

MATRIARCH JULAIGA AND THE STORY OF A FLOWER DYNASTY'S STRUGGLES

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Matriarg Juliaiga en die verhaal van 'n blomme-dinastie se stryd

Julaiga Gomez is 'n tipiese voorbeeld van een van die matriarge in die geskiedenis van die Kaapse blomverkoperstradisie. As 'n derdegeslag-blomverkoper is sy tans die hoof van 'n blomverkoopdinastie wat bestaan uit haar eie kinders, haar kleinkinders en agterkleinkinders, 'n totaal van 156 individue. Hierdie artikel is die tweede in 'n reeks wat fokus op die "lewende nalatenskap" van Adderleystraat se unieke blomverkopers, hulle geskiedenis, en die uitdagings waarvoor hulle staan. Deur 'n studie van hoofsaaklik een lid van so 'n familie, word ook 'n prentjie geskilder van een van Kaapstad se toeriste-aantreklikhede, naamlik die blommemark op Trafalgar Place. Maar hierdie unieke kultuurhistoriese aspek van Kaapstad word nie slegs belig nie. Aandag word ook gegee aan 'n afgeskepte deel van ons kultuurgeskiedenis, naamlik die geskiedenis van 'n belangrike segment van die Kaap se diverse bevolking, die Kaapse Maleiers. Miskien belangriker: die uitdagings waarvoor hierdie spesifieke gemeenskap van blomfamilies staan, naamlik om die blommemark as 'n lewensvatbare bedryf vir hulle nageslagte te behou, terwyl dit ook 'n lewende aspek van Kaapstad se kultuurgeskiedenis bly.

Sleutelwoorde: Adderleystraat, blommemark, blommeverkopers, dinastie, familiegeskiedenis, Kaapse Maleiers, kultuurgeskiedenis, matriarg, mikrogeskiedenis, uitdagings

Julaiga Gomez is a typical example of one of the matriarchs in the history of the Cape flower selling tradition. Herself a third generation flower seller, she is currently the head of a flower selling dynasty consisting of her own children, her grandchildren and great-grandchildren, a total of 156 individuals. This article is the second in a series focusing on the "living legacy" of Adderley Street's unique flower sellers, their history, and the challenges facing their future. Through a study of one member of one such a family, a picture of one of Cape Town's tourist attractions, the flower market

on Trafalgar Place, is painted. Not only is a unique cultural historical feature of the Cape highlighted, but the cultural history of one aspect of an important segment of the Cape's diverse population, namely that of the Cape Malays is addressed. More importantly, the challenges they face to overcome certain obstacles are highlighted. These families are dedicated to maintain Adderley Street's flower market as a viable market, for their own families' sustenance, but simultaneously maintaining an important aspect of Cape Town's cultural and social history.

Key words: Adderley Street, Cape Malays, challenges, cultural history, dynasty, family history, flower market, flower sellers, matriarch, microhistory.

Introduction

This article will attempt to describe certain aspects of the life and times of one member of Cape Town's unique flower selling families in order to highlight this family's history. One can almost say flower selling is in the DNA of these families, who talk of the "bloedlyn" – the "blood line" among themselves.¹

One member of the Cape's "flower families", Julaiga Gomez, is – among many possible personalities – a typical example of one of the matriarchs in the history of the Cape flower selling tradition.

Julaiga is a third generation flower seller and currently the matriarch of a flower selling dynasty consisting of her 11 children, 51 grandchildren and 94 great-grandchildren – a total of 156 individuals – of whom a significant number work in the flower industry (**Figure 1**).

This article is the second in a series focusing on the "living history" of Adderley Street's unique flower sellers, their legacy, and the challenges facing their future. The first article appeared in a previous edition of the *South African Journal for Cultural History* and was titled "Living history – the story of Adderley Street's flower sellers".² The historical site at Trafalgar Place on Adderley Street (**Figure 2**) is also referred to as the "stands" by the flower sellers.³

¹ Telephone interview: Mr Irefaam (Faan) Williams, Chairperson, Trafalgar Place Flower Sellers Association, 2009-07-24.

² L. Rabe, Living history: The story of Adderley Street's flower sellers, *South African Journal for Cultural History* 24(1), June 2010, pp. 83-104.

³ The general reference used for the hawking site based at Trafalgar Place on Adderley Street, Cape Town.



Figure 1: From Left: Nadia and Faan Williams, the latter oldest grandson of Julaiga Gomez, with Armina (oldest daughter of Faan and Nadia), Julaiga Gomez with Ikeraam (youngest son of Nadia and Faan, and Gomez’s great-grandchild no 93), Ashra Adams (Gomez’s second youngest daughter), with Yusuf Adams (youngest son of Ashra) and Nur Adams (oldest son of Ashra)
(Photograph: L. Rabe, 2010)



Figure 2: Trafalgar Place flower market in Adderley Street (Flower Sellers’ Alley), with the monument to Archdeacon Lightfoot.
(Photograph: L. Rabe, 2010)

By studying the detail of the history of one family, one of Cape Town's traditional and popular tourist attractions, the flower market, can be highlighted from a unique socio-scientific perspective. The Cape has a diverse cultural historical past, and the history of an important sub-segment of the Cape community, namely the flower sellers, is also recorded in the process.

The challenges that the flower selling families face will also be discussed. Certain obstacles, some historical, but some recent, in order to maintain the flower market as a viable, sustainable market for the sake of these families' futures, will also be highlighted. The families seemingly face more and more challenges to sustain their heritage. If they and the flower market do not get support in their ideals to maintain this "living history", not only will a unique tourist attraction to the Cape be lost, but, more importantly, so will a vital aspect of Cape Town's diverse culture. Several families' livelihoods and their identity will be endangered.

