

# TREU DEUTSCH ALLE WEGE!<sup>1</sup> – CULTURAL IDENTITY AND THE “GERMAN” COMMUNITY OF PHILIPPI

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## **Treu Deutsch Alle Wege! – kulturele identiteit en die “Duitse” gemeenskap van Philippi**

In ’n tyd waarin die begrip identiteit ’n brandende kwessie op die Suid-Afrikaanse agenda is, terwyl gepoog word om die land se post-94-identiteit te herdefinieer in ’n veeltalige, multikulturele samelewing, kan dit verhelderend wees om te fokus op ’n spesifieke gemeenskap en sy pogings om ’n sekere identiteit te vestig. Ná ’n inleidende agtergrond van die gemeenskap, word die konsep van identiteit kortliks in die artikel bespreek en dan gefokus op die afstammeling van die Duitse immigrante na Philippi op die Kaapse Vlakte, en spesifieke geleenthede waarin die binêre aard van hulle nasionale kulturele identiteit na vore kom. ’n Spesifiek Duitse identiteit het elke aspek van hulle lewe gevorm – van geloof tot skool, werk en ontspanning. Tog het hierdie immigrante hulleself as Suid-Afrikaners beskou. Die redes vir hierdie Duitse nasionalistiese identiteit word bespreek. Die artikel toon ook die onvermydelike invloed aan wat die Tweede Wêreldoorlog op die gemeenskap gehad het, en, as ’n gevolg, hoe die “grens”-identiteit van terselfdertyd Duits- en Suid-Afrikaans-wees, selfs versterk is.

**Sleutelterm:** afstammeling, Duitse gemeenskap, Duitsland, identiteit, immigrante, kultuur, Suid-Afrika.

At a time when the notion of identity seems to be a burning issue on the South African national agenda as attempts are made to redefine the country’s post-94 identity in a multilingual and multicultural society, it might be of significance to focus on a specific community and its attempts to define its identity. Following an introductory background to the history of the community, this article briefly discusses the concept of identity, and then focuses on the descendants of the German immigrants to Philippi on the Cape Flats and on specific events in which

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<sup>1</sup> “True to being German, always!”

the binary nature of their national identity came to the fore. A particular German identity infused every aspect of the community's life, from religion to school, work and recreation, yet these immigrants regarded themselves as being South Africans. The causes of this cultural identity are discussed. The article also touches on the inevitable influence the Second World War had on this community and, as a result, how the eventual "border" identity of being both German and South African, was forged even more strongly.

**Key words:** culture, descendants, German community, Germany, identity, immigrants, South Africa.

## Introduction

On the threshold of Cape Town, approximately 30 kilometres from the city, up to this day, a community of descendants of German immigrants from the nineteenth century still lives and works on a part of the Cape Flats settled by their ancestors. This community has, as its core origin, German Lutheran immigrants from 1859 to 1883<sup>2</sup>. Since the 1950s, in other words after the Second World War period, it developed into a multilingual, multicultural community as a result of intercultural marriages with Afrikaans or English-speaking partners.

During the latter half of the nineteenth century the British colonial government at the Cape recruited German immigrants to populate the then desolate Cape Flats. The reason for this was twofold: they wanted more European settlers to strengthen the white population at the Cape, and also to provide the Cape with much needed fresh produce.<sup>3</sup>

Parts of the Cape Flats, not populated since the arrival of the first Dutch settlers in 1652, were subsequently surveyed by the British colonial government's surveyor-general with a view to settling the German immigrants.<sup>4</sup>

This descriptive article focuses on certain events in the history of the German immigrant community and how it established or maintained its cultural identity.

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<sup>2</sup> L. Rabe, *'n Kultuurhistoriese studie van die Duitse nedersetting Philippi op die Kaapse Vlakte* ("A Cultural Historical Study of the German settlement Philippi on the Cape Flats"), (D.Phil.-dissertation, University of Stellenbosch, 1994).

<sup>3</sup> "Die ersten Anfänge in der Vlakte", in W.J.L. Blumer (ed), *Pflanzgarten im Dünensand* (Wynberg, 1959), pp. 12-13.

<sup>4</sup> "Die ersten Anfänge in der Vlakte", in W.J.L. Blumer (ed), *Pflanzgarten im Dünensand*, p. 13; National Archives, Cape Town: Immigration Agent Cape (Document collection 4/3/3), Public Works Department (Document collection 1/68), House of Assembly (4/8); Office of the Surveyor-General, Cape Town: maps of the Philippi Flats settler area.

## Background

Up to the arrival of these German immigrants to the Western Cape, the geographical area of the Cape Flats was to a great extent uninhabited.<sup>5</sup> Geographical studies of the area<sup>6</sup> indicated that the Cape Flats had been a sea strait, with the Peninsula Mountain Range an island. It could not be established whether this area had been inhabited by the indigenous Khoikhoi people, but it can be concluded that, as a result of the lack of natural shelters and trees and sufficient grazing for their cattle, it was not used as a stand for the pastoral nomads, although they certainly trekked over the Flats, as is evident from graves found there. According to a newspaper report, implements of the Khoikhoi, sea fossils, grinding stones as well as skeletons, were found during sand-mining excavations.<sup>7</sup>

The Cape Flats were described as a “flat, even terrain of sand” that is marked by “vlei” areas (seasonal lakes). On these even flats there are smaller sand dunes in certain parts, and in many areas the water table raises above ground during the rainy season.<sup>8</sup>

Several sources maintain that it was uninhabitable due to various factors: sandy, infertile soil; sandstorms in summer; marshes and lakes in winter; no infrastructure such as roads due to the thick, shifting sand, and a total lack of water in summer.<sup>9</sup> One source, in a vivid description, refers to the non-existence of both roads and trees, how the wind blew over the sandy flats during summer and how it was one marshy area during winter.<sup>10</sup> Schnell describes the area as “practically useless,”<sup>11</sup> although this “weite, öde Sand- und Heidefläche” (wide, desolate sand and heath flats)<sup>12</sup> were so beautiful in spring that it “could be compared to the world during its creation.”

