

**Work in progress. This is an early draft, part of a longer study investigating the racialised, visual representation of poverty in South Africa over several decades. Please do not quote.**

***Binnelandse reise (Interior journeys): Photographs from the Carnegie Commission of Investigation into the Poor White Problem (1929/1932)***

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**Introduction**

In September 1929 eighty-seven year old Hendrik Goosen of the farm Soebatsfontein near Garies, Namaqualand, received a visitor. She was attending carefully to her surroundings and inquisitive about family history. She observed the relative size and the solidity of the house, the striking view from the *stoep*, the furniture, the bible verses and parental portraits on display. That this was no ordinary social visit is evident from the fact of notes, now archived, recording the occasion and from the manner in which she rendered familial photographs into writing:

In die voorhuis hang die portret van sy vader, een van die mooiste ou Afrikaners wat ek al ooit gesien het: groot, fris, maar fyn en beskaafde voorkoms; kennis en goeie oordeel in die oë, beslistheid, humor in die mond; netjies gekleed, byna deftig was dit nie dat sy klere ook werksklere was nie. Skoongeskeerde gesig met baardjie onder ken.<sup>1</sup>

(In the sitting room hangs the portrait of his father, one of the most handsome old Afrikaners that I have ever seen: large, sturdy, but of refined and civilised appearance; knowledge and good judgement in the eyes, a decisive, humorous mouth; neatly dressed, almost stylish were it not that his clothes were also for work. Cleanshaven face with a little beard under the chin.)

Evidently, this visual evidence of an Afrikaner ancestry in which civilised intelligence balanced industrious simplicity was an arresting sight. But so was a troubling image, discerned with more difficulty from an inferior photographic print:

Langs hom sy vrou se portret... 'n slegte vergroting van 'n slegte portret, geneem 'n paar weke voor haar dood toe sy 81 jaar was. Doek om kop en om gesig, soos die

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<sup>1</sup> USDC, MER, 55.M.3 (Carnegie Commission Investigations, 1929), notes on Garies.

vrouens dit nog dra in Namakwaland: Selfs as ‘n mens inreken dat die portret ‘n baie slegte is kom die gesig jou voor asof daar iets verstandelik gebrekkig is aan die persoon – in treffende mate. Moeilik om te oordeel...” (Next to him his wife’s portrait... a bad enlargement of a bad portrait, taken a few weeks before her death when she was 81 years old. Scarf around the head and face in the manner still followed by the women of Namaqualand. Even considering the bad quality of the portrait, the face seems to you to be that of a mentally deficient person – strikingly so. Difficult to judge...)

This reading of the photographs certainly combined long established practice of decoding social status, achievement and personal character by noting bodily posture, facial expression and attire with sensitivity to the specific *platteland* setting. In South Africa of the late 1920s such appreciative recognition of an Afrikaner predecessor’s likeness was also not rare.<sup>2</sup> But that a portrait, proudly exhibited in the living room, could be described as possible evidence of mental disability was perhaps more unusual, certainly against the grain of familial intention.

This interpretation of the photographic was indeed structured by a specific institutional and political context: the visitor was researcher for the Carnegie Commission of Investigation on the Poor White Question which traveled South Africa in 1929 and published its findings in 1932. A major concern for the commission was perceived patterns of generational decline, as the descendants of ‘European’, self-sufficient farming fore-bears degenerated into poverty. Whether mental deficiency was prevalent amongst ‘poor whites’ was one of the commissioners’ questions for research. M. E. Rothmann was also interested in the calibre of poor white mothers.<sup>3</sup> I quote her for two reasons. First, to signal my own investigation into Carnegie Commissioners’

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<sup>2</sup> M. du Toit, ‘Blank verbeeld, or the incredible whiteness of being: amateur photography and Afrikaner nationalist historical narrative’, *Kronos* 27, 2001, p. 98. I show that Afrikaner nationalists did not only describe the photographed faces of Boer leaders as imbued with innate qualities of good character, but also those of the elderly, destitute and invariably white men and women whose portraits occasionally appeared in *Die Huisgenoot*.

<sup>3</sup> M.E. Rothmann, *The Mother and Daughter of the Poor Family. Report of the Carnegie Commission*, Vol. V (Stellenbosch, Pro Ecclesia 1932).

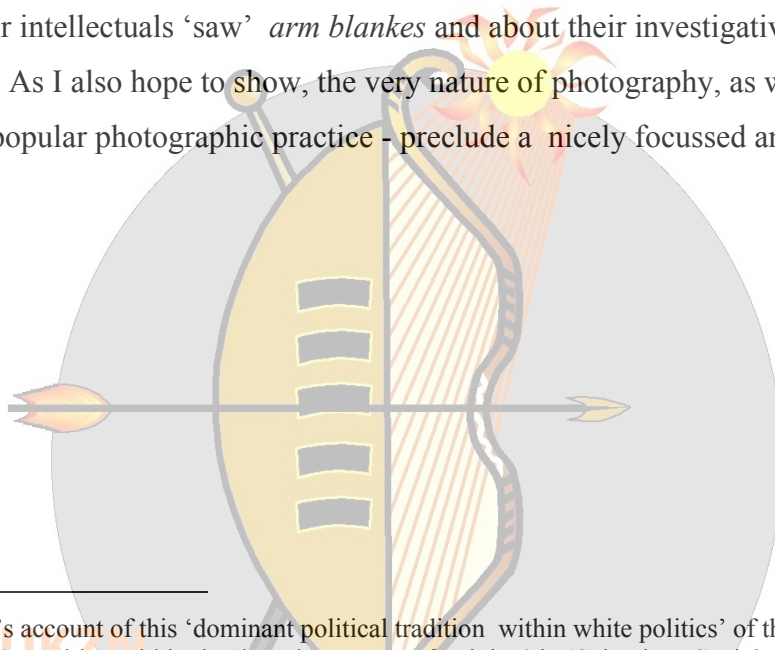
<sup>5</sup> M.E. Rothmann’s Carnegie-related papers form part of the private collection of her manuscripts housed in the Document Centre, University of Stellenbosch. Malherbe’s papers are housed in the Campbell Collections, University of Natal, Durban. I have not been able to trace field notes or any manuscripts compiled by other commissioners, namely the Dutch Reformed Church minister J.R. Albertyn (Author of ‘The Poor White and Society’), W.A. Murray (who reported on ‘Health factors and the Poor White’) and R.W. Wilcocks (who compiled the ‘Psychological Report’).

representation of poorer whites. It is specifically their construction of an *arm blanke* typology and of the (dysfunctional) familial that interest me. Second, in order to introduce a particular aspect of the published Carnegie Commission Report and associated, unpublished research papers. To my knowledge, this was the first South African commission of enquiry that included not only written text but also photographs. No detailed examination of this juxtaposition of word and image has yet been offered, although Godby (1999) has briefly discussed the photographs included in the published Carnegie Report as an example of early South African social documentary photography.

Considered together, the two extant South African collections of this Carnegie Commission's research papers – Rothmann's and those of educationist E.G. Malherbe - comprise written and visual documents, produced in the same year and sometimes on the same, certainly on similar investigative journeys through the South African countryside.<sup>5</sup> Rothmann's meticulous record of numerous interviews contain several neatly appended snapshots. A substantial part of Malherbe's personal record of the commission's work (besides his fairly cryptic notebooks, research papers and speeches based on his research) consist of three albums in which he arranged and captioned the snapshots taken on their travels through the South African countryside. Indeed, all but very few of the published photographs may be traced to these albums and corresponding negatives. Hitherto largely unexamined sets of manuscripts on poor whiteness compiled by middle-class researchers who identified as white and Afrikaner (albeit with differing political allegiance), the documents also prompt me to consider the technologies used by commissioners for the production of truth claims, and the possibilities for historical interpretation of photographic as compared with written inscription.

