‘Ironman’: Joseph Daniels and the white history of South Africa’s deep south

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ABSTRACT. Polar history has historically been white history, nowhere more so than in South Africa, The recent attempt to imagine a post-apartheid deep south through the public recovery of a black boatman who drowned in the annexation of the Prince Edward Islands in 1948 has ironically left the white history largely intact. Re-reading the annexation not as ceremony and survey, but as labour calls the central claims of this white history into question; that the annexation was a triumph of white seamanship not black stevedoring; that Daniels’ death was a tragic accident not a result of racism; and that black labour was merely the manual appendage to white intellects. It reveals that the landing of 300 tons of cargo by black boatmen. was what enabled the ‘effective occupation’ of the islands. Daniels death was the avoidable result of an institutional racism that discounted the lives of black labour and exposed them at Marion Island to the dangerous work conditions of long hours in open boats in rough sea without adequate safety provisions; and that Daniels was a boatman, not an ‘unskilled labourer’, with a tradition of co-adventuring that valued an individual for their strength, skill and courage, not the colour of their skin and in which the individual was defined by their contribution to the group

(Re)inventing Joseph Daniels, 2011

On17 March 2011 a party of senior politicians and bureaucrats from the departments of environmental affairs and public works of the South African government gathered on a rainy, windswept hillside on the nation’s most southerly redoubt, Marion Island for a ‘short but moving ceremony’ to unveil a new cross marking the grave of a young man from Cape Town, Joseph Daniels (*Cape Argus* (Cape Town) 22 March 2011; Fig. 1).

Daniels drowned on 29 January 1948 in a workplace accident while landing stores for the construction of South Africa’s first base on the island. His body was buried on the hillside overlooking ‘Transvaal Cove’ the following day and marked by ‘a simple wooden cross … facing the sea’. Because he was ‘the “wrong” colour of the time there was little acknowledgement of the sacrifice made’ (*Cape Argus* (Cape Town) 22 March 2011). The original ‘simple white cross’ had become ‘weather-beaten over decades of exposure to Marion Island’s extreme weather’, hence its replacement with, ‘as close a replica of the original as possible’, made by artisans in the workshops of the department of public works (*Cape Argus* (Cape Town) 22 March 2011)

Some of the political pressures prompting the public rediscovery and commemoration of Joseph Daniels’ death were evident the following day when the deputy minister of public works, African National Congress member of parliament, Hendrietta Bogopane Zulu, who had been forced to make the arduous journey through the roaring forties to officiate, opened the latest state of the art incarnation of the South African Marion Island research base whose foundations Daniels helped to lay 63 years earlier. While singing the stock paens to science as a frontier of national intellectual endeavour, she also took the opportunity to remind the assembled scientists that Marion Island had for too long been a white man’s land devoted to esoteric scientific enquiries of no obvious value to national development. ‘Ours is to ensure that these islands are not a privilege of a few’ the deputy minister said of her department, ‘but more and more South Africans begin to interact with, understand and respect these islands’, especially women (Zulu 2011).

With no suitable (black) women available for canonisation and with national local government elections just two months away, Joseph Daniels, a coloured working man, was the next best thing. Having been an invisible presence at the creation of the white South African Antarctic in the middle of the twentieth century, black labour, in its everyman embodiment of Joseph Daniels, was now to become the cornerstone of a retrofitted rainbow Antarctic for the post-apartheid 21st century.

The urgency and haste of Daniels’ elevation to national icon was evident in Bogopane Zulu’s candid admission that ‘For us as a department of public works we did not know much about him but we are honored to learn that he came to Marion as a construction worker to contribute to the construction of the first Marion base following its annexation in 1947’ (Zulu 2011).

As the regulators and custodians of the Construction Industry, we feel much honored and hereby commit that his legacy going forward will be preserved. As we leave this room, we will ensure that we unleash our non state sector through EPWP [Expanded Public Works Programme] to profile the community where he came from with an intention of locating some of the family members as this has been done before [sic]. We will be trying to find his family or living next of kin, to come to some form of agreement to preserve his memory by constructing a mini monument, acknowledging his role and contribution but also acknowledging that the

Fig. 1. Unveiling'grave of Joseph Daniels (JohnYeld/*Cape Argus*)

construction industry in [sic] still one of those sectors where the educated and the uneducated continue to work side by side. That will just be the beginning (Zulu 2011).

In addition, the deputy minister also announced a 'Joseph Daniels merit award' to be made to, 'all the men who spent days in the ship to travel to Marion to construct this facility', over the previous eight years, manifesting the purported qualities of Daniels' first sacrifice, 'the commitment and the willingness to serve without complaining and the sacrifices made'(Zulu 2011).

White South Africa's deep south has almost entirely escaped the notice of academic historians over the past six decades since its inauguration on the island where deputy minister Zulu spoke by the military operation in which Daniels died (Dodds 1995, 1996, 1997; Dodds and others 2013; van der Watt 2013). As a result it has remained deep frozen in the historiographical permafrost, still cast today as it first was in May 1948 in the mould of a terminal Smutsian white nationalism (Marsh 1948a). This employed a borrowed imperial trope that focused exclusively on white males represented as engaged in a 'heroic' struggle with nature in pursuit of territory and knowledge. The heroic idiom has proved serviceable down to the present being able both to accommodate previously excluded groups when politically expedient (women and blacks) and depoliticise the acquisition and continued occupation of territory in the southern ocean and Antarctica (individual heroism deflecting attention from collective politics). The recent very public addition of a black boatman to the white master narrative as a(nother) hero of the deep south, intended to correct the elision of blacks from this history, thus has the ironic effect of perpetuating the original exclusion by implying that race is irrelevant and the governing white male consciousness is a universal that already contains all other perspectives. That South African history is founded on the active elision of race is now accepted scholarly wisdom on the mainland, but not in the deep south or, until recently, polar history internationally. The example of Matthew Henson, Peary's black factotum, powerfully demonstrates that the poles were deeply raced spaces and the biography of another 'mere shadow in the heart of whiteness', Joseph Daniels, shows that the same was true of South Africa's deep south (Bloom 1994; Foy 2014)