To summarise: to a great extent the Cape Flats was uninhabited before the arrival of the first German immigrants, as it was seen as an inhospitable semi-desert. It was this area that the Cape colonial government thought fit for German settlement.

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<sup>5</sup> L. Rabe, *'n Kultuurhistoriese studie van die Duitse nedersetting Philippi*, p. 9.

<sup>6</sup> H. Joubert, *Die verstedeliking van die Kaapse Vlakte* (“The urbanisation of the Cape Flats”), (D.Phil.-dissertation, University of Stellenbosch, 1956); M.S. Taljaard, *A glimpse of South Africa* (Stellenbosch, 1949).

<sup>7</sup> *Die Burger*, 1950-06-05, s.p.

<sup>8</sup> H. Joubert, *Die verstedeliking van die Kaapse Vlakte*, p. 27.

<sup>9</sup> L. Rabe, *'n Kultuurhistoriese studie van die Duitse nedersetting Philippi*, pp. 13-14.

<sup>10</sup> W.J.L. Blumer (ed), *Pflanzgarten im Dünensand*, p. 13.

<sup>11</sup> E.L.G. Schnell, *For men must work* (Cape Town, 1954), p. 224.

<sup>12</sup> H. Ludewig, *Geschichte der Deutschen Evangelisch-Lutherischen St. Johannis-Gemeinde zu Wynnberg bei Kapstadt* (Braunschweig, 1911), p. 28.

## Settlement and the first years

The success of the German settlers to the Eastern Cape inspired the Cape Government to settle the Western Cape with similar German stock. It was said that if the Germans could transform “a stone desert [the Eastern Cape] into a paradise”, as it was described, why not also a “sand desert”?<sup>13</sup>

This was also the conclusion after it was noticed what some German immigrants had achieved on the sandy soil on the edge of the Cape Flats, namely the Diep River area, after working themselves free from their contracts as indentured labourers to farms in the Swartland (from the late 1850s to the 1870s).<sup>14</sup>

These first immigrants to the area were called the First Wave, to be followed by the Second Wave (the first recruited groups in 1877/78) and the Third Wave (the last recruited groups in 1883), in a comprehensive study on the history of the Philippi community.<sup>15</sup> This immigration was part of the “Völkerwanderung” (migration of the nations), the mighty socio-cultural phenomenon of the nineteenth century when an estimated five million Germans from the various German states migrated between 1820 and 1890 to parts of the “New World”.<sup>16</sup> The immigrants to Philippi originated mostly from the northern regions of Germany, with those in the Second and Third Wave originating specifically from the area called the Lüneburger Heide (today in Lower Saxony).

The descendants of the German immigrants to the Western Cape, specifically to what had then been called Wynberg Flats and Claremont Flats, today make up the (German) descendant community on Philippi Flats, the agricultural area of the larger geographical area of the Cape Flats, an area specialising in the cultivation of vegetables for the Cape metropolis.

The immigrants formed a close-knit community, with strong ties among themselves – some dating back generations, as many had existing bonds of friendship in the villages of Northern Germany from where they were recruited. These bonds were cemented through the extreme hardships they endured on the Cape Flats, arriving with nothing but their “hands and their [Lutheran] Bible”, as it was said. An article in the *Cape Argus* in 1951 referred to their sense of community:

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<sup>13</sup> W.H.C. Hellberg, Duitse Immigrasie na Wes-Kaapland (“German Immigration to the Western Cape”), in W.J.L. Blumer (ed), *Pflanzgarten im Dünensand*, p. 16.

<sup>14</sup> L. Rabe, ‘n *Kultuurhistoriese studie van die Duitse nedersetting Philippi*, pp. 17-28.

<sup>15</sup> See L. Rabe, ‘n *Kultuurhistoriese studie van die Duitse nedersetting Philippi*, 1994.

<sup>16</sup> E.L.G. Schnell, *For men must work*, p. 159.

*Naturally enough, one finds a strong community feeling among these Philippi farmers. Their common background of endeavour would hold them together, even without their common original nationality.*<sup>17</sup>

Being of peasant stock, they did not have many possessions, and literally started out with nothing but an allotted piece of (barren) land which had to be paid for over a period of ten years, and a tent as their sole shelter. One newspaper report stated that they were not, “as other immigrants had been, provided with any draught animals and other means of carrying on their industry”.<sup>18</sup> There was no infrastructure in the area in which the immigrants settled. They encountered a vast area of sand – in summer a desert, in winter a marshland. A report in a local Wynberg newspaper from 3 November 1883, reprinted in 1988, reads:

*The German families settled on the Wynberg and Claremont Flats, amongst sand-hills about five miles from a hard road and a railway station, deserve the commiseration and assistance of the public. Most of the immigrants, brought out here under misrepresentations, stayed only a few days on their allotments, and perceiving the trap they had fallen into, packed up their scanty chattels, came to Wynberg, and sought and found employment. Several families however [...] have managed to live so far [...] It is a crying shame to treat honest hardworking people in this cruel manner, and the Government should be severely taken to task in reference to this matter when Parliament meets.*<sup>19</sup>

This was the land they had to cultivate, and not only make a living from, but which had to provide them with the “new future” that they had dreamt of as peasants when they left their own country. The hardships led to a well-known expression among the immigrants and their descendants according to which “the first generation earned death, the second hardship, and only the third started to prosper” (“Die erste Generation ernte das Tod, die zweite das Not und die dritte das Brot”).<sup>20</sup>

Initially, the settlers were all members of the Lutheran St Johannis Church in Wynberg, on the edge of the Cape Flats, with the “Schulgemeinde” (school

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<sup>17</sup> E. Allen, Cape’s German Settlers have made good, *Cape Argus*, 1951-04-14.