The Carnegie Investigation has been associated with an era of heightening efforts by the state and by Afrikaner nationalist political, cultural and welfarist organisations to shore up the boundaries of a *blanke volk*. It is also interesting as a document produced by white academics, church officials and welfare activists from across the political spectrum of (white) South African nationalisms. Rothmann was an active supporter of Hertzog's National Party and of ethnic nationalism. Malherbe was a South African Party man and

avid promoter of South Africanism although he identified as 'Afrikaner' and could move fluently into the cultural discourse shared by nationalist Afrikaners.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, within a broader framework for comparison of the making of state racisms in metropolitan and colonial spaces, this commission has been considered as one example of how production of social scientific expertise for the formulation of state policy was strongly shaped by intellectual influences from beyond the local, South African context, specifically the United States.<sup>7</sup> How was this effort reflected in that 'major historical form'<sup>8</sup> of the twentieth century, photography? Photographs and text combined suggest much about how Afrikaner intellectuals 'saw' *arm blankes* and about their investigative methodology. As I also hope to show, the very nature of photography, as well as of amateur and popular photographic practice - preclude a nicely focussed answer to this question.



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<sup>6</sup> See S. Dubow's account of this 'dominant political tradition within white politics' of the inter-war years and of Malherbe's position within its 'broad spectrum of opinion' in 'Scientism, Social Research and the Limits of 'South Africanism': The Case of Ernst Gideon Malherbe', *South African Historical Journal* 44 (May 2001), pp. 99-142. South Africanism rejected singular definitions of political identity and sought instead to accommodate aspects of imperial as well as national sentiment within the terms of an enlarged and plurally defined nationalism. Exponents 'accepted the notion of multiple national loyalties so long as these were founded on the common patriotism of English and Afrikaans-speakers and they presumed the continued existence of an outward-looking, modern, secular state that was constitutionally independent but firmly tied in to the British Commonwealth.' Dubow discusses Malherbe as an 'Afrikaner intellectual' who, together with his promotion of bilingualism, also liked to point out family connections to early Afrikaans cultural nationalist movements and icons.

<sup>7</sup> L.A. Stoler, 'Tense and Tender Ties: The Politics of Comparison in North American History and (Post) Colonial Studies', *Journal of American History* 8 (3) 2001. See particularly Stoler's section on 'The Carnegie Commission on Poor Whites: Logics of Differentiation in South Africa and the United States', pp. 857-865'. Her discussion of the commission remains very generalised however. Saul Dubow's article 'Scientism, Social Research and the Limits of 'South Africanism' provides more nuanced discussion, as does M. Bell, 'American Philanthropy, the Carnegie Corporation and Poverty in South Africa', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 26, 3, 2000, particularly in suggesting a 'reciprocity and mutual exchange of ideas of ideas' rather than the simple transfer of research frameworks from the U.S.A.

<sup>8</sup> E. Edwards, *Raw Histories: Photographs, Anthropology and Museums* (Oxford: Berg, 2001), p.5.

### Word and image in the published Carnegie Report

The five volumes of the Carnegie Commission, published in 1932 and presented as a definitive study of 'white' poverty, offered not only an answer to the question 'What is a poor white' but also several pages of photographs with examples of poor whites. They appear in three of the five volumes of the report. Rothmann's *Mother and Daughter of the Poor Family* and Malherbe's *Education and the Poor White* have photographs interleaved with text. The volume on the psychological traits amongst poor whites by R.W. Wilcocks also has several consecutive pages of pictures. Michael Godby has considered these photographs in order to explore 'the evolution of documentary photography in South Africa' (he compares pictures from the 1932 report with those commissioned for the 'second' Carnegie report on poverty of 1984).<sup>10</sup> The former included small and poorly reproduced photographic prints amongst the lengthy text investigating 'the economic and social retrogression of a considerable part of the white rural (or originally rural) population...'<sup>11</sup> Black people – so Godby argues - only featured as 'actual or potential sources of contamination, racially, economically, and morally'. Godby characterises the Carnegie photographs from 1932 as 'strongly dehumanising' and 'unimaginative'. Use of the photographic medium in the report was 'restricted to a simple

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<sup>10</sup> M. Godby, 'The Evolution of photography in South Africa as shown in a comparison between the Carnegie inquiries into poverty (1932 and 1984), in J-E Lundstrom and K. Pierre (eds), *Democracy's Images: Photography and Visual Art After Apartheid (Uppsala, 1999)*, p. 34. Godby compares photographs from the 'first' (1932) and 'second' (1984) Carnegie Inquiries into poverty, arguing that they provide 'strikingly different vehicles for photography as a rhetorical form – as well as strikingly different views of both poverty itself and the means to eradicate it'. Godby argued that the second commission, conscious of the political context of struggle against apartheid, attempted inclusivity and 'specifically the expressed need for political mobilisation alongside the collection of data'. The photographic exhibition and book, *The Cordoned Heart*, best exemplified the second commission's efforts 'to have the oppressed people of South Africa speak for themselves'. For a more critical interrogation of South African 'struggle' documentary, see Farzana Badsha (forthcoming research).

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p.36.

factual basis' that reflected the reluctance of commissioners to move beyond the presentation of the external conditions of poverty and was apparent in the style of the photographs.<sup>12</sup>

It precisely the logic of the photographs as 'unimaginative' in their content and placing – how the supposedly self-evident realism of these visual prints work together with words and statistics to articulate a definitive presentation of the 'Poor White Problem' - that calls for more attention. The authority of a Commission concerned with 'finding facts and causes' and to offer recommendations suggested 'by the study of the actual conditions'<sup>13</sup> was established through 'methods of gathering data' that (as Malherbe explains in his volume) eschewed the approach of previous commissions – namely to hear evidence from experts and members of the public at formal 'sittings'. Instead, the commissioners prioritised field-work.<sup>14</sup> 'We wanted as far as possible to study the poor whites in their natural habitats – on the farms, in the cities, in the diggings'. The researchers 'visited the poor whites in their homes', listened 'to their stories of stress and viscitude' and 'collected hundreds of biographies and case histories'.<sup>15</sup> Malherbe writes that 'this method' involved traveling for over a year and for some 30 000 miles. Malherbe's 'unwavering commitment to statistical methods and modern social survey techniques' is certainly evident in his report.<sup>16</sup> He enumerates his own several hundred interviews with 'poor white adults', farmers, shopkeepers, magistrates and a variety of professionals. He also explains his use of 'standardized scholastic tests' practised on 15000 pupils of whom 4000 were judged poor white.<sup>17</sup> This was, indeed, an investigation designed to be 'chiefly that of fact-finding' and Malherbe himself devoted his 'attention almost exclusively to

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<sup>12</sup> Godby commented that photographs were not used in relation to specific chapters 'that investigate such internal conditions [of poverty] as psychology and ethics' but were rather attached to chapters dealing with such themes as 'accommodation and opportunities for employment'. (35)

<sup>13</sup> E.G. Malherbe, *Education and the Poor White*, Volume III, p.v. I quote from the section 'Joint Findings and Recommendations of the Commission' which is not specifically attributed to Malherbe. Indeed, it is reproduced in several volumes of the Report.

