42 ‘Terug na die Huis en Vrou as Moeder’ (‘Return to the Home as Wife and Mother’), *Die OB* (30 September 1949), my translation.

43 On the varied uses of the *volksmoeder* image by Afrikaner cultural entrepreneurs, see Elsabe Brink, ‘Man-Made Women: Gender, Class and the Ideology of the *Volksmoeder*’ in Cheryl Walker, ed., *Women and Gender in Southern Africa to 1945* (Cape Town: David Phillip, 1990), 273-92; Louise Vincent, ‘A Cake of Soap: The *Volksmoeder*-Ideology and Afrikaner Women’s Campaign for the Vote’, *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 32, 1, 1999, 1-17; Louise Vincent, ‘The Power behind the Scenes: The Afrikaner Nationalist Women’s Parties, 1915-1931’, *South African Historical Journal*, 40, 1, 1999, 51-73; Louise Vincent, ‘Bread and Honour: White Working Class Women and Afrikaner Nationalism in the 1930s’, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 26, 1, March 2000, 61-78; L. Vincent, ‘From Suffrage to Silence: The South African Afrikaner Nationalist Women’s Parties, 1915-1931’ in K.M. Blee and S.M. Deutsch, eds., *Women of the Right. Comparisons and Interplay across Borders* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania University Press, 2012); M. du Toit, ‘The Domesticity of Afrikaner Nationalism: *Volksmoeders* and the ACVV, 1904-1929’, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 29, 1, March 2003, 155-76; Elsabe Brink, ‘Die *Volksmoeder*: ’n Beeld van ’n Vrou’ in A.M. Grundlingh and S. Huigen, eds., *Van *Volksmoeder* tot *Fokopolisiekar*: Kritiese Opstelle oor Afrikaanse Herinneringsplekke* (Stellenbosch: Sun Press, 2008), 7-16; R. van der Merwe, ‘Moulding *Volksmoeders* or *Volks* Enemies? Female Students at the University of Pretoria, 1920-1970’, *Historia*, 56, 1, 2011, 77-100.

44 Christi van der Westhuizen, *Sitting Pretty*, 8, 19.

45 Elsabe Brink, ‘Man-made Woman’, 280.

46 C. Bignaut, ‘From Fund-raising to Freedom Day’, 127.

47 See Geoff Cronjé, *’n Tuiste vir die Nageslag - Die Blywende Oplossing van Suid-Afrika se Rassevraagstuk* (Johannesburg: Publicité, 1945). The book is dedicated to his wife and to ‘all other Afrikaner mothers because they are the protectors of the blood-purity [*Bloedsuiverheid*] of the Boer nation.’ Also Saul Dubow, ‘Racial Irredentism, Ethnogenesis, and White Supremacy in High-Apartheid South Africa’, *Kronos*, 41, November 2015, 236-64.

domestic service, and family welfare.<sup>48</sup> In keeping with the *volksmoeder* image, women were the moral centre of the *volk*, the guardians of its purity.<sup>49</sup>

How did Vera fit into this world? Unlike some notable Ossewa-Brandwag women,<sup>50</sup> Vera provided no memoir of her experiences in the OB, at least not in the papers that are available.<sup>51</sup> She makes no mention of the OB in her late-life oral interviews. This is lamentable. It would have been instructive to know more about the level of her involvement. How did she balance her medical career and her marriage with her OB commitments? How did she feel about issues that were important to the OB? Judith Tayler, for example, cites Elsa Joubert's 'gently ironic' description of the 'exciting' OB activities she participated in at Stellenbosch University. 'On the one hand there were secret assignments, coded messages, conspiratorial insider status. On the other hand, there were spectacles of uniformed mass gatherings, marching, singing, impassioned speeches.'<sup>52</sup> Hard though it is to imagine, one wonders if Vera engaged in 'secret assignments' or was swept up in the euphoria that was generated at the mass gatherings of the OB. Louise Viljoen characterises Joubert's OB activities as part of her social life rather than her political life.<sup>53</sup> The opposite was in all likelihood the case with Vera; she was a serious-minded person, and no doubt took the OB and her role in it equally seriously. One wonders whether she joined and remained loyal to the OB because she was pro-German or anti-British, or both. Or was it perhaps because she fell under the spell of the OB's charismatic leader, Hans van Rensburg? The Afrikaans journalist and author known as M.E.R.,<sup>54</sup> a prominent OB member

---

48 Geoff Cronjé, 'Vrouevolksorg', *Die OB*, 1 September 1943.

49 According to Blignaut, however, OB women were not passive victims of this man-made construct of womanhood – they actively contributed to it. They accepted their status as auxiliaries to men but interpreted it as a willing acceptance, thus exercising their political agency within the domestic domain which biology (and God) had fitted them for. As Albert Blake posits, the idealised portrayal of the traditional *volksmoeder*-inspired role of Afrikaner women 'did not always keep pace with reality' (my translation). He illustrates the truth of this assertion by devoting a chapter to the exploits of a group of militant women who were integral to many of the OB's sabotage efforts during the war; A. Blake, *Wit Terroriste: Afrikaner-saboteurs in die Ossewabrandwagjare* (Kapaastad: Tafelberg, 2018), 211-26.

50 See Erika Theron, *Sonder Hoed of Handskoen. Synde 'n Klompie Informele Herinneringe Waarin die Kind (Meestal) op Sy Naam Genoem Word* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 1983); Elsa Joubert, *'n Wonderlike Geweld: Jeugherinneringe* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 2005).

51 Documentary evidence for Vera's involvement in the OB is almost completely lacking in the collection of her papers held at UCT. The only reference I could locate was in a notebook dated 1975. In the context of recording a dream, she inserted the phrase 'as in Ossewa-Brandwag days' in parentheses. UCT Libraries, Special Collections, BC1164 Vera Bührmann Collection. It is worth repeating that in all the notes compiled by Anonymous there is no reference at all to Vera's involvement in the Ossewa-Brandwag.

52 J.A. Tayler, 'With Her Shoulder to the Wheel: The Public Life of Erika Theron (1907-1990)' (DLitt et Phil thesis, Unisa, 2010), 86.

53 Louise Viljoen, 'Nationalism, Gender and Sexuality in the Autobiographical Writing of Two Afrikaner Women', *Social Dynamics*, 34, 2, 2008, 198.

54 Maria Elizabeth Rothmann, \* 28 August 1875 † 7 September 1975.

in the Cape, and a good friend of Vera's eldest sister, Aletta, wrote movingly about the deep divisions between friends and family members that resulted from the split between Malan's HNP and the OB. The OB, she wrote, is 'one of the finest things' that ever happened to the *volk*: 'I won't give it up,' she declared, even though it meant that some of her dearest friends would no longer associate with her.<sup>55</sup> One wonders whether similar tensions arose in the Bührmann family. Vera's brother, Louis Bührmann, for example, refused to heed the OB leader's call for OB members not to vote in the 1943 election, and fell afoul of the OB leadership.<sup>56</sup> It is also not clear whether George van Niekerk shared his wife's ardent convictions regarding the OB. Unfortunately, there is no evidence on which to base answers to such speculative questions.

What evidence does exist, then, and what does it show about Vera? Documents held in the OB archive at North-West University and elsewhere reveal that Vera held senior leadership positions in the women's branch of Section E (Transvaal). In a circular dated 9 December 1941, for example, *Hoofkommandant* (Chief Commandant) Dr. M.V. Bührmann is named as member of the *Adjunkraad* for the Eastern Transvaal (Auxiliary Council; the *Adjunkraad* was a body called into being by the *Beheerraad*, the Executive Committee, to advise it on OB women's affairs).<sup>57</sup> Several years later, she is named as a member of the women's executive council of Region E.<sup>58</sup>

An annual highlight for OB women was the *vroue laertrek*, a camp or retreat for women, an important, week-long event held annually within each region. At these camps, women attended lectures presented by a *deskundige* (expert). Vera was regarded as a *deskundige*, and as such was a regular lecturer at these camps.<sup>59</sup> At the *laertrek* of 14 to 20 September 1942, for example, she delivered lectures on *Invloed van Vrou en Moeder op Toekoms van Kind en Volk* (Influence of Wife

55 M.E.R. (Mimie E. Rothmann), A. Bouwer, A. Rothmann, R. Van Reenen. *M. E. R. 'n Kosbare Erfenis: Briewe 1916-1975* (Kaapstad: Tafelberg, 1977), 66 (my translation). See also J.C. Steyn, *Die 100 Jaar van MER* (Kaapstad: Tafelberg, 2004), 132, 200-09, 381-90.

56 North-West University Library, Die Ossewa-Brandwag Argief, 'Die Ossewa-Brandwag – Herinneringe van Mnr. L.C.R. Bührmann', Band nr. 165, 1985.

57 North-West University Library, Ossewa-Brandwag Archive, 1/3/1, 'Omsendbriewe', J.D. Jerling, Omsendbrief NR. TBR. 5/41, 'Ter Inligting I/S die Adjunkraad', 9 Desember 1941.

58 *Die OB*, 17 April 1946.

59 Most lecturers at this time were men; perhaps this is the reason Blignaut assumed that 'Dr Bührmann' was male; Charl Blignaut, 'Doing Gender', 11.

and Mother on the Future of Child and Nation),<sup>60</sup> *Geslagsiektes* (Sexually Transmitted Diseases), and *Die Siel van die Vrou: Haar Bekwaamhede en Tekortkominge* (The Soul [Psyche] of Woman: Her Strengths and Weaknesses). At the 1943 *laertrek*, she delivered a lecture on *Senuweesiektes* (Nervous Disorders).<sup>61</sup>

Vera's commitment to the OB is further evidenced by the fact that she remained a member even after 1948, when the OB had largely become irrelevant. Her concern for the OB and its leader is illustrated in a letter she wrote to her brother Rudolph (also an OB member) in February 1949 while she was on an extended stay in the United States, doing research at the Mayo Clinic in Minnesota:

I am really perturbed by our political front. As a foreigner here [in the United States] who is trying hard to correct many false impressions, my task is made more difficult when there is no unity among our own members. Is there trouble concerning Van Rensburg's leadership? The "Burger" [an Afrikaans newspaper] which I receive occasionally carries articles and, in the last issue, a cartoon which shows that there is much malice.<sup>62</sup>

By 1949, the National Party was in power, and many OB members had abandoned the organisation and found a political home with the NP. But Vera evidently remained loyal to Hans van Rensburg and the OB; there is a missionary zeal in the expression 'trying hard to correct many false impressions.'<sup>63</sup>

The evidence referenced above suggests that Vera was very much more than just an 'ordinary member' of a 'cultural' organisation. She was a high-ranking and engaged office-bearer in a militant organisation with strong nationalist-socialist leanings. She was regarded as an expert and entrusted with educating the *volk* in the right way. It is thus reasonable to assume that she endorsed the OB's ideology, including its vision of a Christian nationalist-socialist *gesagstaat* modelled, in part, on German national-socialism, its exclusionary *rassebeleid* (race policy) with its emphasis on biological, economic, and territorial segregation, its *volksmoeder*-inspired *gesinsbeleid* (family policy), and its

---

60 A copy of this lecture has survived: North-West University Library, Ossewa-Brandwag Archive, Transvaalse Beheerraad-versameling, B/L 8(i)/1/2, M.V. Bührmann, 'Invloed van Vrou en Moeder op Toekoms van die Kind en Volk'.

61 *Die OB*, 14 April 1943; *Die OB*, 2 June 1943.

62 M.V. Bührmann to Rudolph Bührmann, 20 February 1949 (my translation). My thanks to Mr Johann Bührmann for making this letter available to me. Vera was in the United States on a research trip funded by Mead Johnson, about which more in the next chapter.

63 This foreshadows Marius Swart's exhortation to the Bührmann family on New Year's Day 1965 to keep the legacy of their *stamvader* alive by correcting misunderstandings about South Africa (see Chapter 1).

*gesondheidsdiens* (health services) policy with its emphasis on *bloedsuiwerheid* (blood/racial purity).<sup>64</sup>

In short, the evidence suggests that Vera was a staunch OB supporter right to the end, a *bittereinder*.

Vera's involvement in the activities of the radical right were not limited to the OB, however. In 1947, she offered her medical expertise to the *Dietse Kinderfonds*, an organisation that had been called into existence by a group of leading pro-German Afrikaners to put into effect an ambitious plan to bring 10 000 German war orphans to South Africa for adoption. Ostensibly a humane act, the plan was really meant to ensure the survival of white Afrikaners in their fatherland, South Africa, by an infusion of Aryan blood. If it succeeded, it had the potential to become one of the most significant events in Afrikaner history. Vera was to play a pivotal role in this drama.

### **The Dietse Kinderfonds**

The story of the *Dietse Kinderfonds* begins with Mrs Dorothea Petronella Liebenberg. She and her husband were ardent supporters of Germany throughout the war.<sup>65</sup> She was heavily involved in post-war welfare relief efforts in Germany,<sup>66</sup> but was concerned that food parcels and clothing and other such items collected and sent to Germany were not enough. The plight of children orphaned by the war concerned her greatly. She conceived a plan to bring 5 000 German orphans to South Africa with a view to adoption by Afrikaner families.<sup>67</sup> She discussed her idea with a close family friend, another

---

64 Eugenic overtones occur frequently in OB literature on *volksgesondheid* (national health). For example, in a study document signed by Geoff Cronjé, one of the objectives of the proposed health policy is 'the enhancement of the biological quality of the nation' (i.e., improvement of the race; my translation, original emphasis). The document makes clear that the biological quality of the *volk* is compromised by factors such as miscegenation, immigrants of a 'low biological quality,' and certain hereditary diseases which will be 'scientifically' eradicated. Ossewa-Brandwag Argief, Potchefstroomse Universiteit, A0008g Beleidsstudieprogramme, G. Cronje, 'Beleid Is: Volksgesondeid', undated.

65 The Liebenbergs only listened to broadcasts from the German Zeesen radio station, refusing to believe any of the 'English-Jewish propaganda' broadcast by the Union's broadcaster; Werner van der Merwe, 'Duitse-Wesies (6)', <http://www.gelofteland.org/index.php/ons-geskiedenis/29-duitse-weeskinders-1948/375-duitse-wesies-6> (accessed 19 July 2018).

66 Liebenberg started the Vrouenoodleningskomitee (VNLK), which was made up exclusively of Afrikaner women. 'Thousands of food-packages and clothing items were sent to Germany by the VNLK, with the assistance of the DAHA, containing the message, "Van die Boerevolk van Suid-Afrika" (From the Boers of South Africa).'" R. Slater, 'Die Maatskappy vir Europese Immigrasie: A Study of the Cultural Assimilation and Naturalisation of European Immigrants to South Africa 1949-1994' (MA dissertation, University of Stellenbosch, 2005), 32.

67 Van der Merwe argues that Mrs Liebenberg was motivated by factors other than humanitarian aid: she saw the proposed child immigration scheme as an opportunity to bolster the Afrikaner *volk* with an injection of fresh Aryan blood. Werner van der Merwe, 'Duitse-Wesies (1)', <http://www.gelofteland.org/index.php/ons-geskiedenis/29-duitse-weeskinders-1948/214-duitse-wesies-1.html> (accessed 19 July 2018; my translation.)

ardent supporter of Germany, Dr T.E.W. Schumann.<sup>68</sup> He thought it feasible that more children – as many as 10 000 – could be accommodated.

Schumann discussed the plan with a number of prominent pro-German Afrikaners. The enthusiasm with which it was greeted led to an exploratory meeting on 4 September 1945. Eighteen influential Afrikaners attended; all were ‘fiery Afrikaner nationalists with an almost unbounded admiration for the German people.’<sup>69</sup> Two of Vera’s brothers, Willem (a member of Oswald Pirow’s New Order) and Johannes Rudolph (a member of the OB), were present at that meeting.

Schumann explained to the meeting that not only would the adoption of 10 000 children by South Africans make a very real material difference to the plight of post-war Germany, it was also an opportunity for Afrikaners to settle what he referred to as an *ereskuld* (debt of honour). This was a reference to aid which Germany had provided to the Boers during and after the South African War. The meeting discussed the plethora of difficulties that would inevitably be encountered. Despite these obstacles and the apparent idealism of the plan, it was decided to go ahead. An interim committee was elected which included Vera’s brother, Willem Bührmann.<sup>70</sup> At a meeting which took place on 7 September 1945, it was decided to establish an organisation known as the Dietse Kinderfonds which would manage the implementation of the scheme.<sup>71</sup>

It is not necessary to go into detail regarding the DKF’s struggles to get its scheme off the ground in the months leading up to Vera’s involvement; such detail can be gleaned from the works of

---

68 Theodor Eberhardt Werner Schumann (1896-1986) was at the time chief meteorologist at the South African Weather Bureau. He was descended from German missionary stock on both his paternal and maternal sides. Van der Merwe puts him ‘firmly in the pro-German and pro-Nazi orbit’ (my translation); Werner van der Merwe, *Vir ’n ‘Blanke Volk’*, 3. For Schumann’s later defence of apartheid, see Saul Dubow, ‘Racial Irredentism’, 254-55.

69 Werner van der Merwe, ‘Duitse-Wesies (1)’, <http://www.gelofteland.org/index.php/ons-geskiedenis/29-duitse-weeskinders-1948/214-duitse-wesies-1.html> (my translation.)

70 Willem (Wim) Bührmann remained an executive member of the DKF throughout his life (he died in December 1961). He was also a founding member of Die Maatskappy vir Europese Immigrasie (MEI) (The Company for European Immigration). ‘The MEI was essentially established from other organisations which were narrowly linked to the advancement of the Afrikaner, and in particular the advancement of immigration to bolster the Afrikaner population in South Africa. These included the Deutsch Afrikanischer Hilfssausschuss (DAHA), the Vrouenoodleningskomitee (VNLK) and the Dietse Kinderfonds (DKF).’ R. Slater, *Die Maatskappy vir Europese Immigrasie*, 83. On the Broederbond’s role in the establishment of MEI, see I. Wilkins and H. Strydom, *The Super-Afrikaners. Inside the Afrikaner Broederbond* (Cape Town: Jonathan Ball, 2012), 152, 273, 274, 420.

71 It is not clear why the term ‘Dietse’ was chosen instead of ‘Duitse’ (German). The term Diets refers to the Dutch and Flemish, and specifically *excludes* Germans; see ‘Diets of Duits’, *Zuid-Afrika Maandblad* 25, 6. Van der Merwe speculates that ‘Dietse’ was chosen because the Smuts government had expressly forbidden the OB from participating in post-war relief efforts in Germany. Since most of the DKF committee members were OB or New Order members, it is possible that the term Dietse was used to draw attention away from the government’s restriction on OB members’ participation in post-war relief efforts in Germany. Werner van der Merwe, ‘Duitse-Wesies (7),’ <http://www.gelofteland.org/index.php/ons-geskiedenis/29-duitse-weeskinders-1948/420-duitse-wesies-7>.

De Lange and Van der Merwe.<sup>72</sup> Suffice to say that between 1945 and early 1947, the DKF faced mixed fortunes. The scheme was enthusiastically received by many Afrikaners; offers to adopt the children poured in from hundreds of hopeful Afrikaner families.

But official approval proved elusive until, in March 1947, Smuts's office informed the DKF that, in principle, the government had agreed to endorse the DKF's scheme.<sup>73</sup> However, as the September 1947 minutes of the DKF record, the government was only willing to allow 100 German orphans to be brought out to South Africa, with the possibility of more if the endeavour proved successful. The government also required the DKF to provide it with a guarantee that the fund would provide for the children until they reached the age of maturity. In exchange, the government would pay the transport costs of bringing the children to South Africa.

Despite their disappointment at the greatly reduced number of children permitted, the DKF decided to persist with the implementation of the scheme. The terms of the guarantee required by the government were eventually met. The time had come for the immigration scheme to be put into effect.

As noted earlier, two of Vera's brothers, Willem and Dolf, were founder members of the DKF; Willem served on its *dagbestuur* (management committee) until his death in 1961. It is thus highly likely that Vera was aware of the organisation and its mission from its inception; however, her engagement with it only began in June 1947, when Willem Bührmann informed the DKF that his sister Vera was willing to go to Germany to undertake the medical selection of the children.

The Smuts government agreed to permit the DKF to send its own medical *keurders* (selectors) to Germany. This was an important concession since the DKF was not only looking for children who were free from physical or mental infirmities, as stipulated by the government, but children who were *racially* acceptable, that is, of 'pure' Aryan descent. The DKF wanted a certain 'type' of child –

---

72 Eike de Lange, *Die Verhaal van die Dietse Kinderfonds* (Potchefstroom, Potchefstroom Herald, 1970); Werner van der Merwe, *Vir 'n 'Blanke Volk'*. An incomplete serialised account of the DKF by van der Merwe appears on the website 'Gelofteland', <http://www.gelofteland.org/index.php>. Both authors were amongst the children who were brought out from Germany in 1948. De Lange's book was produced by the DKF to mark the end of its official activities.

73 The reason for the change of heart appears to be that the Union government's own child immigration scheme had come to naught. In 1946, the Union government had invited Great Britain and other Allied nations (excluding Russia and Poland) to send 5 000 of their children to South Africa. As Secretary for Social Welfare G.A.C. Kuschke put it, the government had initially rejected the DKF's proposal 'mainly on the grounds that preference should be given to British children and children from Allied countries.' National Archives, Pretoria, A1732, Dietse Kinderfonds Collection, G.A.C. Kuschke to Mrs E.L. Tucker, Provincial Secretary of the SOEWA (undated).



children who were full orphans (both parents deceased), between the ages of three and eight (most prospective parents wanted younger children, and most wanted girls),<sup>74</sup> and of demonstrably pure German and Protestant descent (what Van der Merwe refers to as *herrenvolk*, ‘master-race’).<sup>75</sup> It was thus essential that the medical selector be aware of and sympathetic to these non-negotiable requirements.

Vera’s willingness to perform the task was a godsend for the committee tasked with appointing a suitable candidate. Their efforts to attract a suitable medical officer – preferably an Afrikaner who would undertake the work free of charge and who would be prepared to spend at least three months in Germany – had hitherto proved fruitless. Not only did Vera meet these criteria, but her background in maternity clinics and welfare work, along with her OB pedigree and connections, made her an ideal candidate.

The DKF enlisted the help of Mr G.A.C. Kuschke, secretary of welfare, to secure a three-month leave of absence for Vera, which was granted by the Pretoria Health Department.<sup>76</sup> But much groundwork still had to be done before she could travel to Germany. From January 1948, Vera spearheaded the process of vetting prospective adoptive parents. Criteria for approval were strict: the selection committee investigated prospective parents’ financial circumstances, age, church membership, nationality, social standing, and the reasons for the family wishing to adopt a German child. Applications from English speakers or members of any church other than the three major Afrikaans churches were summarily rejected by Vera.<sup>77</sup>

Schalk Botha, the DKF’s secretary, was tasked with investigating conditions in Germany and assessing the practicability of the scheme. Because the DKF had decided to focus its efforts on the British Zone, Botha left South Africa on 27 April 1948 for London, where he met up with a Dr Kriek

---

74 Van der Merwe includes several extracts from prospective parents’ applications attesting to this. Van der Merwe, *Vir ‘n Blanke Volk*, 87-88. Other applicants were concerned that *only* Afrikaners should be considered as parents. Thus Mr G.L. Brits exhorted the DKF: ‘be sure not to allocate the German orphans to English or Jewish parents, because we are too beholden to Germany to subject their orphans to a twisted education’ (my translation); National Archives, Pretoria, A1732, Dietse Kinderfonds Collection, G.L. Brits to Schalk Botha, 2 November 1947.

75 Werner van der Merwe, “‘Herrenvolk-bloed’ vir die Afrikaner: Veertig Jaar Duitse Weeskinders (1948-1988)”, *Historia*, 33, 2, 1988, 78-87; Werner van der Merwe, *Vir ‘n ‘Blanke Volk’*, 66, 150.

76 National Archives, Pretoria. A1732, Dietse Kinderfonds Collection. Minutes of 20th meeting of the DKF, 24 October 1947.

77 Werner van der Merwe, *Vir ‘n ‘Blanke Volk’*, 84.

who was studying in Holland at the time but had offered his services to the DKF during a short break. Botha spent close to two weeks obtaining the necessary permissions to enter the British Zone. Finally, travelling under the British flag, using British transportation and personnel, Botha and Kriek were able to visit officials and institutions in the four regions that comprised the British Zone, meeting with the German authorities, welfare organisations, and churches, setting out the scheme and soliciting support.

Botha was meant to perform reconnaissance only; he was meant to report back to the management committee, who would make the decision whether to proceed or not, but the *ellende* (misery) he encountered in Germany was so great that he determined not to return to South Africa without the 100 children.<sup>78</sup> Towards the end of May 1948 he persuaded the management committee to allow Vera to join him to perform the selection. He then returned to London to find a shipping company that would ferry the party back to South Africa, and to await Vera's arrival.

Vera left South Africa on 14 June, and a week later she and Schalk Botha arrived in Hamburg. Germany was, of course, a very different country to what it had been when she had accompanied her sister Aletta to Frankfurt in search of Freud back in 1933 (see Chapter 2). Like most German cities, Hamburg lay in ruins, pulverised by Allied bombing raids which were amongst the heaviest of the European war. No doubt the *ellende* Botha described in the radio interview referenced previously had the same effect on Vera as it had on him.

It is a pity that Vera has not left a written record of her personal experiences in Germany. The reports she wrote from Germany are written in a formal register; they do not tell us anything about her state of mind. There is only one letter in the DKF collection at the National Archives in Pretoria which contains any information about Vera's emotional reaction to what was happening. It is addressed to her brother Willem.

---

78 SABC Radio Archives, A78/62, 'Burgers van '48 (1)', Schalk Botha, speaking to Nic Swanepoel, April 1978. In this interview, Botha talks of the almost insuperable difficulties he encountered, due in part to the complicated political situation: each of the four regions in the British Zone had its own German 'government', each of which had its own departments, rules, and regulations. And travelling 'under the flag of the conqueror' (my translation) caused many Germans to view the DKF with suspicion; some even accused Botha of wanting to take the children into slavery in South Africa. As Botha tells it, it was only when he asked Wilhelm Käber, Schleswig-Holstein's Minister of the Interior, what he was to tell 'Oom Paul se mense' ('Uncle Paul's [Kruger] people'), that Käber lent his support to the undertaking – such, Botha says, was the regard the Germans had for Kruger and the Boers who had so bravely fought their common enemy, the British, at the turn of the century.

At Hamburg yesterday I did the final selection and everything was arranged so brilliantly by the Germans that I was profoundly impressed by the duty we have to them and the children they have given to us. I don't know if all the experiences here have made me sentimental but the little dramas that were enacted here yesterday made a deep impression on me. In some cases both parents or only a mother or a father gave up a child, and in other cases it was older children who asked so nicely that we must please adopt them.<sup>79</sup>

It is hard to imagine anyone not becoming 'sentimental' in a situation where parents were offering their children for adoption in a foreign country, or where older children were begging to be taken with younger siblings who had been selected. It is typical of Vera, though, to understate her reaction. She also says nothing about the personal discomfort and ill-health she was experiencing. Notes from interviews with Anonymous suggest that Vera suffered as a result of the scarcity of food in Germany, 'and forever afterwards suffered from the effects of severe malnutrition e.g. damaged eyesight, swollen ankles, sore tongue.'<sup>80</sup> The letter continues:

Children between eight and twelve are being put forward in greater numbers now and we have every hope that we can get about thirty to make up our quota of 100. Already yesterday we made a commitment on our own responsibility to take six children between eight and twelve because they were exceptional children who have suffered a great deal, and to whom we simply could not say no ... We realise that the situation of the older children who have already experienced so much is extremely sad. One is tempted to say yes to all of them, but we have managed to keep our balance.<sup>81</sup>

Whether persuaded by Schalk Botha or motivated by the *ellende* and the 'little dramas' that so deeply affected her, Vera was as determined as Botha to make up the quota. She and Botha thus decided to take it on themselves to go beyond the parameters set by the DKF. They started selecting children as young as two, and much older than eight.

Some of the 'exceptional' older children she refers to are shown in the photograph below (Figure 3.3). According to Annette Jordaan, the child being examined in the photograph is Siegfried Tietz (11). His brother Lothar Tietz (13) stands behind and to the right of him.<sup>82</sup> Their sister Edith (9) was also brought out to South Africa. At 13, Lothar was one of the oldest of the children who were

---

79 National Archives, Pretoria. A1732, Dietse Kinderfonds Collection. M.V. Bührmann to Willem Bührmann, 9 July 1948 (my translation), in minutes of the 29th meeting of the DKF, 21 July 1948.

80 Anonymous, 'Transcript of Interview with Vera Bührmann', undated (F2~1.THE).

81 National Archives, Pretoria, A1732, Dietse Kinderfonds Collection, M.V. Bührmann to Willem Bührmann, 9 July 1948.

82 Annette Jordaan, *Lothar Neethling – 'n Lewe Vertel* (Pretoria: Litera, 2013). Annette was born eighteen months after her parents adopted Lothar Tietz.

eventually selected. Vera was very impressed by Lothar, and probably had him and his siblings in mind when she refers to ‘exceptional children who have suffered a great deal.’



**Figure 3.3:** Vera examining German children, circa August 1948. The child being examined is Siegfried Tietz (11). His brother Lothar Tietz (13) stands behind and to the right of him. Source: National Archives, Pretoria.

Vera was well aware that by selecting older children she was taking a significant risk; most prospective parents wanted younger children, preferably girls. She was also placing the management committee in a difficult position, since they would need to find parents for the older children before the party arrived back in South Africa. In her letter to Willem, her anxiety comes through clearly, and she several times stresses that the final placement of children must be her responsibility:

One thing I want to emphasise again concerns the handing over of the children to the new parents. Our experience yesterday has convinced me anew that I will have to hand over each child individually to each parent. There is so much to explain, so much advice to give, and so much is at stake that it cannot be rushed. Since I have to be in Pretoria that must naturally be the designated place. It may be possible to hand over the small number of Cape Town-based children there, but no more than that. ... I just want to add that no person who hasn't been here would understand the

background of the children, which is why I consider it essential that I hand over the children myself.<sup>83</sup>

Her anxiety was exacerbated by the prospect of being away from South Africa in the near future. She alludes to this in the final paragraph of her letter:

I've also received a letter from the Americans – please arrange whatever is easiest and most practical; I'd prefer to begin there as soon as possible so that I can be back in South Africa as quickly as possible in 1949.<sup>84</sup>

Vera had been offered an opportunity to do research at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota. Perhaps part of the reason she wanted to be back in South Africa as soon as possible was to oversee the welfare of the children as they adapted to their new situation (and, perhaps, to attend to her failing marriage).