The deputy-minister's placing Daniels' class identity in the foreground in her address, 'he came to Marion as a construction worker', and celebration of the workers who built the new base tugs at the loose thread of black labour in the heroic meta -narrative. The latter constitutes the deep south exclusively as a site of self-sufficient (white male) mental labour (that of a capitalised 'Science') without any manual labour except that which is performed by the white scientists themselves (Marsh 1948: 62). This despite the fact that at the very moment of annexation, an international industrial armada employing hundreds of black South Africans was working the Ross Sea harvesting and processing whales and, as we shall see, the annexation itself depended as much on stevedoring as seamanship. Instead the Prince Edward Islands and the mainland Antarctic base acquired a decade later are constituted as white fantasy landscapes without indigenes in which the imperial passion play of conquest and colonisation can be annually re-enacted without guilt or apology (Collins and Stevens 2007). A desire to preserve this fantasy also explains the decision to equip the 'first settlers' with boatmen recruited from Tristan da Cunha rather than the Cape Town waterfront (Marsh 1948a: 107–108, 170, 172–176; Crawford 1948). To thus foreground, as the deputy minister did, 'uneducated' labour then and now as integral to the annual re-enactment of the white heroic meta -narrative is to open a breach in its glacial wall that enables a long overdue process of decolonising the history of South Africa's deep south.

(Re)inventing Joseph Daniels I. The view from the bridge, 1948

Joseph Daniels was the son of a Cape Town lobster fisherman (Van Sittert 1993). Born in the early 1920s he was fishing with his father and brother by the time he was ten. There is no known written public record of Joseph Daniels in his own hand. We do not even know if could read and write. We do know that his mother, Clara, was illiterate, attesting to the truth of the sparse details of his short life for the purpose of his death certificate with a cross made in an unsteady hand which the master of the supreme court confirmed to be 'her mark' (Daniels, J. 1948). Joseph Daniels' literacy is in any case irrelevant. Unlike Cape Town's black petty bourgeoisie whose wealth and education enabled them to narrate themselves into social beings and hence leave behind copious first hand written records, Daniels was born into the city's burgeoning black underclass whose hothouse growth during his interwar childhood helped double the city's population between the end of the World War I and the start of World War II (van der Spuy 2002; Rassool 2004; Angier 1998). The city's white authorities despised and feared this emerging proletariat

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as a threat to the health and safety of the white city and subjected it to enhanced surveillance and interdiction in order to contain and combat these threats. It is thus not by their own hands, but the scribing second hands of state functionaries such as the master of the supreme court that the individuality of Cape Town's black underclass is sporadically and incompletely constituted in the archive.

If we seek Joseph Daniels then we must trawl the vast archival scribings of the various state bureaucracies of census, policing and justice that superintended the black underclass. And even then, the personnel and storage deployed to these tasks always fell short of what was required in all but exceptional circumstances and so the at best erratic and ephemeral traces of his biography will be incomplete or contradictory due to the haste, inattention or indifference of the scribes or even subsequently discarded by its producers and curators to save storage space. The underclass subjects of official scribing, like Daniels, were also active agents in the corruption, confusion and destruction of their thin biographical shells sometimes by accident, but more often by design; erasing, overwriting, falsifying, multiplying and shedding the basic narrative selves created for them by the state. Daniels' short life (his death notice records his age as '25 years') and common Cape Town surname (the current Cape Town telephone directory lists more than one thousand 'Daniels' and no fewer than thirty 'J Daniels') further served to reduce and obscure any archival traces. Lastly, the trusty fallback of proletarian biographers faced with the silence of the official archive, oral history, also offers no solution, more than six decades having eroded and recent events overwritten any traces of Joseph Daniels in the memories of those who knew him or his family and fellows.

If Joseph Daniels is all but invisible to his would-be historians today, he was no more visible to the official historian of South Africa's annexation of Marion Island in January 1948, John Henry Marsh, despite his very public death on the incipient Antarctic frontier of white South African national imagining. The annexation force departed in December 1947 on a naval warship followed by supply vessels in January (the first relief) and March (the second relief) 1948 carrying the materials and men to construct and permanently occupy a South African base on the island. Marsh and Daniels journeyed together to the island on the first supply vessel in January 1948 where Daniels drowned landing its cargo. The only detailed account of Daniels death is that written by Marsh in his official history of the annexation, published simultaneously in Cape Town and London a mere four months after the event in May 1948. Marsh was the author of a wartime best seller *Skeleton coast*, about the rescue of survivors from the wreck of a British liner *Dunedin Star* on the Namibian coast in 1942, which went through no fewer than five editions by 1948 and beat 'every best-selling record for general literature' in South Africa, more than doubling the previous record set by *Gone with the wind* (Marsh 1944, 1948a: Foreword and acknowledgements). This popular success and the political connections made along the way, particularly his friendship with the prime minister's private secretary, helped secure him the commission as official historian of the annexation (Marsh 1948a: Author's preface). Smuts recommended Marsh's history, as he had done *Skeleton coast*, for its 'simple language and straightforward style' telling 'another true story of modern pioneering and adventure that will … be an inspiration to many generations' (Marsh 1948a: Foreword). For Marsh the all white crew of the warship that effected the annexation were 'pioneers helping to shape the history of their young nation' (Marsh 1948a: 64). Marsh incongruously included in his history of white pioneering a vivid first-hand account of the death of Joseph Daniels on 29 January 1948. The relief vessel was *Gamtoos*.

> Despite the unfavourable sea conditions the Gamtoos's men strove throughout the day to get all their cargo ashore before their departure, scheduled for nightfall. They had only hutment sections and timber left to unload, and this they could float ashore without using the landing stage.
>
> By the middle of the afternoon they had everything out except thirty hutment sections, and there seemed hope that they would win the race against time and give the island party every item of much needed equipment that they had brought down for them.
>
> Then disaster came.
>
> The sea had been gradually working up, and the guano boats were experiencing increasing difficulty in preventing themselves being carried ashore each time they approached the beach in order to pass across the towing lines of the slats they had brought in. From the [motor tender] Aqua [guano islands division foreman] Fourie saw a member of the crew of one of the boats he had just towed in take a turn of the grass guide rope round the after bollard, apparently to help hold the craft in position. He knew that this would increase the danger of a capsize and shouted to the boatmen to let go. They did not hear because of the noise of the surf. Others shouted warnings also, and eventually the man in the stern-sheets grabbed the rope and cast it loose. Just at that moment a breaker higher than any yet caught the boat and twisted it round and over. Its crew were thrown out, and it floated bottom up amid a welter of boiling water (Marsh 1948a: 178–179).
>
> Four men were quickly pulled from the sea by the watching soldiers on the beach 'semi-conscious from cold and shock' before a fifth was spotted floating in the water. He was retrieved from the sea 'limp' and 'lifeless' and all efforts to revive him failed. 'He proved to be Joseph Daniels, the man who had been in the sternsheets and had cast the rope off the bollard just before the wave caught the boat. A large bruise on his forehead suggested that the gunwale had struck him as the craft turned over, possibly killing him instantly' (Marsh 1948a: 179–180).