<sup>14</sup> E.G. Malherbe, *Education and the Poor White*, Volume III, p. 8. I still have to determine whether this was indeed an innovation by Carnegie commissioners, or whether earlier South African commissions of inquiry also embarked on research 'in the field'.

<sup>15</sup> Malherbe, p. 8.

<sup>16</sup> S. Dubow, 'Scientism, social research and the limits of 'South Africanism'', p. 102.

<sup>17</sup> Malherbe, p. 9.

the collection and correlation of as many *new* facts as possible concerning the education of this country and its relation to the poor white problem'.<sup>18</sup>

Rothmann also emphasises the several hundred visits she did, often accompanied by farmer's wives, teachers, doctors or social workers and in order to collect information with regards to past and present 'home conditions' and women's work. Her notes of interviews were supplemented by 'my own observations: much can be learned from the order or disorder in a home, from the attitude of various members of the family to each other...'<sup>19</sup>. While his generalised descriptions of economic conditions referred to interviews with poorer whites, Malherbe mostly presented results of psychometric and intelligence tests, educationists' views and governmental reports – situating this within a longer history of white poverty and education in South Africa. Of all five Carnegie authors, Rothmann made the most consistent and detailed use of individual case studies, often quoting her poor white interviewees directly together with descriptions of their domestic surroundings.<sup>20</sup> In this respect, and while she shared a common analytical framework as to the causes of the 'poor white problem' with her colleagues, Rothmann's investigative approach drew strongly on her background in journalism, her social welfare activism and her work as an author in Afrikaans.

Neither Malherbe nor Rothmann ever mentioned photography as a method of data-collection. The former's discussion of methodology was, however, preceded by several

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<sup>18</sup> Malherbe, p. 11.

<sup>19</sup> Rothmann, *Mother and Daughter in the Poor Family*, p.151.

<sup>20</sup> The only other report that depends to a significant extent (still less so than Rothmann) on case studies is J.F.W. Grosskopf's *Rural Impoverishment and Rural Exodus* (volume 1).

<sup>26</sup> E.G. Malherbe, p. 202. Malherbe explains that by 'retardation' he means 'slow progress in scholastic work – irrespective of causes' and that lack of intelligence is only one possible cause of retardation (p. 145).

photographs headed ‘Studying the Poor white Problem on the Spot by means of Interviews’, clearly intended to present visual evidence that commissioners did indeed research poor whites ‘in their habitat’. Here, for example, is an ‘Economist getting the story of the Namaqualand diamonds’ - the tiny photograph shows, apparently, a gesticulating informant sitting in a jumbled farm backyard with the interviewer, pen poised over his notebook. Another photograph, ‘(i)nterviewing the women at work’, shows a neatly dressed commissioner crouched on the bank of a river and facing women and girls who are washing clothes (figure 1).

Photographs in Malherbe’s volume appear intermittently amongst detailed discussion and analysis of statistical data (tables showing, for example, ‘Retardation of Boys and Girls in All Public Schools of the Union arranged according to Areas’).<sup>26</sup> The self-evident indexicality of photography act to authenticate tables of statistics and written text. For example, a table correlating ‘median ages’ and average percentages of ‘retarded’, ‘european’ pupils in primary schools throughout South Africa face two pictures of ‘Children on the Diamond Diggings (Lichtenburg)’. Windows to the specificity of place and time, they are anchored by and add credibility to the statistics and analysis. A woman crouches in the foreground of the first picture, her face obscured by her hat and hair, seemingly intent on her hands rather than the three children behind her. They face the camera with lively expressions directed at the photographer as they pause, momentarily, in their allotted tasks. They are ‘(h)elping mother with the bantom-sorting’. Beyond them are the bare, dusty spaces of the diamond fields. Malherbe’s text discussed the various reasons why children of the poor failed to regularly attend school – hence also the caption with its suggestion of ‘mother’s’ irresponsibility. The second picture on the page shows members of a digger’s family. The mother stands near the open, dark doorway of a corrugated iron house, holding a baby and flanked by three young children. The viewer’s eye is drawn to the slightly foregrounded figure of a man, hat on head, hand on his hip and striking something of an attitude for the camera. The caption: ‘The father had just finished chopping up baby’s chair as last bit of firewood’. Within the broad framework of the report, these anonymously presented families are factual evidence of the dysfunctional familial (figure 2)



In Rothmann's volume, photographs implicitly support and gather meaning from her argument as to the contemporary poverty of white motherhood and from uneasiness about the blurring of class and racial boundaries and (expressed in carefully tempered language) uncontrolled sexuality. Poor mothers and daughters had 'a vague and confused idea of social relationships' and lacked 'social sense'.<sup>27</sup> At worst, people made homes 'under the impulse of the sex urge'. They were 'slum-makers' in poor neighbourhoods and on 'the open veld' and lived like the 'more backwards among the coloured people'.<sup>28</sup> Rothmann also argued that the isolation typical of itinerant farmers, sharecroppers and day labourers 'fail to preserve any necessity or advisability of intercourse with other homes or communities'. Like Malherbe, she emphasised that such parents could not plan an economically viable future for their children. The mother was 'the central figure in the home'. And yet, '(t)oday we have come to this, - that for a large number of our young girls, the potential mothers of our nation, there is no normal social or home education'. Girls placed in an appropriate institution, or whose families lived on well organised settlements were better off. Here, under the 'the powerful influences of the school and the church' they could develop into the makers of 'normal homes' with an understanding of 'inter-community relationships'.<sup>29</sup> Rothmann discussed the arduous domestic tasks that befell women from poor families, the extent of women's work outside the homestead, the frequent lack of modern medicine or any competent help for childbirth.

Several photographs of itinerant or poor families or of mothers and daughters illustrate this chapter. One such picture, 'Wife and children of a poor farm tenant (Karoo-farm)' shows a woman standing at the corner of a roughly built stone wall together with her three small children. Dressed in severe black, frowning into the sunlight, hers is an uncertain dignity as she faces the camera rigidly, one hand clasping the fingers of a toddler. The hard light of the semi-desert afternoon contrasts with strong shadow on skin,

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<sup>27</sup> Rothmann also comments that she 'had no reason to think that' fathers and sons had a more developed 'idea of social relationships', but that her study focused on women.

<sup>28</sup> Rothmann, *The Mother and Daughter of the Poor Family*, p. 170.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 198 – 199.

earth, rock. Stony veld and hills recede behind. Flanked with text discussing the destitution of 'isolated rural life', the photograph warns of the harsh results of barren surroundings upon the familial. If Rothmann's preceding chapter on poor white motherhood also involved sympathetic discussion of the difficulties of survival for poor white farmers' and sharecroppers' wives, this woman was yet presented, anonymously, as typical, and an example of the problem confronting the nation and calling for state intervention (Figure 3).

Overleaf, another photograph presented a more disturbing aspect of this problem. It shows a woman in front of a corrugated iron shack half turning towards the camera, her posture awkward, her face indistinct. In the dark doorway behind her the face of a child is just visible. The shack dominates the picture which also has what seems to be the shoulder of an anonymous (possibly uniformed) observer at the edge of the frame. In an adjacent photograph the same or similar structures are shown, dilapidated dwellings on an open stretch of land. The captions: 'A poor digger's wife and the family's "Kaja"; 'A "kaja" and a hut made of sacking on the diggings'.<sup>30</sup> Read together with Rothmann's written text – including vivid descriptions of untidy and dirty young women on the diggings who seem to combine their idle days with prostitution, the picture absorbs middle-class white (for Rothmann, Afrikaner nationalist) anxieties of racial degeneration. Here, adjacent to text urging the importance of good education for daughters of the *volk*, surveilled by anonymous officialdom, is shown a slum-maker, her progeny hidden at the shadowy threshold of an impermanent dwelling referred to by the colloquialism for black servants' quarters (Figure 4).