<sup>18</sup> Article in *The Cape Times*, 1933-02-27, s.p.

<sup>19</sup> Article in *The Wynberg Times and South African Agriculturist, Simon’s Town, Suburban and Western Province Advertiser*, 1883, reprinted in the *Wynberg and Plumstead News*, 1988-01-13, s.p.

<sup>20</sup> Author’s own experience.

congregation) situated on Wynberg Flats (Philippi).<sup>21</sup> Towards the end of the nineteenth century the community consisted of three churches and three schools (Wynberg, Philippi and Neu Eisleben – the latter deeper into the Dunes area). However, the community still functioned as a unit, bonded together through background, hardship, language, religion and culture. The hostile environment was not only caused by nature, but also by a hostile society. In no unclear terms, the British colonial Government “want[ed] to make [them] English”.<sup>22</sup>

This led to the already legendary hard-headed Germans, whose other characteristics of “Fleiss, Ausdauer, Ehrlichkeit und Sparsamkeit” (diligence, perseverance, honesty and thrift)<sup>23</sup> led the Cape Government to recruit Germans in the first place, to treasure their culture, language, religion and traditions even more.

This article will now reflect on the specific cultural identity that was the result of this fierce inward focus of the community to cherish the “own”, as a result of being the “other” in a hostile environment, as they simultaneously struggled to become “South Africans”.

Arriving in a country where they did not understand the language, where they were maltreated and generally regarded as being inferior, the immigrants understandably strengthened the impulse to remain “German”. One such example (of many) is the story of a hunting club at the Cape which, accustomed to having the Cape Flats as their playground, trampled the wearisomely tilled fields of the immigrants, lashed a settler when he protested, and, when he fell to the ground, further humiliated him. When the settler took the incident to court, the magistrate turned out to be one of the hunters who had participated in the assault, and subsequently dismissed the case.<sup>24</sup>

## **“Identity” and the German immigrants**

In a post-liberalisation-, post-94 South Africa, which seems to be obsessed with the notions of identity as a result of its history and its multicultural and multilingual nature, it is intriguing to see how “identity” manifested itself in a South African German immigrant community.

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<sup>21</sup> L. Rabe, *'n Kultuurhistoriese studie van die Duitse nedersetting Philippi*, 1994.

<sup>22</sup> W.J.L. Blumer (ed), *Pflanzgarten im Dünensand*, p. 23.

<sup>23</sup> “Die ersten Anfänge in der Vlakte”, in W.J.L. Blumer (ed), *Pflanzgarten im Dünensand*, p. 13.

<sup>24</sup> W.H.C. Hellberg, *Duitse Immigrasie na Wes-Kaapland*, p. 18.

An event that most probably contributed to inspiring emotions of a national, cultural identity was the fiftieth commemoration in 1933 of the arrival of the last group of immigrants in 1883. The years leading up to this celebration, as well as the period immediately afterwards, are significant, as it should be noted that this coincide with the build-up of Germany after the First World War as well as the build-up of National Socialism and the outcome of this ideology.

For the purposes of this article, the concept of identity will be discussed briefly. It can be accepted that the term identity is “widely used in developmental, personality, and social psychology, as well as some areas of sociology”.<sup>25</sup> Different theories and scholarly traditions have produced a “myriad of conceptions and connotations.” Whereas the original Eriksonian definition focused on identity as an internal process, later sociological models studied “the groups to which he or she belongs and the roles that he or she plays in the system” – and thus led to frameworks such as “ethnic identity.” Specifically, also, social identity theory emphasises social categorisation, “a process of identifying oneself as a member of a shared category.” It addresses issues of intergroup relations and considers “how people define themselves as members of an in-group in opposition to members of a different social category, termed the out-group.”<sup>26</sup>

According to this theory, one can postulate that the German immigrants were members of their own “in-group”, or, from the perspective of the Cape Government, members of the “out-group”. Furthermore, one can speculate that these two opposing drives could therefore be dominant factors in the formation and affirmation of their unique cultural identity.

If one accepts that “culture” is “embedded in various human activities and social relations”,<sup>27</sup> and that “human beings do not exist in a vacuum”... “but live together in groups to facilitate their survival needs”,<sup>28</sup> one can define “cultural identity” “as self-perception of one’s position in different dimensions of life”<sup>29</sup>, such as, among others, race, social class, gender and religion. Because of the

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<sup>25</sup> A.E Kazdin, (editor-in-chief), *Encyclopedia of Psychology* (American Psychological Association, Washington, D.C., 2000), p. 222.

<sup>26</sup> A.E Kazdin (editor-in-chief), *Encyclopedia of Psychology*, p. 222.

<sup>27</sup> P. McLaren, 1998, as cited in H.-J. Chen, The rationale for critical pedagogy in facilitating cultural identity development, *Curriculum and Teaching Dialogue* (Information Age Publishing, 2005), pp. 11-22.

<sup>28</sup> H.-J. Chen, The rationale for critical pedagogy in facilitating cultural identity development, pp. 11-22.

<sup>29</sup> B.D. Tatum, 1997, as cited in H.-J. Chen, The Rationale for critical pedagogy in facilitating cultural identity development, *Curriculum and Teaching Dialogue*, p. 12.

complexities of human activities, “[c]ultural identity is multidimensional”.<sup>30</sup> Added to this description, the notion of “ethnic identity” includes religious practice, political ideology and friendship patterns.<sup>31</sup>

Accepting that “identity” is a “set of phenomena and not easily delimited”, one can conclude that it is a feature of the individual, but that it also “emerges in a social context and is shaped by the immediate circumstances as well as the broader culture.”<sup>32</sup>

In the case of the Philippi immigrants, the first and second generation, who came as families (adults and children) to the Cape, were still German citizens. This, however, changed dramatically after the First World War when the men were interned in camps in the then Natal. According to the “chronicles” of the Philippi congregation, the pastor, principal and twenty “Familienväter” (heads of families) were interned for ten months after the war broke out in May 1914.<sup>33</sup> The immigrants nationalised themselves directly afterwards, and these certificates of nationalisation took pride of place among their important documents.<sup>34</sup>

The act of nationalisation probably added to the members of the community literally becoming South African citizens, not only because of a pragmatic decision not to be interned again, but purely on the basis of citizenship. This can also be interpreted as a formal break with their “German identity.” However, as was discussed, “cultural identity” manifests itself in multidimensional ways, and the extent of a “German” identity in terms of culture was prevalent for many more decades to come, and led to what can be described as a binate identity: having a German culture, but South African citizenship.