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Although written as an eyewitness account, Marsh did not actually see the accident, having left for Cape Town onboard a departing navy warship earlier in the day (Marsh 1948a: 178). The formal ceremonies of (white) annexation had been completed three days before and with them his responsibilities as the official historian and photographer of the annexation. These same duties made him the intimate of Daniels' white rescuers and enabled him to construct a narrative of the boatman's death back in Cape Town 'seen' simultaneously from their multiple perspectives.

Although in his final moments Joseph Daniels was the helmsman of an open boat standing off a rocky beach in shallow, kelp -choked water mined with blinders and assaulted by a rising sea, he is rendered almost entirely inactive in Marsh's composite white (re)telling; towed into the beach, upended by the unseen wave, spotted, rescued, and unsuccessfully resuscitated by others. His only independent act in the white account, tying his boat onto the guide rope, was a dangerous mistake immediately apparent to his white foreman (but only belatedly to Daniels himself) that potentially imperilled his craft, cargo and crew and elicited volleys of shouted instructions from the whites supervisors. Agency in Marsh's account, as in his history and the wider white popular discourse of the annexation, belongs exclusively to whites. The blacks involved, when they are noticed at all, have no individual identity or agency, but are nameless collective noun objects ('boatmen') their every action remote controlled by white instruction and supervision and their survival in a crisis wholly dependent on white agency.

Marsh's film of the annexation is similarly focused on the white 'pioneers' and entirely excludes black labour, except in the footage shot on Gamtoos en route to the island. Here, in the cramped conditions and enforced physical intimacy of the steamer, black boatmen lurk in the background in one shot and in another one stares directly into the camera from the edge of the frame (Fig. 2). A representative white view of the black labour deployed to the island can be glimpsed at the start of the relief expedition when Gamtoos was still in the Albert Basin and before being overwritten by the exigencies of Daniels' death. A Cape Times reporter watching from the quay as the vessel prepared to depart on 12 January declared that

> The happiest men in the Gamtoos while she lay alongside yesterday afternoon were non- European members of the ship's crew. Unaffected by the top secret nature of their mission, they were nevertheless quite ignorant of their destination - nor did they care. Pleasantly uplifted by the effects of a very obvious farewell party with their friends who had come to see them off, they sat in one of the ship's boats slung on deck and sang lustily until the ship left her berth (*Cape Times* (Cape Town) 13 January 1948).

The ignorant, indifferent, drunken, licentious blacks singing in the life boat were not the Gamtoos's crew, then preparing the ship for departure under supervision

Fig. 2. Black boatmen, *Gamtoos*, January 1948 (Marsh 1948b)

of its officers, but the boatmen, including Joseph Daniels, who were off duty until they reached the island. Marsh, watching events from the deck of Gamtoos, on which he and Daniels would journey south together for the next week, but writing only after the latter's death, reported that:

> As we backed away from our berth late in the afternoon, there were only a few folk on the quayside to wave us farewell. Most of them were officials. A few were Coloured men who had been trying desperately up to the last minute to persuade an official to take them on board. While this had been going on, to the accompaniment of much noisy argument and vociferous encouragement from a crowd of their compatriots who were already on board, I had noticed several jump from the quay on to our bulwarks and make their way purposefully to the fo'c'sle. I gave no special thought to this, but recalled it after dark when we were lying at anchor in the roadstead getting shipshape before proceeding to sea. I was with my cabin mate, Louie Fourie, the Guano Islands' Inspector, when a message was brought to him from the galley. The cook was complaining of 'verneukery' [trickery] among the Coloured boatmen and labourers. He had been told to prepare supper for 13, but already they had drawn 18 meals. Soon afterwards the officers who were issuing blankets, specially warm clothing, oilskins and seaboots to all hands complained that there were not enough to go around, despite the care that had been taken to ensure that every man was adequately provided for. Fourie ordered a roll call, and, sure enough, it produced five men who could not give a satisfactory account of their presence on board. They were voluble in their protestations that they thought they had been chosen to come. Fourie recognised them as old hands who had voyaged in the Gamtoos to the guano islands previously, and as it was rather late to put them ashore now, and their help

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would probably be valuable when discharging began at the islands, he decided to sign the stowaways on (Marsh 1948a: 118–119).

Marsh's fellow journalist, Lawrence Green, travelling *Gamtoos*' normal coastwise beat the following summer unconstrained by an official commission, drew the city's maritime *lumpenproletariat*, from which the department of agriculture raised its annual levy of boatmen and labourers for the guano harvest on the bird islands strung out along the west coast from Cape Town to Namibia, in even more starkly prejudiced pastiche.