Of all the commissioners, R. W. Wilcocks was probably Malherbe's closest intellectual partner – both had studied at universities in the United States and were enthusiastic practitioners of applied social science and psychometric testing. Fifty-four consecutive photographs are offered as 'Illustrations' towards the end of his report. Some refer back to specific chapters – photo's of 'Disappearing Types' (itinerant farmers, hunters,

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<sup>30</sup> The details of the child's face and stripes on the uniformed shoulder are clearer in the original print as available in Malherbe's album.

sharecroppers and transport riders) and refer back to the chapter on the roving spirit supposedly prevalent amongst many poor whites. 'Rural Housing Conditions of the Poor' refers to a chapter on this topic; in one photograph the same sharecropper's wife chosen for Rothmann's volume appears, now shown standing next to her small stone house, with a man, possibly one of the researchers, facing her. In a number of head and shoulder shots, individuals are also presented simply as 'types' of 'womenfolk' and 'menfolk', with no further attempt at explanatory captions or reference to specific discussions. 'Family Groups' are also captioned as 'types of rural families' with no specific descriptions of locality and as always, anonymous. Some of these small photographs are yet striking for their snapshot quality of immediacy or the evocative stillness of portraiture. The distraction of a wriggling little girl as the rest of the family pose in front of their bare-brick house, or how a mother's fingers rest, gently, upon her small daughter's shoulder while her preoccupied toddler bends his head, seemingly oblivious of the camera, the serious expressions and weathered faces of parents posing together with their children against a backdrop of hills engage the viewer beyond the dispassionate presentation of the poor as problematic facts and into a sympathetic mode also associated with the documentary genre (figure 5)

Malherbe was taking these photographs some two years after John Grierson – soon to become well-known for his films - coined the word 'documentary'. According to Price, the term would quickly gain currency within photography.<sup>31</sup> As a graduate of Columbia university who spent several years in the United States during the 1920s, Malherbe may well have been familiar with the work of such photographers as Jacob Rijs who, like those associated with movements for social reform of late nineteenth century Britain, set out to expose the living conditions of poor people. Price argues that 'as photography established itself as an important component in an extensive series of projects to investigate and record the lives of the poor', 'the real took on a class inflection which it was not to lose for many years'.<sup>32</sup> Whether Malherbe's decidedly amateurish use of the camera to record his subjects for this study of white poverty – disinterested as he was in

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<sup>31</sup> D. Price, 'Surveyors and surveyed: Photography out and about', in L. Wells (ed), *Photography: a Critical Introduction* (Routledge New York 2000), p. 74.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 78.

experimentation with anything beyond basic snapshotting - was influenced by American social science methodology rather than (or in addition to) the work of professional photographers remains a question that I cannot yet answer.

However, his effort to create a systematic record of living conditions amongst poor whites probably constituted a new application of visual technology in South Africa. For the most part, earlier photographs of poor people in South Africa were not taken with the intent both to document and to change their circumstances. Albums of newspaper clippings from the early twentieth century include occasional photographs of Boer families displaced by war and described as 'poor whites', as well as pictures of itinerant, impoverished black families. As I have argued elsewhere, amateur photography placed in the cultural Afrikaner nationalist magazine *Die Huisgenoot* included pictures of elderly, 'historic' people – black and white. That some of their black subjects clearly lived in poverty was of no interest to photographers who presented them as faithful servants interestingly connected to past events of Afrikaner nationalist import. Occasional photographs of impoverished whites never named them explicitly as *arm blank*, perhaps because the phrase already had a pejorative inflection. Their claim to whiteness and as fellow Afrikaners worthy of help was asserted by writing them into a historical, *voortrekker* narrative. Afrikaner nationalist cultural and religious publications also printed intermittent photographs particularly of indigent white children in institutional care in order to advertise or demonstrate the work of various charities. From the middle 1920s, as a new mode of locally produced 'current events' photography began to dominate Afrikaans illustrated magazines, they sometimes showed fleeting images of people at diamond diggings, accompanied by minimal captioning.

Considered against previous, visual articulations of whiteness and specifically of 'white' poverty the Carnegie photographs represent a significant shift. The contemporary assumption that predicated photography – of a world 'productive of facts' that could be communicated transparently and 'free of the complex codes through which narratives are constructed' dovetailed neatly with the ascendancy of applied social scientific research

in South Africa of the 1920s.<sup>33</sup> Malherbe's photographic project was distinct from the classificatory obsessions of racial anthropologists, some of whom were still employing the camera in their efforts to record the finer physical differences of South Africa's inferior races at this time. Like the FSA photography of the 1930s, subjects were cast within a 'social problem' framework. People shown in photographs were now systematically – within the classificatory impetus of social science and a typology that emphasised class position and lack of economic mobility (although careful not to suggest intrinsic difference) – named as both poor and white. The Commission's explanation of how they identified their subjects also combined assertion of the visibility of 'European' with an underlying uneasiness about invisible, mixed blood. According to Wilcocks, 'any one having an admixture of coloured or native blood' did not 'strictly fall under the concept [poor white]', and 'practically, ... all those were excluded where such admixture was recognisable by means of ordinary observation'.<sup>34</sup> Within the volumes of the Carnegie report, pictures show race as simple matter of fact. Yet frequent verbal anchoring of a distinct underclass as both poor *and* white mark a shift from previous visual representation (at least within the sphere of Afrikaner nationalism) where whiteness in photographs was not previously named with such insistence.

The published Carnegie photographs are therefore interesting for the interplay between visual image and analysis. But as a selection of Malherbe's photographs, they cannot be fully understood without also exploring his private collection of photographs from his travels in 1928. As a text in itself, the latter also offers rich possibilities for analysis. Malherbe may never have commented publicly on his pictures and they were clearly peripheral to the public Carnegie project. However, he arranged them into albums – spaces of photographic safe-keeping and usually, perusal. What would examining these visual research diaries as 'photographic imagetext'<sup>35</sup>, as photographs sharing space with words on a page, and pasted into patterned and sequential proximity with each other reveal? His collection of papers include written and typescript documents relating to his

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<sup>33</sup> Price, 'Surveyers and Surveyed', p.96.

<sup>34</sup> R.W. Wilcocks, *Psychological Report: The Poor White, V. III*, p. 2.

<sup>35</sup> M. Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, narrative and postmemory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1997), pp. 3-8.

research for the Carnegie Commission. What clues may be found as to his purpose in taking, keeping and arranging these photographs? The negatives of Carnegie album photographs are still filed in their original Kodak Film Wallet or Illingforths Roll Film and Print Wallet ('The Fast Film that catches the sunny smile').<sup>36</sup> In her recent analysis of a few photographs from Malherbe's Carnegie research albums, Sally Gaule was careful to justify her treatment of the pictures as documentary 'despite their impression as snapshots'.<sup>37</sup> Here I begin to examine these images precisely as amateur snapshots.