Further selections followed in Schleswig-Hollstein, Hanover, and Nord-Rhein-Westfallen, but the shortage of time, poor co-operation from the authorities, and a lack of suitable children meant that they were unable to achieve their target of 100 children, even with older children. Once the final assessment and selection had been done, a total of 79 children had been selected.<sup>85</sup>

Now began the logistical nightmare of transporting these 79 children, their nine chaperones, and the DKF team back to South Africa. Passage to South Africa had been secured on the *Winchester Castle*. On 8 September 1948, they disembarked at Cape Town. Those whose adoptive family were from the Cape Town area were immediately placed with them. The rest continued their journey by train to Pretoria. By 25 September 1948, the last child had been handed over to its new parents. In time, several other children were brought out, bringing the final tally to 87.<sup>86</sup>

## Conclusion and Synthesis

This chapter has shown that Vera chose to nail her political colours very firmly to the mast of right-wing Afrikaner nationalism during the tumultuous 1940s and beyond. Her involvement with the Ossewa-Brandwag went further than its cultural façade; she was a high-ranking officer who remained

---

83 National Archives, Pretoria, A1732, Dietse Kinderfonds Collection, M.V. Bührmann to Willem Bührmann, 9 July 1948.

84 Ibid.

85 Werner van der Merwe, *'Vir 'n Blanke Volk'*.

86 Ibid.

loyal to the organisation and to its leader long after it became clear that the OB was an irrelevant organisation and that its envisioned *gesagstaat* would never materialise. Her almost 30-year long involvement with the Dietse Kinderfonds went beyond mere Germanophilia or charity; she placed her medical expertise at the service of a scheme which was firmly rooted in a white supremacist vision of continued Afrikaner survival and domination in South Africa. As Marx put it,

Politically and ideologically, this was to provide a counterbalance to the immigration encouraged by Smuts, as it was feared that the demographic balance could change in favour of the British. Against this, [the DKF's] own programme of adoption was intended to bring new 'Aryan blood' to South Africa.<sup>87</sup>

What became of Vera's political convictions in later life? Did she retain ideological elements of her right-wing Afrikaner nationalist past? As we noted in the Introduction, many who knew Vera in late life hold her up as an example of someone who transcended her right-wing Afrikaner nationalist past. Many people I spoke to were either ignorant of or only vaguely aware of the extent or nature of her involvement with the OB and DKF.

In order to answer this question, it is instructive to consider the political fate of OB members following the organisation's demise. By the time the war ended with Germany's defeat, it was clear that the organisation was ill-fitted for a meaningful role in South African and particularly Afrikaner politics in the post-war era. As Marx notes, 'The OB's vehement rejection of party politics obstructed its path to power through the established parliamentary structures.'<sup>88</sup> The OB lacked the materiel and the leadership to overthrow the state after the war, and, when the National Party did so in 1948 through constitutional means, the writing was clearly on the wall for the OB. Despite attempts to reinvent itself, the OB slipped into obscurity, and was officially disbanded in 1952.

Most rank and file OB members were able to switch allegiance to one of the Afrikaner political parties without too much difficulty; in time, many OB leaders, too, were absorbed into the National Party, and some achieved positions of importance, most notably B.J. Vorster. After 1948, the apartheid policies that began to emerge were not very different from what most OB members would have endorsed. Many of these policies were in fact influenced by OB ideologues such as Geoff

---

87 Christoph Marx, *Oxwagon Sentinel*, 520.

88 Ibid, 554.

Cronjé.<sup>89</sup> But no doubt there were others who could not reconcile themselves with the parliamentary republicanism that characterised South Africa after 1948. Many such Afrikaners stopped being overtly involved in political organisations or continued their right-wing activities clandestinely.<sup>90</sup>

During the 1950s and 1960s, as Vera focused on rebuilding her life and her career after her divorce (more on this in Chapter 4), there is nothing in the available records to suggest that she in any way moved away from the racial ideology of her past or that she dissented from the racial policies of the government of the day. The issue of race does not feature in her academic writings from this period. It is only in the 1970s, when she begins to work with a Xhosa *igqira* in rural Ciskei that issues of race begin to surface in her writings. Certain motifs begin to appear in her academic writings, and these are taken up and perpetuated in others' writings about her and her transcultural work. It then became necessary for Vera to 'airbrush' her racial politics carefully in order to lend credibility to the transcultural work she was involved in.<sup>91</sup> These matters will be the focus in Chapter 5.

It must also be borne in mind that, despite her apparent eschewing of politics after the 1940s, Vera's association with the DKF lasted throughout that organisation's existence. This was, of course, a political action, a form of continued political protest against the mainstream politics of the day. Under the leadership of Schalk Botha, the DKF positioned itself in the 1960s as part of the far right-wing opposition to the National Party; Botha was the right-hand man of Albert Hertzog, who founded the Herstigte Nasionale Party (HNP) in 1969 after being purged from the NP (more on this in Chapter 5)

Vera's involvement with the DKF proved to be a two-edged sword. On the one hand, 'Dr Vera Bührmann' became a household name, at least in Afrikaner circles. This was because the DKF's immigration scheme received much media attention. Broadly speaking, the scheme was regarded as a

---

89 Ibid, 556.

90 'There are rumours that it [the OB] still exists,' Marx noted at the time he wrote (c. 2008); *ibid*, 562. As will become clear, the DKF eventually situated itself amongst these right-wing fringe groups within Afrikaner politics (see Chapter 5).

91 For example, in an early (1977) article, Vera speaks very generally about the need for (white) psychiatrists to have a greater understanding of Xhosa culture and language in order to adequately treat a Xhosa patient. She references American studies to support her assertions. In the next few years, this changes; she gradually represents herself more and more as an expert on black culture and language, having grown up, she claims, amongst black people. See M.V. Bührmann, 'Western Psychiatry and the Xhosa Patient', *SAMJ* 51, 1977, 464-66, cf. M. V. Bührmann, 'Initiation of Xhosa Indigenous Healers (Amagqira)' in L.C. Mahdi, S. Foster and M. Little, eds., *Betwixt and Between. Patterns of Masculine and Feminine Initiation* (Open Court Publishing Co., 1987), 439-56.

great success by the Afrikaner establishment. It was legitimised, even glamorised, by the fact that eminent persons such as the prime minister, Dr D.F. Malan, adopted one of the children.<sup>92</sup>

On the other hand, in later years Vera paid a psychological price for this ‘success’. Ruth Theron, one of the ‘true’ orphans who had been part of the 79 children who came out in 1948, asked Vera at a book club meeting in Tulbagh if she would do it [bring children to South Africa for adoption] all again if she could. After a long silence, Vera had answered, ‘I would never again do that to anyone.’<sup>93</sup>

It is clear from this statement that Vera experienced some form of regret regarding her involvement with the adoption scheme, but it was a *psychological* (personal) regret, not a politically motivated expression of remorse with concomitant repercussions such as a disavowal of the DKF’s ideology, or an apology of some sort. As far as I am aware, she does not stipulate anywhere why she experienced this sense of regret. Several speculative reasons can, however, be put forward.

First, it is likely that Vera felt personally responsible for the problems of adaptation experienced by many of the children once they were adopted. Although most children eventually settled well, not all did, and for some the maladaptation became a source of significant trauma. As the person who had selected the children, and matched the child with prospective parents, she may have felt guilty that she had shown poor judgement in some of the decisions she had made. And it must be remembered that it was Vera and Schalk Botha who, against the wishes of the management committee, brought older children to South Africa, and it was often the older children who struggled most to adapt to their new environment.

---

92 There were suggestions that eminent people such as Dr D.F. Malan, who was both prime minister and a patron of the DKF, were favoured. Korf writes that as soon as the orphans landed in Cape Town, Malan’s wife Maria was at the centre ‘where the orphans were housed in order to be the first to choose a child. It was a small four-year-old girl who caught her attention. To Maria, it felt as if she gave “spiritual birth” to the child. To the little girl, however, the experience was traumatic – especially as she was separated from her younger brother.’ Lindie Korf, ‘D.F. Malan. A Political Biography’ (PhD thesis, University of Stellenbosch, 2010), 441. It has also been suggested that family of DKF members, or people who had made large financial donations, were favoured. Dr C. Lion-Cachet, for example, who had studied with Dr Bührmann, ‘was given the assurance that she could select one of the young boys for herself.’ Werner van der Merwe, *Vir ’n Blanke Volk*, 85, 132-33 (my translation). Dr Lion-Cachet (she ‘selected’ Werner van der Merwe himself) studied for the DPH with Vera at Wits in 1944; R. Keene, *Our Graduates – 1924-2012* (Johannesburg: Adler Museum of Medicine, Faculty of Health Sciences, Wits University, 2013), 109.

93 Kouevuur, ‘Die Duitse Wesies van 1948’, <https://kouevuur.wordpress.com/2011/01/18/die-duitse-wesies-van-1948/>, (accessed 3 July 2019; my translation).



Second, it must be borne in mind that Vera specialised in child psychiatry *after* the DKF mission to Germany. It is possible that her increased knowledge of mental health issues in children played a part in her rueful expression ‘I would never again do that to anyone.’

Third, guilt no doubt played its part in her personal regret, especially guilt at having been part of a lie where many of the children were concerned. In time, as they grew up and entered adulthood, many children expressed the desire to find out more about their past. Some travelled back to Germany to locate family members or to search for their ‘roots’. Some who had been told that their parents or relatives were dead discovered that they were not. As the writer of the blog ‘Kouevuur’ put it, ‘Many of the children in later years went searching for family in Germany. For some this meant joyful reunions, for others it meant more pain and disruption and rejection’ (my translation).<sup>94</sup>

In 1988, one of the orphans, Werner van der Merwe, published his book *Vir ’n ‘Blanke Volk’*. In it he was openly critical of the DKF’s mission, stating ‘without any fear of contradiction’ that it was not a humanitarian undertaking, but a racially motivated attempt to strengthen the Afrikaner *volk*. The goal was the complete Afrikanerisation of the children, a ‘long term investment’ in the continued survival of Afrikaners on a continent on which they were a tiny minority. This was the first time that the morality and ethics of the DKF was publicly criticised, and no doubt Van der Merwe’s recriminations would have contributed significantly to Vera’s sense of personal remorse.

Equally upsetting to Vera would have been the Lothar Neethling affair that followed in 1989. Lothar Tietz, the 13 year-old who had impressed Vera so greatly in 1948, was now General Lothar Neethling, head of the South African Police’s forensic laboratory. In 1989, the Afrikaans newspaper *Vrye Weekblad* reported that Neethling was implicated in murders perpetrated by members of the security police; he was accused of supplying the ‘knock-out drops’ that were used to poison enemies of the state. Neethling sued the newspaper, and won on appeal, but the protracted and very public legal battle meant that stories of Lothar Neethling’s German origins resurfaced. He was often referred to as

---

94 Kouevuur, ‘Die Duitse Wesies van 1948’.

‘South Africa’s own Dr Mengele.’<sup>95</sup> The name ‘Dr Vera Bührmann’ occasionally cropped up in these reports.

Throughout her life, then, Vera was dogged by reminders of her involvement with the DKF. In time, she came to regret her involvement. But an expression of personal regret is not the same thing as a political volte-face. However much she may have come to regret the deleterious emotional effect that the ‘transplanting’ (she had used the word *verplanting* in a 1948 report) of the children had on them, she never repudiated the ideological foundation that gave rise to it. Although she gradually distanced herself from the events of 1948, her reasons may have had more to do with portraying herself in a positive light, especially once she started making a name for herself as a cross-cultural psychiatry researcher. In 1963, for example, she was present at the DKF’s 15th anniversary reunion held in Pretoria. But in 1978 (a few years after she began working with the *amagqira*), when the South African Broadcasting Corporation’s Afrikaans radio service celebrated the 30th anniversary of the scheme with a series of broadcasts under the title ‘*Die burgers van ’48*’, Vera does not appear on any of the episodes, suggesting that she had declined to be interviewed.<sup>96</sup>

\*\*\*

Many individuals who shared with me their memories of Vera in her later years described her as politically naïve, someone who had no interest in politics. This may be true in the sense that she did not belong to any political party, or any political organisation other than the OB and DKF until their dissolution in 1952 and 1973 respectively. But Vera was not naïve; as we shall see, she carefully crafted a persona for herself that would lend credibility to the trans-cultural work she became involved in. However, despite her efforts at hiding her past, there is evidence to believe that her 1940s prejudices remained with her. This evidence will be discussed more fully in Chapter 5.

---

95 Max du Preez, ‘SA’s own bemedaled Dr Mengele is dead’, *IOL*, 13 July 2005, <https://www.iol.co.za/news/politics/sas-own-bemedalled-dr-mengele-is-dead-248047> (accessed 25 July 2019). In an article which appeared in the *Mail & Guardian* on 28 August 1998, just a few days after Vera died, Neethling is described as ‘the “head boy” of 83 Nazi war orphans who were resettled in South Africa by Hitler-loving Afrikaner nationalists.’ G. Evans, ‘The Man with the Deadly Past’, <https://mg.co.za/article/1998-08-28-the-man-with-the-deadly-past> (accessed 3 July 2019).

96 In all the curriculum vitae drafted by Vera found amongst her papers, there is no mention of her involvement in the DKF. Since many of these CVs were for use by publishers or for academic conferences, it is probable that she did not want to draw attention to her past, especially when she was writing or speaking about her transcultural psychology projects. As we shall see in Chapter 5, during this period she was emotionally tied to the Jewish editor of a leading Jungian journal. It would have been very awkward explaining ‘the German thing’ to him.

## Chapter 4. A Decade of Change (1949-1959)

If the 1940s was a definitive decade in Vera's political development, the 1950s would prove to be pivotal in her professional development. On a personal level, however, this was an exceedingly difficult decade for Vera, due mostly to the fact that her marriage to George van Niekerk ended in divorce in 1951. Even though it had been a troubled marriage for a long time, its final dissolution plunged her into an emotional crisis. Dealing with the aftermath of this crisis was largely the reason she spent much of the rest of the decade abroad. From 1954 to late 1959, she spent most of her time in England, specialising initially as a child psychiatrist and later as a Jungian analyst. Apart from pursuing specialist training in England, she went there in search of psychological help for herself, putting both figurative and literal distance between herself and the source of her emotional troubles. These years thus represented a bitter and painful end to what had been a difficult first half of life, but they were also the foundation for what was, as one colleague put it after her death, 'an extremely productive second half.'<sup>1</sup>

Documentary sources for the time Vera spent abroad are regrettably limited. This problem is compounded by the fact that Vera herself is not always clear in retrospect about where she went and at which institutions she studied or was employed. Nevertheless, this chapter reconstructs as far as possible her movements and professional development as she charted a new course for herself following the dissolution of her marriage.

### **Rochester, Minnesota (1948-1949)**

As we saw in the previous chapter, while she was still in Germany with the DKF in 1948 Vera had asked her brother Willem to make travel arrangements on her behalf apropos an offer she had received from 'the Americans.' She had in fact been awarded a year-long Mead Johnson Fellowship by the Society for Pediatric Research to undertake postgraduate research at the Child Health Project which was underway at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota.<sup>2</sup> She left South Africa shortly after handing over the German children to their adoptive parents in Pretoria in early September 1948 and

---

1 Joan Anderson, 'My Tribute to Dr M.V. Bührmann.' *Mantis* 10, 3, 32.

2 'News and Comments', *Pediatrics* 4, 6, 1949, 851-52.

would spend the next year in America.

In a letter sent to her brother Dolf and his wife Nellie, dated 20 February 1949, Vera describes the snow-covered landscape in Rochester, Minnesota, as ‘almost intoxicating’ but states that she finds the ‘study of the people, institutions, etc.’ far more absorbing than the scenery. She is disparaging about her host nation (Americans): ‘In these parts they aren’t nearly the “go-getters” they are thought to be – they think that I’m more like that than they are; I think so too!’ When she gets home, she writes, she’ll have more to say about Americans! She states that she has not been very productive of late, but now she must put her shoulder to the grindstone again because ‘a year is a very short time in which to build up knowledge of medicine and humans.’<sup>3</sup>

What was Vera doing in Rochester, Minnesota? She states in one of her CVs: ‘From September 1948 to June 1949 was spent at the Mayo Clinic in connection with child development both physical and mental.’<sup>4</sup> Although the precise nature of her work there, or the terms of the Mead Johnson Fellowship are not known to this author, it appears that she was attached to the Child Health Institute to observe the Child Health Project, a longitudinal study of children in Rochester which at the time was directed by the renowned paediatrician and best-selling author, Dr Benjamin Spock.<sup>5</sup> Her own research at the institute was in the field of nutrition:

Dr. Vera Bührmann, Pretoria, South Africa, concluded her year as a special assistant in the institute on May 1, 1949. Dr. Bührmann’s special interest was in nutrition and most of her work was in that field. She was assigned to the institute through a Mead Johnson Fellowship. The staff of the institute appreciated the professional contributions as well as personal association with Dr. Bührmann.<sup>6</sup>

Based on interview notes made by Anonymous, it seems that Vera’s research in nutrition centred on the question of how nutritional deficiencies in pregnant women contributed to abnormalities in the infant. Vera states that having grown up on a farm she had long been aware that depriving a pregnant animal of certain nutrients led to abnormalities in its offspring. But she intimates that her work was not

---

3 M.V. Bührmann to Rudolph Bührmann, 20 February 1949 (my translation). My thanks to Mr Johann Bührmann for making this letter available to me.

4 UCT Libraries, Special Collections, BC1164, The Vera Bührmann Papers.

5 See B. Spock, ‘The Child Health Institute in Rochester, Minnesota’, *American Journal of Public Health* July 1949, 854-56.

6 W. Bruce Fye Center for the History of Medicine, Rochester, MN., Annual Report of the Rochester Child Health Institute, 1949. Before leaving the Mayo Clinic, Vera was guest speaker at a graduation ceremony for dieticians at St Mary’s Hospital in Rochester on 20 June 1949; *St Mary’s Hospital News Bulletin*, June 1949, 3. My thanks to archivist Nicole Babcock for supplying me with this information.

well received at the Mayo Clinic. Consequently, she left the Mayo and ‘went to various other centres where I knew, because I knew the literature, that they were doing research on depriving the mother during pregnancy, starting even before she became pregnant.’<sup>7</sup>

Vera left the United States towards the end of 1949. Helen Markovitch, a ‘roving correspondent’ for *Mayovox*, the Mayo Clinic’s newsletter, reported meeting up with Vera on board ship. She writes:

The world is getting smaller all the time! About the first person I ran into after boarding ship, was someone I had met in Rochester last summer – Dr Vera Bührmann of Pretoria, South Africa, a paediatrician who had come to observe the Child Health Project for about eight months ... She is an Afrikaan [*sic*], and because of the bilingual nature of the country I am very happy to have the opportunity to talk with her, because it is much easier and pleasanter getting information this way, than to weave through books and more books.<sup>8</sup>

One can only wonder what information Vera gave this Jewish American reporter, given her political persuasions and the ambivalence about Americans which she had expressed while she was in Rochester. Nevertheless, in spite of (or perhaps because of) this exchange, Helen Markovitch eventually settled in Cape Town and lived there until her death in 2001.<sup>9</sup>

### **Pretoria (1950 to 1953)**

After her sojourn in the United States, Vera returned to her position as medical officer in charge of maternal and child welfare with the Pretoria Town Council, where, apart from administrative duties, her clinical work involved consulting in various mother-and-child clinics in and around Pretoria (see Figure 4.1 below). Her stature in the medical community was growing, especially in the area of paediatrics. She was on the executive council of the Society for Child Health from 1949 until 1954, among other professional associations.<sup>10</sup> In 1952, one of her first professional publications appeared,

---

7 Anon., ‘Transcript of Interview with Vera Bührmann’, undated, (A~1.VER; Vera’s Philosophy and Lifestory). Exactly where Vera went ‘after the Mayo Clinic’ is not known, but she appears to have travelled quite broadly in the eastern United States until leaving in October 1949. Given the ethical issues involved in her provocative statement ‘depriving the mother during pregnancy, starting even before she became pregnant,’ one hopes that she is referring to animal studies. However, her movements between June and October 1949 are not known to this author.

8 Anon., ‘Overseas Staffer Reports on Africa’, *Mayovox*, 10 December 1949.

9 ‘Helen Lizerbrum’, *Quad City Times* Obituaries, 28 February 2001, *Quad City Times*, [https://qctimes.com/news/local/obituaries/helen-lizerbrum/article\\_d65c5004-f5e6-5d9b-9691-075ad84ba2e3.html](https://qctimes.com/news/local/obituaries/helen-lizerbrum/article_d65c5004-f5e6-5d9b-9691-075ad84ba2e3.html) (accessed 21 August 2019).

10 UCT Libraries, Special Collections, BC1164, The Vera Bührmann Papers.

an epidemiological report on the incidence of stillbirths and deaths amongst children under the age of five in the Pretoria area.<sup>11</sup>



**Figure 4.1:** Vera consulting at the Hercules Clinic, Pretoria  
(*Pretoria News* 13 May 1950)

Once back in South Africa, Vera resumed her activities on behalf of the Dietse Kinderfonds. Having been away from South Africa for a year, she was anxious to ascertain whether the children were adapting to their new homes. In 1951, she and Nellie Liebenberg visited more than 30 of the adoptive families and reported that, in general, most of the children and their adoptive parents were doing well. In her report, she expressed satisfaction at the level of *verafrikaansing* (Afrikanerisation) that she encountered amongst the children. She ascribed this to the irreparable rupture with their homeland that had taken place. She thus warned against any reunions in the early years, as any confrontation with their past could have a negative impact on their acculturation and undo the *verafrikaansing* that had taken place.

But there were setbacks, too. Not all the children or parents had adjusted well. In 1953, in one of the most serious cases of maladjustment, one of the children ran away from his adoptive parents. At 13, Hermann van Aarde (born Fischer) was one of the older children selected by Vera on her own initiative. He absconded from the farm of his adoptive parents in Modderpoort in the eastern Free State and made his way to Pretoria where he appealed to the DKF for assistance. His case was turned over to the welfare authorities. Hermann was sent to a boarding school in Brits while the legal process

---

11 M.V. Bührmann, 'Investigation of Stillbirth and Death of Children under Five Years of Age', *South African Medical Journal* (henceforth *SAMJ*), 26, 1952, 835-39. She had also contributed chapters to a nursing handbook, but I have been unable to trace these.

to remove him from his adoptive parents was followed. He was placed in Vera's care, though it is not clear whether she legally adopted him, as is often stated. This seems unlikely, since he was already 18 years-old when he ran away from his adoptive family; the DKF was in any case responsible for his upkeep until he reached maturity. He stayed with Vera when she was in South Africa and with her brother Willem when she was abroad (she was in England in 1954 and 1955 and again from 1957 to the end of 1959). A further tragedy befell the DKF in December 1953, when one of the children (Rynod du Toit, born Wolf Dieter Schmied) drowned.

Vera's marriage ended in divorce in 1951. In her late-life interviews with Anonymous, Vera indicates that even before she went to Germany in 1948 she had informed George that she intended divorcing him. There are hints in the interview notes that George may have had an alcohol problem, and the possibility of infidelity is mentioned. Other contributing factors hinted at are the differences in their education and profession, and a generally irresponsible streak in George.<sup>12</sup>

One of the reasons Vera put forward for adopting Jungianism was that it helped her make sense of her failed marriage. While she was studying in the UK circa 1954, she attended a lecture on analytical psychology during which

the lecturer gave examples of the masculinity and femininity [*sic*] and the differences and how people often marry opposites – anima and animus stuff – and it struck me like a bomb because I had just had my divorce and it explained a lot of why my husband and I couldn't get along.<sup>13</sup>

What might Vera have meant by the differences between 'the masculinity and femininity' (she presumably meant 'the masculine and the feminine') and 'anima and animus stuff', and how did these things lead to her failed marriage? For a possible explication we can turn to a paper she presented in Pretoria in April 1961, at a National Congress on Family Life which formed part of the Union Festival

---

12 The troubled state of her marriage may have been one of the reasons why she would later recall that she did not go to Germany willingly (she used the expression 'I did not go joyfully') but was 'asked' to go; Anonymous, 'Transcript of Interview with Vera Bührmann', undated, (A~1.VER; Vera's Philosophy and Lifestory). The most likely scenario is that her brother Willem asked her to undertake the selection of the children when the DKF committee tasked with finding a doctor failed to find anyone suitable. Vera always felt indebted to her brothers, especially Willem, for their financial sacrifices which enabled her to study medicine. She would have found such a request hard to turn down, particularly since she shared the ideological convictions which gave rise to the scheme. Knowing that she was due to spend a year in the United States directly after the German trip would have increased any reluctance she felt at leaving South Africa – and her troubled marriage – for such a lengthy period.

13 Anonymous, 'Transcript of Interview with Vera Bührmann', undated, (A~1.VER; Vera's Philosophy and Lifestory).

of 1960.<sup>14</sup> She was asked to speak on emotional security in the family. In a later chapter we will examine the speech in more detail, since it is a window into Vera's position on many issues at the time. At this point, it is instructive to consider certain parts of the speech which have an autobiographical ring to them. My contention is that these parts are drawn from her own experience and tell us something of what went wrong between her and George, as she had come to understand it.

Her point of departure is that emotional security implies an absence of pathological anxiety. She discusses ways in which pathological anxiety can manifest in children at various stages. She then turns her attention to 'the emotional problems of the parents and the relationship between husband and wife.' She identifies mother-daughter interactions as a major source of emotional disturbance for women. Mothers, she argues, are by nature motivated to raise their daughters with the expectation of also marrying and raising a family, but they realise that they should perhaps prepare them to pursue a career in the modern world. Mothers and daughters are therefore unsure of their gender roles. In a telling paragraph she writes:

Because the daughter enters marriage as a potential or even actual breadwinner, from the beginning the relationship between her husband and herself is disturbed. If she keeps on going out to work, it is a partial or indirect admission by both that he is inadequate. It affects the husband in his manliness, and the wife is aware that his loss means her own emotional deprivation. The loss of manhood, which of necessity brings with it a loss of her femininity, makes the roles of father and mother unsatisfactory.<sup>15</sup>

She then turns her attention to men and suggests that women can only fulfil their 'most fundamental desires' of 'the fulfilment of love and the protection and care of the man' if men are stable and mature enough to fulfil their role in supplying the needs of the family. 'Is the wife's urge to go out and work to obtain more material security for herself and her children not largely a reflection of her frustration and uncertainty about the love and strength of her husband?' she asks. And then she gets to the heart of the matter:

---

14 M.V. Bührmann. 'The Family and its Emotional Security' in J.R. Lükhoff, ed., *Report of the Family Congress, 4th to 7th April 1961 in the AULA, University of Pretoria* (Pretoria: Steering Committee of the Family Year and Family Congress, 1961), 46-58. It is interesting to note that Geoff Cronjé, Vera's erstwhile OB colleague and architect of the OB's *gesinsbeleid* (family policy), delivered the concluding (summative) address at the congress. The title of his lecture was thus apt: 'Die Formuleering Van 'n Gesinsbeleid' (Formulating a Family Policy).

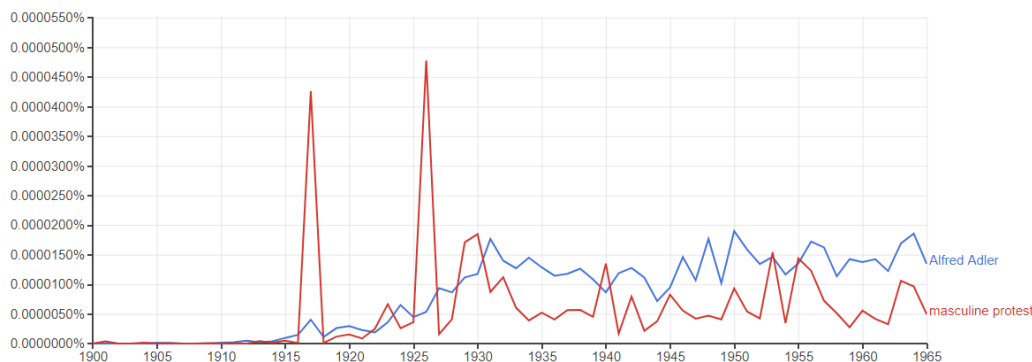
15 Ibid, 53.



Between the sexes exist deep sexual conflicts that are almost entirely hidden. And the rivalry has now spread into practically all aspects of life. The man sees the woman as competitor and even in regard to his wife this feeling is not absent. Rivalry and competition can appear in the marriage and the family; it is as if he feels, “Why should I support my adversary? She can do that for herself.” He feels that she can lighten the economic burden, without considering the loss in human values. If the husband can feel that he can grant his wife her just needs for more intellectual independence and the development of other sides of her personality, without seeing it as competition, the approach is healthier and need occasion no less in human values; rather, it enriches the relationship.

On the other hand, in this regard the wife must be honest with herself, and if the adjustment expected of her becomes difficult it is also necessary. The struggle for so-called ‘equal rights’ was often accompanied by great bitterness. This is understandable to a degree, but it so affected the female psyche that the term ‘masculine protest’ has been coined. Study of the old primitive cultures shows, however, that the woman even then regarded the man as the antagonist in some spheres. I shall not go further into the subject but would make it clear that the wife must pay attention to her feelings of antagonism, jealousy and rivalry towards her husband.<sup>16</sup>

The expression ‘masculine protest’ in the context of hidden sexual conflicts between men and women, the effect of these conflicts on the female psyche, and the struggle for equality between the sexes in the above excerpt are interesting. Vera seems to imply that the ‘masculine protest’ is a recently coined term, yet it was in fact a concept put forward by psychologist Alfred Adler in the early years of the twentieth century, as the Google NGram graph below clearly shows.<sup>17</sup>



**Figure 4.2:** Google NGram graph showing the frequency with which the term ‘masculine protest’ is used in a corpus of texts at particular times.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 54.

<sup>17</sup> See <https://books.google.com/ngrams>. On Google NGram Viewer, see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Google\\_Ngram\\_Viewer](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Google_Ngram_Viewer) (accessed 5 August 2019).