> [T]he quay is alive with struggling men and screaming women. True to the roistering island tradition the men had fortified themselves against departure; yet they are obviously glad to be going. Down the steep gangway they stagger, some with blankets and sacks and wooden boxes, others with nothing but the bright thin costumes they wore at their New Year carnival.
>
> It takes all the strength of the police to handle this crowd. These men are the sweepings of the waterfront, gaolbirds and drunkards; yet all of them anxious for once to earn their keep and regular honest pay. Each man is searched hastily for drink and dagga as he sets foot on the gangway. Some of the bottles are detected and smashed on the wooden fenders between ship and quay - though not without angry protests …
>
> Certain individuals, skilled boatmen and experienced cargo trimmers, have come straight from gaol, cropped and beaming with pleasure, their fines paid by the officials. These are the poorest of the poor. They could not be happier if they were bound for the Islands of the Blest. Besides those who have 'signed on' in the regular way, dozens of others are waiting for the chance to fill last-minute gaps in the ranks. Desperately eager to sail they jump for the deck and often succeed in mingling unobserved with the horde. Talk about stowaways - the ship must be full of them. More and more 'pierhead jumps' arrive, and one falls over the quay on to the fender, among the shattered bottles, and is rescued and carried off to hospital. No use searching the ship. The police dare not search the ship on sailing day. From the 'tween-decks for'ard arises the odour of dagga. Any officer who went down there would be knifed.
>
> I tell you, we have a load of cut-throats and scoundrels in this packet. Tomorrow, and on the islands, they will behave fairly well. Today they are sprawling drunkenly over the hatches, ready to sing or snarl. They are quarrelling over the brandy they have smuggled on board, stealing the pitiful possessions of new hands, swindling each other at cards, shouting coarse farewells to friends on shore. Nearly two hundred of them, and if they all went to the rail at once the little steamer would heel at her berth.
>
> Only the privileged boatmen and trimmers have shelter. All the rest will use hatches, boats, the fo'c's'le head and engine-room superstructure as bunks. They will sleep and eat in the fresh air throughout the voyage. For men who have been sleeping in Roeland Street gaol, or at best on the mountainside, this is luxury …
>
> As the Gamtoos swings out, unaided by tugs, her bow nuzzles against the quay. This brings our merry rascals very close to the shore crowd. Men leaning far over the rail seize panic-stricken girls and pretend to be dragging them on board - presumably to a fate worse than death …
>
> For the island labourers this is a sanatorium. Thin-ribbed and liverish now, addled with canteen liquor and shivering in the sea-breeze, they will return plump and warmly-clad. Today they have the headaches they deserve. But already the polony and coffee and biscuits are going round. Most of them eat out of tins. Hardly a man has had the forethought or the means to bring a knife, fork, mug or plate with him. They ar
> amongst the most improvident people on the face of the globe. Happy-go-lucky stupid, island labourers, but with sense enough to sign for the islands every year when the time comes round.
>
> There may be a crime wave when they return. Six months hard labour between seasons is fair enough, and not a bad way of passing the slack period. But the island man who is taken by the police shortly before the Gamtoos sails has a real grievance. The cunning ones seldom commit a crime that will land them in gaol early in the year (Green 1950: 12–15; Fig. 3).

Fig. 3. The sweepings of the waterfront *Gamtoos*, January 1949 (Green 1950: facing 28).

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Green's account of the guano islands division's method of managing this 'riff raff' further illuminates Daniels invisibility on Gamtoos' Marion island charter the previous year. 'Then I notice Mr Price, the inspector, handing out brass discs to the men … Each brass disc has a number, and a labourer who loses his disc loses his identity with it. Names have little meaning in the islands, for our rascals are too fond of changing their names. And as about seven hundred men are engaged every year to work the whole string of islands, these brass discs are the only means of keeping track of them. The names in the inspector's book are no help at all. If a labourer likes his headman he is liable to adopt the headman's name. Popular, bygone skippers of island ships, and former inspectors, would be gratified to know that labourers have assumed their names too, in fond memory of past favours. Only by brass discs and carefully indexed finger-prints can you be sure of your island men' (Green 1950: 19).

Debauched, delinquent and dangerous, the division reduced its black labour force to numbers and finger prints the same as convicts in the prison system ashore with which, Green claimed, it exchanged labour twice a year in an oscillating cycle pulsed by the seasons.

Given whites' deep race and class antipathies towards black labour at the island, Marsh's inclusion of the work-place death of a black labourer and that as a 'Tragedy' in his official white history of the annexation points to the functional utility of Daniels' drowning to the organic intellectual and political architects of the white Antarctic (Marsh 1948a: 177–181). Black labour mortality was after all commonplace in the maritime industries of the South African mainland, deepsea trawlermen suffering a higher death rate than black gold miners in the mid-twentieth century, and this was glibly accepted by both white officials and public. Had Daniels drowned on a guano island at home, his death would have passed entirely unnoticed. But by happening on Marion Island at the moment of annexation it became a means of simultaneously rescuing Marsh's history from farce and bolstering the national claim to the islands against imagined rivals. The Prince Edward Islands were a hostile environment for both human occupation and nationalist myth-making; the only natives were seals and seabirds, the only armed resistance that offered by skuas and flagpoles and honour guards sank into the peat bogs.

As Marsh himself remarked, 'Solemnity and dignity were not in keeping with the character of Marion' (Marsh 1948a: 77). The stock heroic discourse of colonisation thus completely failed Marsh, continually lapsing into bathos from which only Daniels' death rescued it. Marsh's account of the bravery of the boatmen and their rescuers in fighting and, in Daniels' case, falling in hand to hand combat with a raging sea is immune to the endemic bathos that infects all other aspects of the annexation up to that point and enables Marsh to finally find the elusive heroic register demanded of his history.

Marsh's history also incorporates Daniel's death for reasons of *realpolitik*. His body summarily interred in the bog is transmogrified, shedding the indelible race and class stigmata it bore in life (aided by the unraced, Anglo name affixed to it in death) to become the sacrificial exemplar of the South African body politic, earning the national right of occupation by having paid the ultimate price. Thus Daniels buried becomes another marker of the national annexation of the islands and, like the flagpoles planted on both islands each with its accompanying buried 'brass cylinder … fashioned from a 40mm Bofors cartridge case' containing the South African claim, Marsh's history, in diligently recording Daniels' national identity and the date, place and circumstances of his death, becomes the brass cylinder that converts his grave into the topographical equivalent of a flagpole (Marsh 1948a: 76; Collins 2004; Fig. 4).