The history, or rather microhistory, of flower sellers in South Africa is the study of but one group in our diverse society that still needs formal socio-scientific attention. As was argued in another such article,

*... it is the history of just one of the groups who have tried to make a living on the street. They are one part of a wider class of people in South Africa who have been excluded from the ownership of the means of production; and whose choice of livelihood has either been as an employee/labourer or in an "informal occupation."*⁴

Theoretical framework and methodology

As extensively discussed in the previous article, cultural history, and, in this case, a specific approach to cultural history, namely "microhistory", has never really occupied an important place in historiography.⁵ As was argued in this article (see footnote 4), historiography has traditionally occupied itself with recording the events that changed the course of nations and regions. The notion of cultural history has always taken a "back seat" in terms of importance as opposed to macrohistorical events. Microhistory is a point of departure according to which the "lives and times" of personalities, or, in this case, a family as an exponent of a unique flower selling community, is studied. Developed in the 1960s and 1970s, microhistory is the "study of the past on a very

⁴ R. Tomaselli, Indian flower sellers of Johannesburg: A history of people on the Street, in B. Bozzoli, *Town and countryside in the Transvaal* (Johannesburg, 1983), p. 215.

⁵ L. Rabe, Living history: The story of Adderley Street's flower sellers (2010), pp. 83-104.

small scale”. As stated, this approach has been discussed extensively in the first article on this subject, and will not be revisited here.

For the purposes of this article, however, it needs to be stated that microhistory is typically the study of a small town or village, or individuals “of minor importance”. It is said it is an important component of “new history”, as it has emerged from the 1960s, and is usually closely tied with social sciences such as Anthropology or Sociology.

Also, for the purposes of this article, one must recall that microhistory can also be described as “histories of self”, or of “personal identity”, as discussed by Lepore.⁶ She adds that a specific conference on microhistory defined the paradigm

... in part, as the history of ‘hitherto obscure people’ that ‘concentrates on the intensive study of particular lives’ to reveal ‘the fundamental experiences and mentalités of ordinary people.’⁷

Magnussen quotes Iggers when he argues that microhistory came about, not because the microhistorians considered that the traditional methodology of the social sciences

... is not possible or desirable but that social scientists have made generalizations that do not hold up when tested against the concrete reality of the small-scale life they claim to explain.⁸

Another source argues that microhistory was developed within a political and cultural debate occurring in the social sciences in the 1970s and 1980s.⁹ The source adds

... [f]or microhistorians, this has included examining the lives and experiences of the disadvantaged and exploited, individuals who are often neglected by macrohistorical studies and who rarely fit the existing or resulting model.

It is said that by doing so, “microhistorians have attempted to formulate a history of everyday life”.¹⁰

It is also necessary to mention the shift in focus to include those who have previously been ignored by “mainstream” historiography. One can argue that the previously disadvantaged in South Africa, generally non-white communities, are also the ones who were previously disadvantaged in terms of attention paid to their

⁶ J. Lepore, Historians who love too much: reflections on microhistory and biography, *The Journal of American History* 88 (1), June 2001, p. 130.

⁷ J. Lepore, Historians who love too much: reflections on microhistory and biography (2001), p. 131.

⁸ S.G. Magnusson, What is microhistory? <http://hnn.us/articles/23720.html>, 2007-04-07.

⁹ What is microhistory? <http://web.uvic.ca/vv/student/vicbrewery/content/microhistory.htm>, 2010-03-30.

¹⁰ What is microhistory? <http://web.uvic.ca/vv/student/vicbrewery/content/microhistory.htm>, 2010-03-30.

histories. This conclusion can be confirmed by several scholars, but the following statement by Sochen sums it up. She argues that mainstream history was, until recently, the “fragile expressions of white male historians’ limited perspectives”, as historians “are unavoidably influenced by personal background and social experiences.”¹¹ These “his”-stories are slowly rewritten. Specifically through microhistory, the “histories of self” can be recorded to capture the contribution in various fields by those who, according to Sochen’s description, are “other” than male or white.

A need to rewrite history from a feminist perspective will also have merit and can offer research opportunities to other scholars, although this article will not discuss applicable feminist theories as it is not deemed necessary for the purposes of this study.

It also needs to be emphasised that the consequences of specifically South Africa’s Apartheid history, resulting in uprooting communities under the Group Areas Act, are also factors that have impacted on the flower sellers’ families, something that still needs to be explored from the perspectives of the flower families. Only one such a document from this perspective, although significant, currently exists.¹²

In short, microhistory as a paradigm is thus suitable to examine the “histories of self”, or of “personal identity”, or “a history of everyday life”, or that of “hitherto obscure people”. In this case, it will be the microhistory as manifested in the life story of the matriarch of one of the Cape’s “flower families”, namely Julaiga Gomez, a third generation flower seller.

In terms of a suitable qualitative research methodology for this descriptive article to record the history of one flower “dynasty”, various instruments to collect data were used. Primary sources, mostly Julaiga Gomez and some of her immediate family members, were interviewed. The family also made available personal documents, collected by Julaiga Gomez and her offspring over years. Other primary and secondary sources consisted of documents, reports and other records in mainly two repositories, namely the Western Cape Archive Repository, Cape Town, and the South African Library in Cape Town.

Unstructured interviews were conducted with Julaiga Gomez, one of her daughters, as well as her oldest grandchild, currently a leading figure in the Cape’s flower selling community. Further unstructured interviews were also conducted with various other role-players among the flower sellers. The information was used to

¹¹ J. Sochen, *Movers and Shakers: American women thinkers and activists 1900-1970* (New York, Quadrangle/ The New York Times Book Co., 1973), p. ix.

¹² R.E. van der Ross, *Buy my flowers! The story of Strawberry Lane, Constantia* (Ampersand Press in association with the University of the Western Cape, 2007).

construct this maternal family history narrative of Julaiga Gomez as a matriarch in the Cape's flower selling families.

The problem of limited sources remains a shortcoming in this research project. There is a dearth of scholarly research on the topic, and the research will therefore have to focus on the personal experiences of families. For the paradigm in which this research is undertaken, namely microhistory, it must also be said that these primary sources, therefore, must be accepted as sufficient.