Of particular significance was the period leading up to the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary (in 1933) of the arrival of the last group of immigrants, the celebration itself and its influence on the next period in the history of the community.

The fact that the celebration took place in 1933, possibly at the height of the rise of National Socialism in the “mother country”, explains why the nationalist fervour was probably not incidental. This ideology certainly must have had an influence on the immigrant community, even long before the dawn of the “global village” and its instant communication systems. Regular contact with visiting

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<sup>30</sup> H.-J. Chen, The Rationale for critical pedagogy in facilitating cultural identity development, *Curriculum and Teaching Dialogue*, p. 12.

<sup>31</sup> J.S. Phinney, 1990, as cited in A.E Kazdin (editor-in-chief), *Encyclopedia of Psychology*, p. 223.

<sup>32</sup> A.E Kazdin (editor-in-chief), *Encyclopedia of Psychology*, p. 222.

<sup>33</sup> W.J.L. Blumer (ed.), *Pflanzgarten im Dünensand*, p. 43.

<sup>34</sup> Such certificates can be seen in the German Settler Museum in Philippi.

Germans, especially German naval ships, which led to many cultural evenings in Philippi, as well as available literature, could have been the umbilical cord to Germany, as this isolated community on the most southern tip of Africa even had a “Ha-Jot” movement (HJ, the initials of the Hitler-Jugend [Youth] movement as pronounced in German) (**Figures 1 and 2**).



**Figure 1: A wedding that took place in December, 1935 at the Lutheran church in Philippi. The groom, Hermann Wolff, was a leader in the Ha-Jot Movement, which also explains the guard of honour by the Philippi youth. The bride is Klara Fehle from Plieningen, Germany.**

(Original photograph property of Heins Wolff, son of Hermann and Klara. This photograph is a photograph of the original, taken by the author, with permission of Heins Wolff.)



**Figure 2: A typical display by the Ha-Jot in Philippi. The photograph must have been taken at one of the many “Turn”-festivals held by the youth movement in Philippi, advocating a healthy mind in a healthy body.**

(L. Rabe, *'n Kultuurhistoriese studie van die Duitse nedersetting Philippi op die Kaapse Vlakte*, University of Stellenbosch, 1994, Fig. 236.)

### **Community, culture, education and religion**

Although the German settlers were of peasant stock, day labourers and artisans, it was important to them that their children were educated. Therefore, although all children worked in the fields before and after school, they would not grow up as “barbarians”.<sup>35</sup> Education was regarded as a fundamental and important ally to

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<sup>35</sup> W.H.C. Hellberg, *Duitse immigrasie na Wes-Kaapland*, p. 20.

ensure the survival of the German language, culture, traditions, and, importantly, religion.

For the community, school was a means to an end: the child should learn enough German to be confirmed in its religion.<sup>36</sup> As was the case elsewhere in similar German immigrant communities in South Africa,<sup>37</sup> Lutheran, religion education of the child was far more important than an academic education. Even in 1959, the consul-general of the German Federal Republic in Cape Town, Otto Heipertz, referred to the importance of education to the settlers, and that their children should be educated in the “Muttersprache” (mother tongue) in order to preserve their “deutsche Art” (German nature).<sup>38</sup>

A school in which the medium of education would be German, was thus extremely important to the immigrants. This, in fact, was one of the promises made by the recruiting agent in Germany, and one of the motivators to accepting the immigration recruitment. The immigrants, however, soon after their arrival found that this was part of a whole range of empty promises.<sup>39</sup> Within one year after the arrival of the last group in 1883 they themselves established their own school, and the first school building was erected in 1886.<sup>40</sup>

This was met with antagonism from the Cape Government, which resulted, after some years, in the Government erecting a school adjacent to the German school with the intention of coaxing away children by presenting free education. The German school, as a private and fee-paying school, had to be subsidised by the meagre income of the immigrants, which meant even more sacrifices.<sup>41</sup>

To add to this, the Cape government instituted a new school law in 1905 according to which the German school had to teach in English. According to various sources, the German community’s patience “snapped”. The community took the government to court and won, as was reported in a 1938 German newspaper.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> W.H.C. Hellberg, ‘n Terugblik (“Looking back”), in W.J.L. Blumer, *Pflanzgarten im Dünensand*, p. 34.

<sup>37</sup> U. Küsel, *Die kulturele bydrae van die Hermannsburgse sendelinge/setlaars in Suid-Afrika* (“The cultural contribution of the Hermannsburg missionaries/settlers in South Africa”) (Pretoria, 1992), p. 55.

<sup>38</sup> O.E. Heipertz, Zum, fünfundsiebzigjährigen Bestehen der Deutschen Schule Philippi-Vlakte am Kap (congratulatory letter), in W.J.L. Blumer, *Pflanzgarten im Dünensand*, p. 7.

<sup>39</sup> W.J.L. Blumer (ed), *Pflanzgarten im Dünensand*, 1959; L. Rabe, ‘n *Kultuurhistoriese studie van die Duitse nedersetting Philippi*, 1994.

<sup>40</sup> W.J.L. Blumer (ed), *Pflanzgarten im Dünensand*, 1959.

<sup>41</sup> W.J.L. Blumer (ed), *Pflanzgarten im Dünensand*, p. 29.