Alfred Adler (1870-1937) was one of Vera's early influencers in the field of psychology ('I was reading Freud and Adler when I was a student and afterwards,' she told Anonymous).<sup>18</sup> Although Adler was an early colleague of Freud and initially part of his circle, he broke with Freud and established his own psychological system known as individual psychology, in which the masculine protest is a key component. Adlerian personality development is centred on the idea of the resolution of feelings of inferiority. The 'masculine protest' was the mechanism used by the child (male and female) to compensate for the inevitable feelings of inferiority experienced in the face of the adult world and consisted of attempts to develop 'manly' (superior) attributes to counter the 'womanly' attributes which were considered inferior. If left unresolved, the 'masculine protest' would lead to neurosis in adults, which usually had sexual (marital) ramifications. Adler wrote:

I was the first to describe the attitude of protest on the part of a woman against her sexual role as the masculine protest. It frequently gives rise to menstrual troubles and functional disorders in the sexual sphere. It always springs from the dissatisfaction with a sexual role which already in the girl's family was regarded as subordinate, an evaluation which is considerably supported by the imperfection of our culture.<sup>19</sup>

He went on to argue that:

Many men, and especially many women, through mistakes in their development, have trained themselves to dislike and reject their sexual role. They have hindered their natural functions and are physically not capable, without treatment, of accomplishing a successful marriage. This is what I have called the masculine protest which is very much provoked by the overvaluation of men in our present culture. Both men and women will overstress the importance of being manly, and will try to avoid being put to the test. We can suspect this attitude in all cases of frigidity in women and impotence in men.<sup>20</sup>

Adler further postulated an underlying organic cause for the development of neurosis, something he referred to as 'organ inferiority'. In an early formulation of the concept (1907), he described how 'anomalies of organs' could range from malformation to slow maturation, and could have various outcomes: 'inability to survive, anomaly of form, anomaly of function, lack of resistance and disposition to disease, compensation within the organ, compensation through a second organ,

---

18 Anonymous, 'Transcript of Interview with Vera Bührmann', undated (Misc-A~2, Vera as Analyst).

19 Cited in H.L. Ansbacher and R.R. Ansbacher, eds., *The Individual Psychology of Alfred Adler. A Systematic Presentation in Selections from His Writings* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1958), 313.

20 Ibid, 433.

compensation through the psychological superstructure, and organic or psychological overcompensation.<sup>21</sup> Later he tied (biological) organ inferiority to the (psychological) experience of feelings of inferiority and the masculine protest with its concomitant compensations or overcompensations.

Several factors referred to in these excerpts from Adler's writings resonate in Vera's case. We have noted in previous chapters the difficult relationship she had with her mother, and the conflicting emotions she experienced as a result of her aunt's excessive adoration. In addition, she grew up at a time when male children were generally more valued than female offspring. Vera identified closely with her brothers and participated in many 'boyish' activities with them, such as horse-riding and at times accompanying them on the arduous cattle trek to winter grazing pastures. We have noted Vera's congenital abnormalities ('organ inferiority') and her recurrent bouts of ill-health, all of which would have reinforced her identification with Adler's construct of inherent inferiority. As we shall see later, despite her many achievements, she was plagued by an underlying sense of inferiority and self-doubt. Given Vera's familiarity with Adler's thought, it is feasible that she chose to include in her speech in 1961 this model of dysfunctional husband/wife interaction in the family (without attribution) because it was one that she had adopted to explain her own marital breakdown. The 'anima and animus stuff' she heard about in the lecture in 1954 is analogous to the 'deep sexual conflicts that are almost entirely hidden' and the Adlerian 'masculine protest' which she refers to in her 1961 speech.

The question arises: how did 'masculine protest' manifest itself in Vera and George's relationship? What form did their neuroses take? Whether they suffered the sexual dysfunctions Adler describes as almost inevitable is unknown. But it is possible to speculate on more observable behavioural aspects of their life together. Vera's comments about the husband allowing his wife 'her just needs for more intellectual independence and the development of other sides of her personality, without seeing it as competition' suggest that this was perhaps an area of friction between them. After all, Vera was academically more qualified and no doubt earned more money than George, an unusual disparity for the time. She was a 'go-getter' (a 'masculine' trait), a fact acknowledged even by her

---

21 Ibid, 24.

American hosts a few years before the divorce. Did George resent her ambition and try to stifle her growth? Vera's accomplishments and ambition could conceivably have contributed to feelings of inferiority in George, resulting in the types of behaviours hinted at by Vera in her discussions with Anonymous (such as alcohol abuse, irresponsibility, infidelity).

In her speech, Vera exhorted wives to pay attention to 'feelings of antagonism, jealousy and rivalry' towards their husbands. These feelings could no doubt be expanded to include society at large, with its patriarchal structures and attitudes. Even in 'primitive cultures', Vera notes, women have viewed men as antagonists in some spheres. It is probable that she chafed not only at her own career having to play second fiddle to George's, but also at the restrictions placed on women physicians generally at that time, such as the marriage bar and relegating them to the so-called 'feminine medical disciplines.'<sup>22</sup>

Whatever its causes, the break-up of her marriage had a profoundly negative effect on her. She became depressed, even suicidal. 'I once sat with the suicide tablets in my hands ... I was very suicidal after my divorce,' she recalled.

As a proponent of depth psychology, Vera was an ardent advocate of the importance of dreams. She frequently wrote them down; some of these dream records have survived amongst her papers. She often based important decisions on dreams, and at times delayed making important decisions until she had a dream which she believed guided her. It is thus inevitable that some of her dream material will be incorporated into this narrative of her life. She related to Anonymous a dream she had during her divorce. In the dream she was in her car, 'rushing down this hill, knowing well that it would be suicide because it ended in the railway tracks. And then ... I saw a hand or something indicating that I must turn left.'<sup>23</sup> The hand directing her to 'turn left' in the dream was seen by Vera as a sign that she needed a new direction, a new start if she were to survive.

Apart from the emotional turmoil occasioned by the dissolution of her marriage, the setbacks suffered by the DKF children discussed above would further have exacerbated Vera's fragile state of mind. All these factors contributed to her decision to 'turn left' in a decisive way – to pursue a medical

---

22 Such as maternal and childcare; see Liz Walker, 'Conservative Pioneers', 502.

23 Anonymous, 'Transcript of Interview with Vera Bührmann', undated, (A~1.VER; Vera's Philosophy and Lifestory).

specialisation and psychoanalysis abroad. Little did she know that in ‘turning left’ she would find an entirely new paradigm with which to make sense of her suffering.

## London (1954-1959)

In 1954, Vera left South Africa to pursue a specialist qualification, the diploma in psychological medicine (DPM), in the United Kingdom. At the time, post-graduate training in psychiatry was available in South Africa only at the University of the Witwatersrand which had started offering a diploma in psychological medicine (DPM) in 1949.<sup>24</sup> Vera probably opted to train in England in order to put distance between herself and her domestic troubles. She was also ‘contemplating a Freudian analysis,’<sup>25</sup> which at the time would have been impossible in South Africa.<sup>26</sup>

In various iterations of her CV and in Anonymous’s interview notes, Vera mentions various institutions, such as the Maudsley Hospital (a psychiatric hospital), the Great Ormond Street Hospital for Sick Children (GOSH),<sup>27</sup> and the Brixton Child Guidance Clinic; these references are not always consistent, making it difficult to reconstruct a detailed account of her training. It is probable that she underwent training under the auspices of the Institute of Psychiatry (IoP; previously the Maudsley Hospital Medical School). The Maudsley Hospital Medical School was officially recognised by the University of London in 1933; it awarded one of the first diplomas in psychological medicine and established psychiatry as a specialisation within medicine. In 1948 it changed its name to the Institute

---

24 M. Minde, ‘History of Medicine in South Africa. Part XIV. Psychiatric Education’, *SAMJ* 51, 12 March 1977, 212.

25 UCT Libraries, Special Collections, BC1164 Vera Bührmann Papers, C2. Whether this meant that she was also contemplating psychoanalytic (Freudian) training at that stage is not clear. Her decision to undergo analytical psychology (Jungian) training coincided with her ‘discovery’ of Jung, as we shall see.

26 On the history of psychoanalysis in South Africa, see G. Hayes, ‘A History of Psychoanalysis in South Africa’ in C. van Ommen and D. Painter, eds., *Interiors: A History of Psychology in South Africa* (South Africa: University of South Africa Press, 2008), 182-203. Also T. Hamburger, ‘Psycho-analytic Psychotherapy in South Africa. The Johannesburg Psycho-analytic Psychotherapy Study Group: A Short History’, *Psycho-analytic Psychotherapy in South Africa*, 1, 1, Spring 1992, 62-71. S. Gillespie, ‘Historical notes on the first South African Psycho-analytic Society’, *Psycho-analytic Psychotherapy in South Africa*, 1, 1, Spring 1992, 1-6.

27 The department of psychological medicine had been established at GOSH in the 1940s by Dr Mildred Creak, the first female consultant appointed at GOSH; Archive Service, Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children, NHS Foundation Trust; personal communication with archivist Nicolas Baldwin. Mildred Creak was ‘an extraordinary figure in the history of child-psychiatry – and not just in her native Britain,’ A. Feinstein, *A History of Autism: Conversations with the Pioneers* (Chichester: WileyBlackwell, 2010), 77. Creak, who was at GOSH and at the IoP during Vera’s sojourn in the UK, would become a leading figure in the field of autism studies, a field in which Vera played a prominent part in South Africa in later years (albeit from a different theoretical standpoint to that of Creak).

of Psychiatry. The IoP became ‘the major psychiatric teaching centre in the UK’ in the post-war period.<sup>28</sup>

The award of a DPM to ‘Maatjie [*sic*] Vera Bührmann’ was announced in the *British Medical Journal* of 21 May 1955. Vera, however, did not return to South Africa for some months. She remained in London because she had ‘discovered’ Jung. In an undated symposium talk she delivered titled ‘Jung’s Influence on my Work,’ Vera states:

When I went to London for my training, I had read a considerable amount of Freud and Adler and was contemplating a Freudian analysis. There were things in my [patients] – by then I had worked in a mental hospital for nearly two years – and in myself which I could not understand, and I was looking for answers and explanations. Within the first few weeks I walked into a lecture on Analytical Psychology and had no idea what to expect. Jung was little more than a name. I left the lecture with new insights – I felt some of the dark areas of my life had been illuminated and within a matter of a few days I had become a Jungian.<sup>29</sup>

What were the troubling ‘dark areas’ of Vera’s life that this lecture illuminated? As she later told Anonymous,

I didn’t choose Jung; I knew nothing about him. I knew a lot about Freud because I was reading Freud and Adler when I was a student and afterwards. Then I went into a lecture of analytical psychology. I didn’t even know that it was Jung and there the lecturer gave examples of the masculinity and femininity [*sic*] and the differences and how people often marry opposites – anima and animus stuff – and it struck me like a bomb because I had just had my divorce and it explained a lot of why my husband and I couldn’t get along – why we were incompatible. So that was what led me to Jung. And then I immediately said, this is the person or school I should go to.<sup>30</sup>

As we discussed earlier, the lecture she attended – almost by accident, it seems – gave her insight into

---

28 B. Evans, *The Metamorphosis of Autism. A History of Child Development in Britain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017). Online edition. Chapter 3. <https://oopen.org/view?docId=625488.xhtml#chap-3> (accessed 6 August 2019). Evans provides a detailed picture of the milieu in which Vera underwent her training in the UK, particularly in Chapter 3 which is titled ‘Inside the Maudsley Child Psychotic Clinics in the 1950s’.

29 She adds to this statement that she was not a ‘fanatical’ Jungian ‘because many of Freud’s theories were too meaningful and too applicable to people in the first half of life.’ She continued to use psychodynamic approaches throughout her career, especially with children. University of Cape Town Libraries, BC1164, The Vera Bührmann Papers, C2, M.V. Bührmann, ‘Jung’s Influence on my Work’, undated. Many years later, she gave a somewhat different account of why she became a Jungian: ‘Partly on account of my psychological make-up I found the concepts and therapeutic approach of Jung the most meaningful and I chose to train as a Jungian analyst, or, more correctly, as an analytical psychologist.’ M.V. Bührmann, *Living in Two Worlds. Communication between a White Healer and her Black Counterparts* (Cape Town: Human & Rousseau, 1984), 20.

30 Anonymous, ‘Transcript of Interview with Vera Bührmann’, undated, (MISC~A~2; Vera as Analyst). In general, Jung’s system of psychology was aimed primarily at people in the second half of life, which would further explain why it appealed to Vera at that stage of her life (she was in her mid-forties), and why she opted to maintain an interest in psychoanalytic theories in her work with children.

her own failed marriage. The lecture so impressed her that she abandoned her earlier desire for a Freudian analysis and sought analysis with a Jungian therapist. She told Anonymous that she tried two other analysts before settling on Dr Robert F. Hobson.<sup>31</sup> In order to pay for the analysis, she took part-time work; it is known, for example, that she held a part-time position at Chelmsford Child Guidance Centre in Essex from January 1955.<sup>32</sup>

Vera interrupted her analysis and returned to South Africa at the end of 1955; in 1956, she was back at the maternal and child health department in Pretoria. At this juncture she was also an executive member of the South African National Council for Child Welfare and served as its representative to the National Council for Mental Health.<sup>33</sup> At the end of 1956 she returned to the UK to complete her analysis with Dr Robert Hobson and to undergo training as a Jungian analyst. Minutes from The Hospital for Sick Children's Medical Appointments Committee for July 1957 note that Miss M.V. Bührmann was appointed as part-time registrar to the Department of Psychological Medicine for a period of nine months, to start from 2 September 1957.<sup>34</sup> This appointment no doubt helped pay her way as she underwent analysis and training.

The training of Jungian analysts in the United Kingdom was undertaken under the auspices of the Society of Analytical Psychologists (SAP), a body which had been established in the mid-1930s. In the Vera Bührmann collection at UCT are several notebooks in which, in her distinctive handwriting, Vera took notes during the training seminars she attended; these range chronologically from October 1957 to May 1959 and deal with an array of subjects relevant to analytical and general psychology. Amongst the instructors mentioned are doctors Hobson, Paulsen, Howell, Prince, Moodie, and Rosenthal. During this time, she met Jung twice, in Zurich:

I met Jung briefly at two international congresses in the 1950s. By then he was already an old man. He did not attend the academic meetings but did attend social functions briefly. He still had a powerful body, walked upright, had a straight and clear gaze, and a warm firm handshake. He struck

---

31 Dr Robert F. Hobson (1920-1999). In his tribute to Vera after her death, Lee Roloff identified Hobson as one of her two 'powerful, persuasive and guiding mentors,' the other being Dr D.W. Winnicott; L. Roloff, 'Dr. Vera Bührmann – Psychotherapist and Psychoanalyst of Heart', *Mantis* 10, 3, 37.

32 Archive Service, Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children, NHS Foundation Trust; personal communication with archivist Nicolas Baldwin.

33 International Union of Child Welfare, *International Union of Child Welfare from 1956 to 1958* (Geneva: International Union of Child Welfare, 1958), 194.

34 Archive Service, Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children, NHS Foundation Trust; personal communication with archivist Nicolas Baldwin. See also 'Medical News. Appointments', *British Medical Journal*, Aug. 10, 1957, 364.

me as someone who lived in his body and had lived fully and although there was something awesome about him the term “mystic” seemed inappropriate to me.<sup>35</sup>

## Conclusion

Vera ended the 1950s much as she had ended the 1940s – on the high seas, making her way back to South Africa. In many ways, though, she was a very different person to the Vera of the previous decade. Her marriage to George had ended, plunging her into a deep emotional crisis. She descended into a deep depression; she contemplated suicide. A dream compelled her to ‘turn left,’ that is, to avert the destructive course she was on. Her search for a new direction and for answers regarding her failed marriage and other issues she was struggling with took her to the United Kingdom; like her sister back in the 1930s, she went in search of Freud (or at least a Freudian analysis). In England she attained a further qualification in psychological medicine as well as – and perhaps more importantly – a psychological paradigm which allowed her to make sense of her sufferings. She discovered the analytical psychology of Carl Gustav Jung. She underwent a personal analysis and trained as a Jungian analyst.

Although her initial attraction to analytical psychology was occasioned by her own emotional crisis following her divorce, its influence on her professional life was profound. In a symposium presentation many years later, she described her indebtedness to Jung as ‘enormous’ and outlines some of the ways in which analytical psychology influenced her work:

1. Analytical Psychology has reduced my fear of the unconscious and of people going “mad” ... I could therefore assure my patients with a considerable degree of confidence that it is positive and worthwhile to face and explore the unknown regions [of their psyche].
2. It opened up entirely new areas of study – mythology and the religious practices of the ancient world, fairy tales and legends from all over the world – art.
3. Analytical psychology opened my eyes to family dynamics. It was impossible to study Jung and still believe in the circumscribed individual psyche. He demonstrated the involvement of parents, grand-parents and other ancestors for generations back ...
4. Because of the universality of the images of the collective unconscious meaningful communication between people of different nations, culture and strata is facilitated ...

---

35 University of Cape Town Libraries, BC1164, The Vera Bührmann Papers, C2, M.V. Bührmann. ‘Understanding Jung’s Theories in Terms of His Own Development - A Personal View’, undated.



5. Jung offers little dogma and few rules to guide the therapist ... Each individual is regarded as so unique that therapist and patient embarks on a journey of discovery into unknown areas of the patient's psyche ...<sup>36</sup>

But all of that was a long way off. In 1959, Jung was largely unknown in South Africa; in fact, Vera would be the only Jungian analyst in the country – indeed, on the entire African continent – a situation that would not change for many years. In any case, she had other things on her mind. She did not know if she would find a position in South Africa; the medical authorities in South Africa had reservations about her qualifications. In a letter to her brother Dolf she writes:

The Medical Council probably regard me as a headstrong problem child who thinks their rules and regulations can't be brought to bear on her. But then, my life has never allowed me to develop according to pattern ... Still, I can't believe that there is no place for me in the medical services of the Union. We'll just have to wait and see what the next few months bring.<sup>37</sup>

What the next few months brought was a concession from the medical authorities that she could register as a specialist after serving a year at a mental institution in the Union. This concession was made 'after a lot of negotiation' between the authorities and her brother Willem and an attorney acting on Vera's behalf – no wonder the authorities considered her a problem child!<sup>38</sup>

Vera chose to do the year-long internship at Valkenberg, the mental hospital in Cape Town, the city she would work in for the rest of her life. It was an unusual situation: 'I was an odd person in that I was an analyst working at a hospital where GPs were in charge.'<sup>39</sup> But then, as she had said to Dolf, her life had never unfolded according to any pattern. And it was not likely to do so in the future, either.

---

36 University of Cape Town Libraries, BC1164, The Vera Bührmann Papers, C2, M.V. Bührmann, 'Jung's Influence on my Work', undated.

37 Vera Bührmann to Dolf Bührmann, 26 April 1959 (my translation). My thanks to Mr Johann Bührmann for making this letter available to me.

38 Anonymous, 'Transcript of Interview with Vera Bührmann', 7 February 1995 (H1-1.VAL, Valkenberg Mental Hospital). The nature of the 'negotiations' is unclear.

39 Ibid.

## Chapter 5. Bringing Jung to Africa: Vera amongst the *Amagqira* (1975-1995)

In 1960, at the age of 50, Vera returned to South Africa having undergone a professional and psychological rebirth following the crisis precipitated by her divorce. That crisis resulted in her spending much of the 1950s in England, first to train as a psychiatrist (1954-1955) and then to train as a Jungian psychotherapist and child psychiatrist (1957-1959). Back in South Africa, she began what Joan Anderson described as the 'extremely productive second half' of her life,<sup>1</sup> albeit haltingly at first.

This chapter comprises three sections. The first section (Vera's Career in Child Psychiatry) covers the period 1960 to 1975 and briefly treats her work as a child psychiatrist within the medical establishment, specifically the UCT/Groote Schuur Hospital/Red Cross Children's Hospital complex. The second, and most important, section (Vera's Cross-Cultural Psychiatry Research Amongst the *Amagqira*) investigates Vera's cross-cultural psychiatry research with the 'Tiso school' of *amagqira* (healers, sometimes referred to as diviners) in the former homeland of Ciskei (now Eastern Cape) which began in 1975. The third section (Vera and Sir Laurens van der Post: (Trans)Planting Jung in Africa) briefly examines the partnership that developed in the 1980s between Vera and another Afrikaner, Sir Laurens van der Post, in their joint quest to establish a Jungian organisation in South Africa.

The first and third sections are treated cursorily in this study, although each area of Vera's life merits a more micro-historical treatment. For the purposes of this investigation, however, they serve to 'round out' her life story and to frame the middle section, which is the primary focus of this chapter. Why this particular focus? Vera's cross-cultural psychiatry research led to many publications and national and international acclaim.<sup>2</sup> The claims that have been made about Vera having transcended her radical Afrikaner nationalist past are based primarily on this body of work. The aim of this chapter is to engage critically with her cross-cultural publications and archival materials in order to show that

---

1 Joan Anderson, 'My Tribute to Dr M.V. Bührmann,' 32.

2 It was in effect a 'second professional life' which occupied her throughout the rest of her productive life. The expression is from Renos K. Papadopoulos, 'Jung and Otherings in South Africa' in Pramila Bennett, ed., *Cape Town 2007: Journeys, Encounters: Clinical, Communal, Cultural. Proceedings of the 17th IAAP Congress for Analytical Psychology* (Einsiedeln, Switzerland: Daimon, 2009), 82.

such assertions are in fact unfounded. I seek to demonstrate that her racial prejudice persisted throughout her life based on a close reading of her body of work pertaining to the *amagqira* and related archival sources. In presenting this evidence, attention will be given not only to Vera's own work (her fieldnotes and resultant publications), but to the wider context in which this work was conducted and received.

### **Vera's Career in Child Psychiatry (1960 to 1975)**

Fortuitously for Vera, a temporary position opened up in the psychiatry section of Groote Schuur Hospital when a staff member took a sabbatical at the time that she was completing the internship year at Valkenberg Hospital imposed on her by the Medical Council. She was asked to fill the temporary vacancy.<sup>3</sup> Upon returning, the staff member resigned in order to emigrate, and Vera stayed on. In 1962, her name appeared for the first time in the annual calendar of the University of Cape Town.<sup>4</sup> She was listed as 'lecturer and assistant psychiatrist, part-time' within the Faculty of Medicine's Department of Neurology and Psychiatry, and by 1970 had risen to senior lecturer and senior psychiatrist.<sup>5</sup>

To an onlooker, it may have seemed that Vera was settling down well in these early years after returning to South Africa. She had a year at Valkenberg under her belt. Her specialisation was recognised. She had published a paper based on work she had done in Pretoria before going to England.<sup>6</sup> She had a busy schedule at the medical school and hospital. In 1964, she was lecturing general psychiatry part-time to 4th and 5th year students. She was a part-time senior consultant at both Groote Schuur Hospital and Red Cross Children's Hospital. She was involved in teaching diploma of psychological medicine subjects. She had also started a private practice.

---

3 Anonymus, 'Transcript of Interview with Vera Bührmann', 7 February 1995 (H1-1.VAL, Valkenberg Mental Hospital). The original Department of Psychiatry had been based at Valkenberg but had moved to the newly completed Groote Schuur Hospital in 1938. The name was changed to Department of Neurology and Psychiatry in 1955. In 1962, the two disciplines separated; the neurology department was headed by Dr S. Berman, and Professor Lyn Gillis took charge of the new department of psychiatry. Vera thus joined the new department in the very early stages of its development. J. Louw, *In the Shadow of Table Mountain: A History of the University of Cape Town Medical School and its Associated Teaching Hospitals up to 1950, with Glimpses Into The Future* (Cape Town: Struik, 1969), 355-56.

4 University of Cape Town, *Calendar* (Cape Town: UCT, 1962).

5 University of Cape Town, *Calendar* (Cape Town: UCT, 1970).

6 M.V. Bührmann, 'What can Psychiatry Contribute to Maternal and Child Welfare Services?', *SAMJ*, 27 October 1962, 901-03.

But things were not as they seemed. A letter she wrote to her analyst, Robert Hobson, dated 17 July 1965, paints a picture of someone who is 'disenchanted' with her work; Vera writes about wanting to give up her professional practice and retire to a family wildflower farm.<sup>7</sup> One area of her work that she mentions is the possibility of establishing a children's psychiatric section at the Red Cross Children's Hospital:

If I really want to put my mind to it, I can develop a children's section at the children's hospital but I can't work up any enthusiasm. The general undercurrent seems to be, why create a big service which will swallow me up or keep me tide [*sic*] to C.T. when I want to retire to our flower farm. A real problem is that one has no auxiliary staff & an awful lot devolves on myself. I've lost my pioneer spirit & my sense of dedication.

Somehow, though, Vera managed to overcome the ambivalence she was feeling towards her work; the 'children's section' mentioned in the excerpt above was established. Today, the website of the Department of Psychiatry and Mental Health at the University of Cape Town records that

The Child and Adolescent Psychiatry outpatient service was started at the Red Cross War Memorial Children's Hospital by Dr Vera Bührmann, a psychiatrist, in 1964. A decade later the service was fully developed, with its own premises, three child psychiatrists, a multidisciplinary team, and a day programme for seriously disturbed children in a converted house nearby.<sup>8</sup>

Vera recalled a little more of its beginnings when she was interviewed by Anonymous:

At Red Cross they had nothing. The children [outpatients] were treated in the same place, in the same room at the same time as the adults were ... There was an ordinary social worker for Red Cross patients and there was a psychiatric nurse who was very interested and the three of us started the thing. ... The psychiatric nurse was Merle Rigg and I can't remember the social worker's name ... I think the paediatricians gradually got acquainted with my interests and my work and they were eager to help me.<sup>9</sup>

At the newly established unit, Vera and her co-workers identified a small number of children who were autistic. In a paper from 1966, in which she uses the term 'childhood schizophrenia' (a common term for autism at the time, although she preferred 'childhood psychosis'), she wrote:

---

7 University of Cape Town Libraries, Special Collections, BC1164 Vera Bührmann Papers. Vera Bührmann to Robert [Hobson]. 17 July 1965. Vera was in the habit of keeping copies of her correspondence. Unfortunately, there is no return correspondence from Dr R. Hobson amongst the papers at UCT Libraries. When she travelled to England, Vera did on occasion see him.

8 <http://www.psychiatry.uct.ac.za/psych/child-and-adolescent-psychiatry> (accessed 27 September 2019).

9 Anonymous, 'Transcript of Interview with Vera Bührmann', (H3~1.RE.D; Red Cross Children's Hospital).

There is no information about the incidence or distribution of the syndrome in this country. During the past three years sufficient cases have come to my notice to convince me that the condition deserves the serious attention of psychiatrists, paediatricians and general practitioners. A start must be made with the investigation of all young children who present atypical behaviour or irregular development.<sup>10</sup>

From these hesitant beginnings, the study of autism and, in particular, the need for educational facilities for autistic children, became part of the discourse of child mental health in South Africa during the 1960s and 1970s. The story, and Vera's role in it, has been told elsewhere and need not detain us here.<sup>11</sup> Suffice to say that Vera established herself as an eminent child psychiatrist within the UCT/Groote Schuur Hospital/Red Cross Children's Hospital complex.

Two important questions arise pertaining to this period leading up to her involvement with the *amagqira*. First, was there any continuity between Vera's activities in the period under consideration and her radical right-wing Afrikaner nationalist background? Secondly, what role did her Jungian orientation play during this period?

In answer to the first question, there is indeed evidence of political continuity. In terms of ideology, an interesting illustration is provided by the lecture (mentioned in Chapter 4) that Vera was asked to present at the national 'Family Year' congress, which formed part of the programme of activities leading up to the establishment of the Republic of South Africa on 31 May 1961. Her assigned topic was 'The Family and its Emotional Security.'<sup>12</sup> The lecture she gave on 5 April 1961 is of interest for several reasons. First, it reveals that Vera's understanding of gender roles and the role played by the family in society did not deviate much from what one would have expected had Vera been delivering the lecture at an Ossewa-Brandwag women's camp as she had done frequently in the 1940s instead of at a national congress in 1961. The only difference was that it was now studded with citations from authorities that represent a curious mix of approaches. As is to be expected given her recent training in England, the dominant approach was psychodynamic. The cornerstone of her

10 M. Vera Bührmann, 'Childhood Schizophrenia,' *SAMJ*, 22 October 1966, 920-23.

11 See A. Feinstein, *A History of Autism. Conversations with the Pioneers* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 163-64. Also M. Golding, 'TEACCH in the Rainbow Nation', *aut;talk* 21, November 2014; [http://aut2know.co.za/wp/wp-content/uploads/Issue21\\_2014\\_part\\_3.pdf](http://aut2know.co.za/wp/wp-content/uploads/Issue21_2014_part_3.pdf) (accessed 1 September 2019). On Vera Bührmann's role in a commission of enquiry into special needs education, see Department of National Education, 'Report of the Committee of Inquiry into the Treatment, Education and Care of Autistic Children' (Pretoria: Government Printer, 1971).

12 See M.V. Bührmann, 'The Family and its Emotional Security.'

approach was the attachment theory of John Bowlby (which placed the mother-child bond at the root of all future personality development), buttressed by insights from ethology (animal behaviours such as imprinting). But she also mixed in Adlerian concepts (such as the child's 'drive to independence' and the 'masculine protest' in the context of marriage). Jung is barely mentioned.<sup>13</sup> For the most part, her lecture is simply a more sophisticated retelling of the *volksmoeder* motif. Some of the old Ossewa-Brandwag language is still discernible, such as 'each [i.e., husband and wife] must follow the laws of his own sex' (recalling the biologically determined gender roles beloved of the OB). Similarly, the man represents the 'outside world' and ideally must provide a stable income and adequate housing, while the woman, 'if she is truly feminine,' stays home and takes care of the family.