The story of Julaiga Gomez

Julaiga Gomez was born Julaiga Majiet in Constantia, Cape Town, on September 24, 1932, although her birth certificate indicates 24 March, 1933, as her father only registered her birth six months later.¹³

At an interview on 25 September 2009, one day after her 77th birthday, a small bouquet of one of her favourite flowers adorned the table in her home in Retreat, one of Cape Town's southern suburbs. These were violets – a flower that used to be one of the most popular among the variety on sale at the Cape flower market in Adderley Street. Yet, as fashions come and go, these small flowers are not “in” any more and are not planted on a commercial scale.¹⁴

The young Julaiga grew up at the Adderley Street flower market, and was active as flower seller on the “stands” in Adderley Street at age eight, and a “hawker”¹⁵ herself at age 16, when she was already married. She remained in the flower hawking industry, and today, at the age of 78, can oversee her offspring doing what almost seems to be endogenic to them: working with flowers.

As the granddaughter of the Cape's presumed first flower seller, as was surmised by Julaiga Gomez,¹⁶ she as a girl and young woman probably did not have any control in terms of which trade she would want to pursue. Later, a substantial number of her large family also became involved in the flower industry – flowers were thus almost literally “in their blood”. As mentioned, they also refer to the flower selling families as families who have the “history” and the “bloedlyn” (blood line).¹⁷

¹³ Personal interview: Julaiga Gomez, Retreat, 2009-09-25.

¹⁴ Personal interview: Julaiga Gomez, Retreat, 2009-09-25.

¹⁵ The word with which the flower sellers themselves describe their trade.

¹⁶ L. Rabe, *Living history: The story of Adderley Street's flower sellers* (2010), pp. 83-104.

¹⁷ Telephone interview: Mr Irefaam (Faan) Williams, Chairperson, Trafalgar Place Flower Sellers Association, 2009-07-24.

Julaiga Gomez's family history

Julaiga, born Majiet, was the granddaughter of Hadira Brenner, born Johaar, and grandfather Abbas Brenner, her maternal grandparents.

They were part of a community which lived in Constantia for generations, but which was uprooted during the 1960s as a result of the Group Areas Act. Other family names that Julaiga Gomez can remember in the Constantia community included “the Langeveldts, the Bowmans, and the Adams’s.”¹⁸ They were part of the original families who “founded” the Cape flower market tradition, called “blomdraers” (flower carriers) in the early years before transport was available, because they literally carried their flowers, whether garden flowers or wild flowers, to Cape Town to hawk their wares there. The story of this specific Constantia community is told in one of the important local history recordings which can be regarded as microhistory, namely *Buy my flowers! The story of Strawberry Lane, Constantia*.¹⁹

The first generation: Hadira and Abbas

According to Julaiga Gomez, her grandmother Hadira was the first woman to sell flowers in the Cape Town Docks to ships like the *Edinburgh Castle* and the *Cape Town Castle*. Gomez was told how her grandmother would stand at the bottom of the stairs leading to the ships and sell her bouquets.²⁰

One might even speculate, as was posited in the first article on the flower sellers, that Gomez's grandmother was the first woman who, in 1890, sold flowers to the owners of Adderley Street's Stuttafords, and thus started a trade and a tradition which bloomed into a tourist attraction without which one cannot imagine Cape Town's main street. This started with one of the owners of Stuttafords placing a standing order of a weekly delivery of two bunches of wild flowers.²¹

Gomez supports this speculation, especially because she knows for a fact that her grandmother was “the only flower seller allowed into Stuttafords to hawk her flowers to the sales ladies behind the counters”. According to Gomez her grandmother was called “Julie” by them. She also hawked her flowers in Adderley Street, with her stand closer to the Groote Kerk area.²²

¹⁸ Personal interview: Julaiga Gomez, Retreat, 2009-09-25.

¹⁹ R.E. van der Ross, *Buy My Flowers! The story of Strawberry Lane, Constantia* (2007).

²⁰ Personal interview: Julaiga Gomez, Retreat, 2009-09-25.

²¹ C. Lighton, *Cape floral kingdom* (Cape Town, 1960), p. 7.

²² Personal interview: Julaiga Gomez, Retreat, 2009-09-25.

Hadira also acted as, what might be called one of the first flower “agents” to supply exporters with South African wild flowers. According to Gomez, Hadira also sold flowers to companies such as “Henry Williams, Howies, and Glazer” who were flower exporters. Amongst the flowers she would sell them were chinchinchees, which were cut in the Darling and “Sandberg” area. Abbas Brenner’s nickname was “Wolf”, and his family was subsequently called the “Wolwe” (“Wolves”).

Brenner got this name because of his entrepreneurial prowess. According to Gomez he got the nickname because he was “quick in business”. Brenner, his brothers, and other friends in Constantia would discuss how they would go to the Bellville market (an area where, according to Gomez, the University of the Western Cape is located today) where regular auctions were held. They would buy goods to resell them. Abbas Brenner would regularly leave earlier, at about 4 am, according to Gomez’s mother, with bags wrapped around the wheels of his cart. This strategy was followed to ensure that he could leave without being heard, beating the others to the market to purchase the best goods.

An example of how the grandfather’s nickname still resonates in the flower sellers’ community is the fact that the nickname of one of his grandchildren, and Gomez’s sister, on the “stands” at Trafalgar Place is “Diela Wolf”.²³

The second generation: Armina

All of Hadira and Abbas Brenner’s ten children were active in the flower retail industry, but according to Gomez, her mother Armina was her parents’ confidante. Armina was one of five daughters and five sons, and was born on 19 December 1902 in Constantia. She died on 1 January 1955, aged 53.

Armina was immortalised in an Irma Stern painting which was “rediscovered” after an “incredible 80 year journey”.²⁴ (More about the painting later; also see **Figure 5**.) Armina’s nickname was Sissie or Cissy, and after her marriage to Abdul Majiet, whom she divorced, she married Daniel Bowers, whom she also divorced, and then married Yusuf Afrika. She had 19 children altogether.