### **Kodak Carnegie: Malherbe's research albums of 1929.**

Most of us associate photographic albums with familial traditions of remembrance – with weddings, birthdays, travel and holiday. In one snapshot on this black page a fashionable young woman perches upon a garden wall. Her white dress contrasts nicely with the lush geraniums and her bare, sun-browned arms. Tousled hair frames a face turned towards the sun with narrowed eyes. Behind her, the generous Cape veranda throws foreshortened shadows. This could easily be a snapshot from any middleclass, white, collection of family photographs (figure six).

But this is not a family album, certainly not in any usual sense. The caption identifies Seugnet Bruwer, a teacher from the town Willowmore (in the Karoo) who helped marking 'ons toetse' (our tests). On the same page are other pictures. Here, two suited young men (identified as Grosskopf and Malherbe) pose on a farm vehicle. Close perusal reveals that the smiling economist for the commission is holding a small animal, probably a young *werfbobbejaan* (tame baboon) on his lap (figure seven). Below, variously, children and teacher at a farm school stand single-file with arms akimbo, and a young boy identified as a standard three pupil stands isolated in ill-fitting clothes. In one of two adjacent, similar shots of the 'Van der Mescht' family they pose in front of the bare bricks and sloping patchwork roof of an old house (figure eight). Opposite the page –

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<sup>36</sup> E.G. Malherbe manuscript collection, File 845, packet D.

<sup>37</sup> **Gaule, p. 7.** In a footnote Gaule provides a definition of snapshots emphasising emphasises both their emateur quality and their documentary intent. While this is a 'quick and hurried shote taken without deliberate aim', (t)he work also signified the intention behind the making of the picture: it is intended as a record of a person, place or event, and made with no artistic pretensions or commercial considerations'. (She refers to B. Coe and P. Gates, *The Snapshot: The Rise of Popular Photography 1888 – 1939* (London: Ash and Grant 1977).

and in the first photograph of the album - several smartly dressed men together with one woman pose against their car: 'lede van die Kommissie...' (members of the Commission...) ( figure nine) Indeed, the album has an uncompromisingly specific title: 'Carnegie Onderzoek – 1929. Armblanke-tipes en wonings, Oostelike Kaapland' (Carnegie Investigation – 1929. Poor white types and dwellings, Eastern Cape). It is the way in which a typology of *armblank* is presented in this record of Carnegie research that concerns me here.

On one page of this album and together with photos's of the 'tipiese' (typical) farmhouses of 'armblankes', Malherbe pasted two photographs showing not countryside scenes or people but pieces of paper inscribed with words, numbers and lines. His particular brief as Carnegie Commission member was to determine the academic progress and intelligence quotient of school children. These were the 'Toets resultate van duisende skool kinders. 'n Paar van die grafieke' (Test results of thousands of school children. A few of the graphs) (Figure ten).<sup>38</sup> At first glance and encountered together with his other photographs, the pictures of the graphs seem almost oddly anti-photographic. Blandly impenetrable as to the actual subjects of research, their indexicality seem to lack (to adopt Barthes's phrase) the 'here-now' of photographs presenting people and places that once *were*. But presented as they are in the small size typical of Kodak-style snapshots - hardly available for easy perusal – Malherbe's research results have their own 'insistent anteriority.'<sup>39</sup> They comprise a confident presentation of his scientific method and confront us with the assumptions of South African social science, circa 1929. Facts about the poor were there to be sampled, abstracted and presented as typical of the whole, whether visually or via words and numbers.

But Malherbe's 'visual incisions through time and space'<sup>40</sup> are also, often, dense repositories of detail. In her recent book Elizabeth Edwards asks how photographs' 'apparently trivial, incidental appearance of surface' can 'be meaningful in historical

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 22.

<sup>39</sup> E. Edwards, *Raw Histories*, p.8.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 3.

terms'. Photographs are 'very literally raw histories in both senses of the word – unprocessed and painful. Their unprocessed quality, their randomness, their minute indexicality, are inherent to the medium itself...' As documents that present 'a levelling of equivalence of information, with the trivial and the significant intertwined and shifting places', they present particular difficulties for historical interpretation.<sup>41</sup> Edwards draw her examples of photography's 'rawness' from the archives of colonial ethnography. As a collection of photographs from an archive participant in South Africa's history of racial segregation, Malherbe's snapshots, small, often finely focussed, present much with apparent deliberation and also an excess of detail and hence possibilities for interpretation that must necessarily surpass his intention as social scientific photographer as well as – it has to be said - his apparent lack of imagination.

The three albums contain pictures from the Commission's travels through different parts of South Africa, and are arranged into sections of a few pages each with pictures taken on research excursions to specific districts or towns, possibly in chronological order. As is evident from the title pages, they were intended as a photographic record 'showing' poor whites and their living conditions, and indeed present selections of people named as 'bywoner' (sharecropper), 'trekboer' (itinerant farmer) or simply 'arblank'. An early set of pictures showing the 'Inwoners van [inhabitants of] Baviaanskloof', a relatively remote Cape farming area, confirm Malherbe's use of the camera to methodically record the subjects of their study and the process of white, rural impoverishment. Two centrally placed pictures captioned 'Ferreira en sy familie' (Ferreira and his family) show a man holding his toddler in his arms and standing with his wife. In a fashion typical of his snapshot portraiture throughout the album, Malherbe took three pictures while they stood for his attention. The first is taken from a distance so that figures and landscape are in almost equal focus with a fence and hills clearly visible. For the second he moved closer to focus on their faces; he also framed a portrait of Ferreira on his own. Another picture shows their small stone house (close attention reveals a commissioner, probably in conversation with the family). Surrounding the group portraits are also individual snapshots of young children, identified by their first names. Ferreira was probably a small

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<sup>41</sup> E. Edwards, *Raw Histories*, p. 5.



farmer, for across the page Malherbe's subjects are identified specifically as *bywoners*. His family's ambivalent future is suggested by an over-exposed closeup of veld, captioned as 'erosie' (erosion), and the more positive adjacent portrait of 'Martiens – slim seun (clever boy)' (Figure 11)

But a number of photographs in the sequence of pages on Baviaanskoof are suggestive of the imbrication of his social documentary mode with other aspects of popular, amateur picture-taking and of a more complex relationship with his subjects. In fact, on the first page documenting this part of their research, poor whites take second place to male commissioners' pride – their touring car, one of two 1928 Fords presented to them for their travels by the Carnegie Foundation. Read from left to right, the first of ten pictures shows high mountains towering against the sky, grass and tall shrub, a stony country road. In the foreground, a stream. Behind, the focal point - a man with legs widely placed, one hand confidently, even theatrically on his hip, the other arm stretched to touch the roof of his car. The next two pictures show more familiar subjects: a head-and-shoulder shot of a man with hat and breeches and a family group standing at their doorway. But what compells the viewer is the car. Seven out of ten pictures show the car, always against the vista of mountain pass. Most enigmatically, a photograph in which the road is shown curving into the high, fading distance of bush and mountains foregrounds a slice of car at the edge of the frame. Upon more careful perusal, another pattern of repetition becomes apparent. Four pictures actually comprise the same two prints and have been pasted onto the page to create a strong measure of symmetry. Placed between such insistent and triumphant images of travel, the snapshots of people appear as if passing glimpses that are yet replete with detail – of the man with the hint of a quizzical smile on his lips, of the woman framed in her dark doorway, standing with husband and her daughters dressed in white (Figure 12).