Secondly, the mere fact that Vera was selected as a featured speaker at a national congress shortly before the new republic was born is significant; after all, she had been out of the country for quite some time and had not yet developed a reputation as an authority on family matters other than within certain Afrikaner circles. Why was she asked to contribute a paper? Her participation may well have been facilitated by Geoff Cronjé, the key-note speaker tasked with pulling together the threads discussed at the congress. As noted earlier, the sociology professor had headed the women's section of the Ossewa-Brandwag and formulated the OB's family policy. He was, in effect, Vera's commanding officer during the war years. Like many previous OB leaders, he had risen to a position of prominence amongst Afrikaner intellectuals. In his summative lecture, titled 'The Formulation of a Family Policy,' Cronjé's bold endorsements of white superiority are reminiscent of his earlier writings:

It is self-evident that an ethnic community which has reached spiritual and cultural maturity – as is the case with the whites of this country – has the right to determine its own family policy. Communities which have not yet progressed to that level of maturity – as is the case with the non-whites of this country – must be helped by the adults (in other words, the whites) to develop to the stage where they can be socially and culturally self-determining and thus be in a position to formulate their own family policy.<sup>14</sup>

---

13 There could be several reasons for this. The most likely reason is simply that Jungian psychology did not concern itself much with childhood issues. Another possibility is that Jungian concepts were not well known in South Africa at the time.

14 G. Cronjé, 'Die Formulering van 'n Gesinsbeleid', 153-78. Compare statements he made in his 1948 publication *Voogdyskap en Apartheid* (Guardianship and Apartheid) in which he argued that whites have a moral duty to act as guardians over non-whites because they had reached a higher level of development; cited in J. M. Coetzee, 'The Mind of Apartheid', 14. See also S. Dubow, 'Afrikaner Nationalism, Apartheid and the Conceptualization of "Race"', *The Journal of African History*, 32, 2, 1992, 209-37.

In this lecture, some of the cruder aspects of scientific racism have been replaced by an emphasis on the 'spiritual and cultural' superiority of whites; however, traces of Cronjé's earlier horror of miscegenation remain, as evidenced by inanities such as the following: in the context of bemoaning the manner in which books, films, and advertisements are dragging the honour of (white) women through the mud, he states, 'And we can't possibly expect that non-whites should treat white women with esteem and reverence if we ourselves allow her and her gender to be exploited for mere profit' (my translation).<sup>15</sup>

Apart from her connection with people such as Cronjé, one should not lose sight of the fact that Vera's family were well connected in Afrikaner circles, particularly her brother Willem (who would die later that year). The significance of her participation thus lies in the fact that she remained part of the Afrikaner establishment, a person with many influential contacts in Afrikaner intellectual and political circles.

As further evidence of political continuity we can cite Vera's continued engagement with the work of the Dietse Kinderfonds. In 1963, she attended the 15th anniversary reunion of the DKF in Pretoria; many of the German children were present, as were DKF and government officials, South African and German.

It is important to recognise that the DKF was not an isolated organisation; it was, in fact, part of a large right-wing movement within Afrikaner politics. On 23 July 1967, the *Sunday Times* ran an exposé of the 'Hertzog Group,' a *verkrampste* element within the National Party that was in revolt against the Party's 'outward-looking policy'. Albert Hertzog was then Minister of Communications, Telecommunications and Postal Services. Schalk Botha, the secretary of the DKF who had gone to Germany with Vera in 1948, is identified as Hertzog's right-hand man, and they were key figures in what was described as the 'Big Seven', a group of seven men who constituted the 'high command' of the secret organisation known as the Afrikaner Orde, which Albert Hertzog controlled. The DKF was

---

15 On changing emphases in the racist policies of apartheid ideologues, and a resurgence in aspects of scientific racism in the 1960s, see S. Dubow, 'Racial Irredentism, Ethnogenesis, and White Supremacy in High-Apartheid South Africa', *Kronos*, 41, 1, 2015, 236-64.

one of many organisations under Botha’s control within the Hertzog Group. The Hertzog Group is described as having a *verkramp*te ideology, with a nostalgia for the pure Afrikanerdom of the past.

Implicit within its philosophy is a political opposition to virtually every other group – the English, Jews, Coloureds and Africans – all of whom are regarded in varying degrees as a threat or a danger to Afrikanerdom. A strong current of “national socialism” flows through the ideas and thinking of the Hertzog Group. This is not surprising, since a substantial number of Ossewa-Brandwag members are amongst its ranks.<sup>16</sup>

Through her continued association with the DKF, Vera thus remained connected to the radical right-wing elements of Afrikanerdom which had spawned it, and which continued to administer it. She remained part of the network of ex Ossewa-Brandwag members. There is no evidence to suggest that she ever disavowed the ideology she had espoused in the 1940s. The DKF’s legal responsibility for the German children adopted by Afrikaner families ended when the youngest child reached the age of maturity in 1967, but the organisation officially disbanded only in 1973, 25 years after the children landed in South Africa. Vera was associated with it right up to the end of its existence.

What of Vera’s Jungian identity during this period? Jungian psychology was not represented in South Africa at all when she returned in 1960. Apart from a few lay people who at various times had an interest in the subject,<sup>17</sup> analytical psychology had no practitioners, no professional status, and was not part of any academic syllabus. Aspiring analysts had to go overseas, as she had done, but most never returned. It was this ‘brain drain’ that Vera used as motivation for election as a professional member of the United Kingdom-based Society for Analytical Psychology (SAP) in 1963: ‘We feel obliged to reduce this [loss of aspiring analysts] to a minimum and one way of doing it is to offer the best possible facilities for training. The status of their teachers and the recognition which will be afforded to their training is therefore important.’<sup>18</sup>

---

16 J.H.P. Serfontein, ‘Hertzog Group – The Facts’, *Sunday Times*, 23 June 1967.

17 An interesting example of such individuals is Mrs Dorothy Harris, mother of Jean Albert who would later become librarian at the Southern African Association of Jungian Analysts (SAAJA) and after whom the library at SAAJA is named. There is a letter in the SAAJA Archives from Carl Jung to Dorothy Harris, dated 1935. She had corresponded with him to inform him of how meaningful she found some of his books, and he wrote back recommending two others. SAAJA Archives, C.G. Jung to Dorothy Harris, 15 November 1935. In the 1940s, Dorothy Harris had organised Jungian study groups in Cape Town.

18 University of Cape Town Libraries, Special Collections, BC1164 Vera Bührmann Papers. Vera Bührmann to Kathleen Newton, SAP, 13 January 1964. In July 1964, she was informed that she had been elected as a professional member of the SAP. University of Cape Town Libraries, Special Collections, BC1164 Vera Bührmann Papers. Kathleen Newton, SAP, to M.V. Bührmann, 24 June 1964. However, the problem of losing promising analysts and psychiatrists to overseas appointments was not solved.



Although Vera tentatively introduced Jungian perspectives into some of the lectures which she was presenting to students for the diploma of psychological medicine course at UCT, her Jungian identity remained very much outside of her establishment persona. Renos Papadopoulos, a lecturer in the UCT Psychology Department who at the time was part of a private Jung study group run by Vera, describes Vera in the early 1970s as ‘very much part of the establishment, being both a psychiatrist and an Afrikaner.’ He labels her a ‘crypto-Jungian’ because

she was extremely shy of her Jungian identity and was doing her utmost not to attract attention to it ... As a loyal psychiatrist employed in the local hospital and university, Vera did not have a private practice, so she did not work as an analyst. Instead, she used her analytical knowledge in her psychotherapy work with children in a hospital context and also offered psychotherapy supervision to some young registrars in psychiatry.<sup>19</sup>

Thus, despite being a qualified Jungian analyst (the only one on the African continent), opportunities to practice what she had been trained for were very limited. Her hesitance to be open about her Jungian orientation within the university psychiatric establishment and the lack of opportunity to practice Jungian analytical psychology must have been frustrating to Vera and contributed to the alacrity with which she became involved in the research amongst the *amagqira* which is discussed in the next section.

### **Vera’s Cross-Cultural Psychiatry Research Amongst the *Amagqira***

‘For the past several years, Xhosas at Keiskammahoek in the Ciskei have had to get used to a white woman with white hair being present at many of their ceremonies,’ wrote a reviewer in *Die Vaderland* in 1985.<sup>20</sup> That woman was, of course, Vera Bührmann, who, beginning in 1975, engaged in a cross-cultural psychiatry research project in which, using the methodology of participant observation, she investigated the parallels between Jungian psychotherapy and the techniques of Mr Mongezi Tiso, a Xhosa *igqira* (healer).

---

19 R. K. Papadopoulos, ‘Jung and Otherings in South Africa’, 81. His ‘crypto-Jungian’ characterisation accords with Vera’s own statement in her letter to Robert Hobson referred to previously: ‘At times I feel very ashamed that I am not more public spirited & that I make no effort to spread the gospel.’

20 P. du Plessis, ‘Die Wit Dogter van Mongezi Tiso’, *Die Vaderland*, 4 February 1985, 12.

How was it that a white-haired white woman (Vera was already in her mid-sixties) came to spend more than a decade exploring the healing methods of a small group of rural Xhosa *amagqira*? If one were to believe the website of the Southern African Association of Jungian Analysts, it was Vera's 'journey to understand the conflicting opposites in South African society during the dark years under Apartheid' which led her to Jung. Her 'immersion in the complexities of South African culture' led her to undertake transcultural research.<sup>21</sup> If one were to believe Professor Astrid Berg, Vera, 'a child of Africa,' was drawn 'into the country beyond the largely europeanized city life and returned to her roots in black rural Africa' compelled by an urgent quest to communicate with traditional healers.<sup>22</sup> If one were to believe philosopher Augustine Shutte, then Vera not only researched the methods of traditional healers, 'eventually she became a fully-fledged *igqira*,' a notion repeated by Fanny Brewster who stated that Vera 'became a practitioner of Xhosa medicine through her training with Mongezi Tiso,' at whose school she is said to have studied for nine years.<sup>23</sup>

These 'explanations' and amplifications have one thing in common: they are all false. They illustrate aspects of the legend that has grown up around Vera's cross-cultural work in some circles. As romantic (and patronising) as it is to view Vera's cross-cultural psychiatry project as a noble quest to comprehend and reconcile the conflicting opposites of South Africa's abnormal society during apartheid, the truth is far more prosaic. As Vera herself often acknowledged, her foray into this field of study was entirely accidental (much like her 'discovery' of Jung in the 1950s): a student named Robert Schweitzer, who was doing an honours thesis in psychology at Rhodes University, needed the assistance of a psychiatrist to assess the mental state of some Xhosa healers he was investigating. She 'jokingly' offered her services; to her surprise her offer was accepted, but she still expected only a once-off visit.<sup>24</sup> In a later publication she adds:

---

21 Southern African Association of Jungian Analysts, <https://www.jungsouthernafrica.co.za/index.php/about-us> (accessed 1 September 2019). As we saw in Chapter 4, Vera was not 'led' to Jung by anything, let alone apartheid; she became a Jungian by accident.

22 A. Berg, 'Can We Prevent Colonization of the Mind? Traditional Culture in South Africa' in Ann Casement, ed., *Who Owns Jung?* (London: Karnac Books Ltd., 2007), 95.

23 A. Shutte, 'Reflection in Practice as Source of Values: The Cross-cultural Creation of a Health-care Ethics in Post-Apartheid South Africa', *Journal for the Study of Religion. Festschrift for Martin Prozesky*, 31, 1, 2018, 177-206. F. Brewster, *African Americans and Jungian Psychology. Leaving the Shadows* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2017), 50.

24 M. Vera Bührmann, *Living in Two Worlds*, 13.

I want to explain that I did not choose the Xhosa initiation research; it seemed, rather, to choose me. A psychology student elected to do his honours thesis on the Xhosa indigenous healers of South Africa but found that he required the assistance of a psychiatrist. He wanted to assess the mental health of these healers, as well as that of their patients, from the standpoint of Western psychology. We had not known each other previously, and indeed, it seemed that our paths crossed merely by accident – but soon after our first meeting we arranged to visit the Xhosa together.<sup>25</sup>

It is interesting to note that in several of her articles Vera mentions that she was asked to assist the student (Robert Schweitzer) with his honours thesis, which is how she got involved with the *amagqira*, but the publication cited above is the only article in which she relates a dream she purportedly had more than a decade earlier, the night before her first visit to them. In this dream, her parents, who are both dying, instruct her to leave them to go and do her work. She then finds herself in the passenger seat of a car, holding a baby on her lap. The car is driven by ‘a composite figure of several of my young, dynamic, enterprising male relatives.’ In the article, she states that the significance of the dream became clear to her in time as she became more aware of the integral role of ancestors in Xhosa cosmology. In her notebook, where she originally recorded the dream, she states that her ancestors (parents) were giving her permission to do this work.

Thus, the correct answer to *how* Vera got involved in cross-cultural psychiatry research amongst a small group of *amagqira* is: it was by chance. A more intriguing question is *why* she became engrossed in the research to the extent that she did. In many of her publications, Vera states that her curiosity was kindled at the very first ceremony she witnessed when Mongezi Tiso said, ‘If my patients don’t dream I can’t treat them.’ At that point, she writes, ‘I went over to him and I said, “Well, then we are colleagues because I also like my patients to dream.”’<sup>26</sup> From the outset, she saw a connection between their methods and her own Jungian orientation and wanted to explore it. To abuse an idiom, she had finally found a peg on which to hang her Jungian hat. This avenue of research opened up a space in which she could give free reign to the analytical psychology she had been trained in, and which up to that point she had not had an opportunity to fully express or explore. As we saw

---

25 M. Vera Bührmann, ‘Initiation of Xhosa Indigenous Healers (Amagqira)’, 440.

26 ‘Vera Bührmann Interviewed by Mario Schiess.’ Directed and produced by Peter Ammann; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GhastRtaz2w> (accessed 5 September 2019). The motif ‘If they don’t dream, I can’t heal them’ is one that recurs throughout Vera’s writings on the *amagqira* and is held up as the key that unlocked for her the intuitive relationship that existed between the methods of the *amagqira* and her own Jungian approach.

earlier, Vera was, as Renos Papadopoulos put it, a ‘crypto-Jungian’. Her ‘shyness’ about her Jungian identity would explain why none of her publications prior to this were on Jungian themes or in Jungian journals. But here, at a time of life when she was free from some of the earlier ‘establishment’ restraints, an unexpected avenue opened up in which she could use and test her analytical psychology knowledge freely. From 1977 on, she produced a steady flow of publications explicating the relationship between the healing methods used by the *amagqira* she observed and the Jungian psychology she had studied. And, as her publication count grew, so did her prestige in both Jungian and some non-Jungian circles at home and internationally. The ‘crypto-Jungian’ was now an emboldened advocate of analytical psychology.

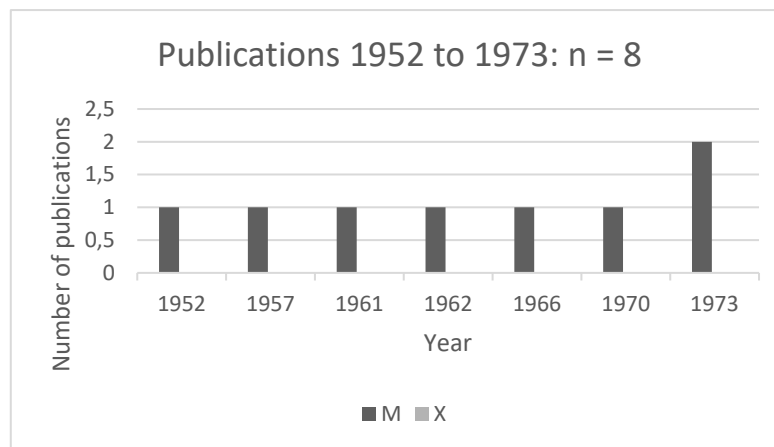
As indicated above, Vera’s research resulted in a steady flow of publications, as well as the opportunity to present papers on her work at home and abroad. Appendix 2 contains a list of as many of Vera’s publications as I have been able to track down.<sup>27</sup> By ‘publications’ I refer to writings submitted to and accepted by academic journals or included in edited collections, and monographs. The 45 publications listed range in date from 1952 to 1998 (the year Vera died), and comprise a monograph, 12 chapters in edited collections, and 32 articles which appeared in academic journals.

These publications fall broadly into two subject areas. The first category (designated M on the charts below) covers general psychiatric or medical subjects, such as maternal and child health, autism, children and death, and so on. The second category (designated X on the charts below) includes publications that stem from, or are related to, her cross-cultural psychiatry research project. Included in this category are articles in which she interprets the rituals and ceremonies she observed from a Jungian perspective, as well as writings on related topics, such as some medico-legal implications of her findings, Jungianism and witchcraft, and general advice for Western psychiatrists dealing with Xhosa patients.

---

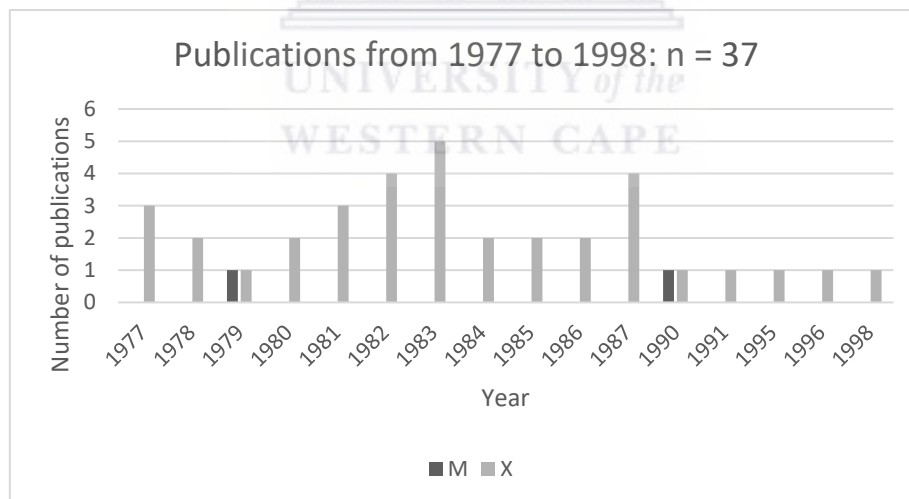
27 I wish to thank Mrs Sue Ogterop for her generous assistance locating bibliographic materials. Vera reported on her research at two congresses in 1976 (the Second National Psychiatric Congress in Pretoria and the Biennial Congress of Transkei and Ciskei Research Committee) but I have not been able to trace these two presentations.

Figure 5.1 shows that the total number of articles Vera published up to 1973 (prior to the *amagqira* research) was eight, all of them on general psychiatric themes (no cross-cultural psychiatry or even Jungian-themed publications):



**Figure 5.1:** M. Vera Bührmann’s publications from 1952 to 1973

This picture changes dramatically after she begins her cross-cultural research project in 1975. Between 1977 and 1998, she published a further 24 articles, 12 book chapters, and a monograph. The bulk of the material published during the 1977-1998 period (95 per cent) derived from her cross-cultural psychiatry work with the *amagqira*, as shown in the chart below:



**Figure 5.2:** M. Vera Bührmann’s publications from 1977 to 1998

Before engaging directly with some of Vera’s writings, it is instructive to take note of how her body of work was received by scholars working in the field at the time. Cross-cultural psychiatry or psychology research was, of course, not new when Vera began her work. The investigation of mental illnesses amongst South African blacks goes back to Wulf Sach’s *Black Hamlet* and B.J.F.

Laubscher's *Sex, Custom and Psychopathology*, both published in 1937.<sup>28</sup> But it was only in the 1960s and 1970s that this field became popular, driven mainly by ideals related to community psychology.<sup>29</sup> The novelty of Vera's approach lay in her use of Jungian psychology to explain the Xhosa rituals and methods she observed.<sup>30</sup>

In a 1986 review of cross-cultural psychiatry research in South Africa, Leslie Swartz identified three primary approaches to cross-cultural psychiatry: first, the postulation of a specific 'personality, world-view, and set of attitudes towards mental illness' that is unique to each 'group' in South Africa (a relativist emphasis); second, an attempt to locate illness and healing within a broader social context (a universalist emphasis); and third, psychological approaches which use certain psychological theories to explain observed phenomena.<sup>31</sup> Psychological approaches such as Vera's Jungian framework incorporated both relativist and universal aspects.

Needless to say, within Jungian circles Vera's writings met with enthusiastic approval. She became a celebrated figure, a sought-after speaker at congresses and conferences at home and internationally.<sup>32</sup> At the time, cross-cultural psychiatry was becoming a popular field of research despite the many pitfalls attached to it in South Africa.<sup>33</sup> Vera was frequently invited by lecturers in certain psychology departments open to such approaches (such as at Rhodes University and Wits University) to address students on her research. A colleague of Vera's at Medunsa (Medical University of South Africa), J. B. Schoeman, is representative of the positive reception of her contribution to cultural psychology and psychiatry which he summarised as follows:

- a) The development and practical application of a research approach in cultural psychiatry/psychology, which can serve as a guideline for future workers in the field.

---

28 W. Sachs et al., *Black Hamlet* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1996). B.J.F. Laubscher, *Sex, Custom and Psychopathology: A study of South African Pagan Natives* (S.I: s.n.).

29 Tiffany Fawn Jones, *Psychiatry, Mental Institutions, and the Mad in Apartheid South Africa* (London: Routledge, 2012), 98.

30 It is noteworthy that B.J.F. Laubscher, in *The Pagan Soul*, published in 1975 but recounting his experiences with an *igqira* in the 1930s when he was a psychiatrist in a 'Bantu' hospital in Transkei, made a connection between the Jungian collective unconscious and the role of the ancestors in the *igqira*'s methods. However, he did not develop the nexus between the two approaches. Barend Laubscher, *The Pagan Soul* (Cape Town: Timmins, 1975).

31 Leslie Swartz, 'Transcultural Psychiatry in South Africa. Part I', *Transcultural Psychiatric Research Review*, 23, 4, 1986, 273-303.

32 A particular highlight for Vera was being invited by the CG Jung Institute of Los Angeles to give public lectures and workshops in the United States in 1989.

33 Tiffany Fawn Jones, *Psychiatry*, 98. In a letter to Vera, Dr Stewart Gilder, then editor of the *South African Medical Journal*, quipped, 'As you say, transcultural psychiatry is now becoming a popular sport, unfortunately engaged in by amateurs as well as professionals.' University of Cape Town Libraries, Special Collections, BC1164 Vera Bührmann Papers, B4, Correspondence, Dr Stewart Gilder to Dr M. Vera Bührmann, 8 July 1985.

- b) Describing fundamental cosmological meanings of illness and healing from the point of view of the Black man's experience of life.
- c) Laying the foundations for the future development of diagnostic and therapeutic approaches which will be relevant to the Black people.

Perhaps the most important meaning of Bührmann's work is that she has made a major contribution towards the White man's understanding of the Black man. From this can grow better communication and better relationships in a country characterised by racial polarisation and confrontation.<sup>34</sup>

Of course, Vera's work was not universally celebrated. The Jungian framework within which she worked was itself grounds for challenging her findings. Allegations of anti-Semitism and pro-Nazi sympathies and a racist attitude towards Africans have attached to Jung for decades. Although issues pertaining to Jung's alleged Nazi collaboration have receded,<sup>35</sup> Jung's racist attitude towards Jews, Africa, and Africans (and other 'primitives') remains problematic; for many, this taints anything to do with Jung and his followers. A paper written by F. Dalal titled 'Jung, a Racist' is still a cause for introspection within Jungian circles, as evidenced by the recent publication of an open letter on the subject in Britain.<sup>36</sup>

Thus, in some instances Vera's work was simply rejected based solely on her Jungian framework. A scathing critical assessment of Jungian psychology in the South African context is worth quoting at length:

It is not surprising perhaps, that approaches derived from Carl Jung ... should have been the most popular psychoanalytic perspectives under apartheid in South Africa. What Jung provides is an ideological legitimization for the underlying differences between racial groups in the name of 'archetypes'. While humanists like to gaze at the archetypes that are common to all humanity, they avert their gaze from the no less necessary notion in Jung's work of 'racial archetypes' that distinguish the essentially different psychology of one group from another ... indeed,

34 J. B. Schoeman, 'Vera Bührmann's Approach to Cultural Psychiatry', *Psychotherapeia & Psychiatry in Practice*, 36, March 1985, 12. This particular issue of *Psychotherapeia* celebrated the 50th year of Vera's career (1935-1985). Note Schoeman's use of a discourse of 'the Black man' and 'the White man' which echoes Vera's writings in the 1970s and 1980s.

35 Biographer Frank McLynn posits that it is best to reach a verdict of 'not proven' on the charge of Jung being a Nazi supporter, but 'the case for the defence becomes virtually impossible when we move from the *general* count of fascist sympathies to the two specific counts of the indictment against Jung: that he collaborated with the Nazis in the area of psychoanalytical politics; and that he made offensive remarks about Jewish culture and the Jewish mentality that were grist to the Nazis' anti-Semitic mill.' Frank McLynn, *Carl Gustav Jung. A Biography* (London: Black Swan, 1997), 358.

36 See F. Dalal, 'Jung: A Racist', *British Journal of Psychotherapy*, 4, 3, 1988, 263-79. For the open letter, see A. Samuels, 'Open Letter from a Group of Jungians on the Question of Jung's Writings on and Theories About "Africans"', *British Journal of Psychotherapy*, 34, 4, 2018, 673-78. See also Andrew Samuels, 'Jung and "Africans"', *International Journal of Jungian Studies*, 10, 2, 2018, 122-34. As far as I could establish, Vera never addressed the issue of Jung's alleged racism in any of her writings.

phenomenological psychologists could travel out from their departments to the ‘homelands’ of oppressed cultures in order to explore the different life worlds, and then return back home reassured that those horizons of meaning were so utterly distant from their own that they really did necessitate the joys of separate development.<sup>37</sup>

Saul Dubow, writing in the context of scientific racism in South Africa (thus not critiquing Vera’s cross-cultural psychiatry research per se), singles Vera out as the ‘best known exponent’ in South Africa of Jung’s view that primitive man’s mentality was ‘analogous to that of the European child in modern society.’<sup>38</sup> In an early criticism of ‘the Bührmann position’ apropos the relationship between culture and mental illness, Leslie Swartz and Don Foster identified several shortcomings in Vera’s work, including one that is key in the context of this study, i.e., her lack of engagement with political power relations:

To some extent, Bührmann's reliance on affect as a permissible heuristic tool makes her work difficult to evaluate from the rational perspective she so obviously sees as limited. However, the focus of this paper is not on therapeutic issues but on perceptions of the relationship between culture and mental illness, and it is undeniably clear that she shares many of Cheetham and Griffiths’ views on Black culture. Once again, this is seen as better than Western culture in many ways – more whole, better integrated, more ‘natural’, more able to deal with certain aspects of emotional life. And once again the issue of power of any political sort is not examined.<sup>39</sup>

A detailed critique of Vera’s oeuvre was undertaken by Ken Roper.<sup>40</sup> He too calls into question the suitability of the Jungian paradigm for cross-cultural research because of its ‘racist core.’ His analysis finds Vera’s corpus wanting on many counts. He highlights the inconsistencies in her application of Jung’s ‘evolutionist perspective [of other cultures] and attendant racist views,’ and, as far as her methodology is concerned, he raises issues of sample representativity and generalisability: despite limiting her observations to only one *igqira* and his small ‘school’, ‘she generalizes her findings and interpretations to progressively broader groupings of people, namely, the “Xhosa”, the “African” and ultimately the “blacks”.’ Like Swartz and Foster, he finds her use of affect as a heuristic tool

---

37 Ian Parker, ‘Psychoanalysis and Critical Psychology’ in Derek Hook, ed., *Introduction to Critical Psychology* (Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press, 2004), 147.

38 Saul Dubow, *Scientific Racism in Modern South Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 205-06.

39 L. Swartz and D. Foster, ‘Images of Culture and Mental Illness: South African Psychiatric Approaches’, *Social Dynamics*, 10, 1, 17-25.

40 K. Roper, ‘The Cross-Cultural Application of Analytical Psychology: A Consideration of the Research of M. Vera Bührmann’, *South African Journal of Psychology*, 22, 3, 1992, 157-62.



problematic, along with her lack of engagement with socio-political factors. He points out that Vera's approach, whether she intended it or not, served to maintain the racial divisions that existed within South Africa:

The essentialist attitude reflected by Bührmann (and for that matter Jung) has underlain, and provided a justification for, the maintenance of the legally and politically prescribed division of "race" or "culture" in South Africa. The extent to which Bührmann's image of a "natural" or "traditional" Black culture reproduces such artificial divisions, despite the best of intentions to the contrary, and is itself constructed by the experience of these divisions merits consideration.<sup>41</sup>

He concludes his critique by identifying as its chief limitation 'her essentialist stance which constructs and positions people within unchanging "cultural" categories without regard for historical forces.'<sup>42</sup>

As should be clear from the above, Vera's scholarly work on the Xhosa *amagqira* has been hotly contested. Jungian commentators have been laudatory (at least in public),<sup>43</sup> while social scientists and analysts of race in southern Africa have been critical. In this section, I provide my own reading of the monograph which cemented her scholarly reputation, *Living In Two Worlds:*

*Communication Between a White Healer and Her Black Counterparts* (Human & Rousseau, 1984).

What does the book tell us about the relationship between Jungian theory and Xhosa healing methods, and how does it position Vera in relation to the African culture she was studying?<sup>44</sup>

*Living in Two Worlds* is a short text (104 pages) aimed at non-specialist readers. The glossary of Xhosa and psychoanalytic terms at the beginning of the book create the impression that Vera is an expert in both: indeed, 'Xhosa Cosmology' and 'Concepts of Depth Psychology' each merit a chapter. The nexus between depth psychology and Xhosa cosmology as reflected in the healing methods of the

---

41 Ibid, 160. Tiffany Fawn Jones has shown how cross-cultural approaches such as Vera's played into the hands of the apartheid state, albeit sometimes inadvertently: 'it [cross-cultural psychiatry] authenticated apartheid practices by endorsing stagnant ideas of "cultural" and "ethnic" differences ... The idea that each African group had unique needs, could easily be translated into the view that Africans needed to be divided and treated accordingly. This was a view that supported the National Party's policies in the 1970s that forced homeland citizenship on blacks along ethnic lines.' Tiffany Fawn Jones, *Psychiatry*, 109.

42 Roper, 'The Cross-Cultural Application of Analytical Psychology,' 161. See also L. Swartz, 'Overview: Transcultural Psychiatry in South Africa Pt. 1', *Transcultural Psychiatric Research Review*, 23, 1986, 273-303.