The third generation: Julaiga

As stated earlier, Julaiga Gomez was born Majiet on September 24, 1932. At the age of eight the young Julaiga Majiet was already a regular at the “stand” at Trafalgar

²³ Personal interview: Julaiga Gomez, Retreat, 2009-09-25.

²⁴ Douglas Carew, Irma Stern’s Flower Sellers come home: Epic intercontinental journey of 80 years”, *Saturday Argus*, 2001-09-08/9, p. 15.



Figure 3 (Top): Adderley Street’s flower sellers, probably in the early 1900s
(Photograph: Cape Archive Repository, AG6435)

Figure 4 (Bottom): The flower sellers lined up along the curve in Adderley Street
(Photograph: Cape Archive Repository, J8493)

Place. According to her the flower sellers in those days would stand in Adderley Street along the curb until 1 pm, after which they would move to Trafalgar Place. **Figures 3 and 4**, from the collection in the Cape Archive Repository, depict the flower sellers standing along the curb in Adderley Street. Estimating the date of the photograph by the dress worn, as well as the modes of transport, it must have been in the early twentieth century.

Some of the flowers which were popular during Gomez’s youth were dahlia, lupine, poppies, snapdragons, narcissus and similar “garden flowers”, unlike the cut flower varieties of roses, chrysanthemums and bulbous varieties on sale today.

Some were grown on the family's grounds in Constantia, others were purchased. Gomez remembers that as a girl of 16, in the late 1940s, she went to buy flowers from Ulrich Hörstmann, one of the descendants of the German immigrants to Philippi who had a flower farm. They also bought flowers from the Engelke Brothers, also descendants of German immigrants to Philippi.

Julaiga married her first husband Raashad (Ronnie) Naidoo, at a very young age, had her first child at 16 and named her after her mother, Armina. She almost literally gave birth to Armina on Trafalgar Place, as she worked until the last before her firstborn was due. Armina was put in a basket when Gomez hawked her flowers in Adderley Street.

Julaiga had seven children with her first husband, and four with her second husband, Yusuf (Leon) Gomez. The 11 children are Armina Naidoo, born 19 July 1949; married surname Williams; Abdurahmaan Naidoo, born 19 September 1950; Fatima Naidoo, born 20 Nov 1951, married surname Salie; Farieda Naidoo, born 2 May 1953, married surname Bailey; Abdul Gamiet Naidoo, born 21 August 1954; Asma Naidoo, born 16 September 1955, married surname Salie; Riedewaan Naidoo, born 31 January 1958, died 31 March 1996; Faizal Gomez, born 26 May 1961; Ashra Gomez, born 1 September 1965, married surname Adams; Ikeraam Gomez, born 19 July 1968, and Gaironesa Gomez, born 19 January 1970, married surname Van Heerden.

All these children worked in various capacities for their mother in the flower industry, some also on the "stand" at Trafalgar Place. The daughters' married names represent some of the other "flower dynasties" of Cape Town as they married into these similarly well-known flower families.

Gomez's first born, Armina, has nine children, and all nine also work in the flower industry. Four of the late Riedewaan's children work in the flower industry as well, and so do her other children, and even other grandchildren (who total 51). According to Gomez, approximately 30 of them are still involved in this industry.²⁵

Her oldest grandchild, Irefaam (Faan) Williams, son of her oldest daughter Armina, is chairperson of the Trafalgar Place Flower Sellers' Association (TPFS). He follows in the footsteps of his uncle, the late Riedewaan, a founding member of the association and first chairperson.

Intermarriage among the different flower families means that, in the end, the Cape flower sellers consist of one big extended family. Williams is, for instance, on his father's side, part of the large Williams flower dynasty.

²⁵ Personal interview: Julaiga Gomez, Retreat, 2009-09-25.

Of Gomez's 94 great-grandchildren, the oldest is already continuing the flower selling legacy. She is Armina Vollenhoven, who, as the oldest great-granddaughter of Julaiga, is also named after Julaiga's mother and her great-great-grandmother. There are currently "about 15 Armina's" in the family, all named in honour of Gomez's mother.²⁶

In 2011, this flower "dynasty" can be found across various outlets in the Cape Peninsula: from the traditional Trafalgar Place to various shopping malls across the Peninsula – from the N1 City in the Northern Suburbs to the Somerset Mall in Somerset West; some also work from home and some even conduct business in Namibia.²⁷ One of Gomez's daughters, Farieda Bailey, is currently contracted to provide all the Parliament buildings in Cape Town with flowers.

The flower sellers as artistic inspiration

Cape Town is almost unimaginable without her colourful flower-selling heart. The flower sellers, therefore, also routinely adorn either newspaper front pages or tourist brochures. Several other artistic interpretations of the flower sellers, other than photographs, exist, which can constitute the topic of a separate article. One such interpretation, a portrait valued at millions of Rands, is specifically applicable to this article because it portrays Gomez's mother (**Figure 5**).

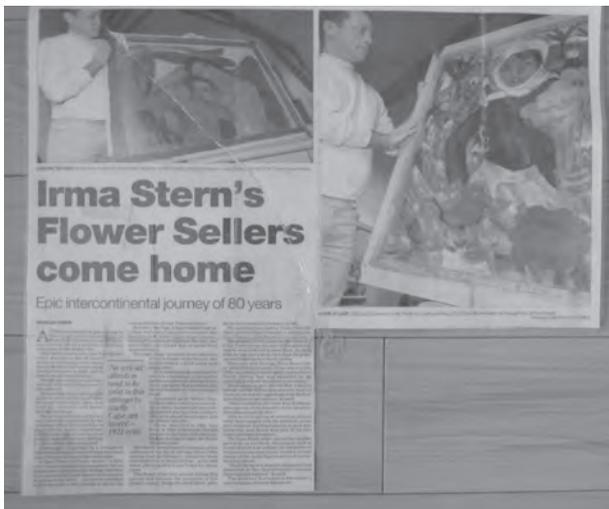


Figure 5: The painting by Irma Stern of Gomez's mother, Armina.