<sup>42</sup> H. Bruckschen, Aus der Heide in die Vlakte, in W.J.L. Blumer (ed), *Pflanzgarten im Dünensand*, p. 40.

In another article, this “Erbe” (legacy) manifested itself also in various cultural organisations in the community, such as the founding of a “strong” youth group, as well as a gymnastics club and a choral society.<sup>43</sup>

In a community where both the official and unofficial motto was “Bete und Arbeite”, or Ora et Labora as was the Latin wording on the crest of the German school in Philippi, it is to be expected that its recreation centred around the church and other religio-cultural activities. There were also informal get-togethers, such as dances on Saturday nights, when it was “Feierabend” (time to relax) and the church bell was rung at 18:00 to mark the end of the work week.<sup>44</sup> One settler, who was a small girl when her family arrived, remembered in 1955:

*Oh, we had fun. Saturday nights we carried on through the sands or waded through the marshes to someone’s small house where we danced on the clay floor to the tune of a harmonica or a hand organ until the early hours. And days after that when you milked a cow or turned the churn, those tunes still fluttered through one’s head and kept you happy!*<sup>45</sup>

According to this source, the German children also loved reading: they received books and magazines on a regular basis from Germany and sat at night by candle or oil lamp “happily whiling away the time”. Another source also remembers, besides the “German songs” and “German dances”: “Entertainment there was enough, a lot of fun, and also enough books and German publications to read.”<sup>46</sup>

It was predominantly religious reading matter, mostly from the Hermannsburg Mission, as well as books such as “Haus-Andachten”, “Starck’s Gebetbuch” and “Frisches Wasser”. In addition, the congregation also collected money to start their own library. The first collection in 1901 raised the amount of £11/10, enough to buy the first 160 books for the library.<sup>47</sup>

### **The duality of being: “Fern von der Heimat und doch in der Heimat!”**

Two events serve as examples – although three decades apart – to illustrate the binary nature of the community’s identity. These were the German Kaiser’s 90<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Interview with F. Schultz, 1992.

<sup>45</sup> A. Bouwer, Hul spore in die sand hul grootste monument (“Their footprints in the sand their greatest monument”), *Sarie* magazine, 1954-05-04, p. 16.

<sup>46</sup> A. Bouwer, Hul spore in die sand hul grootste monument, p. 16.

<sup>47</sup> W.H.C. Hellberg, *Die Deutschen Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirchengemeinden im Westen des Kaplands* (“The German Evangelical Lutheran Congregations in the Western Cape”), (D.Phil.- dissertation, University of Stellenbosch, 1957), p. 206.

birthday celebration in 1887 and the visit of the famous research ship, the Meteor, to Cape Town in 1926.

According to a report on the Kaiser's birthday celebration, held on 21 and 22 March 1887, this event was celebrated by a group of people loyal to their newly adoptive country, but still yearning for their Heimat.<sup>48</sup>

The day's weather was even described as "echtes Kaiserswetter" – in other words, a perfect day. No less than five German cruisers lay at anchor in the harbour. What was said on the day by the various speakers, led to one report stating that although they were separated by an ocean from their Heimat, they still pray for the prosperity of "their" emperor.<sup>49</sup> After the final toast, the celebrations were ended with the "thunderous" singing of the then German national anthem, *Wacht am Rhein*.<sup>50</sup>

Another reason for the rich cultural life, besides the passionate readers in the community, was the regular contact with "Landsleute" thanks to visiting ships of the German navy anchored in Table Bay. This cultural bond was resumed after the First World War with the arrival of the first post-war German ship, namely the research ship the Meteor, in 1926.

The captain and his crew were astonished to witness such a lively German community at the Cape, the highlight being the schoolchildren's singing of their own "Meteor-Lied". The captain recorded how, after some speeches, something "wonderful" happened when the school children sang their original, self-composed song.<sup>51</sup> This song is also evidence of the German identity, even among the then young generation. One can conclude that within a relatively conservative community the youth would naturally conform and would not be critical of their culture, but it is an astonishing account of the nationalist identity still infusing the community. The first verse welcomed the Meteor, the second saluted science and the research done by the ship, and the third, as indicated below, celebrated the "Heimat":

<i>Lass wehen Deine Fahnen,</i>	<i>("Let your flags flutter,</i>
<i>Die Farben schwarz-weiss-rot,</i>	<i>The colours black-white-red,</i>
<i>Sie sollen uns ermahnen:</i>	<i>They need to admonish us:</i>
<i>Sei treu bis in den Tod!</i>	<i>Remain true till death!</i>
<i>Wir grüssen alle, Hand in Hand,</i>	<i>We greet you, hand in hand</i>
<i>Dich, deutsche Fahn'! Dich Vaterland!</i>	<i>You, German flag! You, Fatherland!")</i>

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<sup>48</sup> G.W. Wagener, *Volkskalender für Südafrika auf das Jahr 1888* (Cape Town, 1888), p. 111.

<sup>49</sup> G.W. Wagener, *Volkskalender für Südafrika auf das Jahr 1888*, p. 112.

<sup>50</sup> G.W. Wagener, *Volkskalender für Südafrika auf das Jahr 1888*, p. 114.

<sup>51</sup> F. Spiess, *Die Meteor-Fahrt. Forschungen und Erlebnisse der Deutschen Atlantischen Expedition 1925-1927* (Berlin, 1928), p. 148.