It is the way in which Malherbe's album combines photographs easily identified as those of the social scientist studying poor whites with other contemporary genres of snapshot photography that fascinate me and that seem to offer possibilities for exploring whiteness beyond the class-specific focus of many individual pictures. The numerous snapshots of

the car crossing mountain passes as well as of the commissioners pickicking or swimming in rivers – placed as they are in the more private and personal space of album and combined into a single narrative with images of ‘arm blankes’ - involve smooth transitions between using the camera for social science and as adventurous traveler. As examples of amateur landscape photography, they are also suggestive of the commissioners’ relationship with countryside and certain of its inhabitants beyond the impetus to show, scientifically, environmental degradation or generational decline.

*Die Huisgenoot* of the late 1920s (to which Malherbe subscribed<sup>42</sup>) featured a regular page showing the prowess of various touring cars at crossing mountains or racing trains. The magazine also published articles on ‘binnelandse reise’ (domestic, lit. inland travel) promoting holidays in South Africa, particularly to motorists. Within the context of ‘Afrikaner’ culture, photographs featuring men and their car, symbol of modernity, in control, traversing the wilder spaces of the countryside, are interesting to consider, not least because of the contemporary construction of a proprietary and often romanticised relationship with *grond* and platteland.<sup>43</sup> Even as Carnegie commissioners identified many poor whites as problematically rural and the rural economy an object for social scientific study, Afrikaner nationalist cultural labours involved the construction of *grond* as Afrikaans and belonging to the Afrikaner, and an often romanticised relationship of recently urbanised Afrikaner intellectuals with rural landscapes. Hence perhaps, Grosskopf and Malherbe’s pose on the farm lorry with *werfbobbejaan*, and other photographs showing (for example) the researchers camping in the *bosveld*.

Parallels also exist between Malherbe’s research albums and his family Kodak snapshot albums from the 1920s, where holiday pictures proliferate, including posturings with motor-cars as well as long sequences of landscape snapshots from an album compiled by his wife Janie - probably taken by his brother-in law, they show Malherbe and the former

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<sup>42</sup> E.G. Malherbe Manuscript collection, note in diary, 1928. KCM 56985 (33) File 568/2.

<sup>43</sup> See A. Coetzee, ‘n Hele Os vir ‘n ou Broodmes: Grond en die Plaasnarratief sedert 1595 (Cape Town, 2000) for an exploration of the Afrikaans ‘plaasroman’ (farm novel) as point of entry into a fascinating discussion of Afrikaner identity and a discourse of *grond* (roughly, ground/earth) within the broader context of South Africa’s colonial history of land dispossession.

(as captions put it) ‘on trek’. The latter was a government-employed geologist who used a motorcycle or car and an ox-wagon, presumably for his equipment (figure thirteen). While these photographs of professional men combining work and leisure in the countryside comprise a more consciously aesthetic framing of landscape, both albums present the *platteland* as wide, empty spaces traversed by white modernity. The sequence of travel pictures from the family album include only one tiny snapshot of black workers (probably the drivers of the ox-wagon). Malherbe’s landscape and travel photographs sometimes include, occasionally and often without apparent intent, the small figures of black sharecroppers or farm labourers (figure fourteen).

But the difference of Malherbe’s social scientific touring is evident from comparison with an earlier *binnelandse reis*, also involving encounters with itinerant white farmers. An article on Namaqualand (a region important to Malherbe and Rothmann’s Carnegie research) from 1920 represents a new genre of writing that blended modern *vaderlandse* travel with motifs of *trek*. ‘Afrikaners’ were told that by traveling through their ‘*ei* land en onder [hul] *ei* mense’ (own land and under their own country) – here they would find unparalleled enjoyment and happiness. The ‘woeste eentonigheid’ (wild monotony) of barren plains – territory of *vaderland* (fatherland) - spoke to Afrikaners in their language. Moreover, tourists would derive special pleasure from meeting fellow Afrikaners. Whether they were rich farmers or poor *trekboers*, the same ‘wereldberoemde gasvryheid’ (world-renowned hospitality) would be encountered. Photographs celebrated the semi-desert landscape and the pleasures of touring. Portraits also featured the likes of a *trekboer* family encountered by the travelers: poor, generous, versed in Afrikaans folklore and intent on cleanliness. In their photograph, the car’s imposing fender flanks the *trekkers* and their tent in front of which the visitors are seated. On the right, children perch on top of a wagon, again providing a balance of old and new.<sup>44</sup>

While a similar pleasure at traversing the countryside is evident from Malherbe’s album, neither this nor his published photographs make any particular effort to present rural poor – at least culturally - as ‘Afrikaners’. Rothmann’s research notes – not her published

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<sup>44</sup> *Die Huisgenoot*, September 1920.

report - include at least one detailed personal history (and a snapshot portrait) of a respectably poor Afrikaner woman's *voortrekker* past. That Malherbe associated poor white with Afrikaans is evident from the way in which he only switches to English captioning right at the end of one section of the first album, where he also labels people as 'poor whites' of 'English' and 'German' descent. His photographs include pictures of people whose mode of dress and age made them ideal for presentation as aged *voortrekkers* – but these pictures were not chosen for the published volumes, nor are they provided with a cultural framing in the albums.

The Baviaanskloof sequence of pictures do suggest possibilities for more subtle analysis of the relationship between photographer and photographed – as Afrikaner researchers of white Afrikaans speakers – than do the photographs in their published form. Individual portraits of brightly smiling school children, of a relaxed looking and simply dressed mother photographed with her child, of school groups posing with their teachers and of performances by pupils suggest a context of patronage and excitement at the arrival of important visitors. It is difficult to reconcile certain of the pictures with social scientific facticity and the hardening idea of class difference evident from the commission's research and the pictures' use for publication. Considered individually, snapshots of young children and family groupings, with their atmosphere of informality, ease and connection between photographer and photographed, could also fit into an ordinary family album (Figure fifteen).

However, a sequence of photographs towards the middle of the first album offers opportunities for discovering more about Malherbe's intent with presentations of the familial, perhaps also of his interaction with subjects of his study, not least because the Malherbe collection has associated research notes. The first of three pages devoted to one family show eight men and women – the caption reads family name and place as 'Die Landmans – Steytlerville distrik'. Most faced the camera squarely and all looked directly at the camera at that swift moment when the shutter blinked open and close. Strong sun casts deep shadows on eyes and faces, accentuating the markings of time and climate. All are framed as head and shoulder portraits. There is a striking similarity of camera angle

and posture, bleached out sky and lack of background detail – although three of the photographs show part of the same building and open veld behind them. The small prints are the same size and shape, placed in line and evenly spaced. Below the family surname the Malherbe has added, in parenthesis, ‘Hulle het vir 5 geslagte ondermekaar getrou’ (For 5 generations they married amongst each other). One man is identified as ‘Teringslyer’ (TB sufferer) and arrows in ink point to two female ‘Lede van teringslyer familie’ (Members of TB sufferer family). Below, also bracketed, is another comment: ‘Afgesonder, Arm maar steeds vreedzaam’ (Isolated, Poor but still at peace.) Also, ‘Hulle hou eenvouding baie van mekaar’ (They simply like each other a lot) (Figure sixteen). Turn the page and another eight snapshots under the heading “Landmans” present themselves. Several of the small prints show, according to Malherbe’s inscriptions, a “Landmangesin” (Landman family) and “Landmankinders” (Landman children) posing next to their home – a group of children also feature in a photograph usefully captioned “Huis” (House). Two head and shoulders portraits, somewhat similar to those on the previous page, feature centre and right. But here the smiling face of a “Landman-seun” proclaims “Met my is dit net reg!” (‘with me things are just fine!’). Presumably Malherbe quoted him as comment on this extended family’s innocently problematic, bemusing acceptance of familial intermarriage, for the same boy is recorded as having declared that he wants to marry ‘Sarie Landman’, a small figure in an adjacent group photograph of children in front of their school. “Sarie is darem so mooi!” (‘Sarie is so pretty!’) (Figure seventeen)