Photograph: From clipping collection of Julaiga Gomez and Irefaam (Faan) Williams, from an article that was published in the *Cape Argus* in 2002. (Photograph of report: L. Rabe, 2010)

²⁶ Personal interview: Julaiga Gomez, Retreat, 2009-09-25.

²⁷ Personal interview: Julaiga Gomez, Retreat, 2009-09-25.

The canvas by Stern, now one of South Africa's most popular artists, was taken out of the country to Germany, Stern's parents' country of origin, in the 1920s, and from there to Brazil by its owner who fled from Germany during the Second World War (1939-1945).²⁸ The painting, according to a report in 2001, has not been viewed in South Africa since it was painted and first exhibited.

Although local art critics in Cape Town in the 1920s described Stern's work as "provocative" as it was the first exhibition in the "modern style" in Cape Town, they also declared that it could not be taken seriously. One even proclaimed that it should be viewed with "frank disgust". Despite this negative critique, the exhibition was a roaring success – with "crowds so great that queues formed".²⁹ According to the report the painting was done during the three years that Stern stayed in Cape Town, namely from 1920 to 1923. It became the property of Stern's cousin, Trude Hernfeld Stern, after the artist returned to Germany in 1923. Hernfeld Stern fled from Germany to Brazil in 1939, taking the painting with her. After more than six decades, her grandchildren contacted an art agent in Cape Town to sell the painting on their behalf. (It is not known who subsequently bought the painting.) According to the art expert, quoted in the article, this specific painting reflects Stern's duality: "She was always emotionally connected to South Africa, but was moulded by an upbringing and art connection in Germany."³⁰ The bonus discovery was that the back of this canvas also contained a painting, namely of two nudes.

In terms of other depictions of the flower sellers, it is almost tradition to have them depicted on newspaper front pages on certain days such as Valentine's Day, and they are to be found on numerous tourist brochures and websites promoting the Cape. The granddaughter of one of the original "blomdraers" whom Gomez knew as a child, is depicted on one such brochure (**Figure 6**).³¹ She is Gairo Dorman, and her grandmother was Louisa Langeveldt, the oldest of the "blomdraers" whom Gomez knew in Constantia,³² as the Langeveldts also were one of the original Constantia families. This is a typical example of how images of the flower sellers are used to portray Cape Town's colourful touristic heart.

²⁸ Douglas Carew, Irma Stern's Flower Sellers come home, *Saturday Argus*, 2001-09-08/9, p. 15.

²⁹ Douglas Carew, Irma Stern's Flower Sellers come home, *Saturday Argus*, 2001-09-08/9, p. 15.

³⁰ Douglas Carew, Irma Stern's Flower Sellers come home, *Saturday Argus*, 2001-09-08/9, p. 15.

³¹ Document belonging to Julaiga Gomez.

³² Personal interview: Julaiga Gomez, Retreat, 2009-09-25.



Figure 6: Gairo Dorman on the cover of a local Cape Town tourism brochure.

(Photograph of brochure: L. Rabe, 2010)

A luta continua – the struggle continues

Since their first beginnings, the flower sellers led a life of continuous struggle for survival. In the early years, various municipal regulations threatened their means of existence.³³ Some regulations prohibited them from selling on the curbs of sidewalks, or the sidewalks themselves, because of traffic and safety issues.³⁴ After many years the specific area of Trafalgar Place, a passage way leading from Adderley Street, was allocated to them. Yet, each decade presented its own challenges in terms of providing a sustainable livelihood for the flower sellers.

Gomez remembers her mother Armina accompanying the activist Cissy/Cissie Gool and Louisa Langeveldt, to fight for shelters for the flower sellers on Trafalgar Place. According to Gomez this was “around 1949”,³⁵ whilst still living in Constantia.

Although some of the flower sellers are convinced that the area was allocated to them in the form of a “trust”, thanks to the efforts of Archdeacon Thomas Fothergill Lightfoot (1830-1903), in whose name a monument has been erected at the deep end

³³ Cape Archive Repository (hereafter CAR): Report dated 1933-02-14; 3/CT 4/2/1/247 136/33; Report dated 1949 G/18/101; Report dated 1953 3/CT 4/2/1/1/621 13/1/8.

³⁴ CAR: Section 194(36) Ordinance no 10 of 1912. Ref G.18/101, Western Cape Archive Repository.

³⁵ Personal interview: Julaiqa Gomez, Retreat, 2009-09-25.

of Trafalgar Place (see **Figure 2**), also known as “Flower Sellers Alley”,³⁶ this could not be supported by any evidence. The only evidence thus far indeed shows that such a “trust” does not exist, as is also indicated in a document dated 22 July 1997, from the office of an attorney who acted on behalf of the flower sellers. As a post script, it was added that

*A Deeds Office Search has not revealed any reference to any Trust which might secure the rights of the Flower Sellers Association despite whatever intentions of the Council might be [sic], whether now or in the future. Further investigations in this regard are on-going.*³⁷

Although no documentary evidence of the flower sellers’ collective memory of such a “trust”, and their right to Trafalgar Place, could be found up to this point, current generations’ memory of the right to their legacy should also bear weight. Lightfoot devoted his life to the urban poor, and even his “paltry” salary was used to feed the less fortunate. It is said that when Lightfoot died in 1903, the bell of St George’s Cathedral tolled for an hour. Four thousand people filed past his coffin, and not even when Cecil John Rhodes’s body passed through the city’s streets *en route* to the then Rhodesia, were there so many mourners behind the cortege, “including Anglican, Roman Catholic, Jewish, Dutch Reformed and Moslem clergy.” Lightfoot’s nickname was “South Easter” as it is said he “was a doer and as vigorous and fast” as the South Easter. His death at the age of 73 was caused by injuries sustained when he was blown over by the notorious South Easter. Three years after a memorial was erected in his honour, the top-heavy structure was blown over by the South Easter.³⁸

In the mid to late 1990s the flower sellers’ battle for survival began anew as they had to convince a new local government that they have an historic right to sell their products in this specific area.