43 Privately, however, some Jungian writers were critical of Vera's work. For example, Andrew Samuels notes that Fred Plaut, who, as will be discussed further below, had encouraged Vera to publish articles in the *Journal of Analytical Psychology* when he was editor, once remarked, 'Funny how the Xhosa healers seem to have had Jungian analytical training!' Andrew Samuels, 'Global Politics, American Hegemony and Vulnerability, and Jungian-psychosocial Studies: Why there are No Winners in the Battle Between Trickster Pedro Urdemales and the Gringos', *International Journal of Jungian Studies* 7, 3, 2015, 227-41.

44 I wish to thank Prof. Andrew Bank for his guidance and insights on the critical evaluation of Vera's work within the framework of South African anthropology, on which much of this section is based.

*iggira*<sup>45</sup> lies in the role of the collective unconscious which is mediated through dreams. The cultural layer of the collective unconscious contains culture-specific imagery, making it imperative for anyone wishing to understand Xhosa healing to understand Xhosa cosmology (e.g., the ancestors).

The remaining chapters, written in the ethnographic present, comprise descriptive rather than analytical accounts of various rituals and ceremonies that occur as part of the training of an *iggira*. The chapters focus successively on the initial purification ceremonies, two river ceremonies in which the ancestors are evoked, communal rituals dances and a concluding ritual of acceptance of the new initiate as a trained healer.

What is immediately apparent from a reading of the text and a glance at the notes and references cited, is Vera's lack of engagement with anthropological literature. The bulk of her referencing and notes refer to depth psychology sources or to very general texts on gods, myths, dreams and mysteries, usual of the ancient world. Anthropological texts are infrequently cited. Igar-Axel Berglund's *Zulu Patterns of Thought and Symbolism* is cited several times in the main text in order to illustrate the concept of the unity of body and mind in African cosmology; indeed, references to Berglund occur in most of her publications (often the same reference). She references two works by Victor Turner, and one by Max Marwick, but in a cursory manner suggesting the most superficial engagements. The most noticeable omission from her reading list is any work on Xhosa ethnography, notably Monica Hunter's *Reaction to Conquest* (1936), which provides detailed analyses of Pondo and Xhosa concepts of ancestors and of healing rituals akin to those Vera witnessed. We know that on one occasion in 1978 she met the eminent anthropologist Monica Wilson at Hogsback:

Met ... Monica Wilson who remains inhibited and detached. She seems the purely thinking type with feelings undeveloped. How does she communication [sic] with people? She discourages her black servants from visiting a diviner and having their family problems sorted out. She is certain it can have only one result i.e. the daughter-in-law will be seen as the cause of the trouble. Am I wrong or is she?<sup>46</sup>

The circumstances of the meeting are not clear. There is only one brief reference in Vera's work to

---

45 It is important to note that Vera limits her investigation primarily to psychological 'healing'; she does not investigate other aspects such as the use of traditional medicines.

46 UCT Libraries, Special Collections, BC1164, Vera Bührmann Papers, A2. Notebooks.

Monica Wilson's *Reaction to Conquest*, and that is to highlight the importance of goats to the Xhosa.<sup>47</sup> She also makes no mention at all, for example, of the classic ethnography of Philip and Iona Mayer, *Townsmen or Tribesmen*, which examined rural 'Red' Xhosa cultural identities (like the Tisos) in town and country.<sup>48</sup>

Vera attempts to cast *Living in Two Worlds* as a story of her personal discovery and acceptance of the Other and concludes with reflections that this kind of cross-cultural communication could facilitate a better understanding between blacks and whites in South Africa.<sup>49</sup> But such sentiments are undermined by the fact that her work is premised on an underlying theory of racial essence and racial difference. As Roper pointed out, she generalises from the worldview on one Xhosa healing school in the Ciskei of the mid-late 1970s and early 1980s to 'Black people' and even to 'African culture' and 'African civilisation'. In fact, an essentialised ideology of difference runs right through the text. The 'two worlds' in the title of her book 'are the Western world which is primarily scientific, rational and ego-oriented, and the world of the Black healer and his people, which is primarily intuitive, non-rational or oriented towards the inner world of symbols and images of the collective unconscious.'<sup>50</sup> She begins her the book by stating that 'preliterate people ... *act out* what the Western people *talk about*' (original emphasis). She concludes the book in much the same vein:

Our Black compatriots ... have the advantage of still living closer to the world of the unconscious, where symbols are still alive and vibrant and where archetypal images form a natural part of their daily existence and direct their behaviour in ways which sometimes seem irrational to us. Their ego structure and functions are less goal-oriented [than those of whites] ... Their civilisation, according to

---

47 M. Vera Bührmann and J.N. Gqomfa, 'The Xhosa Healers of Southern Africa. II. The Songs Sung in a Healing Ceremony', *Journal of Analytical Psychology*, 26, 4, 1981, 297-312.

48 P. Mayer, *Townsmen or Tribesmen: Conservatism and the Process of Urbanization in a South African City* (Cape Town: O.U.P., 1961).

49 Elsewhere she writes, 'In a pluralistic society like ours there is a need for an ethnic specific as well as a global form of psychology and psychiatry to understand the universal and the culture specific psychological processes.' UCT Libraries, Special Collections, BC1164, Vera Bührmann Papers, C2. M.V. Bührmann, 'Community Involvement with Special Reference to Traditional Psychiatry in South Africa', unpublished Morris Ginsberg Memorial Lecture, undated. Her focus within this 'pluralistic society' is, of course, the Xhosa 'group'. She describes the Coloured population group as 'more complex' than the black group. 'Differences between the Coloured group and the White group are minimal at the level of depth psychology ... At the level of ego psychology differences do exist.' As for Bushmen, Laurens van der Post's *The Heart of the Hunter* 'has given me a real feeling for their cosmic relatedness. Credo Metwa wrote that the best Xhosa diviners had Bushman ancestry.' UCT Libraries, Special Collections, BC1164, Vera Bührmann Papers, C2, M.V. Bührmann, 'The Value of Certain Concepts of Analytical Psychology to Our Multiracial Society', unpublished paper, undated.

50 M.V. Bührmann, *Living in Two Worlds*, 15.

Senghor, is one of “intuitive reason”. They function largely at the level of intuition and feeling, and *images*, not *concepts*, are their main mode of apperception.<sup>51</sup>

Echoing an older version of apartheid which stressed respect for polarised cultural differences, Vera concludes by admonishing ‘the Black man’ not to ‘sever his connection with the world of symbols and mythical thinking and archetypal images’ and warns whites not to attempt to ‘fashion the other after one’s own image.’<sup>52</sup>

Vera’s relationship with Mongezi Tiso was undoubtedly respectful and warm; likewise, her relationship with her interpreters, especially Joseph Gqomfa.<sup>53</sup> The years she spent in the field, the experiences she had observing the Xhosa rituals, the relationships she built, and the acclaim that resulted from her published work enriched her life immensely. But there is no escaping the conclusion that the framework within which she ultimately made sense of these interactions was the essentialised language of racial differences that she had learnt in her childhood and carried forward in her early professional life, particularly through her political associations with the OB and DKF from the 1940s. In the next section, further evidence of a lingering racism will be added to this analysis.

### Archival Traces

In the preceding section, we engaged primarily with Vera’s publications, reception and monograph, but now we take a step back and accompany her through the process of the knowledge production she reported on.

Several times a year, usually at the invitation of the *igqira* at a time when a particular ceremony was to be performed, Vera travelled to the Ciskei in an old Kombi (a camper van), sometimes accompanied by Robert Schweizer, the student who introduced her to the Tisos, sometimes alone.

---

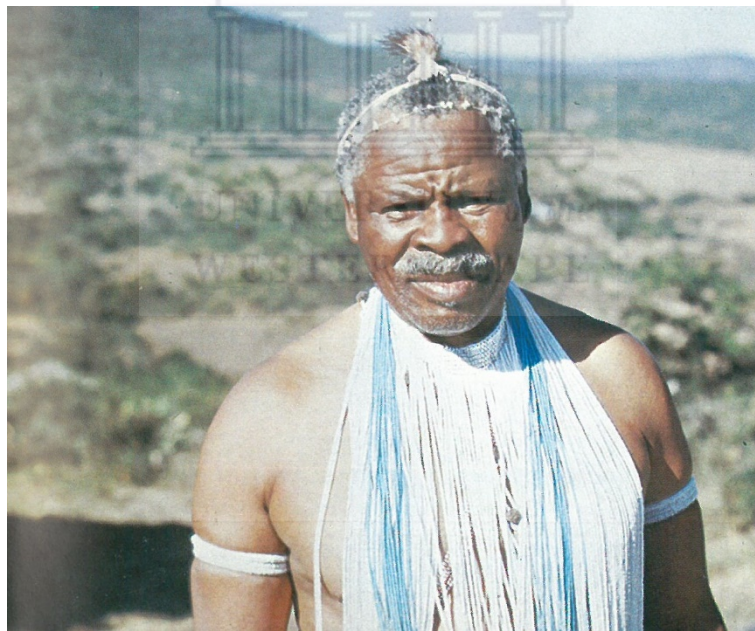
51 Ibid, 13, 100-01.

52 Ibid, 13, 102-03.

53 Correspondence in the Bührmann Papers at UCT attest to this. Both Tiso and Gqomfa maintained contact with Vera after her research activities ceased; Joseph Gqomfa’s last letter to Vera is dated 1997, a year before she died. UCT Libraries, Special Collections, BC1164, Vera Bührmann Collection, B5, Correspondence with Joseph Gqomfa. Of course, Joseph Gqomfa was more than an ‘interpreter’. He was a co-producer of knowledge and is acknowledged as such by Vera on several occasions. On the complexities of the relationship between researcher and interpreters and/or field assistants, see Pamela Reynolds, ‘Gleanings and Leavings: Encounters in Hindsight’ in A. Bank and L.J. Bank, eds., *Inside African Anthropology: Monica Wilson and her Interpreters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 308-19. A more comprehensive analysis of Joseph’s contribution to Vera’s work merits consideration.



**Figure 5.3:** Lenye location in Ciskei where the homestead of Mongezi Tiso was located. Source: *Living in Two Worlds* (1984), between pp. 48 and 49 (used with permission).



**Figure 5.4:** Mr Mongezi Tiso. Source: *Living in Two Worlds* (1984), between pp. 48 and 49 (used with permission).

Vera was always accompanied by an interpreter. Several interpreters assisted her and Robert Schweitzer over the years, but the one Vera most relied upon was Joseph Gqomfa, a psychiatric nurse who worked at the Fort Beaufort Hospital. Vera worked hard at mastering the Xhosa language, as can

be seen from the many pages in her notebooks in which she lists Xhosa terms and their meanings. However, it seems she never reached the stage of language proficiency that allowed her to work without the aid of an interpreter. At the Tiso homestead, or wherever the ritual to be observed was being performed, Vera would spend several days or weeks at a stretch observing the ‘Tiso school,’ confining herself to them ‘because they function largely as psychotherapists and are my counterparts. I feel I can therefore assess their methods and results.’<sup>54</sup> How did she go about doing this?

A character trait of Vera throughout her life was thrift. This becomes clear to anyone who works with the papers in her archives. She habitually used scrap paper (such as the blank back side of mail she received – old letters, bills, circulars and so on) for the writing of the drafts of her correspondence and her publications before typing them up. This thriftiness is discernible when one looks at her fieldnotes from her trips to the Tisos: she used old, out-of-date blank medical pocket diaries in which to record her data. There is some irony in this: at the bottom of each page of these diaries is listed a medical condition followed by the name of an appropriate pharmaceutical drug. The juxtaposition of Vera’s notes regarding the ‘traditional’ healing rituals and ceremonies she was observing, and these ‘western’ categories and their pharmacological remedy is a graphic metaphor for the ‘two worlds’ she was inhabiting. Her thriftiness, however, confounded whoever compiled the inventory of her collection of papers housed at UCT Libraries; for example, what is listed as a ‘pocket diary’ from 1967 was in fact a detailed record of several of her trips to Mr and Mrs Tiso in 1977 and 1978! To make matters worse for archivist and researcher alike, she often worked from the back of the diary, and cross-referenced it to still other diaries. To further complicate matters, she was something of a palimpsest; it is at times difficult to know when she had inserted something out of sequence or at a later stage. In any case, these ‘pocket diaries’ in her collection of papers at UCT Libraries provide an invaluable record of many of the trips she made and give clear evidence of the methods she used as she went about her research.

Vera’s research methodology was that of participant observer. She described the process she followed in gathering her data as follows:

---

54 M. Vera Bührmann, *Living in Two Worlds*, 15.

My method of research is to shed my Western, scientific, logical mode of being (to the extent to which it is possible), and to merge with the group and participate in their ceremonies with a minimum of prejudice or criticism, i.e., I try to become an organ of perception. The research, in the first instance, is therefore subjective and experiential. On withdrawal from a ceremony I immediately write down what I have experienced, observed and heard. The third stage is when I try to put these into meaningful terms of analytical concepts or the concepts of related fields of knowledge. Discussion with the healers is not excluded but I do not use a questionnaire method, rather the dialectic of analysis.<sup>55</sup>

The method of research described here is that of the classic participant observer, although, as Bank pointed out to me, it lacks the preliminary step of ‘reading, mapping your field, planning before doing fieldwork.’<sup>56</sup> It is worth noting that Vera penned these words in 1984, nine years after she began her research. When she started in 1975, she had no anthropological experience or training. Her use of expressions such as ‘experienced, observed and heard,’ which echo the structural functionalist school of anthropology that developed in South Africa, is something that she would no doubt have picked up from a later reading of anthropological literature, although, as we have seen, her engagement with such literature was extremely limited. Vera’s claim that she aimed to ‘merge with the group and participate’ suggests a degree of intimacy which is not apparent from her fieldnotes; a degree of detachment is more often discernible, as when she notes that she wishes she had the skill of Rembrandt so she could paint the expressions she observed on the faces of the men and women around her.<sup>57</sup>

Parts of Vera’s notes from a trip in March and April 1977 are reproduced below to provide an example of her work in the field.<sup>58</sup> While I have attempted to reproduce Vera’s notes as accurately as possible, her hurried scrawl, abbreviations and diagrams are at times difficult to make out; it is possible that some of the isiXhosa words, in particular, may be misread as a result. No attempt has been made to verify her spelling, English or isiXhosa, or to correct her grammar.

---

55 M.V. Bührmann, ‘Initiation of Xhosa Indigenous Healers (*Amagqira*),’ 441-42. See also M.V. Bührmann, *Living in Two Worlds*, 14-15.

56 Andrew Bank, private communication.

57 UCT Libraries, Special Collections, BC1164, Vera Bührmann Papers, A2, Pocket Diaries. In another context, after a suggestion by her is rejected, she admonishes herself to ‘Remain the “observant participant” – do not become a colleague. Do not introduce foreign material or approaches!!’

58 Ibid.

The first excerpt is from notes that are written in a rough, irregular and often short-hand format, indicating that these were the notes Vera made immediately after her observation and participation in the ceremony (i.e., step 1). In this case she was observing an *Isiko lentambo* ceremony, the ‘ceremony of the neckband’. The notes cover the events of Friday 25 March to Sunday 27 March 1977. They read as follows:

Friday Isiko Lentambo 25/3/77 March

...

Evening in the hut next to T’s hut

Mr T. “I’m just giving you few drops today rest for tomorrow”

♂ (spokesman) thanking T. Custom is for Mr T. to serve beer – as head of clan or person for whom ceremony is done

Mr T. appointed brothers to serve

I became aware of tension and dis-ease and suddenly remembered the liquor.

I gave it to Tiso in own home → had to put it in the centre of assembly hut and say a few words and he responded telling them about me → they then aired their surprise and ? resentment at having white ♀ in kraal and hut – explained her presence in greater detail.

Toing and frowning between them and me.

T. “she’s also a dr not idle visitor” “doing research” If you ever find her on the road in difficulties I request you to help her, to improve relations betw. black and white.

♂ “pleased Tiso has some one to send diff cases to”

I’m “pleased to send our diff cases to Mr T.” Gave example.

Fact that I was a doctor changed the atmosphere a lot and also that things have been discussed.

- (1) This incident indicated to me the importance of observing the customs – gifts – liquor etc.
- (2) Their reactions to non-observance of sex taboo i.e. ♀ in kraal – only ♀ diviners are admitted.
- (3) Their reaction and suspicion of white people.

I felt it was only near the end of the 3 day ceremony that the males really accepted me – they were not people I had met previously.

On this occasion, Vera’s presence created a sense of dis-ease amongst some of the participants who were unfamiliar with her. This happened on many occasions, prompting her at one point in her notes to wonder whether her presence inhibited participants. Clearly, without Mongezi Tiso’s patronage, Vera would not have been able to access these rituals; her status as a doctor coupled with the Tiso’s endorsement also gave her access to areas usually reserved only for men and female diviners.

Enter Tisos and 4 diviners. Trainees drop out after welcoming diviners. Diviners ask for song they like “Kumnyama Phandle” “It is dark outside”

...



Dance hotting up!!

♀ wishes him long life even if God wants him

Trainee diviner.

Clap louder. Song “The world must fall” “Dilika Mhlabo”

...

Evening xhentsa

In hut full of amakwetha

2-3 pats usually dancing – (stationary stamping)

1. Few semi-trained ones.

S. “Hamba nehashe lam” “Go with my house”

around – audience to clap and sing.

2. Mrs T. in charge, Mr T. sitting quietly smoking

S. “Unonkale emlamyeni” (crab in the river)

Trainee: thanks God for letting him know Tisos. One completely new pat on whom diagn. seems not to have been made. At times he’s sharply reprimanded by seniors and then temporarily sits down.

Theme song was usually introduced by Mrs Tiso. Dancers interrupted this briefly with thanks, praise appeals or bits of history or requests for special songs. E.g. Tisos have seen God and trainees hope to see Him one day.

Mr T left early to sleep alone in his hut ?to brood to “tukama” or “camanga”

Mrs T slept in the amakwetha hut (Saturday)

Sunday I saw him at kraal early morning – still not having seen his wife.

At +- 9am we were invited to eat meat and drink broth from bones in the kraal. I was only ♀. Mrs T being a diviner could have been present. Small boys are present and fed like dogs.

These rough notes are then followed by several pages of notes titled ‘Impressions’; these notes were clearly written up once Vera had withdrawn and had time to reflect. The handwriting is neat and regular, with ample spacing between lines.

### Impressions

On Friday (day of slaughter) I was aware of tiredness sadness ? depression of both Mr and Mrs T.

The evening even after the relationship problem and my presence had been sorted out the atmosphere and dancing lacked joy.

Boredom and depression sent me to the combi to prepare supper for Michael<sup>59</sup> and myself. I got up later than usual went to the river for water and washing.

Saturday

While Michael and I was having breakfast Mr T came up and I invited him in for tea and bread. Later we watched making of intambo and chatted.

The atmosphere was still heavy.

---

59 ‘Michael’ was the interpreter on this occasion.

...

In the kraal Robert and I both had feeling of sadness as though they were aware of impending death. Anticipating mourning. We were strangely affected and did not as usual sit with Tiso's party but at other end of kraal.

(I felt as though I was not taken into their hearts and home as on previous occasions – this was intense family affair and I had to respect their privacy. Not offered as much hospitality as previously.)

That evening at the dancing Tiso was sitting quietly and a little aloof and solitary, wrapped in his blanket – smoking (had silent Indian chief 'grey owl' feeling about him). Mrs T seems to be in charge and even when talking about him they addressed her. She responded but the inner glow and heart touching warmth was absent.

Again, we sense discomfort, this time on the part of the researchers who have not been received with as much warmth as previously. Vera ascribes this to the fact that the ceremony was occasioned by a private family matter.

Her allusion to 'Grey Owl' is interesting. Grey Owl was the name of a member of what are commonly called the 'first people' of Canada. He was, in fact, an imposter, an Englishman named Archie Belaney who posed as an 'Indian', but who in this guise did much for the cause of wilderness conservation. The significance of the reference lies in the fact that the American and Canadian first peoples were also romanticised in much the way that other 'primitive' peoples were. Much of Vera's work references texts that deal with such peoples.

Vera then lists 19 points that she found meaningful in the ritual. Only a few pertain specifically to the relationship with Jungianism and are listed for illustrative purposes.

1. Transference and counter-transference.
5. They seem to share a common unconscious layer, from which things well up.
14. The songs all seem to be an expression of an archetypal experience some of them from the scriptures now applicable to therapy, some about animals.

Apart from gathering information through observations, Vera also gathered information through discussions with healers and patients (what she called the 'dialectic of analysis'). An example from a visit to the Tisos in March 1981 is included below for illustrative purposes:

They talked about difficult wumisa cases.

A ♂ came to ask them for med. to kill the ♂ who had grabbed his shop. The real story was that he abandoned it because he ran it at a loss and the other chap restocked it and they signed a contract that

he could run it for X-number of years. When the time was up he refused to give it back – the first ♂ still owed him money.

No. 1 came to Tiso for help. They said they don't make med. Like that but referred\* him to a herbalist. In the meantime his wife suffered from "nerves" and was treated by white Dr.

\*They actually accompanied him because they felt sorry for him but they felt bad and their conscience worried them. The wife later committed suicide ...

Shortly afterwards the husband married again. In retrospect they think that he wanted to kill the other man but the death wishes were actually in his home (?case of displacement)

Nerves = Umbelini not a feature. They don't have dreams or visions like thwasa person. Their minds are gone – even if they stand in front of something and you tell them to pick it up they won't or can't do it.

The fieldnotes contained in Vera's pocket diaries are clearly a fascinating record of her time spent in the field, but time and space preclude a thorough examination in this study. A relevant question to ask is: What was fieldwork to Vera? Andrew Bank cites the anthropologist Hilda Kuper who in later life said, 'To some, it [fieldwork] is a confrontation and an ordeal; to others a series of encounters; and to others a transforming and humanizing experience.'<sup>60</sup> Was it a transforming and humanizing experience for Vera? Indeed, reading her fieldnotes, picturing this aging white Afrikaner woman 'roughing it' in an old Kombi in areas which a white person needed a permit to enter, sitting in a circle in a hot, smoky hut, observing dancers clapping and stomping to the rhythm of African drums, it is difficult to imagine that it could be anything else; it is difficult to imagine that she was once a staunch member of the radical Afrikaner right.

But there are passages in the very diaries that contain her fieldnotes which call into question such a conclusion. The diaries are not only a record of her research process; they also contain ruminations and reflections that were private, that were never intended to be put into an article or a book. Some of these reveal the extent of her ambivalence about her black subjects (the Tisos) and black people in general in ways that clearly counter the perception of Vera as someone who had evolved beyond the racial intolerance demonstrated by her earlier political alignments. A selection of some of these entries is provided below. The first is from a visit to the Tisos early in 1981.<sup>61</sup>

---

60 Andrew Bank, *Pioneers of the Field. South Africa's Women Anthropologists* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2016), 199.

61 The context to this excerpt is the wide-scale dispossession of land-owners leading up to the granting of independence to Ciskei in December 1981.

Friday 13/3/8[1]

Visit to Seymor home of Mrs Tiso

Impressions

The lovely Katriver valley is gradually going black and after independence 4 Dec. 1981 will be Ciskei territory – few white farmers will see their way open to staying on. The prospect for agriculture is grim – this is the opinion expressed by everyone.

I have intense feeling of sadness. White people (4 generations) had to sell out (at a loss) and leave and see their handiwork going to wrack and ruin.

Black and coloured people or also uprooted in urban areas.

What is the difference in terms of suffering and hardship?

In the homelands the whites are dispossessed in the urban areas the Blacks.

Keiskammahoek

Hotel is under new management. Since Sept' 80 the Xhosa Devel. Corporation took over and asked Mr and Mrs [] to manage it.

It is lovely, clean and spacious, with a lovely garden and all modern comforts. A place I would like to linger with company.

The possibility is that after independence it will be under Black management and even the members of the present Black government is concerned about the dropping of standards and are begging the whites to stay on.

Same story at the shop. ... "Everything is going downhill. Already we do not think we'll be able to face it." They feel they cannot stay on for the sake of the money, wh' is good. "One needs white companionship."

Morality

Mrs [] is +-55 but applied for an old age pension wh' is valid from 65 yrs.

"I told them I'm 60 and that because I have to look after this old man I have no way of earning money. I trusted my ancestors and knew that with their help the people at the office will like me and they did." Has already been drawing the pension for 3m. Everyone is surprised at Lenye. On being granted the pension she brewed beer to thank the anc.

The fact that they make a lot of money as healers is not taken into account. They spend money very freely and even paid R3.10 for a small lean live chicken!

Their time concept is non ext.! I had to be rude to get them into the Kombi so as to get home before dark and even so I had to travel on dangerous roads in the dark. They respond impulsively to whims eg. asking me without warning to stop because they want to greet someone who lives near the road – and then planning is forgotten! This impulsiveness is linked to a generosity of the heart that forestalls anger.

Perhaps the most telling example comes from Vera's notes in which she records her impressions of the independence celebrations that she witnessed in Keiskammahoek on 4 December 1981, the day Ciskei

became an 'independent' homeland.<sup>62</sup> She begins her account as follows:

I was offered a seat of honour but refused as I wanted to [be] free to record and photograph – sat on stand though. Opened 3 hours late with songs and prayer. Brief recording – various choirs recorded. Welcome Mr Camagu. Very colourful scene.

Under the heading 'Gen. Impressions' she notes:

Very colourful gathering with little or no discipline. The crowded in [*sic*] on small space in front of 'grand stand' (!) Entreaties had little effect had to be driven back by a few policemen and organisers with twigs – those very people however obstructed our view ++ ... As choirs started terminating the distant drums of the amagqira could be heard. Response of audience was immediate.

Women were in their ordinary colourful dress. Others in Xhosa skirts but with such high heels that they lost their grace. The third group – choirs – dressed in long cream coloured frocks with shoes of all types mostly mod – high heels looked completely out of place in the open air and on muddy ground!

Two groups of young girls doing rhythmic movement stole the show. 1st group in yellow and red. 2nd group in white with red. This group seemed to portray horses and riders and at one stage on [*sic*] sat on knee of other one making riding movements. Movements free, spontaneous and yet like a 'chor de ballet' [*sic*]. Acting and miming was superb! Photos of each group taken.

Time is of no consequence! Most boring talk by chief headman of area lasting indefinitely. Seems obsessed with uniforms of all kinds. Crowd became restive but he was oblivious to it!! A few people among organisers tried their very best but they made little impression. How are they going to run an organised society.

In the meantime a horse display started as a side-show! Annoyed the organisers with right!! *CALL of the blood!* (My emphasis.)

In these excerpts from her note books, Vera expresses (or, in some cases, reports uncritically) several well-worn racial stereotypes:<sup>63</sup> 'Going black ... wrack and ruin' (= blacks bring about a drop in standards; whites are more industrious; blacks are lazy); 'Begging whites to stay on' (= whites are superior, more intelligent); 'Little or no discipline ... Respond impulsively' (=blacks are childlike); 'Time concept non-existent ... Time is of no consequence' (=blacks are primitive); 'How are they going to run an organised society' (=blacks are incompetent and unable to run anything by themselves).

---

62 UCT Libraries, Special Collections, BC1164, The Vera Bührmann Papers, A2, Notebooks.

63 The propositions in brackets are borrowed from Media Monitoring Project, 'The News in Black and White: An Investigation Into Racial Stereotyping in the Media' (Media Monitoring Project Report, 1999).

The significance of such private personal beliefs is best summed up by the great biographer James Boswell: it is often in such unguarded, private moments that a person's true character is revealed. Boswell premised this view on no less an authority than Plutarch, who wrote, 'Nor is it always in the most distinguished achievements that men's virtues or vices may be best discerned; but very often an action of small note, a short saying, or a jest, shall distinguish a person's real character more than the greatest siege, or the most important battles.'<sup>64</sup> Indeed, privately expressed observations such as these point to persistent prejudices and a deep ambivalence that calls into question the image of Vera as someone who had undergone a Damascus Road-like transformation with respect to her racial politics.

Further traces of racial prejudice are found in some of the other publications that resulted from Vera's participant observer activities amongst the *amagqira*. For example, the notes she took in the excerpts that were quoted above were used extensively in the article 'The Xhosa Healers of Southern Africa. IV. *Isiko Lentambo*. A Renewal Sacrifice' published in 1982.<sup>65</sup> The article was published in the *Journal of Analytical Psychology (JAP)*, which carried eight of the 23 articles that resulted from Vera's cross-cultural work, more than any other journal.<sup>66</sup> Why did she favour this United Kingdom-based journal?

Apart from its Jungian orientation and connection to the 'London School' where she trained (it was produced by the London-based Society for Analytical Psychology), Vera's preference for the *Journal of Analytical Psychology* no doubt had something to do with her relationship with Alfred (Fred) Plaut, its editor in the 1970s. In a poignant and extremely personal piece contained amongst her papers at UCT Libraries, titled 'Fred and the Jung Course,' Vera writes very movingly about feelings she has developed for 'Fred' (his last name is not given). The context is a 'Jung course' which was

---

64 J. Boswell, *The Life of Samuel Johnson. LL.D. Vol. 1* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1952), 9.

65 M.V. Bührmann and J.N. Gqomfa, 'The Xhosa Healers of Southern Africa. IV. *Isiko Lentambo*. A Renewal Sacrifice', *Journal of Analytical Psychology*, 27, 2, 1982, 163-72. The ceremony was staged by Mrs Tiso for Mr Tiso's benefit, since he was experiencing a bout of lethargy or depression – he had lost his vitality. It is interesting to note that the article only appeared in 1982, whereas the notes were made in 1977; Michael had been the interpreter in 1977, but Joseph Gqomfa is co-author of the article.