After this, it was time for “Spiel und Tanz ins Freie” (play and dance outside) with the “blonden, festlich gekleideten deutschen Kinder” (blond children in their best outfits), with games “wie sie nur die Heimat kennt: Drittenabschlagen, Blindkuh, Bäumchenwechselln” (that are only known in the Heimat).<sup>52</sup>

This event during the twenties illustrated the still fervent loyalty towards Germany, and the German identity of the community. The Meteor captain recorded that despite the long separation since immigration, as well as the difficult years after the war, the “Deutschtum” (Germaness) and German language were held in high esteem, even despite the fact that they had to be multilingual in terms of having also to speak English and Afrikaans.<sup>53</sup>

### **The run-up to the 1933-celebration**

This German identity was a result of the strong and conservative, traditionalist value system at the core of the community, as was manifested in the various cultural organisations thriving under the system. Music and singing were always important to the community: the choir of the first congregation in Wynberg was established in 1887.<sup>54</sup> After the break-away-formation of the Philippi congregation in 1897, its choir was established in 1899.<sup>55</sup>

The “Posaunenchor” (brass orchestra), which met twice weekly for practice, became part of the bigger “Jugendverein” (youth society) in 1928, which in turn became part of the “Deutscher Orden” (German Order) in the early 1930s.<sup>56</sup>

Another important cultural and societal body was the agricultural society. Established in 1885, it is today the oldest agricultural society in South Africa. At the time, it was the second oldest agricultural society in South Africa (the first had also been established by German immigrants a couple of years earlier in the Eastern Cape).<sup>57</sup>

Besides the regular meetings of these official community bodies, concerts and “Familienabende” were held on a regular basis, also as a means of collecting funds for certain ends. This brought “challenges” of a lesser kind: for concerts, the prompter had to stand outside the window of the bigger school room in which the performances were held with a candle to assist the actors in case they forgot their

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<sup>52</sup> F. Spiess, *Die Meteor-Fahrt*, p. 149.

<sup>53</sup> F. Spiess, *Die Meteor-Fahrt*, p. 149.

<sup>54</sup> W.H.C. Hellberg, *Die Deutschen Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirchengemeinden*, p. 158.

<sup>55</sup> W.J.L. Blumer (ed), *Pflanzgarten im Dünensand*, p. 26.

<sup>56</sup> W.H.C. Hellberg, *Die Deutschen Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirchengemeinden*, p. 219.

<sup>57</sup> L. Rabe, *'n Kulturhistoriese studie van die Duitse nedersetting Philippi*, 1994.

words: “It also always had to be one with good eyes [because of the dark]. Everything was very primitive, but we enjoyed it so much.”<sup>58</sup> The “Jugend”, as the members of the youth society were also known (more so after the Second World War, but before that, the “Ha-Jot”), once gave a concert in honour of the settlers:

*I remember how Mama, she was already a widow, and her brother-in-law, Onkel August, he a widower, sat next to one another in the audience. And how the tears streamed down their cheeks; that we did something like this for them.*<sup>59</sup>

The Deutscher Orden in Philippi was established in 1933 – the year of the jubilee celebration. This “Orden” became the overarching body for the brass orchestra, the choir and the male choir,<sup>60</sup> and organised many events, among others sport festivals, concerts and “tickey evenings”. Thanks to the activities of the youth, it was decided to build a bigger community hall, called the “Ordenhalle”. It was eventually built in 1935, following a couple of years of fundraising events, after the original decision was made in 1931.<sup>61</sup>

Especially in the twenties and thirties of the previous century, the community experienced this rich cultural life. Besides performances, “Bunter Abende” (evenings of poetry, music and social activity, often followed by a dance) and Lieder evenings were held.<sup>62</sup> According to sources, this led to a tight cultural bond with the Heimat, although all were unanimous that the Philippi descendants were not aware of a political agenda, as they had, maybe naively so, no knowledge of German politics. The “Hitler-Jugendgruppe” was seen as a cultural, recreational society, a type of “Boy Scouts”, as it was put.

The cultural life in Philippi experienced a high season during the rise of National Socialism in Germany, and as a result of the many visits by ships from the German navy, regular contact was maintained with “Landsleute”. If the German intellectual elite at the Cape knew the extent of the Nazi ideology in Germany, the Philippi immigrant descendants were totally ignorant, as many expressed their concern that to them the “Orden” and all its activities were purely of a cultural nature and that it had no political subtext.<sup>63</sup>

One can go as far as to make a statement that this probably naïve group of German descendants was abused for the sake of National Socialism, as many moving

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<sup>58</sup> Interview with I. Bode, b. Schultz, 1992.

<sup>59</sup> Interview with I. Bode, b. Schultz, 1992.

<sup>60</sup> W.H.C. Hellberg, *Die Deutschen Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirchengemeinden*, p. 189.

<sup>61</sup> W.J.L. Blumer (ed.), *Pflanzgarten im Dünensand*, 1959.

<sup>62</sup> Interviews with I. Bode, b. Schultz & F. Schultz, 1992.

<sup>63</sup> L. Rabe, *'n Kultuurhistoriese studie van die Duitse nedersetting Philippi*, 1994.

articles on the community and its proud German heritage, identity and values appeared in the German media during this period. One such article included a photograph of which the caption, brimming of German Nationalism, alluded to the leader of the Boy Scouts (the Ha-Jot, although it was not referred to as such), who, although he himself had never seen Germany, educated the farmers' sons with respect for the old Heimat<sup>64</sup> (Figure 3).



**Figure 3: Welt Grote.**<sup>65</sup>

(I. Steinhoff, *Hamburger Illustrierte* 6, 1938-02-07, p. 6.)

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<sup>64</sup> I. Steinhoff, Bauern aus der Lüneburger Heide am Kap der Guten Hoffnung, *Hamburger Illustrierte* 6, 1938-02-07, p. 6.

<sup>65</sup> The original caption to this photograph read: "Welt Grote, der Führer der Pfadpfindergruppe Vlake [this was the Ha-Jot, and it is interesting that it was not named such), einer der stärksten jugendlicher Vorkämpfer des Deutschtums in Südafrika, mit einem seiner prächtigen Pimfe. Er ist Führer, Freund und Kamerad der jungen Bauernsöhne und erzieht sie in Gedanken und Achtung der alten Heimat, die auch er selbst nie gesehen hat." The photograph accompanied an article in the *Hamburger Illustrierte* of February 1938, "Bauern aus der Lüneburger Heide am Kap der Guten Hoffnung".