According to the chairperson of the Trafalgar Place Flower Sellers Association the new local government system, without any knowledge of the history of the flower market, nor sympathy with the “flower families”, wanted to open up the area for all other kinds of hawking. Clearly, this would have been the end of the flower market.³⁹

At the time Gomez’s son Riedewaan (Waan), who died after a car accident in 1996, was one of the leaders among the flower families. Taking after his grandmother in the late 1940s, he now also had to fight for the survival of the Trafalgar Place flower sellers.

³⁶ G. Jonas, Thomas Fothergill Lightfoot, <http://www.historicalmedia.co.za/?p=41>, accessed 2011-02-8.

³⁷ Document among the collection belonging to Julaiga Gomez and Faan Williams, dated 1997-07-22.

³⁸ G. Jonas, Thomas Fothergill Lightfoot, <http://www.historicalmedia.co.za/?p=41>, Accessed 2011-02-08.

³⁹ Personal interview: Irefaam (Faan) Williams, Retreat, 2009-09-25.

The new struggle started in 1995, when the Cape City Council (CCC) wanted to allow other traders onto Trafalgar Place. A series of meetings were held to fight for the survival of the flower sellers' legacy. The first meeting was held in the Old Library in Cape Town.⁴⁰ The Trafalgar Place Flower Sellers Association (TPFS) was founded in 1995, and has handwritten "house rules" as a constitution.⁴¹

The CCC had to be convinced of the legacy of the original flower sellers, their traditional right to Trafalgar Place, and that this could not be alienated from them unilaterally.⁴²

Three years later, the problems were still not solved, as another document noted that it is "unfortunate" that the CCC intends to lease the area to a third party, but that the decision is not final, and that the flower sellers

*must think ahead [and] settle for an agreement with the council and S&S [Stocks & Stocks, the company that would sublease the area from the City Council] to cater for our needs and our future, so let's come together as disciplined adults and dicide [sic] on a wonderful future.*⁴³

Whereas "management rights" to the area were granted to the flower sellers according to which they had to pay a minimal fee for water usage, the CCC wanted to sublet the lease to a specific company (Stocks & Stocks), who would then let the stalls to a variety of traders. Riedewaan, as the then chairperson of the subsequently founded TPFS, among others, "told one of the officials that they cannot just do anything with the flower market". As he said: he was already on the stand when he was still "in his mother's stomach," Gomez commented on this uncertain period in the history of the flower market.⁴⁴

In 1998, signatories to the fact that the TPFS would "manage" the area (all flower sellers and those representing their families), that Stocks & Stocks would "maintain" the area, and that "Security" will be the responsibility of both parties, included: 1. G Benjamin (Aunty Polla); 2. F Gamieldien (Diela); 3. G Dorman (Aunty Gairo); 4. G Theunissen (Aunty Baby); 5. J Africa (Aunty Leiga); 6. C Solomons (Aunty Stenie); 7. G Bowman (Genie); 8. C Williams (Siellie); 9. F Saliem (Poppie); 10. S Naidoo (Soraya); 11. L Naidoo (Leila); 12. I Cornelius (Iptishaam); 13. A Oliver (Abubakir);

⁴⁰ Personal interview: Julaiga Gomez, Retreat, 2009-09-25.

⁴¹ Trafalgar Square Flower Sellers Association "House Rules", handwritten document, dated 1998-09-13, Irefaam (Faan) Williams Collection.

⁴² Telephone interview: Mr Irefaam (Faan) Williams, Chairperson, Trafalgar Place Flower Sellers Association, 2009-07-24.

⁴³ Document among the collection belonging to Julaiga Gomez and Faan Williams, dated 1998-07-22.

⁴⁴ Personal interview: Julaiga Gomez, Retreat, 2009-09-25.

14. A Snyders (Alison); 15. F Gomez (Faizel); 16. S Martin (Sophia); 17. I Benjamin (Ilaam); 18. E Jacobs (Blanche); 19. N Williams (Nazlie); 20. S Solomons (Soraya).⁴⁵

On 6 August 1998, a letter on the TPFS's letterhead read as follows:⁴⁶

Re Proposals for terms of the new lease agreement for Trafalgar Flower Sellers

We would appreciate that the under-mentioned conditions be taken into account prior to any building alterations commencing at Trafalgar Place (Adderley Street).

- 1. 21 stalls, 2 meter width, 7 meter length, and 70 cm between every stall is required*
- 2. Rental of stalls remain as present [written by hand:] NIL RAND, AND R10-00 with 10 % annual increase over period of 45 years for water which includes the extension of 15 years. In the event of new lease owners during the above-mentioned period the said conditions will remain in place.*
- 3. No other traders other than the Flower sellers will be permitted to trade within the new development structure.*
- 4. Ownership of stalls is and will be passed from one generation to the other.*
- 5. Refuse bins to be placed behind the storage space of each stall.*
- 6. Rotation of stalls to be at our discretion.*
- 7. Eleven water taps required to accommodate 21 stalls.*
- 8. Off-loading zone sign to be installed (reading Flower Suppliers Only).*
- 9. Control of the management of the stalls will be at our sole discretion.*

Kindly furnish us with the written confirmation that the above-mentioned conditions will be inserted in the Lease Agreement.

[Signed]

I Williams

In another document, dated 22 September 1998, "ownership" in (4) is replaced with "occupation". This letter was signed by the secretary, A. Adams.⁴⁷ Added in longhand, it was stated that the flower sellers will pay for the water themselves.

⁴⁵ Document among the collection belonging to Julaiga Gomez and Faan Williams, dated 1998-07-26.