66 Other journals in which Vera frequently published were *Psychotherapeia & Psychiatry in Practice*, a journal published by the South African Institute for Psychotherapy, an organisation Vera had helped start ('She was one of the prime movers in the establishment of the S.A. Institute for Psychotherapy.' L. Gillis, 'Comment: Vera Bührmann, the Pride of South African Psychiatry', *Psychotherapeia & Psychology in Practice* 36, March 1985, 4) and the *South African Medical Journal*. Predictably, articles carried in the *SAMJ* did not have a Jungian emphasis.

held in Cape Town in 1977 (in a separate diary entry amongst other entries dated 1977 she mentions a dream she had shortly before ‘Fred’ left; this dream is also mentioned in ‘Fred and the Jung Course’). They discuss a lecture given by Renos Papadopoulos, a UCT psychology lecturer. She mentions time spent with Fred at her Gansbaai home. In the dream mentioned previously, she speaks of storm-tossed waves threatening her home, and links it to Fred’s imminent departure. ‘What is love at 67?’ she asks, as she details the physical and mental anguish she is suffering. What leads me to suspect that ‘Fred’ is Fred Plaut is her statement, ‘His response to my draft articles made me happy – he wanted Dilemma, took Xhosa Diviners but “don’t get mixed up with witchcraft”.’<sup>67</sup> Plaut was editor of the *Journal of Analytical Psychology* from 1971 to 1979, the very period during which Vera started to publish more prolifically and the period during which the first of several of her articles appeared in *JAP*.<sup>68</sup>

Like her letter to Robert Hobson in 1965, this is one of the few extant records in which the ‘human’ Vera, the vulnerable and lonely Vera, is so visible. This was a Vera few ever saw. Yet here too, in a private reflection in which she agonises over the effects of ‘Eros’ on her body and mind, deep-seated racial prejudices rise to the surface. As she recalls the events of her time with Fred over the past few days, she ponders the evidence of his interest in her, things he had said or done that suggested that her feelings might be reciprocated.<sup>69</sup> Against this, she lists things that count against her: ‘my age, geographic differences, *differences in race*’ (my emphasis). Fred Plaut was Jewish!<sup>70</sup>

Before moving on from Vera’s relationship with the *Journal of Analytical Psychology*, this is an apposite juncture at which to raise a puzzling phenomenon pertaining to Vera’s publications that appear in *JAP*. The puzzling – disquieting might be a better word – element is not in the content but in the metanarrative: in the ‘Contributors to this Issue’ section, it says of Vera: ‘Early years spent among a tribe related to the Xhosa people.’ This bit of biography, which appears in most of the volumes of

---

67 ‘Dilemma’ and ‘Xhosa Diviners’ are references to draft articles; ‘Xhosa Diviners’ is probably a reference to ‘Tentative Views of Dream Therapy by Xhosa Diviners’ which was published in *Journal of Analytical Psychology* 23, 2, 1978, a year after ‘Fred and the Jung Course’ was penned. It is not clear which article ‘Dilemma’ refers to.

68 Vera’s relationship with his successor, Judith Hubback, was less convivial, as evidenced by an exchange of letters regarding issues of copyright. UCT Libraries, Special Collections, BC1164, Vera Bührmann Papers, B6, Correspondence with Judith Hubback

69 In his autobiography, Plaut admits to having had love-affairs, including extra-marital affairs, but it is not clear if his relationship with Vera progressed to that level. For one thing, he was still in mourning for his second wife, Evelyn, who had passed away in 1976. He mentions Vera as one of the notable Jungians he had met in his lifetime but provides no details of their relationship. See Fred Plaut, *Between Losing and Finding*, 91-92, 113.

70 This echoes the anti-Jewish ideology of the Ossewa-Brandwag.

*JAP* to which Vera contributed, is clearly misleading. One assumes that the information was supplied by Vera. She makes similar claims elsewhere, highlighted to show the similarities:

I also write as one who *spent her early days in close proximity to the Zulu and Swazi peoples of this country*, and it was only as a teenager and older that I became more fully acquainted with the other groups of White, Black, Coloured and Indian peoples who inhabit South Africa.<sup>71</sup>

My childhood was spent *in close contact with the Zulu and Swazi speaking people of the Nguni nation* ... As a medical doctor, a large proportion of my practice were Zulu speaking because communication was easy.<sup>72</sup>

These statements are misleading, to say the least. Vera did not spend her early years ‘among a tribe’ of any description – she grew up on a farm on which there were Zulu- and Swazi-speaking Africans, true, but they were *servants*. Some may have been *oorlams* – descendants of black children used as labourers under the *inboekeling* system lauded by her grandfather (see Chapter 1). As was shown in Chapter 2, the race relations that existed between white farmers and their black farmworkers during the early part of the twentieth century was characterised by patriarchal paternalism, often involving violence or the threat of violence. At most, Vera could lay claim to playing with black children on the farm as a child or having them as servants while she was growing up, but she is clearly claiming something more in these statements.

Why would she airbrush her past in this manner? A review Vera wrote in 1990 for a book titled *Zulu Thought Patterns and Symbols* by Axel-Ivar Berglund (1989) provides a clue to solving the puzzle. She begins her review as follows:

This anthropological study is unique and important for a variety of reasons. In the first instance, it is relevant that the *author was born and grew up with the people he studied and writes about*. The Zulu people are part of the greater *Nguni* nation. Zulu is like a mother tongue to him and he rarely needed an interpreter even when discussing complicated and intimate concepts. He did not have to try and gain their trust, he had it. *As a child* he had already, like a sponge, sucked up much of the Zulu history, tradition, and way of expressing themselves.<sup>73</sup>

---

71 UCT Libraries, Special Collections, BC1164, Vera Bührmann Papers, C2, M.V. Bührmann, ‘The Value of Certain Concepts of Analytical Psychology to our Multicultural Society’, undated.

72 M.V. Bührmann, ‘Initiation of Xhosa Indigenous Healers (Amagqira)’, 441. It is not clear what she means when she speaks of becoming ‘more fully acquainted’ with other groups in the first quotation, or which ‘medical practice’ she has in mind in the second.

73 M.V. Bührmann, ‘Review of Zulu Thought Patterns and Symbols by Axel-Ivar Berglund’, *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 23, 4, 1990, 720 (my emphasis).



In the 1976 edition of his book (which is the edition Vera cites in many of her publications), Berglund wrote:

I was born at Ceza and grew up at Ekuthuleni, at which places my parents were missionaries. *So I spoke Zulu from early childhood.* Language, when communicating with Zulu-speaking people, has therefore not been a problem.<sup>74</sup>

Berglund goes on to say that ‘*before attending school my playmates were Zulu children*’ (my emphasis) and it was from them that he learned Zulu and was introduced ‘in a very real and natural way’ to aspects of Zulu culture and custom that fascinated him and which, at a later stage, he explored further. The similarities between Berglund’s formulation and Vera’s are striking (see emphases in quotes above), except that in Vera’s case this ‘backstory’ is not accurate. It is hard not to conclude that she deliberately appropriated this trope from Berglund and used it to create the impression that she had extensive contact with (and understanding of) black people from an early age. It is obvious why Vera did this – to deflect attention from her background and add credibility to her work with the *amagqira*.

In May 1976, shortly after she had begun her work with the *amagqira*, Vera recorded a dream she had:

We are assembled under the oak tree (one that was always infested with flying ants and as a result was small and pathetic) on the grass in front of Emigratie home. I’m trying to formulate or get help with talk on gadusa ceremony. Present :- Gerwin, Noel and Mary, Pa/Louis, ? females of farm and young ♂ ? Dawie [or Danie] (k)<sup>75</sup> and others +- 12.

I said I need help of classical scholar – Eleusian or Greek initiation ceremony. Right at the start interrupted by Noel. I stopped him. “It’s both graduation and initiation.”

Slaughter of ox and eating of the meat – “eating of the meat dipped in balaw is like our holy communion.” Pa/Louis got up with a snort and a look of disgust and walked towards their bedroom window. Group disappeared.

Found myself in T. Maat and my bedroom in the corner in front of a bookcase – having first seen Sussie asleep in next bedroom and Pat sitting on twin bed in bored fashion.

In front of bookcase which contained some of my books – but as it was not my office many were missing (?Jung’s) I still wanted light on the mysteries.

---

74 A-I. Berglund, *Zulu Thought Patterns and Symbols* (London: C. Hurst & Co., 1976), 19.

75 Although based entirely on speculation, I find the use of ‘(k)’ behind this young man’s name unsettling. Vera usually named people in her dreams if she knew who they were. If not, she used a question mark. The fact that she repeats the (k) later, and the fact that this young man is named amongst unknown (‘?’) ‘females of farm’ (i.e., black female servants) suggests that the ‘k’ might be shorthand for the pejorative term (now known as the ‘k-word’) which was commonly applied by whites to black people.

Gerwin was talking eagerly about her dreams, D (k) was talking about something else, 4th was also young ♂. Very prominent on the bookshelf was a book titled “DREAMS” ? Freud’s interpretations of dreams. Striking thing to me was that everyone was ignoring the topic which I had introduced – I felt lonely and alone.<sup>76</sup>

In typical fashion, Vera then added her interpretation: ‘Am I busy with flying ant activities that are alienating me from my family and undermining the tradition?’ (My translation.)

This dream is important in understanding the internal struggle Vera faced as she undertook her fieldwork amongst the *amagqira*. She risked alienating herself from her family and she was concerned about undermining ‘the tradition’ (her white Afrikaner tradition, which is cast in the dream in Christian terms, recalling the Christian-Nationalist foundation of the OB). Her father/Louis (male family members/authority of males in the ‘tradition’) distance themselves from any suggestion that there is equivalence between Xhosa ritual slaughter and the Christian eucharist. She risked personal and professional derision (the stunted oak tree). She was seemingly unsure of herself professionally (Jung was missing from the bookshelf; Freud was there). In a dream reported previously (the dream before she went on her first visit to the *amagqira* in 1975 or early 1976), she had dreamt that she was given ‘permission’ by her parents to pursue this work. But these doubts clearly stayed with her; elsewhere she writes of her fear of ‘going for black’ (losing herself). To prevent this, it was important for her to hold on to her family and tradition, and not to completely abandon her ‘Western’ scientific training. She records her admiration for M.E.R.<sup>77</sup> who, Vera says, was a ‘natural Afrikaner.’ That is the dilemma Vera faced – how to remain a natural Afrikaner while engaging in her fieldwork.

To return to Hilda Kuper’s formulation regarding the impact of fieldwork on researchers, it never became a ‘humanizing and transforming’ experience for Vera, at least not fully. Even though some of the rituals and ceremonies she witnessed affected her deeply at times, her field trips remained

---

76 UCT Libraries, Special Collections, BC1164, Vera Bührmann Papers, A2, Notebooks (my translation).

77 Maria Elizabeth Rothmann, noted Afrikaner author, social worker and campaigner for women’s rights (known as M.E.R. or Ta’ Miem). In August 1975 (thus shortly after her *amagqira* research began), after listening to a radio programme about M.E.R., and reading about Leopold Senghor who assimilated French literature without being assimilated (she comments, ‘I have my doubts about that’), Vera had a dream in which she ‘lost all [her] white habits.’ Then her car got stuck and disintegrated. She was rescued by a white farmer, who complimented her on her good Afrikaner manners, and his excellent (white) mechanic who fixed her car. This dream she interpreted as ‘my c.c. psych. [cross-cultural psychiatry] and dangers of getting stuck when I lose my identity and try to go for black.’ The mechanic (fixer, doctor) had to be true to himself. This dream, too, illustrates the intense internal turmoil Vera experienced at the prospect of losing her Afrikaner identity.

‘a series of encounters.’ Through this series of encounters, Vera created for herself a reputation in the field of cross-cultural psychiatry. She became celebrated as someone who had undergone a ‘humanizing and transforming’ experience, and even contributed to that perception, but, as the material from her published and archival records have shown, there is overwhelming evidence to suggest that she retained significant traces of the racist ideology that had been inculcated in her from childhood.

### **Vera and Sir Laurens van der Post: (Trans)Planting Jung in Africa (1984-1995)**

Ever since returning to South Africa in 1960, Vera had recognised the need to establish an accredited Jungian training centre in South Africa to stem the loss of potential analysts who went abroad to study and invariably did not return. But it was only in 1984 that she addressed the problem with a sense of urgency. Graham Saayman, a psychology lecturer at UCT and part of Vera’s Jung study group, remembers the day she came to his office to seek his assistance:

Vera’s eyes sparkled, her cheeks were flushed quite pink. She put her hand on my forearm and said, ‘I must tell you of my dream and ask for your help. I want us to start the training program we have talked about so often. And I want to start it now.’<sup>78</sup>

The dream which galvanised Vera into action was of a bird’s nest,

finely woven and lined with feathers. In the nest she counted a clutch of seven eggs, their unbroken shells the colour of old ivory. This single image robbed her of her peace. A sense of obligation distracted her. This dream of unrealised creative potential called and beckoned and would not let her go. She wanted to start an internationally accredited Jungian training centre in Cape Town. It was as simple as that. That was the beginning.<sup>79</sup>

Other than the reported dream, what might have sparked Vera’s determination at that late stage (she was already in her seventies) to embark on this ambitious project? It was probably the confidence that she had gained as the recognition of her work amongst the *amagqira* grew. Simply stated, she no longer needed to be ‘shy’ about her Jungian identity. She was reaping the rewards of her cross-cultural

---

78 Graham Saayman, *Hunting with the Heart. A Vision Quest to Spiritual Emergence* (Rondebosch: Kima Global Publishers, 2007), 225. Saayman was attached to UCT’s Psychology Department as senior lecturer, associate professor and professor between 1974 and 1989, and also served at times as head of the department on a rotational basis.

79 Ibid, 223.

psychiatry research amongst the *amagqira*: her publication count was climbing, interest in her work was increasing, and she was coming into her own as a Jungian. Her increased confidence in combination with her advancing years would have been powerful catalysts to finally put in motion what had been on her mind for the last two decades.

Vera and Graham Saayman immediately set to work drafting a post-graduate curriculum. But that was the easy part; the bigger challenges were how such a centre should be structured and administered, who would conduct the training, and, most importantly, how it was to be funded.

One option was for the centre to be situated within the structures of the University of Cape Town. Early in 1984, discussions were initiated with Vice-Chancellor Dr Stuart Saunders and other UCT officials regarding the possibility of post-graduate training in psychotherapy within the psychology department. In June 1984, Vera travelled to congresses in the United Kingdom and United States; while in the US she also visited Jungian centres which had established similar training programmes in order to gather information.<sup>80</sup> Then, in August 1984, Graham Saayman informed UCT's VC, Dr Saunders, of an unexpected development:

Sir Laurens van der Post, unsolicited and on his own initiative, has written to Dr Ian McCullum (one of our group) suggesting that an Institute of Jungian Psychology be established in Cape Town and has offered to find sponsors. Sir Laurens is coming to South Africa at the end of this month to personally investigate this possibility ... I gather that Sir Laurens' view, at this time, is that his proposed Institute should concern itself with socio-political matters, rather than with psychotherapy and envisages the Institute as falling outside of the formal orbit of the University, although there would be contact and exchange.<sup>81</sup>

The 'unsolicited' intervention by Laurens van der Post in 1984 was a watershed moment in the development of Vera's envisaged training centre. Without his assistance, it is doubtful that the Jungian

---

80 SAAJA Archives, Prof. G. Saayman to Dr S. Saunders, 5 June 1984.

81 SAAJA Archives, Prof. G. Saayman to Dr S. Saunders, 16 August 1984. Papadopoulos's recollection is somewhat different. As he tells it, it was in the late 1970s that Van der Post 'connected with us.' He states that Vera, though wary of the manner in which Van der Post cast himself as 'the grand old man of Africa,' was a pragmatist and was thus keen to explore ways that Sir Laurens could help the Jungian study group. Whenever Van der Post was in Cape Town, he would treat Vera and Papadopoulos ('occasionally also Graham') to tea at the luxurious Mount Nelson Hotel and regale them with 'endless ideas and dreams, often unrelated to the problems we were facing.' Renos Papadopoulos, 'Jung and Otherings in South Africa', 82.

centre would have been established, especially within an academic environment which at the time was ambivalent about Jungian psychology, even hostile.<sup>82</sup>

In many ways, Vera and Van der Post made strange bedfellows. Van der Post was an Afrikaner turned English ‘Establishment man’;<sup>83</sup> Vera was an Afrikaner whose ideological background was vehemently anti-British. He fought in the British Army during the Second World War; she joined the anti-war, pro-German Ossewa-Brandwag. He was vociferously anti-apartheid;<sup>84</sup> Vera was steeped in a tradition of segregation and white supremacy. What drew them together, of course, was their admiration for Carl Gustav Jung.<sup>85</sup> As Jungians, they shared romanticised notions about ‘primitive’ cultures, believing that they retained a cosmic relatedness which, as Swartz and Foster put it, made them ‘better than Western cultures in many ways – more whole, better integrated, more “natural”, more able to deal with certain aspects of emotional life’ (see note 354).

In her previously mentioned letter to Robert Hobson in 1965 (see Chapter 2, note 7), Vera had lamented her lack of enthusiasm for spreading the Jungian gospel. ‘Spreading the gospel’ is, however, an apt metaphor to describe Lauren’s van der Post’s discipleship – he regarded Jung as a prophet or messiah and was convinced that Jungian psychology was the key to South Africa’s (indeed, the world’s) political and inter-racial woes. The world, he believed, projected its racist shadow onto South Africa;<sup>86</sup> only Jungian psychology could reverse this. ‘If we can establish a really rooted Jungian

---

82 This is well illustrated by the Centre’s attempts to secure a fund-raising permit (number) from the state which would allow the Centre to raise funds from the general public. The Department of National Health and Population Development rejected the application, explaining that it had reached its decision after having canvassed the views of third parties, notably several psychology departments in South African universities. The recommendation from these departments was unanimous – the Centre should not be granted a public fund-raising permit. Many called into question why such a training centre was necessary at all. The psychology department at Stellenbosch University, for example, was of the opinion that, since Jungian psychology represented an extremely small segment of a large and diverse field, the existence of such a training centre was questionable and granting the application would set a precedent for similar organisations. SAAJA Archives, Department of National Health and Population Development to Dr Vera Bührmann, 13 February 1989.

83 J.D.F. Jones. *Storyteller. The Many Lives of Laurens van der Post* (London: John Murray, 2001), 243.

84 As has often been pointed out, despite his anti-apartheid rhetoric, Van der Post detested Nelson Mandela and favoured Mangosuthu Buthelezi and the Inkatha Freedom Party over Mandela and the ANC. See J.D.F. Jones, *Storyteller*, 411-12. Malcolm Draper describes him as a ‘dyed in the wool believer in separate development’ who, because of his support for the Zulu nation, was plotting a political course in South Africa that would have led to right-wing balkanization. Malcolm Draper, ‘African Wilderness® Pty Ltd: An Authentic Encounter with the Big Five, Death and the Meaning of Life’ in C. Ryan, S.J. Page and M. Aiken, *Taking Tourism to the Limits: Issues, Concepts and Managerial Approaches* (London: Routledge, 2011), 120.

85 Van der Post regarded himself as one of Jung’s closest friends. See his biographical study of Jung: L. van der Post, *Jung and the Story of Our Time* (London: Hogarth Press, 1976). Jung, however, did not see Van der Post in quite the same way. See J.D.F. Jones, *Storyteller*, 220-30.

86 ‘Projection of shadow’ was a Jungian gloss Vera frequently used to explain the inter-racial problems in South Africa. It goes back to Jung who saw the Soviet Union during the Cold War as the shadow of the West. Later Jungians ‘saw

Institute in the Cape, I am certain it will be one of the finest things that ever happened to South Africa,' he wrote to Vera in 1984.<sup>87</sup>

Van der Post was of the opinion that western people had lost their soul; this was at the heart of the 'deadly encounter between western modernity and noble cultures and natures throughout the world.'<sup>88</sup> As a corrective to the latter, he advocated the importance of 'wilderness' (contact with nature), most significantly with Ian Player's Wilderness School.<sup>89</sup> As a corrective to the former, he advocated contact with 'primitive', 'noble' cultures. Van der Post's romanticised and essentialised view of the Bushmen, which was at the heart of much of his success as an author, film-maker, and advocate of 'wilderness' and other New Age causes, has been well-documented.<sup>90</sup> In Vera, whose work amongst the *amagqira* was predicated on similar grounds (and who, as we have seen, also had a penchant for self-invention, albeit to a lesser degree than Van der Post)<sup>91</sup> he found an ally in his quest to establish a 'rooted' Jungian institute in Africa. According to Jones, Laurens at this stage of his life



---

all divisions between superpowers or between political Right and Left as neurotic disassociations, reflecting on the world stage what was happening in the divided psyche of Modern Man.' Frank McLynn, *Carl Gustav Jung*, 467. A good example of Vera's application of it is found in her archival collection at UCT Libraries. A common practice at the CGHCJS was for visiting analysts to send ahead reading lists. One such analyst (Dr Gustav Dreifuss, who visited CGHCJS in 1990) requested as required reading a chapter titled 'Shadow, Destructiveness and Evil' (from *Power in the Helping Professions* by Adolf Guggenbühl-Craig, 1982) to be read in preparation for his visit. The article describes evil and destructiveness in terms of shadow projected onto the world. On a photocopy of the chapter Vera has written a note: 'In my view this [projection of shadow] is the tragic aspect of the black unrest. Evil is culturally projected onto witches, sorcerers, envy and malice of associates and now on to authority especially white (not entirely without reason). The white liberals also ascribe *all* evil to the government, police and army' (original emphasis). UCT Libraries, Special Collections, BC1164, The Vera Bührmann Papers, D5, Jungian Analysis. In this view, blacks and whites projected their shadows on each other, and apartheid South Africa was simply the world's scapegoat – the rest of the world cast its racist 'shadow' onto South Africa. There was thus no critical engagement with systemic issues of power or prejudice or historical processes, despite her acknowledgement that the 'projection' by blacks upon whites was 'not entirely without reason.'

87 SAAJA Archives, Laurens van der Post to M. Vera Bührmann, 7 November 1984.

88 Malcolm Draper, 'African Wilderness.' 119.

89 Ian Player was also proselytised to Jungianism by Van der Post and was one of the founding members of the Jungian centre in Cape Town

90 For a detailed account of Van der Post's cultural essentialism, see Edwin N. Wilmsen. 'Primitive Politics in Sanctified Landscapes: The Ethnographic Fictions of Laurens van der Post', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 21, 2, 1995, 201-23. Edwin N. Wilmsen. 'Primal Anxiety, Sanctified Landscapes: The Imagery of Primitiveness in the Ethnographic Fictions of Laurens van der Post', *Visual Anthropology* 15, 2, 2002, 143-201. J. D. F. Jones, *Storyteller*, 211-39. See also Edwin N. Wilmsen, Alan Barnard, Megan Biesele, Akira Takada and Owen B. Sichone. 'To See Ourselves as We Need to See Us: Ethnography's Primitive Turn in the Early Cold War Years', *Critical African Studies*, 1, 1, 20-95.

91 As Jones put it, Laurens created so many fabrications about his life that it needed 'a skill sometimes bordering on genius' to maintain them; J.D.F. Jones, *Storyteller*, 4.

was concerning himself more and more with the political situation in South Africa,<sup>92</sup> and Jungianism was, in his view, an integral part of the solution.<sup>93</sup>

A detailed history of the founding of the Cape of Good Hope Centre for Jungian Studies has yet to be written. Such an account will reveal a far more fractured relationship between Vera and Van der Post (and the other founders of the CGHCJS) than is evident in the brief accounts that have thus far been produced.<sup>94</sup> Vera and Van der Post had very different ideas about the form the envisaged Jungian centre would take, and the function it would fulfil. The reality is that Vera's vision for a training centre would never have materialised without Van der Post's influence and fund-raising and Van der Post's desire to root Jung on the continent of Africa would not have been possible without Vera's knowledge and connections. They needed and used each other. 'The finances I leave to the men. I feel compelled to explore human resources, especially as I already did so during my recent visit to the States,' she wrote to van der Post in 1984.<sup>95</sup>

'The men,' in the form of a group of Van der Post's American friends, came through with the finances.<sup>96</sup> In 1987, the Cape of Good Hope Centre for Jungian Studies was inaugurated. By 1991, the

92 'His retreat from the publishers' lists did not mean that he was contemplating retirement. On the contrary, his energy seemed undiminished, but now he directed it into various quasi-political areas. He continued to engage himself in the affairs of his own South Africa ...' J.D.F. Jones, *Storyteller*, 365.

93 If Jung represented the psychological answer to South Africa's problems, Mangosuthu Buthelezi and the Inkatha Freedom Party represented the political solution, in Van der Post's opinion. On the collaboration between Van der Post, Ian Player, and the eccentric and controversial 'White Zulu' David Aspinall with the Zulu leader, see Malcolm Draper and Gerhard Maré, 'Going In: The Garden of England's Gaming Zookeeper and Zululand', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 29, 2, 2003. DOI: 10.1080/0305707032000075858 (online; accessed 19 September 2019). See also M. Barker, 'Who was Laurens van der Post? Part I', <http://www.swans.com/library/art19/barker142.html> (accessed 13 April 2018); M. Barker, 'Who was Laurens van der Post? Part II', <http://www.swans.com/library/art19/barker144.html> (accessed 13 April 2018).

94 Brief accounts of or references to the Centre's history can be found in the following (sometimes contradictory) sources: CGHCJS, 'Editorial: A Brief Outline of the History and Structure of the Centre', *Mantis* 1, 1988, 4-7; T.B. Kirsch, *The Jungians. A Comparative and Historical Perspective* (London: Routledge, 2000), 202-04; S. Bloch, 'Analytical Psychology in South Africa: A Response. Review of Thomas B. Kirsch's *The Jungians: A Comparative and Historical Perspective*', *The San Francisco Jung Institute Library Journal*, 21, 1, 2002, 29-32; G. Saayman, *Hunting with the Heart*, 218-43. R. Papadopoulos, 'Jung and Otherings in South Africa', 401-13. It is worth repeating that in a recent volume on the history of psychology in South Africa, the Centre is mentioned only in passing in the chapter on psychodynamic psychology; Jungianism as a separate branch of psychology is not dealt with at all. G. Hayes, 'A History of Psychoanalysis in South Africa' in C. van Ommen and D. Painter eds., *Interiors: A History of Psychology in South Africa* (South Africa: University of South Africa Press, 2008).

95 SAAJA Archives, M.V. Bührmann to Laurens van der Post, 30 October 1984.

96 The bulk of the funding came from a group of American friends cultivated by Van der Post who became known as the 'Company of Seven'. According to Jones, one of the Americans, Bob Schwarz, had told another wealthy American, Arman Simone, that when he had first met Laurens van der Post, 'Laurens had said, "If I had \$150,000, I could save the world." To which Simone replied, "Then let's fly to London and give him \$150,000!" Which, with Doug Greene, they did.' This was the money which was used to finance resident analysts such as Julian David. See J.D.F. Jones, *Storyteller*, 403-04. Further funding for a library at the Centre was separately obtained by Van der Post from another wealthy American family, the McMillans of Texas. In a letter to Julian David dated 30 December 1989, Van der Post laid out the reasons why the library ought to be named after McMillan. SAAJA Archives, Laurens van

first group of candidates completed their training and were accepted as members by the International Association of Analytical Psychology (IAAP). In the same year, an anonymous donor made a house available in Rondebosch, a suburb of Cape Town, which still serves as the premises in which SAAJA is housed. A portrait and other photographs of Vera adorn the foyer. There are no photographs of Laurens van der Post.<sup>97</sup> In 1992, the CGHCJS was reconstituted as the South African Association for Jungian Analysts (SAAJA). By 1995, SAAJA was granted training status by the IAAP.

The Cape of Good Hope Centre for Jungian Studies was thus born from an awkward alliance of these two Afrikaners. However, as Papadopoulos has pointed out, in many respects the CGHCJS was not an African institution at all, but a ‘transplant’ of the Zurich institute so beloved by Van der Post.<sup>98</sup> Like the Zurich Institute, it has remained a niche white organisation; to date it has not produced a single black graduate, let alone solve the complex racial problems that still characterise South African society three decades after the centre was established.



**Figure 5.5:** Vera Bührmann and Sir Laurens van der Post at the opening of the CG Jung Centre in Rondebosch, Cape Town, 1991. Source: SAAJA (used with permission).

- 
- der Post to Julian David, 30 December 1989. See also J.D.F. Jones, *Storyteller*, 408-10. The library was initially named the Frank N. McMillan Library but was later changed to the current Jean Albert Library.
- 97 Perhaps the publication in 2001 of Jones’s biography of Laurens van der Post has something to do with this. As Jungian analyst Rod Anderson writes, the biography ‘portrayed Sir Laurens as a mythomaniac and carefully detailed his rather chequered love life. This account not only proved devastating to Sir Laurens, but to anything associated with him, not least of all Jungian psychology.’ A. Samuels, R. Anderson, S. Austin, J. Merchant, V. Kast, T. Kirsch and L. Wahba, ‘Reactions to Jung. What (if Anything) Should IAAP Do About the Bad Press He Gets? An International Think Tank About the Reputation of Analytical Psychology’ in Pramila Bennett, ed., *Cape Town 2007: Journeys, Encounters: Clinical, Communal, Cultural. Proceedings of the 17th IAAP Congress for Analytical Psychology* (Einsiedeln, Switzerland: Daimon, 2009), 519-22.
- 98 R.K. Papadopoulos, ‘Jung and Otherings in South Africa,’ 84.



## Conclusion

Three major areas of activity engaged Vera during the latter years of her life (1960-1995). The first was her institutional work as a child psychotherapist. In this capacity, she is still celebrated as the initiator of the children's psychiatric service at the Red Cross Hospital for Children, and for her contribution to the treatment and education of autistic children. It is tempting to see a 'golden thread' running through Vera's life: her own illnesses as a child, coupled with her exposure to the deleterious effect that her sister's mental illness had on her nephews, her own childlessness, and her many years of experience working in maternal and child welfare services that created within her a desire to alleviate the sufferings of children afflicted with mental problems. Her institutional work could thus be the fulfilment and apotheosis of this process. The existence of such a 'golden thread' is, however, problematic, for several reasons. First, much of the evidence for Vera's childhood illnesses and her developing desire to alleviate suffering is based on a late-life retelling of events (see Chapter 2). Second, the image of the caring psychiatrist with a life-long devotion to children is marred by her work with the Dietse Kinderfonds (see Chapter 3). Third, the letter she wrote to Robert Hobson in 1965 suggests that there may well have been an element of chance rather than deliberation in the starting of the service at the Red Cross Hospital. The contribution made by others to the founding of the service also merits further consideration.

The second area of activity, her cross-cultural psychiatry research, very clearly began by accident rather than design. More than the other activities, it was this that led to the creation of an image of Vera Bührmann (to which she contributed) that still persists – the image of a person who underwent a personal transformation which resulted in a volte-face regarding previously held political views. As we have seen, there is no evidence to support such an image. An examination of Vera's published works, as well as an in-depth investigation of associated archival sources, has shown that the racial prejudice that characterised her early years as a member of the Afrikaner radical right persisted. Indeed, *this* was the golden thread that ran through her life: her Afrikaner identity and her steadfast adherence to the racial politics of the tradition that shaped it.