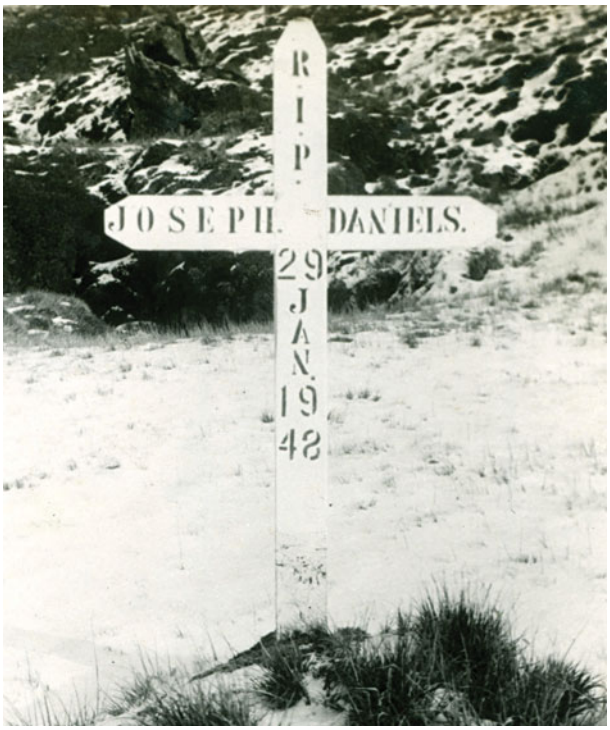

Fig. 4. Grave Joseph Daniels, Prince Edward Islands, 1950 (Kockjoy 1950)

The continued significance of Daniels' grave as a national place holder on the Antarctic frontier is underlined by the diligent maintenance of its marker for the past sixty three years in stark contrast to the anonymity of subsequent burials on the island (Graham 1989: 85, 90). And yet a mere nine months later the 'tragedy' of Daniels death had already been forgotten by whites on the island. The 'governor' of the first South African over wintering party, Alan Crawford, reporting that the landing stage under the cliff had been washed away and only 'Landings of a primitive nature can be made onto the rocks on the beach … and life is endangered in anything but the very smoothest of weather', warned his superiors in September 1948 that 'something must be done to improve landing conditions or else, before long, lives will [sic] be lost' (Crawford 1948).

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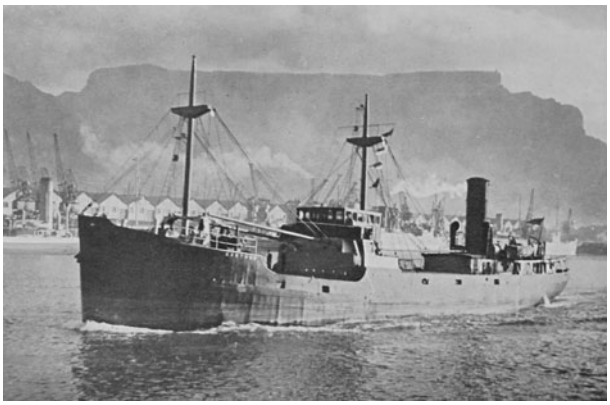

Fig. 5. *Gamtoos*, January 1946 (Cover *South African Shipping News and Fishing Industry Review*, January 1946)

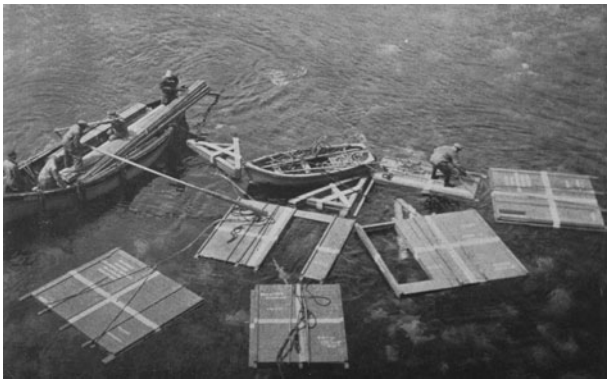

Fig. 6. *Gamtoos* boatmen, Marion Island, January 1948 (Marsh 1948a: 153)

(Re)inventing Joseph Daniels II. The view from the deck, 1948

If Marsh's history of the annexation is the view from the bridge, is it possible to gain a view of events from the deck of Gamtoos? Not the view of the boatmen, but one nearer to their perspective. A view of the annexation, in other words, not as ceremony and survey, but as labour. Not as flag raisings and resource inventories, but cargo handling. And might such a perspective not also fundamentally change the way we see the boatmen as a collective and perhaps even Joseph Daniels as an individual? The search for a view of the annexation from the deck must begin with an understanding of the way that labour was organised and authority vested on Gamtoos in January 1948.

*Gamtoos (*Fig. 5) was an 800 ton coaster converted into a naval salvage vessel during the war and returned to peacetime duties in 1946 as the workhorse of the Department of Agriculture servicing its guano island empire. Green described it as having the look of 'a tough miniature tanker … Miniature is the word, for [it] is a ship … less than two hundred feet long and without a deck anywhere where I can exercise my legs (Green 1950: 13).

The vessel was employed by the Department of Agriculture's Guano Islands Division to transport labour and supplies to the islands and haul the thousands of tons of the annual guano harvest to Cape Town. The Department of Agriculture was reluctant to charter its new coaster to the Department of Public Works for Marion Island at the start of the 1947–1948 guano harvest. It only agreed provided all expenses, including chartering a replacement vessel during Gamtoos' absence, were charged to Public Works and the Guano Islands Division's chief, superintendent Theuns Kruger, was allowed to accompany the Gamtoos to Marion in order to assess the sealing and guano prospects of the new territory first hand (Green 1950). In return the guano islands division agreed to also provide the means and labour necessary to land public works' estimated 300 tons of cargo at Marion (Marsh 1948a: 117, 152). In the absence of a harbour at the island, this had to be done the same way it was done on the guano islands, two flat boomed 'guano boats' (Fig. 6) and a motor tender ferrying the cargo from *Gamtoos* to an improvised landing jetty rigged along the base of the cliff face in Transvaal Cove by the annexation party (Marsh 1948a: 95).