⁴⁶ Document among the collection belonging to Julaiga Gomez and Faan Williams, dated 1998-08-06.

⁴⁷ Document among the collection belonging to Julaiga Gomez and Faan Williams, dated 1998-09-22.

The struggle continued, and a study of a collection of various documents during this period, supports this.⁴⁸ In 2006, minutes of one meeting read that the TPFs was unsuccessful in obtaining answers from the CCC. The person representing the CCC, of whom there is also a business card⁴⁹ among the collection of documents, indicating his title as “Area Co-ordinator Business Area Management City of Cape Town”, was not “interested in the historical message”.⁵⁰

The building of the stalls to improve the facilities on Trafalgar Place was only completed in 2009 (**Figure 7**). Up to that point misinformation from the CCC led to many uncertainties among the flower sellers, e.g., in 2005, when it was rumoured that only “16 baths and 16 taps” would be installed. In a document it is recorded that this

*... [i]ncorrect info & requests by certain flower sellers caused unhappiness amongst them. Chairman also explained the TPFs is a heritage place, and that nobody other than the flower sellers together with the committee can make changes concerning the trading on the market.*⁵¹



Figure 7: The new storage facilities in Trafalgar Place
(Photograph: L. Rabe, 2010)

⁴⁸ Various documents belonging to Julaiga Gomez and Faan Williams, among others: documents dated as 1996-04-30; 1996-06-12; 1997-06-08; 1997-07-22; 1997-08-23; 1997-08-26; 1997-07-07; 1997-07-22; 1997-07-26.

⁴⁹ Business card among the documents belonging to Julaiga Gomez and Faan Williams. For privacy reasons, the name is withheld.

⁵⁰ Document belonging to Irefaam (Faan) Williams, dated 2006-04-26.

⁵¹ Document among the collection belonging to Julaiga Gomez and Faan Williams, dated 2005-06-12.

Misinformation abounded, as other role-players, in this case an apparent outsider, also interfered. A document dated 3 August 2005 stated:⁵²

Lots of concerns and dispute issues were raised, ito “people” that are treating the TPFs at a very low callibrea [sic], especially the old people. The letter received by the chairman from [name withheld] was also brought to the attention of the TPFs. The majority felt very upset as they were not aware that [same name withheld] was busy munupilating [sic] them. Not once did she defend herself as she was found guilty.

[Added in blue ballpoint pen:] *Mr Williams explain to the flower sellers the power they had over their stalls. The following were also discussed re the upgrading of the stalls:*

A toilets

B lights

C security

D gates

F trading hours 6 am - 8 pm

The same scenario was repeated towards the end of 2010, when rumours that the area was given out on tender and that a Gauteng entrepreneur won the tender, made the rounds.⁵³

According to a response by the City Council, the original occupation and development agreement with the company Stocks & Stocks made provision for the fact that it can be sublet. The official insisted that the future of the flower sellers was not threatened.⁵⁴ Williams, as chair of the TPFs, was quoted that it was not in the interest of the flower sellers to sublet the area.⁵⁵

Together with these rumours that are increasing uncertainty among the flower sellers, other long-standing requests to ensure the sustainability of the market, are also still not met. Two of these are a dedicated loading zone for the flower sellers in Adderley Street, as well as a central phone number for the market. This, according to Williams, can be advertised in order for the public to place orders for flowers from specific sellers.⁵⁶

⁵² Document among the collection belonging to Julaiga Gomez and Faan Williams, dated 2005-08-03.

⁵³ M. van Bart, Blommemark se einde dalk in sig, *Die Burger*, 2010-10-16, p. 5 (Eiendomme).

⁵⁴ R. Gelderblom, Blommeverkopers word nie bedreig, *Die Burger*, 2010-10-25, p. 12.

⁵⁵ M. van Bart, Blommemark se einde dalk in sig, *Die Burger*, 2010-10-16, p. 5 (Eiendomme).

⁵⁶ Personal interview: Irefaam (Faan) Williams, 2009-09-25.

These issues highlight some of the ongoing problems the flower selling families face: an unsympathetic trading environment in a fast changing world, to which a change in lifestyle and buying habits should also be added.

With the local government who should be more aware of the strategic importance of the market for the sake of Cape Town's important tourism industry, if not for the sake of the livelihood of the flower families, the changes in lifestyle and buying habits of consumers might still prove to be the most difficult challenges to overcome.

It is clear that Cape Town's CBD has changed much over the past almost two decades in terms of socio-economical dynamics. Ordinary Capetonians do not venture into Adderley Street as they would previously, and therefore are not tempted by the display of flowers in Trafalgar Place. Furthermore, a recent cycle lane has been built along Adderley Street, which made the sidewalk, and therefore, trading space, in front of the flower market smaller. The fact that potential buyers also cannot park their vehicles in close proximity to the market, is also problematic.

Lifestyle challenges

From analysing the history of the flower sellers and interviewing several of them,⁵⁷ the challenges facing the flower families one decade into the 21st century are of external as well as internal origin.

Besides the fact that the flower sellers had to contend with a new local government system which was not sympathetic towards them, society has also changed drastically.

Buying habits of consumers and security in the area itself have changed. Competition has become much more sophisticated, offering consumers quality flowers that were not exposed to varying climate conditions such as theirs in the open air. The "cold chain" deemed necessary for a longer life for perishable goods such as flowers cannot be a quality criterion for the flower sellers trading in Trafalgar Place.

Consumers also buy on credit, which is problematic to the flower sellers, who do not have credit card facilities on the premises. This is something that the TPFs will have to address, as mobile payment technology is available.