To some degree the third activity, the establishment of a Jungian training centre, was equally dependent upon chance; if it had not been for the fortuitous intervention of Sir Laurens van der Post in 1984, it is highly improbable that a Jungian training centre would have been established at all. The political situation in South Africa, the relative obscurity of analytical psychology in both academia and in the ordinary person's perception, and a lack of funds are amongst the many factors that would have made it almost impossible for Vera to establish a Jungian centre without the assistance Sir Laurens van der Post was able to provide. But, as we have seen, her awkward association with and ostensible differences from Van der Post masked several similarities, such as their shared penchant for self-invention and their racial romanticism premised on ideologies of archetypal difference.



## Chapter 6. Conclusion

Vera Bührmann's legacy is well-established; one might even say that it is cast in stone, at least on the façade of the Vera School. Her continued presence is felt in institutions such as the Department of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry at UCT, where an imposing portrait of her hangs in one of the rooms, along with an inscription which, ironically, contains several errors of the type common to the mythology surrounding Vera, e.g., that she received an honorary doctorate from UCT at the same time as Nelson Mandela, and other factual inaccuracies. A portrait of Vera adorns the foyer of the CG Jung Institute Building in Rondebosch, from which the ghost of Sir Laurens van der Post, without whom the Jungian centre would not have existed, appears to have been driven. But more significant than these corporeal representations is the spirit of Vera Bührmann which lives on in many of those who knew her, were trained and inspired by her, and who are still attempting to further the work she initiated. At seminars and conferences, her memory is frequently evoked. As recently as August 2019, at an IAAP conference in Vienna, delegates from SAAJA delivered a presentation in which they state, 'Our modest hope is to build on Vera's work, to break down barriers, to show remorse for ancestral hurt and to offer a healing path through a new pattern of dialogue.'<sup>1</sup>

As I read that statement on the SAAJA website, I could not help wondering if the 'remorse for ancestral hurt' included remorse for Vera's persistent racist attitude. Or was it simply the most recent iteration of the myth of Vera as bridge builder and embracer of the Other?

Vera Bührmann's life began long before she was born in 1910. It began with a young Hollander who came to South Africa in the middle of the nineteenth century in search of wealth. This he found in the form of land. He also found a people with whom he so closely identified that he became as one with them. He put down roots on the South African Highveld and established a family securely tethered to the traditions and *weltanschauung* of the frontier Boers who were his adopted countrymen.

---

<sup>1</sup> 'Dialogue between Jungian Analysts and African Traditional Healers', <https://jungsouthernafrica.co.za/newsite2019/traditional-health-practitioners/> (accessed 1 November 2019).

Vera grew up in the bosom of a large and mostly caring family on De Emigratie, the farm established almost half a century before her birth by her grandfather. The tradition he passed on was tempered by the tragedy and turmoil occasioned by the South African War in which her parents and older siblings were embroiled. Her childhood coincided with the creation of Afrikaner myths that were forged from tales of Boer bravery and British brutality that emerged in the aftermath of that war. She reached maturity at a time when the world was in the throes of a deep economic crisis. Against great odds, the Ermelo *plaasnooi* diligently and courageously pursued her quest to qualify as a doctor, which she did at English-speaking universities (Wits and UCT) which were far from liberal. The flamboyant Raymond Dart and the dour Matthew Drennan, both of whom taught anatomy within a racially prejudicial framework, were figures from her university years that had a lasting impact on her. She grew to adulthood amidst the growing threat of a world-wide conflagration precipitated by the emergence and spread of fascism in Europe. As the conflicting forces abroad were mirrored more and more in South Africa, Vera remained true to the tradition she was raised in by steadfastly aligning herself with the Afrikaner anti-war movement known as the Ossewa-Brandwag. Long after its demise she continued its programme of resistance through her association with its sister organisation, the Dietse Kinderfonds.

A failed marriage was the probable catalyst which compelled her to travel to the United Kingdom in the 1950s to further her medical career and to seek psychological balm for her emotional troubles. The former she accomplished by design, the latter by accident. She had gone to England contemplating a Freudian analysis; instead she 'discovered' Jung, first abstractly in a lecture about him, and then in the flesh, in Switzerland, where she met him on two occasions which she later vividly recalled. When she returned to South Africa at the dawn of the 1960s, she was a qualified child psychiatrist and a qualified Jungian psychotherapist.

During the last three-and-a-half decades of her life, Vera was engaged in three major activities: her institutional work as a child psychiatrist, a lengthy cross-cultural psychiatry research project with Mongezi Tiso, a Xhosa healer, and the establishment of an internationally accredited training centre for Jungian psychotherapy in South Africa. Typically, she accomplished a great deal in all three areas, so much so that the University of Cape Town bestowed an honorary degree on her in

recognition of her work in these fields.<sup>2</sup> Twenty-one years after her death, she is still celebrated for these contributions.

As I stated in the Introduction, one of the tropes most commonly used with reference to Vera is that of ‘pioneer’. In the pages of this study, I have attempted to provide the context within which this reputation was forged. Examples abound. Her medical training in the 1930s, in a male-dominated English institution such as UCT, and in the face of severe financial and domestic challenges, was courageous, even inspiring. Her institutional work with children, which had as one consequence the establishment of specialised schools for autistic children, was path-breaking and important to many generations of children and parents who have benefitted. Equally indicative of her pioneering spirit was her willingness to venture into the field of transcultural psychiatry, a field in which she had no training, and her novel use of Jungian psychiatric concepts to assess and explain the methods used by Mongezi Tiso and his school of *amagqira*. And there would be no accredited Jungian training Centre in South Africa if it were not for the energetic spirit she brought to this project in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

It was precisely these unusual qualities that piqued my curiosity and attracted my attention to Vera’s life story to begin with. But, as stated in the Introduction, it was the trope of Vera Bührmann as exemplar of racial transformation that became the focal point of my investigation. That Vera Bührmann was a ‘dyed-in-the-wool’ Afrikaner nationalist who identified with the principles and programmes of the radical right is beyond question. She endorsed and actively promoted the virulent racism associated with this faction. But so too did other Afrikaners who later underwent a transformation so complete that they openly and often at great personal risk became critics and opponents of Afrikaner nationalism in all its forms – people such as Bram Fischer, Beyers Naude and Breyten Breytenbach, to name but a few. It was evidence of this kind of transformation that I hoped to find as I delved deeper and deeper into Vera’s life.

---

2 University of Cape Town. ‘Citation delivered by Professor J. V. O. Reid, Deputy Vice-Chancellor, in presenting Maatje Vera Bührmann to the Chancellor at the Graduation Ceremony at 10.30 a.m. on 29 June 1990 for the award of the Honorary Degree Doctor of Medicine.’

Unfortunately, I could not find it. Instead, I found evidence that her ideological convictions remained largely unchanged throughout her life. She never renounced her past association with the Ossewa-Brandwag. She never disavowed the racist ideological basis of the Dietse Kinderfonds in whose service she willingly placed her medical knowledge for the implementation of a scheme which was morally and ethically questionable. In fact, she maintained her ties with the DKF for almost three decades, attempting only to hide her involvement, or ‘spin’ it in such a way that it appeared to have been some sort of humanitarian effort. Even in her transcultural psychiatry research, which is where I most expected to find evidence of a fundamental shift in Vera’s racial politics, I found firm evidence of her continued commitment to an ideology of racial difference. There is no doubt that she developed a warm relationship with Mr Tiso and his wife, with Joseph Gqomfa and with a few other black people she encountered, but, as sociologist Susan Fiske has shown, it is quite possible to hold ambivalent or contradictory views about other groups, leading to an attitude of paternalistic prejudice.<sup>3</sup> Evidence of generalised racial prejudice is found widely in her writings. She used Jungian concepts to reframe the essentialised language of race that she had learned in childhood and which had been reinforced over the years by her involvement with the radical right. Her writings further show an unsettling dishonesty in her attempts to recast her own past, making it seem as if from childhood she had enjoyed a close and relatively equal relationship with Africans. But it is the personal reflections retained in her archives that offer the clearest instances of her lingering racism. In unguarded moments, in private jottings and musings, her deep-seated racial prejudice bubbles to the surface and is applied not only to black people in general, but even to the Tisos, whom she regarded as her professional counterparts – and a Jew towards whom she felt deep affection.

Where does this reinterpretation leave me as the author of a revisionist account of Vera’s life? The writing of biography is indeed an awkward business; as Jacobs and Bank state, ‘issues of privacy and the extent of revelations about personal lives which impact on professional achievement’ are a potential source of discomfort to the subject (if still living), to those close to the subject, and the

---

3 See, for example, Susan Fiske, ‘Managing Ambivalent Prejudices: Smart-but-Cold and Warm-but-Dumb Stereotypes’, *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 639, 1, 2012, 33-48. doi:10.1177/0002716211418444.

biographer.<sup>4</sup> I did indeed feel a deep sense of discomfort as my investigation began more and more to assume the form of an exposé. At times I wondered if I had the right to pursue the line of investigation I was taking. Did my responsibility to respect Vera's reputation and legacy take precedence over my responsibility to test the authenticity of that legacy and, especially, her self-representation?

It was not my intention, when I started this study, to 'tarnish' Vera Bührmann's reputation and legacy. Many aspects of her life are indeed worthy of emulation, and I hope that I have managed to capture something of the pioneering essence of this formidable woman. Those who knew her, particularly in later life, could no doubt point to other qualities she possessed that are worth emulating which this study has not addressed. I am left feeling saddened that, despite the many battles Vera fought and won, there was one she was not able to win – the battle to overcome the deeply ingrained racial prejudice that was inculcated in her from birth.

Despite my discomfort, I persisted. Future assessments of Vera's legacy must also take account of the contradictions in her self-representation that this study has exposed. The international Jungian establishment is still trying to resolve issues of racism and anti-Semitism that cling to Jung. Perhaps that process will help South African Jungians to come to terms with the 'shadow' side of their much-venerated founding 'ancestor', Dr M. Vera Bührmann.

---

4 Nancy Jacobs and Andrew Bank, 'Biography in Post-apartheid South Africa', 175.

# Bibliography

## Archival Collections

Archive for Contemporary Affairs, University of the Free State. PV32 A.E. Van der Merwe Collection.

Archive Service, Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children, NHS Foundation Trust.

National Archives, Pretoria. W73, H.T. Bührmann Collection.

National Archives, Pretoria, A1500, J.R. Bührmann Collection.

National Archives, Pretoria. A1732, Dietse Kinderfonds Collection.

North-West University Library. Die Ossewa-Brandwag Argief.

SABC Radio Archives. A78/62. 'Burgers van '48 (1)'. Schalk Botha, speaking to Nic Swanepoel. April 1978.

Southern African Society for Jungian Analysts, Cape Town. SAAJA Archives.

University of Cape Town Libraries, BC1164, The Vera Bührmann Papers.

## Books, Book Chapters, Journal Articles, Theses

Anderson, J. 'My Tribute to Dr M.V. Bührmann', *Mantis*, 10 (3), 1998, 32.

Anon. 'Diets of Duits', *Zuid-Afrika Maandblad*, 25, 6.

Anon. 'News and Comments', *Pediatrics*, 4, 6, 1949, 851-52.

Anon. 'Overseas Staffer Reports on Africa', *Mayovox*, 10 December 1949.

Anon. 'People and Events', *South African Medical Journal*, 67, 12 January 1985, 69.

Anon. 'Stealazine Symposium', *Medical Proceedings*, 6, 1960.

Anon. *Iets oor die Ossewa-Brandwag* (Pretoria: Voorligtingsafdeling, Ossewa-Brandwag, 1946).

Anon. *St Mary's Hospital News Bulletin*, June 1949, 3.

Ansbacher, H.L. and R.R. Ansbacher, eds. *The Individual Psychology of Alfred Adler. A Systematic Presentation in Selections from His Writings* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1958).

Bank, A. "'Broederbande" [Brotherly Bonds]: Afrikaner Nationalist Masculinity and African Sexuality in the Writings of Werner Eiselen's Students, Stellenbosch University, 1930-1936', *Anthropology Southern Africa*, 38, 3-4, 2015, 180-197.

Bank, A. 'Fathering *Volkekunde*: Race and Culture in the Ethnological Writings of Werner Eiselin, Stellenbosch University, 1926-1936', *Anthropology Southern Africa*, 38, 3-4, 2015, 163-179.

Bank, A. *Pioneers of the Field. South Africa's Women Anthropologists* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2016).



- Berg, A. 'Can We Prevent Colonization of the Mind? Traditional Culture in South Africa' in Ann Casement, ed., *Who Owns Jung?* (London: Karnac Books Ltd., 2007), 93-110.
- Berg, A. *Connecting with South Africa. Cultural Communication and Understanding* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2012).
- Blake, A. *Wit Terroriste: Afrikaner-Saboteurs in die Ossewabrandwagjare* (Kaapstad: Tafelberg, 2018).
- Blignaut, C. 'Volksmoeders in die Kollig: 'n Historiese-Teoretiese Verkenning van die Rol van Vroue in Die Ossewa-Brandwag, 1938-1954', (MA dissertation, North-West University, 2012).
- Blignaut, C. 'Doing Gender is Unavoidable: Women's Participation in the Core Activities of the Ossewa-Brandwag, 1938-1943', *Historia*, 58, 2, 2013, 1-18.
- Blignaut, C. 'From Fund-Raising to Freedom Day: The Nature of Women's General Activities in the Ossewa-Brandwag', *New Contree: A Journal of Historical and Human Sciences for Southern Africa*, 66, 2013, 121-50.
- Blignaut, C. "'Die Hand aan die Wieg Regeer die Land [The Hand that Rocks the Cradle Rules the Land]": Exploring the Agency and Identity of Women in the Ossewabrandwag, 1939-1954', *South African Historical Journal*, 67, 1, 2015, 47-63.
- Blignaut, C. "'Kan die Vrou Haar Volk Dien deur Haar Huis?'" Afrikanerpolitiek en Vroue in die Ossewa-Brandwag, 1942-1954', *Journal for Contemporary History*, 40, 1, 2015, 102-24.
- Blignaut, C. "'Skep Julle Kommando's in Reddingslaers om! Een vir Almal, Almal vir Elkeen!'" Die Ossewa-Brandwag se Maatskaplike Beleid van Sosiale Volksorg, 1943-1952', *New Contree: A Journal of Historical and Human Sciences for Southern Africa*, 74, 2015, 72-89.
- Blignaut, C. "'Rebellie Sonder Gewere": Vroue se Gebruik van Kultuur as Versetmiddel teen die Agtergrond van die Ossewa-Brandwag se Dualisties Karakter', *SAJCH/SATK*, 30, 2, Dec. 2016, 109-31.
- Blignaut, C. and du Pisani, K. "'n Onselfstandige Gesin Beteken 'n Onselfstandige Volk": Organiese Nasionalisme en die Amptelike Gesinsbeleid van die Ossewa-Brandwag', *Historia*, 63, 2, 2018, 138-60.
- Bloch, S. 'Analytical Psychology in South Africa: A Response. Review of Thomas B. Kirsch's *The Jungians; A Comparative and Historical Perspective*', *The San Francisco Jung Institute Library Journal*, 21, 1, 2002, 29-32.
- Boswell, J. *The Life of Samuel Johnson. LL.D. Vol. 1* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1952).
- Bouws, J. 'Bosman, Jan Gysbert Hugo,' in D.J. Potgieter, ed., *Standard Encyclopaedia of Southern Africa Volume 2 Bac-Cal* (London: Nasionale Boekhandel, 1970), 433.
- Brewster, F. *African Americans and Jungian Psychology. Leaving the Shadows* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2017).
- Brink, E. 'Man-Made Women: Gender, Class and the Ideology of the Volksmoeder' in C. Walker, ed., *Women and Gender in Southern Africa to 1945* (Cape Town: David Phillip, 1990), 273-92.
- Brink, E. 'Die Volksmoeder: 'n Beeld van 'n Vrou' in A.M. Grundlingh and S. Huigen, eds., *Van Volksmoeder tot Fokopolisiekar: Kritiese Opstelle oor Afrikaanse Herinneringsplekke* (Stellenbosch: Sun Press, 2008), 7-16.
- Bühmann, J. 'Die Bühmanns se Skaapboerdery' in D. de Villiers and B. de Villiers (van der Merwe), eds., *Bühmann Familieboek. H.T. Bühmann en sy Nageslag* (Cape Town: Private Publication, 2005), 62-68.

- Bührmann, J. 'Pa-Rudolph se Verhale' in D. de Villiers and B. de Villiers (van der Merwe), eds., *Bührmann Familieboek. H.T. Bührmann en sy Nageslag* (Cape Town: Private Publication, 2005), 49-51.
- Bührmann, J.R. 'Briewe van JR Bührmann aan sy Famielie Tydens die Anglo-Boereoorlog, 1899-1902', *Die Kultuurhistorikus*, 17, 2, n.d., 5-38.
- Bührmann, J.R. 'Briewe van JR Bührmann aan sy Famielie Tydens die Anglo-Boereoorlog, 1899-1902, Aflewering 2', *Die Kultuurhistorikus*, 40, 2, 2003, 5-35.
- CGHCJS. 'Editorial: A Brief Outline of the History and Structure of the Centre', *Mantis*, 1, 1988, 4-7.
- Clingman, S. *Bram Fischer. Afrikaner Revolutionary* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1998).
- Coetzee, J.M. 'The Mind of Apartheid: Geoffrey Cronjé (1907-)', *Social Dynamics*, 17, 1, 1991, 1-35.
- Cronjé, G. 'Die Formulering van 'n Gesinsbeleid.' In J.R. Lükhoff, ed., *Report of the Family Congress, 4th to 7th April 1961 in the AULA, University of Pretoria* (Pretoria: Steering Committee of the Family Year and Family Congress, 1961).
- Cronjé, G. *'n Tuiste vir die Nageslag – Die Blywende Oplossing van Suid-Afrika se Rassevraagstuk* (Johannesburg: Publicité, 1945).
- Dalal, F. 'Jung: A Racist', *British Journal of Psychotherapy*, 4, 3, 1988, 263-79.
- Davenport, T.R.H. *South Africa. A Modern History* (London: Macmillan, 1991).
- Davis, G. 'A Tribute to Vera Bührman', *Mantis*, 10, 3, 37-38.
- De Lange, E. *Die Verhaal van die Dietse Kinderfonds* (Potchefstroom: Potchefstroom Herald, 1970).
- De Vaal, J.B. 'Die Rol van João Albasini in die Geskiedenis van die Transvaal' in A. Kieser et al., eds., *Archives Yearbook for South African History* (Pretoria: Government Printer, 1953).
- De Villiers, B. 'De Emigratie, 30 Mei 1901' in J. Ferreira, ed., *Boereoorlogstories: 34 Verhale oor die Oorlog van 1899-1902* (Pretoria: JL van Schaik, 1998), 100-02.
- De Villiers, B. 'Historiese Oorsig' in D. de Villiers and B. de Villiers (van der Merwe), eds., *Bührmann Familieboek. H.T. Bührmann en sy Nageslag* (Cape Town: Private Publication, 2005), 5-7.
- De Villiers, D. and Biebie de Villiers (van der Merwe). 'Samewerking' in D. de Villiers and B. de Villiers (van der Merwe), eds., *Bührmann Familieboek. H.T. Bührmann en sy Nageslag* (Cape Town: private publication, 2005), 69-71.
- De Villiers, J.C. *Healers, Helpers and Hospitals. A History of Military Medicine in the Anglo-Boer War. Volume 1* (Pretoria: Protea, 2008).
- Delius, P. *The Land Belongs to Us: The Pedi Polity, the Boers, and the British in the Nineteenth-Century Transvaal* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).
- Department of National Education. *Report of the Committee of Inquiry into the Treatment, Education and Care of Autistic Children* (Pretoria: Government Printer, 1971).
- Draper, M. 'African Wilderness® Pty Ltd: An Authentic Encounter with the Big Five, Death and the Meaning of Life' in Chris Ryan, Stephen J. Page and Michelle Aiken, eds., *Taking Tourism to the Limits: Issues, Concepts and Managerial Approaches* (London: Routledge, 2011), 113-28.

- Draper, M. and G. Maré. 'Going In: the Garden of England's Gaming Zookeeper and Zululand', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 29, 2, 2003. Online: DOI: 10.1080/0305707032000075858 (accessed 19 September 2019).
- Du Toit, M. 'The Domesticity of Afrikaner Nationalism: *Volksmoeders* and the ACVV, 1904-1929', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 29, 1, March 2003, 155-76.
- Dubow, S. 'Afrikaner Nationalism, Apartheid and the Conceptualization of "Race"', *The Journal of African History*, 32, 2, 1992, 209-37.
- Dubow, S. *Scientific Racism in Modern South Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).
- Dubow, S. 'Human Origins, Race Typology, and the Other Raymond Dart', *African Studies* 55, 1, 1996, 1-30.
- Dubow, S. 'Introduction: South Africa's 1940s' in S. Dubow and A. Jeeves, eds., *South Africa's 1940s: Worlds of Possibilities* (Cape Town: Double Storey, 2005).
- Dubow, S. 'White South Africa and the South Africanisation of Science: Humankind or Kinds of Humans?' in P. Bonner, A. Esterhuysen, and T. Jenkins, eds., *A Search for Origins. Science, History, and South Africa's 'Cradle of Humankind'* (Johannesburg, Wits University Press, 2007), 9-22.
- Dubow, S. 'Racial Irredentism, Ethnogenesis, and White Supremacy in High-Apartheid South Africa', *Kronos*, 41, November 2015, 236-64.
- Duvenage, G.D.J. *Die Gedenktrek van 1938. 'n Bedevaart en 'n Kruistog* (published by Prof. G. D. J. Duvenage, 1988).
- Engelbrecht, C.L. *Die Bank van Oom Bossie* (Pretoria, Volkskas, 1978).
- Engelbrecht, S.P. *Geschiedenis van de Nederduits Hervormde Kerk in Zuid-Afrika Deel 1* (Amsterdam en Pretoria: J.H. de Busy, 1920).
- Erasmus, D.J. 'Re-thinking the Great Trek: A Study of the Nature and Development of the Boer Community in the Ohrigstad/Lydenburg Area, 1845-1877', (MA dissertation, Rhodes University, 1995).
- Feinstein, A. *A History of Autism. Conversations with the Pioneers* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010).
- Feldman, M, Friedman, L. S. and Brandt, L. J., eds., *Sleisenger and Fordtran's Gastrointestinal and Liver Disease: Pathophysiology, Diagnosis, Management* (Philadelphia, Saunders/Elsevier, circa 2010).
- Fiske, S.T. 'Managing Ambivalent Prejudices: Smart-but-Cold and Warm-but-Dumb Stereotypes', *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 639, 1, 2012, 33-48.  
doi:10.1177/0002716211418444.
- Fokkens, A.M. 'Afrikaner Unrest Within South Africa During the Second World War and the Measures Taken to Suppress it', *Journal for Contemporary History*, 37, 2, 2012, 123-42.
- Fordham, M. *The Making of an Analyst. A Memoir* (London: Free Association Books).
- France, P. 'From Eulogy to Biography: The French Academic Eloge' in P. France and W. St Clair, eds., *Mapping Lives. The Uses of Biography* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2002), 83-102.
- Furlong, P.J. *Between Crown and Swastika: The Impact of the Radical Right on the Afrikaner Nationalist Movement in the Fascist Era* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press; Hannover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1991).
- Giliomee, H. 'The Beginnings of Afrikaner Ethnic Consciousness, 1850-1915' in Leroy Vail, ed., *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa* (London: James Curry, 1989), 21-54.

- Giliomee, H. *The Afrikaners. Biography of a People* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 2003).
- Giliomee, H. *The Last Afrikaner Leaders. A Supreme Test of Power* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 2012).
- Gillespie, S. 'Historical Notes on the First South African Psycho-analytic Society', *Psycho-analytic Psychotherapy in South Africa*, 1, 1, Spring 1992, 1-6.
- Gillis, L. 'A Tribute to Vera Bührman', *Mantis*, 10, 3, 27.
- Gillis, L. 'Comment: Vera Bührmann, the Pride of South African Psychiatry', *Psychotherapeia & Psychology in Practice*, 36, March 1985, 4.
- Gordon, R. 'Apartheid's Anthropologists: The Genealogy of Afrikaner Anthropology', *American Ethnologist*, 15, 3, 1988, 535-53.
- Grundlingh, A. 'The Anglo-Boer War in 20th-Century Afrikaner Consciousness' in F. Pretorius, ed., *Scorched Earth* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 2017), 230-49.
- Hamburger, T. 'Psycho-analytic Psychotherapy in South Africa. The Johannesburg Psycho-analytic Psychotherapy Study Group: A Short History', *Psycho-analytic Psychotherapy in South Africa*, 1, 1, 1992, 62-71.
- Hayes, G. 'A History of Psychoanalysis in South Africa' in C. van Ommen and D. Painter, eds., *Interiors: A History of Psychology in South Africa* (South Africa: University of South Africa Press, c. 2008), 182-203.
- Hirst, M. 'Cape Town August 2007. Promoting Dialogue Between Jungian Analysts and African Traditional Practitioners in South Africa', *Curare*, 32, 1+2, 2009, 145-49.
- Hofmeyr, I. 'Building a Nation from Words: Afrikaans Language, Literature and Ethnic Identity, 1902-1924' in S. Marks and S. Trapido, eds., *The Politics of Race, Class and Nationalism* (New York: Longman, 1987), 95-123.
- Hofmeyr, I. 'Popularizing History: The Case of Gustav Preller', *Journal of African History* 29, 3, 1988, 521-35.
- Hough, S. 'n Kritiese Onderzoek na die Afrikanerbees as Ideologiese Kulturele Fenomeen binne die Konteks van Afrikanernasionalisme' (MA thesis, Stellenbosch, 2010).
- International Union of Child Welfare. *International Union of Child Welfare from 1956 to 1958* (Geneva: International Union of Child Welfare, 1958).
- Jones, J.D.F. *Storyteller. The Many Lives of Laurens van der Post* (London: John Murray, 2001).
- Jones, T.F. *Psychiatry, Mental Institutions, and the Mad in Apartheid South Africa* (London: Routledge, 2012).
- Jordaan, A. *Lothar Neethling – 'n Lewe Vertel* (Pretoria: Litera, 2013).
- Joubert, E. *'n Wonderlike Geweld: Jeugherinneringe* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 2005).
- Keene, R. *Our Graduates – 1924-2012* (Johannesburg: Adler Museum of Medicine, Faculty of Health Sciences, Wits University, 2013).
- Kemp, S. *My Life: The Making of an Afrikaner Revolutionary in the South African Liberation Struggle* (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, 2017).
- Kirsch, T.B. *The Jungians. A Comparative and Historical Perspective* (London: Routledge, 2000).
- Kirsch, T.B. 'Finding Fred Plaut', *The San Francisco Jung Institute Library Journal*, 2005, 24, 3, 35-37.

- Kirsch, T.B. 'The Legacy of C. G. Jung' in Ann Casement, ed., *Who Owns Jung?* (London: Karnac Books Ltd., 2007), 153-67.
- Koorts, L. *D.F. Malan and the Rise of Afrikaner Nationalism* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 2015)
- Kooy, G.A. *Een Eeuw Boerenlewen in Zuidoost-Transvaal* (Wageningen, H. Veenman & Zonen N.V., 1965).
- Korf, L. 'D.F. Malan: A Political Biography' (PhD thesis, University of Stellenbosch, 2010).
- Laubscher, B.J.F. *The Pagan Soul* (Cape Town: Timmins, 1975).
- Lilja, F. 'Inside the Enclosed Farm: Farmers, Shepherds, and the Introduction of New Technology in Cape Wool Farming, 1865-1950', *IRSH*, 63, 1, 2018, 63-89. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020859018000019>
- Lombard, R.T.J. *Ermelo 1880-1980* (Ermelo: Ermelo Town Council, 1980).
- Louw, J. *In the Shadow of Table Mountain: A History of the University of Cape Town Medical School and its Associated Teaching Hospitals up to 1950, with Glimpses Into The Future* (Cape Town: Struik, 1969).
- M.E.R. (Mimie E. Rothmann), A. Bouwer, A. Rothmann, R. Van Reenen. *M. E. R. 'n Kosbare Erfenis: Briewe 1916-1975* (Kaapstad: Tafelberg, 1977).
- Marx, C. 'The Ossewabrandwag as a Mass Movement, 1939-1941', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 20, 2, 1994, 200-02.
- Marx, C. *Oxwagon Sentinel: Radical Afrikaner Nationalism and the History of the 'Ossewabrandwag'* (Pretoria: University of Pretoria Press, 2008).
- McKenzie, J. *A Man of His Time – Brigadier General Sir Duncan McKenzie* (Pietermaritzburg: Triple Creek Publishing, 2011).
- McLynn, F. *Carl Gustav Jung. A Biography* (London: Black Swan, 1997).
- McMillan III, F. N. *Finding Jung. Frank N. McMillan Jr. A Life in Quest of the Lion* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2012).
- Media Monitoring Project. 'The News in Black and White: An Investigation Into Racial Stereotyping in the Media.' (Media Monitoring Project report, 1999).
- Meredith, M. *Afrikaner Odyssey: The Life and Times of the Reitz Family* (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, 2017).
- Minde, M. 'History of the Mental Health Services in South Africa. Part V. Natal', *SAMJ* 49, 9, 1 March 1975, 322-26.
- Minde, M. 'History of Medicine in South Africa. Part XIV. Psychiatric Education', *SAMJ* 51, 12 March 1977, 210-14.
- Morris, A.G. 'Biological Anthropology at the Southern Tip of Africa: Carrying European Baggage in an African Context', *Current Anthropology*, 53, Supplement 5, April 2012, S152-S160.
- Mostert, D. ed., *Gedenkboek van die Ossewaens op die pad van Suid-Afrika, Eeufees: 1838-1939* (Afrikaanse Taal- en Kultuurvereniging: Hartenbos. National Press: Cape Town, 1940).
- Murray, B.K. *Wits. The Early Years. A History of The University of The Witwatersrand Johannesburg and its Precursors 1896-1936* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1982).
- Nasaw, D. 'Historians and Biography', *American Historical Review*, June 2009, 573-78.