What are we to make of Malherbe’s comments about the Landmans, their great liking for each other, their isolation and peacable nature? That a researcher of ‘poor whites’ should articulate an interest in eugenics through a composite portrait arranged to emphasise family resemblance is not very surprising. In fact, soon after the conclusion of the Carnegie Commission’s journeys, Malherbe (newly appointed as head of the South African Education Bureau) would frequently speak on such topics as, the problem ‘unbalanced fertility’ and of ‘quality vs. quantity’ (poor people were on average less intelligent; poor, therefore less intelligent people had larger families), the relative power of social, hereditary and factors on intelligence, the merits and possibilities for birth

control and of sterilising ‘certified’ individuals.<sup>45</sup> His field of reference included eugenicist research from the United States, specifically Goddard’s writing on the ‘Kallikak’ family, which claimed the persistence of congenital feeble-mindedness through generations. However, Malherbe’s jokey tone differs from the brief descriptive captions to photographs in the published volumes of the Carnegie report and is jarring to ears expecting the dispassionate voice of the professional educationist or sociologist engaged in documentary endeavour. The comments seem flippant, and placed as they are in parenthesis, they read almost as asides. They prompt questions as to the nature and purpose of Malherbe’s juxtaposition of word and image and draw attention to the particularity of the space of album – a space with a certain assumption of privacy and shared conversation.

A foray into Malherbe’s own field notebooks and associated typescript pages provide some insight and intrigue as to the dynamics of Malherbe’s research on this family and the place of the photographic in his investigation. His eugenicist interest is certainly confirmed upon perusal of his research report about the Landmans, which comprise a detailed genealogy mapping out marriages between members of the extended family. They also contain more flippant remarks about the Landmans – but by members of the clan. As one informant, “Ou Tant (Old Aunt) Johanna Landman” (née Landman) told Malherbe: “Hulle trou met mekaar soos Israeliete, Tot hulle soos ‘n stasie aanmekaar sit. Hulle bly so een gedermte – aanmekaar” (“They marry with each other like Israelites. Until they stick together like a station. They stay together like one intestine”). But while he clearly appreciated this remark, Malherbe seems to have found little evidence that intermarriage had resulted in diminished intelligence rather concluded his research by emphasising social reasons for relative economic decline and that the pattern of marriage was motivated by a desire to hold on to land. For Malherbe, the “jolly ineffectiveness” that characterised the Landmans was typical of rural dwellers unable to realize that they could no longer live the isolated and undemanding lives of their forebears. Somewhat less

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<sup>45</sup> E.G. Malherbe Manuscript Collection, KCM 56979 (240) File 477/4. In a presentation to the Dutch Reformed Synod where he argued for their approval of voluntary birth control (excluding abortion), Malherbe also suggested sterilisation of ‘gesertifiseerde persone wat nie algeheel gesegregeer kan word nie’ (certified persons who cannot be altogether segregated’.)

‘scientifically’, he also speculated that this “charming” and good-looking family – pale skins, the men well built, the girls with lively brown eyes - had “an affinity of likableness about them which caused cousins to fall in love with cousins”.<sup>46</sup> Malherbe’s ordered snapshots present a more uncomplicatedly pathologising focus on familial resemblance than emerges from his research notes.

In fact, his research notes also refer to photographs. Like Rothmann, Malherbe’s perusal of family pictures may have been shaped by questions pertaining to his research. However, his cryptic notes only recorded that portraits of parents and of a family group decorated Tante Johanna Landman’s living room. Malherbe’s detailed genealogical study often included mention of ‘kiekies’ (snapshots) next to the names of family members (and, in the case of some children, the results they had achieved in his tests). The negatives of many more photographs than those placed in the album show a slightly larger but unsurprising array of framings and poses. But notes on his conversations with photographic subjects suggest that some participated in picture-taking with a measure of assertiveness. Portraits of elderly couples probably include one of Tante Hannie who (according to Malherbe) had insisted that she would not be pictured ‘sonder haar ou man’ (without her old man). Tante Hannie had also disconcerted the researchers by offering them coffee without sugar and telling them that the teaspoons were ‘om die vliee uit te skep’ (for scooping out the flies).<sup>47</sup>

More interesting is the fact of two letters from school teachers thanking Malherbe for ‘die kiekies’ (the snapshots) and promising to identify the children pictured. ‘Ek sal die kiekies veilig besorg’ (I will safely deliver the snapshots) to the homes of ‘Mnr Jan Piet Landman en Mnr Edward Landman’ added one.<sup>48</sup> We have no access to the portraits that commissioners observed in the homes of their subjects of study. However and surprisingly of photographs comprising a typology of poor whites, Malherbe’s snapshots may well have augmented a collection of Landman family photographs. This incongruity of a gesture more easily associated with practices of personal and familial photography

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<sup>46</sup> E.G. Malherbe Manuscript Collection, KCM 56979 (200) file 476/21.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

hints at the inadequacy of any neat categorisation of this album as social documentary. Malherbe's diaries of the late 1920s contain regular notes about 'kiekies' (snapshots) - of a wedding party, of his small son - posted to relatives and friends.<sup>49</sup> Were those sent to the Landmans an extension of this habit? What does this suggest about this amateur photographer's interaction with his subjects?

Closer attention to the characteristics of contemporary familial photographic practise clarifies some of the difference of Malherbe's Carnegie snapshotting. His own family photographs offer useful opportunities for comparison. One page of seaside holiday kiekies from 1924 features the head and shoulders portrait of a young man and woman. Bare-armed, relaxed shoulders touching, the sea visible behind, their smiling faces seem at ease with the presence of a camera. This atmosphere of intimacy, also between photographer and subjects presents a contrast to any Carnegie pictures. The caption: "Patsy: Hai! Wat sal Gert sê! Paul: Toemaar, hy's ver weg!" (Patsy: Hey! What will Gert Say! Paul: Don't worry, he's far away!)<sup>50</sup> (Figure Eighteen) If Malherbe was a Kodak camera man, his wife Janie was evidently the main custodian of the family snapshot albums. Her handwriting, which changed over the years, shows that they remained objects intermittently compiled, paged through and that more captions were often added much later – here, photography was certainly a 'means by which family memory' was 'continued and perpetuated'.<sup>51</sup> As a repository of self-representation, Malherbe's albums may have been a lasting source for memories of 'the twenties' (to quote from Janie's nostalgic captions to the earlier trek with the government geologist). Many of the holiday-like pictures of travel and camping certainly appear in his autobiography – as do pictures of poor whites.

Malherbe and his wife's numerous personal photographs from the 1910s and 1920s are some examples of how the idea of the camera as 'instrument of ... togetherness' and the snapshot as displaying family cohesion<sup>52</sup> was absorbed by white, middle-class South

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<sup>49</sup> EGM, Diary for 1928, KCM 56985 (33) File 568/2.