Some of the internal factors, according to Williams, are that some of the hawkers do not man their stands every day. He argues that they have to be consistent in order

⁵⁷ Personal Interviews: Mrs Mariam (Nappie) Johnson, Lansdowne, 2008-06-03; Mrs Gairo Lackay; Mrs Glenda Bowman; Mrs Millie (Christine) Solomon, Flower sellers, Trafalgar Place, Adderley Street, Cape Town, 2008-01-11; Mrs Mary Petersen, Retiree, Grassy Park, 2008-11-03; Mr Moos Jaftha, Flower grower, Grassy Park, 2008-11-03.

to ensure a constant supply to the public.⁵⁸ This is also one of the “house rules” in the handwritten constitution of the TPFS.⁵⁹ This document, on a letterhead of the TPFS, dated 13 September 1998, reads:

House-Rules

1. *Rotation of stalls after every 2 weeks*
2. *No swearing – rude language*
3. *Lotering [sic] of strangers other than the FLOWER-SELLERS are not acceptable*
4. *All stalls to be occupied, if not in a period of 12 months the ownership will be transferred*
5. *The owner may appoint an assistant to continue with his/her business*
6. *Each and every stall owner will be responsible to pay on a monthly basis to the Council*
7. *A waiting list will be drawn up and will be updated at all times*
8. *Work place to be kept tidy and clean at all times*
9. *No other traders other than the Flower Sellers will be permitted to trade within the new development structure*
10. *Our business will always be recognised traditionally.*

[Signed by I Williams, chairperson, and A Adams, treasurer]

The number of stall holders has dwindled over the last fifty years. Originally there were 55 stalls, today there are “about 21”. According to Williams, since the 1990s, supermarkets such as Woolworths and Pick ’n Pay, as well as petrol stations, started to sell flowers.⁶⁰ Therefore, he says, the Trafalgar Place flower sellers need to be on their spot every day to provide a consistent service.

According to Williams, some members of their association want the market to become smaller, but others feel such a strategy will only empower a minority instead of the inheritors of all the original “blomdraers”.

Furthermore, Williams says competitors like the supermarkets have financial muscle that the flower sellers do not have. They dominate the market with their prices, and also dominate the Johannesburg commercial flower market, where some of the flower sellers also buy, and influence prices at the acquisition level.

Another external factor is the availability of local flowers. The dwindling local produce, due to various reasons, means they have to buy more expensive flowers at

⁵⁸ Personal interview: Irefaam (Faan) Williams, Retreat, 2009-09-25.

⁵⁹ Document among the collection belonging to Julaiga Gomez and Faan Williams, dated 1998-09-13.

⁶⁰ Personal interview: Irefaam (Faan) Williams, Retreat, 2009-09-25.

the commercial flower market in Johannesburg. This means that the added freight costs make their offerings more expensive, an area in which they also cannot compete against the national companies. The fact that these flowers, once on the stands in Adderley Street, are exposed to severe climatic conditions which cannot be regulated as in supermarket chains, add to the challenges the flower sellers have to overcome. The current 21 traders share ten small storage rooms, each divided in two.

The future

Among all these insecurities, Williams feels strongly about one thing: the Trafalgar Place market must remain the legacy of the original flower sellers. He insists it must be “inherited” by those who have the “history” and the “blood line” and who is part of the flower culture of the Cape.

The last two points of the “house rules” which serve as a constitution to the TPFS also refers to the legacy of the flower sellers: Point 9 mentions that “no other traders other than the Flower Sellers will be permitted to trade within the new development structure”, and Point 10 that “our business will always be recognised traditionally.”⁶¹

Gomez’s family history narrative within the paradigms of microhistory is but one example of those who can claim the “blood line” of the Cape’s rich legacy of the “blomdraer” families. Many other such descriptive family history studies can – and should – also be undertaken to record these families and their contribution to Cape Town’s cultural life. There are other similar families to whom the market “belongs”.

As both Gomez, as a third generation flower seller, and her grandson, as member of the fifth generation, say: The market must remain in the hands of the “blommense”, the flower families, and it is in the hands of the various generations’ members to protect their legacy.

However, these families also deserve the support of the Cape local government, as well as that of the public.

As was argued in the first article, a strategy to ensure sustainability must be formulated which will benefit all stakeholders. The value of the Trafalgar Place flower market is much more than its main parts, namely the livelihood and heritage of the flower families and an iconic ‘must-see’ for the tourism industry.

The flower families have already shown entrepreneurial spirit by branching out, and diversifying their trade. Different branches of the flower industry which they

⁶¹ Trafalgar Square Flower Sellers Association “House Rules”, handwritten document, dated 1998-09-13, Irefaam (Faan) Williams Collection.

pursue in order to sustain their livelihood include being suppliers of flowers to entities such as Parliament, but also establishing outlets in other areas, and other countries, such as Namibia. Some have even branched out to be suppliers themselves, as is the case of Suraya Cassiem,⁶² who now is a flower producer herself. As daughter of Darawiesa and Riedwaan Africa, another flower family, Cassiem's earliest memories are getting up before four o'clock on Fridays and Saturdays to sell flowers, and becoming a full-time flower seller at the age of eleven.⁶³

The heart of the flower families' trade continues to be the market on Trafalgar Place. The market, its people and its history should be valued as an important part of Cape Town's heritage. Therefore, this article again places focus and responsibility on the municipality and the flower sellers themselves to ensure that a viable strategy is being put in place. One such plan, as argued in the first article, is to entrench the historical and touristic value of the market by installing a weatherproof gallery with photographs, relating the story of the flower sellers and their families by means of text and visuals. This will turn the flower market into a living, open-air museum and provide "oxygen" to a group of people who, in turn, provides the Cape with vibrancy and colour.

As an open air heritage site, together with a marketing strategy for sustainability, the Cape public should also take ownership in supporting the market. As the flower market should be of much more significance than just ensuring that future photographers will be able to capture an image of Cape Town's "living history" for the next Valentine Day's newspaper front page, or a touristic brochure, or as a memory of a visit to Cape Town.

⁶² Cassiem, as example of how the "blomdraers" have empowered themselves and have made the full circle of becoming flower producers themselves, will be the focus of a next study.

⁶³ A. Mouton, From flower-seller to businesswoman, *Village Life* (June/July 2007), p. 6.