## The 1933 celebration

The run-up to this celebration, commemorating the arrival of the last group of immigrants in 1833, and the celebration itself provide an interesting case study of how such an event exponentially magnified certain emotions related to identity among the immigrants.

The 1933 celebration was attended by more than 1 000 people.<sup>66</sup> A number of addresses were given, and a choir of more than 100 members performed. The chairperson of the “Orden” and principal of the German school, Klaus Schröder, wrote a thirty-page manuscript, in Germanic script, to record the events. Schröder speculates on why so many descendants turned up to celebrate – “maybe their German blood forced them to attend”.<sup>67</sup>

In one of six speeches it was specifically said that the descendants can only be “good South Africans” if they cherish their own culture. This speaker also reminded the audience of the German idiom “Halte was du hast, dass niemand deine Krone nimmst” (hold that which you have, in order not to lose your “crown”), with the community’s crown, their language, church and school. This was answered with “brausende Beifall” (loud cheering), after which the *Deutschlandlied* was sung.<sup>68</sup>

Leading up to the celebrations, and during the celebrations, especially men greeted one another with a sturdy handshake saying “50 Jahre harte Hände-Arbeit!”, while the greeting was returned with “Treu Deutsch alle Wege!”<sup>69</sup> Schröder also ends his manuscript with this phrase, and according to sources, this became the clarion call for the descendants after the celebrations.

A report on the occasion in a German newspaper ends with the hope that the German spirit will never wane, and that the “German” Flats will remain a monument to German thrift, thoroughness and success.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> I. Steinhoff, Bauern aus der Lüneburger Heide am Kap der Guten Hoffnung, *Hamburger Illustrierte* 6, 1938-02-07, p. 6.

<sup>65</sup> The original caption to this photograph read: “Welt Grote, der Führer der Pfadfindergruppe Vlakte [this was the Ha-Jot, and it is interesting that it was not named such), einer der stärksten jugendlicher Vorkämpfer des Deutschtums in Südafrika, mit einem seiner prächtigen Pimfe. Er ist Führer, Freund und Kamerad der jungen Bauernsöhne und erzieht sie in Gedanken und Achtung der alten Heimat, die auch er selbst nie gesehen hat.” The photograph accompanied an article in the *Hamburger Illustrierte* of February 1938, “Bauern aus der Lüneburger Heide am Kap der Guten Hoffnung”.

<sup>66</sup> Colonisers of the Flats, *Cape Times*, in W.J.L. Blumer (ed), *Pflanzgarten im Dünensand*, p. 64.

<sup>67</sup> K. Schröder, manuscript 1933, pp. 20-21. In possession of the present author.

<sup>68</sup> L. Rabe, ‘n *Kultuurhistoriese studie van die Duitse nedersetting Philippi*, p. 512.

<sup>69</sup> Interviews with I. Bode, b. Schultz, & F. Schultz, 1992.

## A dual identity

These German South Africans were, for the period under discussion, clearly more German than South African. Although they belonged to the South African nation, and their nationality was South African, their identity was predominantly German. Although they gradually assimilated to specific physical aspects of living in a totally different country, the shift in identity was more difficult.

The annual publication, the *Volkskalender*, during the years of Wagener as pastor of the congregation (in the 1880s), was meant, among others, to literally help the settlers assimilate into their new environment, as it also gave advice on how, e.g., to adapt to the “new” Southern hemisphere seasons at the Cape.<sup>71</sup>

In a letter (still in the possession of a distant relative in the area from which the settlers originated in Germany) an immigrant wrote to his remaining relatives how difficult it was in the sand, and how difficult it was under a burning sun, but how proud he was to contribute to building a new nation.<sup>72</sup>

However, a German magazine article in 1938 still described the descendants of these immigrants as “Germans who had never been to Germany”. Under the heading “700 Deutsche die niemals in Deutschland waren!” (700 Germans who have never been to Germany!), the community was described as a unique settlement at the tip of Africa which, through four generations, has remained true to the traditions of its forebears.<sup>73</sup> Despite the fact that they sought a new future where they could be landowners instead of working for landowners, they nevertheless initially established a “lütje Dütschland” (little Germany, in the Lower German dialect of the immigrants).<sup>74</sup>

A German reporter described her feelings when she saw flax blond German children, who might as well have been playing on German village roads, but who had never been to Germany and whose grandparents had already been born in South Africa.<sup>75</sup> But even these children had a German identity, as, growing up in the 1920s and 1930s, they were forged by a specific German-ness (even to the point of knowing Germanic mythology).<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> *Der Deutsch-Afrikaner*, 1933-02-09, s.p.

<sup>71</sup> G.W. Wagener, *Volkskalender für Südafrika auf das Jahr 1888* (Cape Town, 1888), p. 37.

<sup>72</sup> *Heimat op die Vlakte* (“Heimat on the Flats”), SABC TV documentary, 1983.

<sup>73</sup> I. Steinhoff, *Bauern aus der Lüneburger Heide am Kap der Guten Hoffnung*, p. 4.

<sup>74</sup> Interview with I. Bode, b. Schultz, 1992.

<sup>75</sup> I. Steinhoff, *Bauern aus der Lüneburger Heide am Kap der Guten Hoffnung*, p. 6.

<sup>76</sup> Interview with F. Schultz, 1992.

The youth generation at the time of the 1933 celebration, in later years, explained how they were “torn” between their two identities: proud to be German, but also proud to be South African. One of them explained how she astonished a German during one of her regular trips to Germany during a conversation. In their discussion, he referred to a German poem, and said “she, of course, would not know the poem”, after which he started to recite it, only to hear her complete the poem.<sup>77</sup>

She was proud to be a “Südafrikanerin”, but equally proud of her German heritage. Another member of her generation said that on her visit to Germany she felt “as if torn between two countries”.<sup>78</sup> Their generation, who had been infused with German nationalism during their youth in the 1920s and 1930s, the source explained, were “German enough for Germany and South African enough for South Africa”.