<sup>50</sup> EGM, 'E.G.M. and Janie – varia with Relations and Friends'.

<sup>51</sup> M. Hirsch, *Family Frames*, pp. 6-7.

<sup>52</sup> M. Hirsch, *Family Frames*, p. 7.



Africans. Writing about the ‘coded and conventional nature of family photographs’ and relational construction of ‘familial subjectivity’, Hirsch has emphasised that ‘multiple looks’ circulate in their production and reading. The ‘dominant ideology of the family... superposes itself as an overlay over our more located, mutual, vulnerable individual looks’<sup>53</sup> If the visual interactions involved in Malherbe’s Carnegie photography were sometimes structured by networks of paternalism or patronage, close attention to specific photographs in the albums show another dynamic at work. For example, the photograph printed in Rothmann’s volume of the woman with her three children also appears in the sequence of Landman photographs, but uncropped, so that the figure of a man with hat, a white shirt and neat trousers is visible where he stands at a small distance from the assembled family. Discussing the importance of looking beyond the ‘obvious characteristics’ of a photograph’, Edwards suggests the value of scrutinising not merely ‘the detail of content but the whole performative quality of the image’.<sup>54</sup> An urbane presence in this bare landscape, the man seems intent on a small notebook, and is sometimes pictured writing in it. It is not he who is on display. But once noticed, he seems to dominate the page. His multiple presence in adjacent snapshots create the impression of a figure (always partly intent on his hands) circling the small groups of people who stand facing him, or turned away from him, always at some distance. In some of the snapshots he is shown from the back – his stance suggests that his recording device could well be a box camera. It is difficult to discern details of his face on the small prints, but this was certainly member of the Carnegie research team, photographed in action. As framings not only of armblanke subjects but of research in progress, the photographs include the researcher investigating his subjects and confront us with the intrusiveness of the social scientific gaze (Figure nineteen – compare also figure seventeen).

For Afrikaner nationalists as for many others, the construction of imagined communities across time and space included taking, looking at and writing about photographs.

Rothmann had ‘recognised’ the likeness of Hendrik Goosen’s father as ‘Afrikaner’ - as belonging to the family of volk - whilst also engaging in another dynamic of looking and

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<sup>53</sup> M. Hirsch, *Family Frames*, p. 11.

<sup>54</sup> E. Edwards, *Raw Histories*, p. 2.

reading his wife's portrait for disquieting signs of degeneracy. Malherbe – believer in the unambiguous potency of facts - used the camera as straightforward mechanism for recording appearances. Of course, photographic indexicality itself provides possibilities for the subversion and frustration of such assumptions. Sharp details reflected onto film presented individual likenesses to readers of the published report and to whoever might have perused the albums. Because his Carnegie photographs appear to share in some of the conventions of snapshot and personal photography (as his film caught 'the happy smile' or physical gestures of affection between parents and children) the photographs may have worked to engage viewers with familiar signs of the familial and to offer possibilities for imagined recognition. However, and contradictorily, the systematic, visual construction of typologies of similitude emphasised 'otherness'.

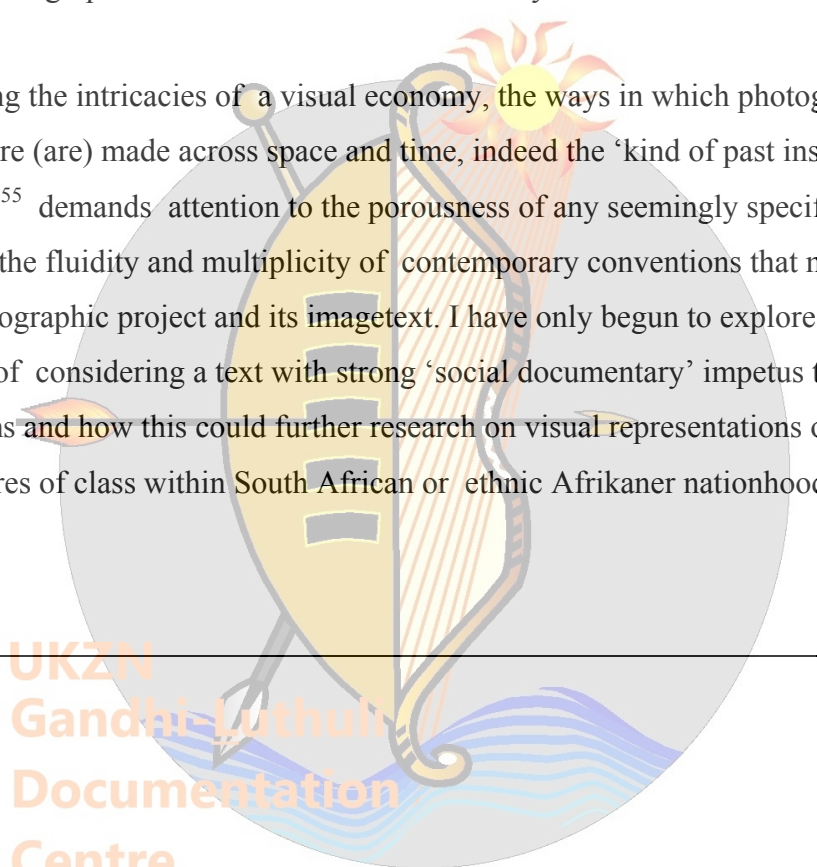
### **Towards further writing (eventually, a conclusion)**

From the first arrival of the camera in southern Africa it was incorporated into projects for documenting landscape and people – often associated with travel, expeditions and safaris. Were I to provide a comprehensive answer as to the nature of the Carnegie travellers' album – both for its images of travel and as social documentary - I would have to consider this broader context. My paper is also part of a longer research project that seeks to trace the changing visual representation of 'poor whites' within a larger context of *blank verbeeld* (whiteness imaged/imagined), particularly in the context of Afrikaner nationalism – from the late nineteenth century and into the 1930s. Hence, partly, my interest in images of travel and *trek*. From ca. 1916-1925, Afrikaner nationalist depictions of (invariably elderly) poorer whites emphasised their credentials as *Voortrekkers* and therefore deserving members of the *volk*. The Carnegie Commission album of 1929, itself emphatically documenting the work of a travelling commission, departed from such depictions by focusing on photographing 'arm blankes', their yards and houses with no similar attempt to place them into nationalist history as voortrekkers. During the 1920s, state-sponsored projects for the rehabilitation of landless whites also

generated photographs. For example, the Losperfontein state farm project published regular pictures in the *Industrial and Social Review*, a journal issued by the Pact government's department of labour. I plan to write a more detailed history of the photographs of poorer whites generated by state-associated projects. Unlike my writing on amateur photography in *Die Huisgenoot*, this paper does not interrogate black verbeeld - the dynamic between images of blackness and whiteness. While the published Carnegie photographs have few images of black people, Malherbe's albums include a number of photographs that demand attention and analysis.

Understanding the intricacies of a visual economy, the ways in which photographic meanings were (are) made across space and time, indeed the 'kind of past inscribed in photographs'<sup>55</sup> demands attention to the porousness of any seemingly specific visual genre and to the fluidity and multiplicity of contemporary conventions that may structure any one photographic project and its imagetext. I have only begun to explore the possibilities of considering a text with strong 'social documentary' impetus together with family albums and how this could further research on visual representations of whiteness and the fissures of class within South African or ethnic Afrikaner nationhood.

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<sup>55</sup> E. Edwards, *Raw Histories*, p.5.