Boatmen initially refused to sign on for Marion Island, however, until Kruger agreed to pay a salary of £7 per month, £2.5s over the normal rate and the same as that paid to the certified black ratings on *Gamtoos* (Kruger 1948d). This suggests an alternative explanation for the black 'crew's' celebrations and the many 'pierhead jumps' despite tight security in the Alfred Basin. Kruger claimed the boatmen's initial reluctance was due to, 'the work on Marion Island being only of short duration and the perpetual bad weather making it very demanding' as justification for the wage inflation to his superiors (Kruger 1948d). His explanation is revealing for two reasons. First, despite the elaborate Boys Own paraphernalia of code words, sealed orders and radio silence intended to make the Gamtoos' destination a secret exclusive to select white insiders, the 'veil of mystery' was pierced by none less than the waterfront lumpenproletariat, which, through Kruger's recruiting, knew that the steamer was headed to Marion (Marsh 1948a: 113). Second, Kruger's explanation overlooked the fact that the boatmen not only made employment decisions based on wage and work conditions, but also acted collectively, withholding their labour from the relief voyage (until they had won a 50% pay rise.

There was no shortage of examples of trade union-organised collective action available on the wartime Cape Town waterfront, but the maritime lumpenproletariat had its own strike traditions derived from the pre-industrial practice of co- adventuring in the inshore fisheries (Van Sittert 1994). As capital gained greater control over the means of fishing production during the first half of the twentieth century it was able to constrain the freedom of movement of fishers, but the power of the latter (and the strength of the co-adventuring tradition) was still on

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public display every autumn in mid- century Cape Town when the maritime lumpenproletariat migrated en masse away from lobster to snoek fishing, shuttering the canning and freezing industry for the second quarter of each year. Joseph Daniels came from an inshore fishing family and was raised in its co-adventuring tradition.

The position of 'boatman', as Green indicated and Kruger confirmed, was of a higher status than ordinary labourer, warranting them 'shelter' on Gamtoos in recognition that they were 'trained men' rather than 'ordinary' labour (Green 1950: 13; Kruger 1949). Given that 'boatmen' were not on the guano islands division permanent establishment, their 'training' was informal and most readily acquired in the lobster fishery which demanded the same stamina and skills of its fishers to that required by the division of its boatmen and was the place where Joseph Daniels served his apprenticeship.

These were the physical and mental skills Joseph Daniels acquired as a youth in the 1930s and sold on the Cape Town waterfront, in January 1948 to Theuns Kruger for one and a half times the going rate.

Kruger had no doubt he would need them on Marion Island, but the South African Naval Forces (SANF) director in charge of the relief placed priority on ceremony and construction over cargo in packing *Gamtoos* with a third more sappers than boatmen. Excluded from the conference of 'principal men' briefed by the returning warship commander, Kruger and Fourie took matters into their own hands and quietly doubled Gamtoos' official complement of boatmen (Marsh 1948a: 115). According to Marsh, there were 18 boatmen onboard, five more than approved, but Kruger paid 24, suggesting that Marsh missed about as many pierhead jumps as he noticed when Gamtoos departed (Kruger 1949). By contrast the steamer carried 30 sappers, two officers and three wireless operators to provide a guard for the annexation ceremonies and assemble the kit-form storage huts in the cargo (Kruger 1948f). Kruger reported that of *Gamtoos*' ten days (245 hours) at Marion it had 'relatively calm' weather for only 60% of the time (143 hours) of which less than half (65 hours or a mere quarter of the total time at the island) were daylight and thus workable (Kruger 1948c). In order to clear *Gamtoos* of its 300 tons of cargo in 65 hours, the boatmen had to land about four and a half tons per hour or two and a quarter tons per boat every hour. Marsh, likened the process to 'using a teaspoon to empty a bathtub' (Marsh 1948a: 15)

None of the dangers and deprivations faced by whites at the islands, so assiduously chronicled by Marsh, could compare to the hours spent by the black boatmen and their white foreman in open boats in Transvaal Cove hauling cargo.

The guano boats were loaded alongside *Gamtoos* with the aid of the ship's derricks. The motor-boat, *Aqua*, was used only for towing the guano boats to within a short rowing distance of the landing-stage. It dared not go too close owing to the kelp that was floating in the shallow water. The crew of five coloured men in the guano boat would haul alongside the landing stage with the aid of a strong guide rope made fast to a rock at the shore end of the catwalk and running out parallel with the landing stage to an anchor a little distance seaward. As soon as the craft was in the correct position one of the crew would take a swift turn of the rope round a bollard in the boat, and all hands would then begin bundling the packages from the boat on to the landing stage. The waiting soldiers seized them and passed then from hand to hand down the catwalk to the shore. The whole operation had to be done smartly with the boatmen keeping a constant watchful eye seaward. There was always danger that a wave larger than usual would surge round the Point and catch them under the landing stage, with risk of an immediate capsize, or that it would tear them from their moorings and cast them onto the rocks only a boat's length ahead. They dared not moor too securely else they would not be able to slip quickly and pull seaward to comparative safety (Marsh 1948a: 151). The boatmen earned 'the admiration of all by their daring, skill and endurance' in daily braving the perils of the cove working long hours exposed to the elements without the protection of lifejackets, lifelines or lifebuoys (Anon. 1948b).

The everyday heroism of the *Gamtoos* boatmen working off the cargo was the central drama of the relief, a high risk race against time but Marsh ignored it because the main *dramatis personae* bar one were black and the multiracial war effort that Marsh had hymned in 1944 had been supplanted by a return to the narrow chauvinism of white national politics by 1948 (Marsh 1944).

The time constraint on the boatmen was a secondary effect both of the weather and the fuel supply of *Gamtoos*. With nowhere to re-coal en route, she had only the coal taken on in Cape Town to get to Marion and back. The 'hardship passage' through the roaring forties and the two fifths of its time at the islands spent battling 'bad weather' forced *Gamtoos* to consume its bunkers at a rapid rate (Marsh 1948a: 121; Kruger 1948c). There was a reserve coal supply onboard, but it was inaccessible until the cargo had been cleared from the hold. After just five days at the island and a 36 hour hurricane that reduced his 'coal safety margin … to less than 48 hours', the master of *Gamtoos*, WF Finlayson, decided to return to Cape Town with three quarters of the cargo still onboard (Marsh 1948a: 166). Kruger, who as superintendent outranked Finlayson ashore, 'after much argument and hard words', forced him to remain at the island until all the cargo had been landed (Kruger 1948c).