- Nasson, W. 'Waging Total War in South Africa: Some Centenary Writings on the Anglo-Boer War, 1899-1902', *The Journal of Military History*, 66, 3, 2002, 813-28.
- Nasson, W. *The War for South Africa* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 2010).
- O'Meara, D. *Volkskapitalisme: Class, Capital and Ideology in the Development of Afrikaner Nationalism, 1934-1948* (Johannesburg: Ravan, 1983).
- Papadopoulos, R. 'Jung and Otherings in South Africa' in P. Bennett, ed., *Cape Town 2007: Journeys, Encounters: Clinical, Communal, Cultural. Proceedings of the 17th IAAP Congress for Analytical Psychology* (Einsiedeln, Switzerland: Daimon, 2009), 76-85.
- Parker, I. 'Psychoanalysis and Critical Psychology, in D. Hook, ed., *Introduction to Critical Psychology* (Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press, 2004), 139-61.
- Parle, J. *States of Mind: Searching For Mental Health in Natal and Zululand, 1868-1918* (Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2007).
- Phillips, H. *The University of Cape Town, 1918-1948: The Formative Years* (Cape Town, UCT/UCT Press, 1993).
- Plaut, Fred. *Between Losing and Finding. The Life of an Analyst* (London: Free Association Books, 2004).
- Pretorius, F. 'The Fate of the Boer Women and Children' in F. Pretorius, ed., *Scorched Earth* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 2017), 36-59.
- Raper, P. *Dictionary of Southern African Place Names* (Johannesburg: Lowry, 1987).
- Rasool, C. 'Rethinking Documentary History and South African Political Biography', *South African Review of Sociology* 41, 1, 2010, 28-55.
- Reynolds, C. *Konsentrasiekampsterftes Gedurende die Anglo-Boereoorlog 1899-1902: 'n Genealogiese Databasis van Vroue, Kinders en Bejaardes van Suid-Afrika* (Pretoria: FAK, 2013).
- Reynolds, P. 'Gleanings and Leavings: Encounters in Hindsight' in Andrew Bank and Leslie J. Bank, eds., *Inside African Anthropology: Monica Wilson and her Interpreters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 308-19.
- Roloff, L. 'Dr. Vera Bührmann – Psychotherapist and Psychoanalyst of Heart', *Mantis*, 10, 3, 37-38.
- Roper, K. 'The Cross-Cultural Application of Analytical Psychology: A Consideration of the Research of M. Vera Bührmann', *South African Journal of Psychology* 22, 3, 1992, 157-62.
- Saayman, G. 'Vera Bührmann: Living in Two Worlds', *Mantis*, 10, 3, 51-57.
- Saayman, G. *Hunting with the Heart. A Vision Quest to Spiritual Emergence* (Rondebosch: Kima Global Publishers, 2007).
- Samuels, A. 'Global Politics, American Hegemony and Vulnerability, and Jungian-psychosocial Studies: Why there are no Winners in the Battle Between Trickster Pedro Urdemales and the Gringos', *International Journal of Jungian Studies* 7, 3, 2015, 227-41.
- Samuels, A. 'Open Letter from a Group of Jungians on the Question of Jung's Writings on and Theories About "Africans"', *British Journal of Psychotherapy*, 34, 4, 2018, 673-78.
- Samuels, A. 'Jung and "Africans"', *International Journal of Jungian Studies*, 10, 2, 2018, 122-34.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/19409052.2018.1454647>

- Samuels, A., Anderson, R., Austen, S., Merchant, J., Kast, V., Kirsch, T. and Wahba, L. 'Reactions to Jung: What (if anything) Should IAAP Do About the Bad Press He Gets? An International Think Tank about the Reputation of Analytical Psychology' in P. Bennett, ed., *Cape Town 2007: Journeys, Encounters: Clinical, Communal, Cultural. Proceedings of the 17th IAAP Congress for Analytical Psychology* (Einsiedeln, Switzerland: Daimon, 2009), 518-39.
- Schellack, W. 'The Afrikaners' Nazi Links Revisited', *South African Historical Journal*, 27, 1, 1992, 181.
- Schoeman, J.B. 'Vera Bührmann's Approach to Cultural Psychiatry', *Psychotherapeia & Psychiatry in Practice* 36, March 1985, 7-14.
- Serfontein, J.H.P. *Brotherhood of Power. An Exposé of the Secret Afrikaner Broederbond* (London: Rex Collings Limited, 1979).
- Shain, M. *A Perfect Storm: Antisemitism in South Africa, 1930-1948* (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball Publishers, 2015).
- Shutte, A. 'Reflection in Practice as Source of Values: The Cross-cultural Creation of a Health-care Ethics in Post-Apartheid South Africa', *Journal for the Study of Religion. Festschrift for Martin Prozesky* 31, 1, 2018, 177-206.
- Slater, R. 'Die Maatskappy vir Europese Immigrasie: A Study of the Cultural Assimilation and Naturalisation of European Immigrants to South Africa 1949-1994' (MA dissertation, University of Stellenbosch, 2005).
- Snyman, J. 'The Politics of Memory: Vestiges of Trauma' in C. van der Merwe and R. Wolfswinkel, eds., *Telling Wounds. Narrative, Trauma & Memory: Working Through the SA Armed Conflicts of the 20th Century: Proceedings of the Conference Held at the University of Cape Town, 3-5 July 2002* (Stellenbosch: Van Schaik, 2002).
- Spies, S.B. *Methods of Barbarism? Roberts and Kitchener and Civilians in the Boer Republics January 1900-May 1902* (Cape Town: Human & Rousseau, 1977).
- Spock, B. 'The Child Health Institute in Rochester, Minnesota', *American Journal of Public Health*, July 1949, 854-56.
- Stanley, L. *Mourning Becomes ... Post/Memory, Commemoration and the Concentration Camps of the South African War* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2008).
- Steyn, J.C. *Tuiste in Eie Taal. Die Behoud en Staen van Afrikaans* (Kaapstad: Tafelberg, 1980).
- Steyn, J.C. *Die 100 Jaar van MER* (Kaapstad: Tafelberg, 2004).
- Steyn, R. *Louis Botha. A Man Apart* (Cape Town: Jonathan Ball, 2018).
- Swart, M.J. 'De Emigratie', *Historia*, 4, 1, 1959, 55-59.
- Swart, M.J. *Hendrik Teodor Bührmann. Sy Rol in die Transvaalse Republiek* (Cape Town: HAUM, 1963).
- Swart, M.J. 'Bührmann, Hendrik Teodor (Theodor)' in D.W. Krüger, ed., *Dictionary of South African Biography Volume II* (Pretoria: HSRC, 1972), 97-99.
- Swartz, L. 'Overview: Transcultural Psychiatry in South Africa Pt. 1', *Transcultural Psychiatric Research Review* 23, 1986, 273-303.
- Swartz, L. and Foster, D. 'Images of Culture and Mental Illness: South African Psychiatric Approaches', *Social Dynamics* 10, 1984, 17-25.

- Taylor, J.A. 'With Her Shoulder to the Wheel: The Public Life of Erika Theron (1907-1990)' (DLitt et Phil thesis, Unisa, 2010).
- Theron, E. *Sonder Hoed of Handskoen. Synde 'n Klompie Informele Herinneringe Waarin die Kind (Meestal) op Sy Naam Genoem Word* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 1983).
- Thompson, L. *The Political Mythology of Apartheid* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).
- University of Cape Town Faculty of Health Sciences, 'Truth and Reconciliation. A Process of Transformation at UCT Health Sciences Faculty' (NRF Project Report 15/1/3/21/0022, UCT Faculty of Health Sciences, 2003).
- University of Cape Town. 'Citation delivered by Professor J. V. O. Reid, Deputy Vice-Chancellor, in presenting Maatje Vera Bührmann to the Chancellor at the Graduation Ceremony at 10.30 a.m. on 29 June 1990 for the award of the Honorary Degree Doctor of Medicine.'
- University of Cape Town. *Calendar* (Cape Town: UCT, 1962).
- University of Cape Town. *Calendar* (Cape Town: UCT, 1965).
- University of Cape Town. *Calendar* (Cape Town: UCT, 1970).
- Uys, C.J. 'Smellekamp, Johan Arnold' in D. J. Potgieter, ed., *Standard Encyclopaedia of Southern Africa Volume 10 Sle-Tun* (London: Nasionale Boekhandel, 1974).
- Uys, R. 'The Lives and Deaths of Memorials: The Changing Symbolism of the 1938 Voortrekker Centenary Monuments' (MA thesis, University of the Western Cape, 2019).
- Van der Merwe, A.P. 'Onderwys en Onderwysers in Lydenburg' in *Lydenburgse Eeuftesgedenboek, 1850-1950* (Munisipaliteit van Lydenburg, 1950), 134-52.
- Van der Merwe, H.P. 'Die Voorgeskiedenis van die Republiek Lydenburg' (MA dissertation, University of Pretoria, 1940).
- Van der Merwe, R. 'Moulding Volksmoeders or Volks Enemies? Female Students at the University of Pretoria, 1920-1970', *Historia*, 56, 1, 2011, 77-100.
- Van der Merwe, W. "'Herrenvolk-bloed" vir die Afrikaner: Veertig Jaar Duitse Weeskinders (1948-1988)', *Historia* 33, 2, 1988, 78-87
- Van der Merwe, W. '*Vir 'n 'Blanke Volk': Die Verhaal van die Duitse Weeskinders van 1948* (Johannesburg: Perskor, 1988).
- Van der Post, L. *Jung and the Story of Our Time* (London: Hogarth Press, 1976).
- Van der Schyff, P.F. and Badenhorst, J. J. 'Vuurtjie in die Droë Gras' in P.F. Van der Schyff, ed., *Die Ossewabrandwag: Vuurtjie in Droë Gras* (Potchefstroom: Potchefstroomse Universiteit vir Christelike Hoër Onderwys, 1991).
- Van der Schyff, P.F. ed., *Die Ossewabrandwag: Vuurtjie in Droë Gras* (Potchefstroom: Potchefstroomse Universiteit vir Christelike Hoër Onderwys, 1991).
- Van der Walt, J.C. *Zululand True Stories* (Richards Bay: published by Dr J.C. van der Walt, 2009).
- Van der Walt, J.F.J. '*n Volk op Trek, of, 'n Kort Geskiedenis van die Ontstaan en Ontwikkeling van die Ossewabrandwag* (Johannesburg: Kultuur en Voorligtingsafdeling van die Ossewabrandwag, 1944).



- Van der Westhuizen, C. *Sitting Pretty. White Afrikaans Women in Postapartheid South Africa* (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 2017).
- Van Hartesveldt, F.R. *The Boer War. Historiography and Annotated Bibliography* (London: Greenwood Press, 2000).
- Van Heyningen, E. 'The Concentration Camps of the South African (Anglo-Boer) War, 1900-1902', *History Compass* 7, 1, 2009, 22-43.
- Van Heyningen, E. *The Concentration Camps. A Social History* (Johannesburg: Jacana, 2013).
- Van Onselen, C. 'The Social and Economic Underpinnings of Paternalism and Violence on the Maize Farms of the South-Western Transvaal, 1900-1950' (University of the Witwatersrand: African Studies Seminar Paper No. 291, 1990).
- Van Onselen, C. *The Seed is Mine: The Life of Kas Maine, a South African Sharecropper 1894-1985* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1996).
- Van Rensburg, A.P.J. 'Die Simboliese Ossewatrek van 1938', *Historia* 12, 1, 1972, 12-46.
- Van Rensburg, J.F.J. *Their Paths Crossed Mine: Memoirs of the Commandant-General of the Ossewa-Brandwag* (South Africa: Central News Agency, 1956).
- Venter, A. 'Die Politieke Oortuigings van Hans van Rensburg (1898-1966): Kontinuiteit en Verandering', *Tydskrif vir Geesteswetenskappe*, 48, 1, Maart 2008, 41-57.
- Venter, J.D. 'Ontwikkeling van die Onderwys in die Ermelose Distrik, 1862-1962', (MEd dissertation, Potchefstroomse Universiteit vir Christelike Hoër Onderwys, 1963).
- Verhoef, F. 'Die Stigting van Instellings as Werktuie in die Ekonomiese Opbouing van die Afrikaner sedert die Anglo-Boere Oorlog', *Tydskrif vir Geesteswetenskappe*, 46, 2, Junie 2006, 211-19.
- Verhoef, G. 'Afrikaner Nationalism in South African Banking: The Cases of Volkskas and Trust Bank' in S. Jones, ed., *Financial Enterprise in South Africa since 1950* (Palgrave Macmillan, London), 115-153.
- Viljoen, L. 'Nationalism, Gender and Sexuality in the Autobiographical Writing of Two Afrikaner Women', *Social Dynamics*, 34, 2, 2008, 186-202.
- Vincent, L. 'A Cake of Soap: The *Volksmoeder*-Ideology and Afrikaner Women's Campaign for the Vote', *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 32, 1, 1999, 1-17.
- Vincent, L. 'The Power behind the Scenes: The Afrikaner Nationalist Women's Parties, 1915-1931', *South African Historical Journal*, 40, 1, 1999, 51-73.
- Vincent, L. 'Bread and Honour: White Working Class Women and Afrikaner Nationalism in the 1930s', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 26, 1, March 2000, 61-78..
- Vincent, L. 'From Suffrage to Silence: The South African Afrikaner Nationalist Women's Parties, 1915-1931' in K.M. Blee and S.M. Deutsch, eds., *Women of the Right. Comparisons and Interplay across Borders* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania University Press, 2012), 132-46.
- Visser, G.C. *OB: Traitors or Patriots?* (Johannesburg: Macmillan South Africa, 1976).
- W. Bruce Fye Center for the History of Medicine, Rochester, MN. 'Annual Report of the Rochester Child Health Institute, 1949'.
- Walker, E. 'Conservative Pioneers: The Formation of The South African Society of Medical Women', *Social History of Medicine*, 14, 3, 2001, 483-505.

- Walker, E. 'The South African Society of Medical Women, 1951-1992: Its Origins, Nature and Impact on White Women Doctors' (PhD thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, 1999).
- Walker, E.A. 'The Formation of New States, 1835-1854' in E. Walker, ed., *The Cambridge History of the British Empire. Volume VIII. South Africa, Rhodesia and the High Commission Territories* (Cambridge: The Syndics of the Cambridge University Press, 1963).
- Wilkins, I. and H. Strydom. *The Super-Afrikaners. Inside the Afrikaner Broederbond* (Cape Town: Jonathan Ball, 2012).
- Wilmsen, E.N. 'Primal Anxiety, Sanctified Landscapes: The Imagery of Primitiveness in the Ethnographic Fictions of Laurens van der Post', *Visual Anthropology*, 15, 2, 2002, 143-201.
- Wilmsen, E. N. 'Primitive Politics in Sanctified Landscapes: The Ethnographic Fictions of Laurens van der Post', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 21, 2, 1995, 201-23.
- Wilmsen, E. N., A. Barnard, M. Biesele, A. Takada and O. B. Sichone. 'To See Ourselves as we Need to See Us: Ethnography's Primitive Turn in the Early Cold War Years', *Critical African Studies*, 1, 1, 20-95.
- Wurthwein, E. *The Text of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1957).

## Electronic Sources

- Ammann, O. 'Vera Bührmann Interviewed by Mario Schiess.' <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GhastRtaz2w> (accessed 5 September 2019).
- Barker, M. 'Who was Laurens van der Post? Part I', <http://www.swans.com/library/art19/barker142.html> (accessed 1 October 2019).
- Barker, M. 'Who was Laurens van der Post? Part II', <http://www.swans.com/library/art19/barker144.html> (accessed 1 October 2019).
- Blignaut, C. 'Die Ossewa Brandwag en Haar Vroue', <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wt5QC3KHeIQ> (accessed 18 March 2018).
- David, Julian. <http://www.juliandavid.co.uk/About> (accessed 12 September 2019).
- 'Dialogue between Jungian Analysts and African Traditional Healers', <https://jungsouthernafrica.co.za/newsite2019/traditional-health-practitioners/> (accessed 1 November 2019).
- Diederling, T. 'Prisoners of War and Internees (Union of South Africa)' in U. Daniel, P. Gatrell, O. Jantz, H. Jones, J. Keene, A. Kramer, and B. Nasson, eds., *1914-1918 Online. International Encyclopedia of the First World War* (Berlin, Freie Universität, 2014). DOI: 10.15463/ie1418.10685 (accessed 20 September 2017).
- Evans, B. 2017. *The Metamorphosis of Autism. A History of Child Development in Britain*. Manchester: Manchester University Press. Online edition. Chapter 3. <https://open.org/view?docId=625488.xhtml#chap-3> (accessed 6 August 2019).
- Evans, G. 'The Man with the Deadly Past', *Mail & Guardian*. <https://mg.co.za/article/1998-08-28-the-man-with-the-deadly-past> (accessed 3 July 2019).
- Giliomee, H. 'The Rise and Fall of Afrikaner Women', talk given at Spier Estate, Stellenbosch, on 2 August 2003; <http://www.oulitnet.co.za/seminarroom/afwoman.asp> (accessed 3 July 2017).

- Golding, M. 'TEACCH in the Rainbow Nation', *aut;talk* 21, November 2014, 52-55;  
[http://aut2know.co.za/wp/wp-content/uploads/Issue21\\_2014\\_part\\_3.pdf](http://aut2know.co.za/wp/wp-content/uploads/Issue21_2014_part_3.pdf) (accessed 1 September 2019).
- <http://www.boompies.com/MBCHB.pdf> (accessed 29 September 2019).
- <http://www.psychiatry.uct.ac.za/psych/child-and-adolescent-psychiatry> (accessed 27 September 2019).
- [https://www.imdb.com/title/tt2354565/?ref\\_=tt\\_urv](https://www.imdb.com/title/tt2354565/?ref_=tt_urv) (accessed 25 September 2019).
- <https://www.politicsweb.co.za/documents/harold-macmillans-winds-of-change-speech-verwoerds> (accessed 2 September 2019).
- Koorts, L. 'Palatable and Unpalatable Leaders: Apartheid and Postapartheid Afrikaner Biography' in de Haan, Binne, Hans Renders and Jonne Harmsma, eds. *The Biographical Turn: Lives in History* (Abingdon, Oxon, New York, NY: Routledge Press, 2016), eBook.
- Kouevuur. 'Die Duitse Wesies van 1948'. <https://kouevuur.wordpress.com/2011/01/18/die-duitse-wesies-van-1948/> (accessed 3 July 2019).
- Southern African Association of Jungian Analysts. <https://www.jungsouthernafrica.co.za/index.php/about-us> (accessed 1 September 2019).
- Transnet. 'Railway Country. 150 Years of Rail in South Africa.' <http://www.transnetfreighttrail-tfr.net/Heritage/150years/150YearsRail.pdf> (accessed 10 November 2017).
- University of Cape Town Libraries. 'Racial Anthropology.' <http://www.digitalcollections.lib.uct.ac.za/racial-anthropology>
- University of Cape Town. Department of Psychiatry and Mental Health. <http://www.psychiatry.uct.ac.za/psych/child-and-adolescent-psychiatry> (accessed 27 September 2019).
- Van der Merwe, W (Shellack). 'Duitse-Wesies (1)', <http://www.gelofteland.org/index.php/ons-geskiedenis/29-duitse-weeskinders-1948/214-duitse-wesies-1.html> (accessed 1 May 2017)
- Van der Merwe, W (Shellack). 'Duitse-Wesies (6)', <http://www.gelofteland.org/index.php/ons-geskiedenis/29-duitse-weeskinders-1948/375-duitse-wesies-6> (accessed 1 May 2017).
- Van der Merwe, W (Shellack). 'Duitse-Wesies (7)', <http://www.gelofteland.org/index.php/ons-geskiedenis/29-duitse-weeskinders-1948/420-duitse-wesies-7> (accessed 1 May 2017).
- Van Heyningen, E. 'British Concentration Camps of the South African War 1900-1902', [http://www2.lib.uct.ac.za/mss/bccd/Person/146134/Johanna\\_Maghrita\\_Buurman](http://www2.lib.uct.ac.za/mss/bccd/Person/146134/Johanna_Maghrita_Buurman) (accessed 11 September 2017).
- Wikipedia, 'Google Ngram Viewer', [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Google\\_Ngram\\_Viewer](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Google_Ngram_Viewer) (accessed 5 August 2019).
- World Health Organization. 'Burn-out an "occupational phenomenon": International Classification of Diseases.' [https://www.who.int/mental\\_health/evidence/burn-out/en/](https://www.who.int/mental_health/evidence/burn-out/en/) (accessed 27 September 2019).

## Newspapers and Magazines

- De Villiers, I. Interview with Vera Bührmann, *Sarie* 5 September 1990.
- Die OB*, 14 April 1943.

*Die OB*, 17 April 1946.

*Die OB*, 2 June 1943.

*Die OB*, 'Terug na die Huis en Vrou as Moeder', 30 September 1949.

Du Plessis, P. 'Die Wit Dogter van Mongezi Tiso.' *Die Vaderland*, 4 February 1985, 12.

Serfontein, J.H.P. 'Hertzog Group - The Facts', *Sunday Times*, 23 June 1967.

### **Oral History**

Anonymous, Transcripts of Interviews with Vera Bührmann, 1994-1995.



## Appendix 1. Genealogical information

Adapted from the *Bührmann Familieboek*.

Born \*  
Died †  
Married x

- a1 Hendrik Teodor Bührmann \* 17 Mar 1822 † 12 May 1890  
x 1849 Margarethe Magdalena Maré \* 7 Dec 1830 † 2 Aug 1855  
xx 1857 Johanna Jacoba Neethling \* 26 July 1826 † 24 May 1896
- b1 Johannes Hendrik Stephanus (Sep-Nov 1850)  
b2 Henriëtte Charlotte (1851-1928) x Sluiter  
b3 Anna Margretha (1853-1894) x Rood  
b4 Hendrik Teodor (1855—1935)  
b5 Johanna Jacoba (1859-1946) x Smuts  
b6 Anna Sophia (1860-1865)  
b7 Willem Hendrik (1861-1913)  
b8 Herman Christiaan (1862-1865)  
b9 Theodora Christina (1866-1950) x Hickman  
**b10 Johannes Rudolph (1868-1936)**  
b11 Anna Maria (1870-1950) x Neethling
- b10 **Johannes Rudolph** x 1893 Johanna Magrietha (Nonna) Steenkamp \* 5 July 1871 † 16 Nov 1941
- c1 Aletta Elixabeth Isabel Maria (1894-1979) x de Villiers xx van der Merwe  
c2 Hendrik Theodor (1895)  
c3 Johanna Jacoba (1896-1897)  
c4 Willem (1898-1961)  
c5 Johanna Margrieta (1900-2001)  
c6 Louis Christiaan Rudolf (1903-1985)  
c7 Johannes Rudolph (1905-1999)  
**c8 Maatje Vera (1910-1998)**  
c9 Henriette Charlotte (1911-1985)  
c10 Hermanus Nicolas Steenkamp (1912-1949)

## Appendix 2. Publications by M. Vera Bührmann

- ‘Investigation of Stillbirths and Deaths of Children Under 5 Years of Age in the Pretoria Municipal Area (Exclusive of Lady Selborne) for the Year 1950’, *SAMJ*, 18 October 1952, 835-39.
- ‘A Psychological Approach to Behaviour Problems in Children’, *The Medical Officer*, 14 June 1957, 335-37.
- ‘The Family and its Emotional Security’ in J.R. Lükhoff, ed., *Report of the Family Congress, 4th to 7th April 1961 in the AULA, University of Pretoria* (Pretoria: Steering Committee of the Family Year and Family Congress, 1961), 46-58.
- ‘What can Psychiatry Contribute to Maternal and Child Welfare Services?’, *SAMJ*, 27 October 1962, 901-03.
- ‘Childhood Schizophrenia’, *SAMJ* 22 October 1966, 920-23.
- ‘Death – Its Psychological Significance in the Lives of Children’, *SAMJ*, 16 May 1970, 586-89.
- ‘The Dying Child’, *SAMJ*, 47, 1973, 1114-16.
- ‘Hanteering van Krisis-situasie in Gesinne’, *SAMJ*, 47, 1973, 1474-76.
- ‘Western Psychiatry and the Xhosa Patient’, *SAMJ*, 51, 1977, 464-66.
- ‘Xhosa Diviners as Psychotherapists’, *Psychotherapeia & Psychiatry in Action*, 3, 4, October 1977, 17-20.
- ‘Dream Therapy Through the Ages’, *Psychotherapeia & Psychiatry in Action*, 3, 1, January 1977, 16-18.
- ‘Tentative Views of Dream Therapy by Xhosa Diviners’, *Journal of Analytical Psychology*, 23, 2, 1978, 105-21.
- ‘An Existential-Phenomenological Interpretation of Thwasa among the Xhosa’, *Psychotherapeia & Psychiatry in Action*, 4, 2, April 1978, 15-18. (With R. Schweitzer)
- ‘Why are Certain Procedures of Indigenous Healers Effective?’, *Psychotherapeia & Psychiatry in Action*, 5, 1979, 20-25.
- ‘Early Recognition of Infantile autism’, *SAMJ*, 56, 27 October 1979, 724-27.
- ‘The Inner Reality of the Black Man and his Criminal Responsibility’, *SAMJ*, 58, 15 November 1980, 817-20.
- ‘Disintegrating Effect of Death Among Southern African Black People’, *International Mental Health Research Newsletter*, circa 1980.
- ‘The Xhosa Healers of Southern Africa. I. Intlombe and Xhentsa: a Xhosa Healing Ritual’, *Journal of Analytical Psychology*, 26, 3, 1981, 187-201.
- ‘The Xhosa Healers of Southern Africa. II. The Songs Sung in a Healing Ceremony’, *Journal of Analytical Psychology*, 26, 4, 1981, 297-312. (With J.N. Gqomfa)
- ‘Exploration of the Meaning of Songs Sung During an Intlombe.’ *Journal of Analytical Psychology*, 26, 4, 1981, 297-312.

- 'The Xhosa Healers of Southern Africa. III. A Family Therapy Session with a Dream as Central Content', *Journal of Analytical Psychology*, 27, 1, 1982, 41-57. (With J.N. Gqomfa)
- 'The Xhosa Healers of Southern Africa. IV. Isiko Lentambo. A Renewal Sacrifice', *Journal of Analytical Psychology*, 27, 2, 1982, 163-72.
- 'Training, Growth and Development of Xhosa *Amagqira*', *Humanitas* 8, 1, 1982, 59-67.
- 'Thwasa and Bewitchment', *SAMJ*, 61, 5 June 1982, 877-79.
- 'Some Psychological Factors in Particular Crimes of Violence in the Black Man', *South African Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology*, 7, 3, 1983, 252-58.
- 'Community Health and Traditional Healers', *Psychotherapeia & Psychiatry in Action*, Nov 1983, 15-18.
- 'The Role of the Indigenous Healer', *Africa Insight*, 13, 3, 1983, 215-21.
- 'Training of Analytical Psychologists and Xhosa Medicine Men' in John Beebe, ed., *Money, Food, Drink and Fashion in Analytical Training: Depth Dimensions of Physical Existence* (Los Angeles: C G Jung Institute, 1983).
- 'Archetypal Transference as Observed in the Healing Procedures of Xhosa *Amagqira*' in John Beebe, ed., *Money, Food, Drink and Fashion in Analytical Training: Depth Dimensions of Physical Existence* (Los Angeles: C G Jung Institute, 1983).
- Living in Two Worlds. Communication Between a White Healer and her Black Counterparts* (Cape Town: Human & Rousseau, 1984).
- 'The Health Care of an *Igqira* (Indigenous Healer)' in Renos K. Papadopoulos and Graham S. Saayman, eds., *Jung in Modern Perspective* (Craighall: Ad Donker, 1984), 152-64.
- 'Kritiese Beskouing van Transkulturele Psigiatrisie Navorsing', *Psychiatric Insight/Psigiatrisie Insig* 2, 2, 1985, 29-32.
- 'Witchcraft, Witchcraft Beliefs and the Black People of South Africa. Some Medicolegal Considerations', *SAMJ*, 68, 26 October 1985, 668-71.
- 'Nature, Psyche, and a Healing Ceremony of the Xhosa' in C.A. Meier, et al., eds., *A Testament to the Wilderness* (Zurich: Daimon Verlag, 1985), 75-86.
- 'Some Aspects of Healing Among Black South Africans' in G. C. Oosthuizen, ed., *Religion Alive* (Johannesburg: Hodder and Stoughton, 1986).
- 'The Feminine in Witchcraft Part 1', *Journal of Analytical Psychology*, 32, 2, 1987, 139-56.
- 'The Feminine in Witchcraft Part 2', *Journal of Analytical Psychology*, 32, 3, 1987, 257-77.
- 'Initiation of Xhosa Indigenous Healers (*Amagqira*)' in Louise C. Mahdi, Steven Foster and Meredith Little, eds., *Between and Between. Patterns of Masculine and Feminine Initiation* (Chicago: Open Court Publishing Co., 1987), 439-56.
- 'Pain and Depression', *S.A Journal of Continuing Medical Education*, 1987, 21-26.
- 'Psyche & Soma: Therapeutic Considerations' in G. Saayman, ed., *Modern South Africa in Search of a Soul. Jungian Perspectives on the Wilderness Within* (Boston: SIGO, 1990).

- 'Crisis Phases in the Life of the Child and Adolescent as seen in Adult Psychotherapy', *Southern African Journal of Child and Adolescent Mental Health*, 2, 2, 1990, 29-31.
- 'My Experience of Anthropological Research Work' in Mary Ann Matoon, ed., *Personal and Archetypal Dynamics in the Analytical Relationship. Proceedings of the Eleventh International Congress for Analytical Psychology 28 August to 2 September 1989* (Einsiedeln, Switzerland: Daimon Verlag, 1991), 441-43.
- 'Ethics in Xhosa Healing' in Lena Ross and Manisha Roy, eds., *Cast the First Stone. Ethics in Analytical Practice* (Chiron Publications, 1995).
- 'Views of Healing and the Healer' in Melissa E. Steyn and Khanya B. Motshabi, eds., *Cultural Synergy in South Africa. Weaving Strands of Africa and Europe* (Randburg: Knowledge Resources, 1996), 119-30.
- 'World Without as World Within' in R. Hinshaw, ed., *The Rock Rabbit and the Rainbow. Laurens van der Post Among Friends* (Einsiedeln: Daimon Verlag, 1998), 288-94.