The outcome of the Second World War was not only catastrophic for Germany. In the small German community on the southern tip of Africa, language and tradition were almost ruthlessly discarded to rid themselves of the “stigma” of being German. Being “South African”, was now more important than being “German”. A journalist reported as follows after a 1951 interview with a German descendant:

*But, one member of the colony said to me, although we speak German as well as English and Afrikaans, and are proud of our German heritage, we are still thorough-going South Africans. This is our country – our loyalties are not divided. But we are loyal also to our Lutheran Church. It is the church as much as everything else that holds us together. We are more of a German-speaking Lutheran community than a German community in any nationalist sense.<sup>79</sup>*

This 1951-interviewee preferred to deny a German nationalist identity, which could be attributed to the fact that he voiced his opinion shortly after the Second World War. Anti-German perceptions were strong in the Cape at the time. This author’s grandmother often described how, among many incidents after the war, they were ignored in shops when they dared to speak German to one another.<sup>80</sup>

The loyalty to South Africa, as South African citizens, was also emphasised in a much later interview, namely a SABC documentary made in 1983 during the descendants’ centenary celebrations.<sup>81</sup> The younger post-war generation, in

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<sup>77</sup> Interview with F. Schultz, 1992.

<sup>78</sup> Interview with I. Bode, b. Schultz, 1992.

<sup>79</sup> E. Allen, Cape’s German settlers have made good, *Cape Argus*, 1951-04-14, s.p.

<sup>80</sup> L. Rabe, *’n Kultuurhistoriese studie van die Duitse nedersetting Philippi*, p. 409.

<sup>81</sup> *Heimat op die Vlakte* (“Heimat on the Flats”), SABC TV documentary, 1983.

particular, chose not to be “German”. One source mentioned that even the German method of knitting was forfeited at the end of the 1940s because “they were stared at” when they knitted in this way on public transport (buses) when they were on their way to their jobs in town.<sup>82</sup>

It seemed that many things changed after the Second World War, to the extent that the first generation to marry, consciously or subconsciously married non-Lutheran, non-German partners.<sup>83</sup> This resulted in the first truly South African generation with its offspring having a “mixed” identity. In most cases, Afrikaans was the mother tongue, but a German identity was maintained through education, religious affiliation, family and community traditions. This generation was described as “too Afrikaans for Friedrich Schiller, but too German for Jan Celliers [an Afrikaans poet]”.<sup>84</sup>

In the 1970s the pastor of the Philippi congregation described the community as people whose fate it was to “live on the border”, and that it was to be expected that they could not be that for those who expected a certain identity of them [presumably Germans], and, on the other hand, they were not yet that what another group expected them to be [presumably South Africans].<sup>85</sup>

This was written in a letter when the German government withdrew a school subsidy due to the fact that the Philippi children were not “German” enough any more. In the letter he refers to a member of the congregation who arrived as a baby of six months with the group of 1883, and who, when she died in her nineties, was the last surviving original immigrant, and how upset she was at the news. She referred to the Philippi community sending food to Germany after the Second World War, and that “that was good enough for the Germans”, yet now they were not good enough any more, and what devastating effect it would have on the community if the school had to close down.<sup>86</sup>

## Conclusion

A metaphor for the community’s values is the story of a church runner:

The headmaster of the German school in Philippi in the 1950s referred to this runner which had been knotted by a blind member of the congregation. The man

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<sup>82</sup> Interview with I. Henke, b. Hörstmann, 1992.

<sup>83</sup> W.J.L. Blumer (ed.), *Pflanzgarten im Dünensand*, p. 48.

<sup>84</sup> H. Bodenstern, *Unsere Schule einst und jetzt* (“Our school then and now”), in W.J.L. Blumer (ed.), *Pflanzgarten im Dünensand* p. 67.

<sup>85</sup> L. Rabe, *’n Kultuurhistoriese studie van die Duitse nedersetting Philippi*, p. 579.

<sup>86</sup> L. Rabe, *’n Kultuurhistoriese studie van die Duitse nedersetting Philippi*, p. 580.

collected hessian sacks washed ashore on the close-by beaches of False Bay, which he unravelled, and then knotted the runner as his contribution to the church built by members of the congregation themselves. After the runner became too worn, it was put beneath the newly bought one as a reminder, not only of this dedication, but also of the foundational values of the community.

When a visiting German senator preached in the church while the runner was still in use, he remarked negatively on it, because, to him, it looked a bit shabby. He was then told the history of the runner, after which he remarked he wished his congregation could have one. On a next visit, the runner was not to be seen, and the senator reprimanded the congregation, upon which he was showed that it was still there, under the new runner.

The headmaster used this analogy to remark on new threats facing the community, and that a figurative runner should remain as evidence of the community's identity and values.<sup>87</sup>

One can argue that this also applies to the generations of descendants in the Philippi immigrant community: there is a new, outer layer of South African-ness, built on a foundation of a knowledge of another identity that enriched (and still enriches a new generation) in a unique way.

From critical observation of this community, as well as being a descendant of this community, the present author can postulate that this community still has a unique identity within a broader South African identity. Accepting that "identity" emerges in a social context and is "shaped by the immediate circumstances as well as the broader culture", one can also state that identity can be conceptualised "as a process occurring and changing over time".<sup>88</sup>

How the identity of the German immigrants and their descendants was shaped by immediate circumstances, within a broader culture, as a process which occurred and changed over time, is therefore perhaps a key to the current processes of identity formation, from within various ethnic and cultural identities, towards one national South African identity.

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<sup>87</sup> H. Bodenstein, *Unsere Schule einst und jetzt* ("Our school then and now"), in W.J.L. Blumer (ed), *Pflanzgarten im Dünensand*, p. 59.

<sup>88</sup> A.E Kazdin, (editor-in-chief), *Encyclopedia of Psychology*, p. 225.