The main impediment to this happening when weather permitted was the inadequate labour employed in clearing the cargo from the beach. 'Everybody who could be useful on the job was employed on it', Marsh reported, 'ashore the entire [army] occupation party was concentrated on clearing the landing stage and slipway as speedily as possible of the cargo brought by the guano boats' (Marsh 1948a: 152). An 'unskilled' task performed by black labour at home was believed by the military commanders planning the relief to be

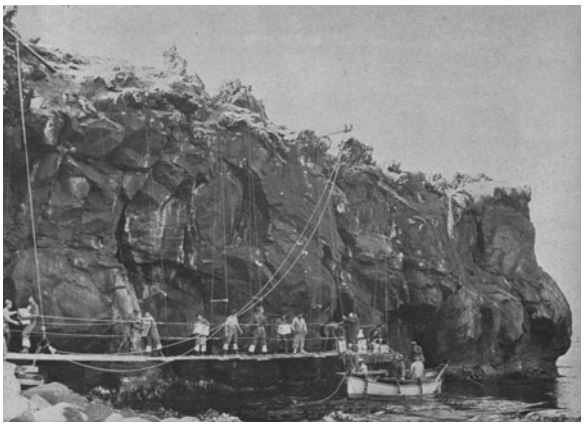

Fig. 7. Boatmen versus sappers, Transvaal Cove, January 1948 (Marsh 1948a: facing 73)

comfortably within the capabilities of white soldiers when the need for a uniformed white audience at the formal annexation required the relief to make do without sufficient black labour for all its heavy lifting. The physical fitness of stevedoring, however, was fundamentally different to that of soldiering as was the disciplined collective effort of the work gang to that of the platoon and the strapping white sappers tasked with clearing the cargo from the beach were simply unable to match the speed with which the black boatmen filled it, even with the aid of a hastily rigged slipway and winches (Marsh 1948a: 152; Fig. 7).

So stark was the disjuncture in labour that even Marsh noticed, but explained it in racial terms, suggesting that the black boatmen had a physiological advantage over the white soldiers (Marsh 1948a: 180).

On the first two working days at the island, 20–21 January, Marsh estimated that *Gamtoos,* with its labour fresh, put 100 tons ashore (Marsh 1948a: 152). Thereafter the long working day of the austral summer (the sun rising at 3.00 am and setting at 9.00 pm) coupled with temperatures so low they forced a 50% increase in the ration scale rapidly eroded productivity, especially that of the white sappers bivouacked on the island and manning the beach (Marsh 1948a: 78, 93, 164–165). On day four, Kruger reported that 'problems ..experienced at the landing place' were the cause of only three loads of cement being landed in four hours that morning (Kruger 1948c). Two days later he was more explicitly critical of the sappers, 'The work is going extremely slowly because of the fact that the men on shore cannot properly perform their share of the landing work' (Kruger 1948c). The following day, with the reserve coal supply at last accessible, Kruger thought that the 'goods will probably all be landed if the men on land can keep up with the work', but by 'early afternoon, however, they had got behind to such an extent that work onboard had to be discontinued'(Kruger 1948c). Bad weather ensured that it could only resume 36 hours later, on Thursday 29 January,

> 6.00 am anchored at Marion Island and got to work immediately. Although the wind was not blowing strongly from the SW the sea remained rough. Breakers on the coast so no landing work possible, but still able to bring floats and planks to shore. At 4.10 pm boat capsized in breakers and one boatman, Joseph Daniels, better known as Ironman, drowned. Everyone onboard shocked and flag raised to halfmast as sign of mourning. We still have 31 floats onboard and I doubt if we will be able to land them. The big problem is that the men on shore can't do the work (Kruger 1948c).

Kruger thus provides a fundamentally different explanation for Joseph Daniels' death to Marsh's view from the bridge. Viewed from the deck, Daniels' death was not a 'tragic' accident, but rather the result of a fundamental failure in the logistical planning of the relief and its implicit view of black labour as expendable; the decision to carry sappers for ceremonial purposes instead of sufficient boatmen to land the cargo in good time. As a result, the offloading of *Gamtoos* was continually held up by congestion on the beach and the boatmen put in harm's way far longer than necessary. Indeed, on the day he died, Daniels had been working for ten hours straight in what Marsh euphemistically described as 'unfavourable sea conditions' under the gun of Finlayson's determination to depart for Cape Town that evening with whatever cargo remained in the hold (Marsh 1948a: 178, 172). So treacherous were the conditions that the officer in charge of the beach party, Lt W.L.C. Bond, felt compelled to 'beg' a lifebuoy from the naval escort in case of an emergency on the beach (Marsh 1948a: 179).

Kruger was not alone in his low regard for the utility of white soldiers as stevedores. The second relief despatched at the end of February, although transporting only 150 tons of cargo (half that hauled by *Gamtoos*), carried 34 boatmen, (a third more than *Gamtoos* and nearly three times its official allocation), including as many veterans of the first relief as were willing to return to Marion (Anon.1948c). This time, 'The Coloured men who were not required to man the boats were put ashore to serve as a labour force, and the Natal [the naval escort] provided a stevedoring party to get the cargo out of the storeship and a fatigue party to assist ashore' (Marsh 1948a: 189).

Kruger also had personal reasons for blaming the relief's logistics and, by implication the naval authorities, for Daniels' death. His own authority on *Gamtoos* had been repeatedly disputed by its master, Finlayson, an ex-navy lieutenant commander, and his very presence on the vessel was subsequently questioned by the head of the navy (Anon. 1946b; Deputy Chief of the General Staff 1948) . Finlayson clearly resented having his decision to return to Cape Town with most of the cargo still onboard overruled by Kruger and when requested by the superintendent to circumnavigate Prince Edward Island on their departure to enable him to survey its penguin

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colonies which he had been unable to reach overland during his solitary half hour landing, he proceeded instead on the course designated by the naval commander at the islands, forcing Kruger to publicly overrule him for a second time (Kruger 1948e). Unlike Marsh, who was always unctuously sycophantic towards the military, Kruger, regarded himself as the 'principal' on *Gamtoos* with a 'special mission' of his own who, by forcing the recalcitrant Finlayson to remain at Marion when he was dead set on returning fully laden to Cape Town, played a crucial role in ensuring the success of the relief (Kruger 1948e). His anger at Finlayson's 'double-cross' and the navy's substitution of sappers for cargo 'trimmers' doubtless coloured his account of the voyage and the death of 'Ironman', submitted to the secretary for agriculture just five days after his return to Cape Town (Kruger 1948e).

Precisely because of his alienation from the bridge and the Anglo naval culture of the vessel, the narrative of Kruger, the rural Afrikaner, was closer to the deck and the boatmen working it. Rather than an accidental artefact of the tensions on Gamtoos' bridge, however, Kruger's 'view from below' was embedded in relations of production on deck. Unlike Marsh and his white military informants for whom the dead boatmen 'proved to be Joseph Daniels', an unknown individual, Fourie, confronted by the pierhead jumps, 'recognised them as old hands who had voyaged in the Gamtoos to the guano islands previously' (Marsh 1948a: 11). Similarly, Kruger knew the dead man not as 'Joseph Daniels', the unraced Anglo name he was made to bear in death by the whites who buried him, but by his nom de travail, 'Ironman', and was shocked at and mourned his death. Back in Cape Town it was Kruger who explained his domestic arrangements to the confused master of the supreme court, unsure who to recognise as the legitimate heir to the boatman's last salary and personal effects (Kruger 1948b).

Kruger and Fourie's intimate knowledge of their black boatmen was the necessary intimacy of co-adventuring, a product of the highly dangerous occupation they were engaged in, landing cargo with open boats on open beaches, in which the safety of each individual was dependent on the effort of the collective and the collective effort was the sum of the individual boatman's attributes of physical strength, sea sense and courage. Indeed, the foreman, Fourie, was himself a co-adventurer, more than doubling his £550 annual salary from the guano islands division through his 'lays' in the annual seal harvest and monopoly on the sale of 'slops' on the islands (Public Service Commission 1948: 38–47). The guano island division may have treated its levies of 'ordinary labour' as nothing more than numbers and fingerprints, as Green claimed, but its boatmen and trimmers were individuals each of whose skills were known and valued because the ultimate success of the annual seal and guano harvest and the safety of all its participants depended on them. That was why Kruger was prepared to divulge Gamtoos' destination and pay well over the going rate to his boatmen in January 1948. He would have read Finlayson's notes on the Prince Edward Islands and been in no doubt that only the very best boatmen would do for the most public and dangerous resupply cruise the division had ever undertaken (Finlayson 1948; Marsh 1948a: 66, 103–104).

(Re)inventing Joseph Daniels. A (re)view from the deck, 2011

Joseph Daniels returned from Marion Island in name only. Because he died 'by accident at sea' there was no inquest and because he was a temporary worker there was no claim against the workmen's compensation fund (Daniels, J. 1948; Kruger 1948a). The only official loose thread to his life were his few personal effects and his outstanding salary, £ 4.14s of the £7 per month windfall he signed on for in January due to him for the 17 days he worked from his departure to his death (Kruger 1948a, 1948b). Back on the mainland the segregationist bureaucracy, ignorant and indifferent to the distinction, demoted him from a boatman back to an ordinary 'coloured labourer' from Grassy Park and was done with him (Daniels, J. 1948). His mother was given his effects and final salary on the grounds that his wife had left him some years earlier and the woman he lived with, although she called herself 'Raai Daniels', was not married to her son (Kruger 1948b). We know nothing of the family's trauma, grief and mourning except what we might infer from his 90 year old father's drowning at Kalk Bay on the fourth anniversary of his son's death at Marion Island in January 1952 (Daniels, M. 1952).

After 1948, the SANF took over responsibility for the annual summer relief of the islands, now involving the much more modest task of resupply, rather than construction of the Marion Island base and with this visible black labour was removed from the island which reverted to a fantasy white man's land. So complete was this erasure and powerful the illusion that it conjured, that a biologist visiting the island in 1952, astutely observed that, 'Station personnel seldom concern themselves with landing operations. … In the past a prevalent tendency has been to "leave it to the sailors". This rather selfish attitude is deplored and in fact results in a disgruntled atmosphere amongst the stevedoring sailors themselves' (Rand 1952).

Thus forgotten, the Joseph Daniels rediscovered in 2011 is the cipher in Marsh's account invisible until his death made him convenient for the narrative and geopolitical purposes of the nascent white Antarctic. A product of white Antarctic history, Marsh's Joseph Daniels is impotent to decolonise it, and his employment to such ends, as by deputy minister Zulu, reinforces rather than revises the white heroic meta-narrative. White Antarctic history easily accommodates Daniels the good 'boy' who gave uncomplaining service and made the ultimate sacrifice, by simply expanding its pantheon of heroes to include him. Indeed his inclusion has been a

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pet project of the white scientific establishment not the new black political class. The revanchist nature of this re-membering of Daniels is clearly evident in deputy minister Zulu's resultant re-imagined alliance of 'the educated and the uneducated'.

The rediscovery of Marsh's Joseph Daniels thus perpetuates rather than dispels several myths of white Antarctic history: that the annexation was a triumph of white seamanship not black stevedoring; that Daniels' death was a tragic accident; and that black labour were mere manual appendages to white intellects. Firstly, recognising that the landing of 450 tons of cargo by the black boatmen of the two 1948 reliefs. was what secured the annexation by enabling 'effective occupation' of the islands, qualifies the central tenant of the white Antarctic and opens the way for a new black Antarctic history. Secondly, by recognising that Joseph Daniels death was not an act of god, but an avoidable result of an institutional racism that discounted the lives of black labour and exposed them at Marion Island to the dangerous work conditions of long hours in open boats in rough sea without adequate safety provisions, we can name what the deputy minister only alluded to in opening the new Marion base, that the annexation and subsequent five decades of occupation of the islands was a racially exclusive project which mirrored that on the mainland (the base that Daniels died helping to build included, as noted above, separate accommodation for 'non-Europeans'). Finally, by recognising Daniels for what he was, a boatman, and not as the deputy minister implied an uneducated construction worker we can re-claim the tradition of co-adventuring which he embodied: one that valued an individual for their strength, skill and courage, not the colour of their skin and in which the individual was defined by their contribution to the group. This provides an altogether more appropriate metaphor, than the hierarchy of the 'educated' and 'uneducated' suggested by the deputy minister, for the post-apartheid re-imaging of national endeavour in the deep south.

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