

# **THE WUPPERTHAL STORIES**

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## A Mountain Community

Years ago, before realizing that development practice is an art and discipline in its own right, and before recognizing the development practitioner as a professional, I went as a community worker to 'do development work' in a remote mountain community. I went, or was sent (as most community workers are sent) with little understanding of my role and even less support, relying on intuition and the arrogant presumption that I knew more than those I was sent to 'serve' there. I had no training in community work as such, nor was this expected of me, for those who sent me assumed - as do many NGOs (non-governmental organizations) even today - that community development work was an ad hoc and informal non-discipline in which one bumbled along hoping to find one's feet, or not, as the case may be. Since leaving that community, in which I lived for three years, I have striven to understand the development practitioner's art and to gain recognition for the development practitioner as a disciplined professional whose work is not only vital but also, I believe, profoundly consequential with respect to humanity. I have worked with urban and rural organizations of civil society; with national and regional organizations throughout Southern Africa; with northern donors and with development practitioners from many countries. I have gained experience and reflected actively on that experience. Years later, I think back on my experiences in that mountain community with gratitude, appreciation and love, and realize in retrospect that the time contained great learnings for me; that the kernel of my developing practice was formed then, and that my quest has, in a sense, been an endeavour to understand the dilemmas and uncertainties of that time. I shall therefore intersperse the chapters of this book with interludes about that time and that community, with vignettes which might serve to bring the body of the text closer to home.

Wupperthal is situated in the Cedarburg mountains, 300 kilometres north of Cape Town. It consists of a central village with twelve 'outstations', or smaller villages, many scattered in remote valleys where access is difficult. It is an area inhabited - during the days of apartheid South Africa, which is when these incidents occurred - by poor, disenfranchised, coloured people who had once been labourers on white-owned farms.

Wupperthal was founded in the early 1800s by German missionaries. The missionary church has since become an independent South African church and

still owns the land and, in a real sense, the people. The majority of Wupperthal residents are subsistence farmers, although some farm on an economic basis (rooibos tea, small stock farming) and certain small industries have been established including a glove factory, shoe factory, tannery and village shop. However, in the face of declining economic viability and urban migration, the church was at a loss as to how to maintain and develop the community. I was sent in, partly to do research, partly to establish cooperative ventures, using current farming and 'industrial' activities as the basis for development.

Wupperthal is a beautiful, timeless place, remote and isolated. The mountains are harsh and uncompromising; the lines on the faces of the people seem to take on the character of the weather-beaten rocks themselves. The people are closely connected to their land, their crops, animals, and their community. They have little else. They live a life which cycles with the seasons. They welcomed me into their midst with open arms - but as a person, not as a development worker. Their understanding of my role was fraught with inconsistency, as indeed was mine.

From the first I was confronted with dilemmas. The church had sent me in, yet there was little love between the church and the people. In spite of employing me to undertake development work, the church confounded every effort which I made or which the people made to develop themselves. From its head office in Cape Town the church appeared to wish to maintain the villagers' dependence and subservience. And for many reasons the people were apathetically antagonistic to the church. I found I was caught in between. The people themselves had little interest in the changes which appeared to be the inevitable consequences of the development process. They had no wish to change their subsistent, timeless way of life; they had not asked for me to come in. At the same time, they were no longer a contented community. Their poverty hurt, and many younger community members were migrating to the cities. The money which they sent back to their elders was beginning to create social divisions between the haves and have-nots. Division had never existed before when all had only 'what God had the grace to give us'. The people resisted change, yet were patently unhappy with their current state.

I found my position ambiguous. Development seemed necessary, yet should I force development on an unwilling people? The irreverent nature of their response to my efforts and their resistance to change made me wonder whether I could, let alone should, facilitate development. The people were asking

for my assistance all the time, yet continuously resisting the implications of that assistance for their lifestyle. Was development necessary? Perhaps my interventions were disturbing the integrity of village life, and I should leave the situation to evolve or gradually disintegrate on its own.

What would development bring anyway: a TV set to replace a winter's fire in the hearth? A formica kitchen table to replace the roughly hewn cedarwood table? Yet people were suffering, and at their wit's end.

I walked the mountains, and my questions bounced back at me from cliff faces and ricocheted down tumbling kloofs.

## **Cohesion and Division.**

It was late at night. Outside the stars hung close and comforting, while inside the sparse fire burned brightly and through an open window drifted the stilling murmur of the Tra-Tra River as it flowed through the village. Wupperthal was asleep, yet we remained awake – they keeping the fire alive while I pushed at their thoughts in order to gain some understanding and clarity: an old man and an old woman, who have seen an eternity of such nights; and a young city-bred development worker, fighting himself.

I had been seduced by this community which seemed sufficient unto itself, which apparently had no need of me and had no impulse towards development. Yet everywhere I turned I found evidence of discontent, and so was forced to confront the paradox of an apparently contented community which was at the same time unhappy and discontented. On one level the community was socially cohesive; yet on the other it was shot through with division and conflict, with antagonism and tension.

In answer to my questions the old man put some more wood on the fire, slowly and thoughtfully. He did not speak. Yet tacitly he communicated with her, and she spoke from her place in the shadows.

“In the old days we cared for each other, and each of us was cared for in our times of need. We respected each other” She stared into the fire. “If we arrived at someone’s house, we were fed and sheltered. Although our hosts might have had nothing, they would give us everything, because the Lord would provide the following day, or the Lord would not. We had nothing, we were dependent on His grace. All of us. Under such circumstances, how could we not give everything?”

No longer staring into the fire, she was looking at me and here eyes were lit by distress, indignation and anger.

“But it is all so different now. Sons and daughters have gone to the city to become nurses and teachers. They send back money to their families, some more, some less. Now some here build bigger houses, buy cars, buy generators and install TVs. Others have less money; many have none. Suddenly, people have, where before they did not have. And now there is selfishness. People hold on to what they have. There is pride and arrogance. We who have nothing are looked down upon and scorned. We are no longer one. We no longer thank the Lord. We respect those who have, and what is this but disrespect for those who do not have?”

She subsided into silence and we each sat with our difficult and weighty thoughts. As the fire died down the embers glowed fitfully. I wrestled with myself, with my task here. Would development not worsen this picture and increase division? Development seemed to imply moving beyond dependence, becoming self-reliant and independent, and thereby separate. Was this not a cause of problem, rather than a solution? Yet it was happening anyway. How could a developmental intervention assist? The ambiguities of development were fragmenting my thought and forcing my mind into an ignoble retreat. I struggled to understand where the community was heading and why.

## **Resistance and Awakening**

Battered cardboard boxes filled with goods had been unloaded from the truck and were stacked on the ground to one side of the dusty village square. I sat on one of them, shifting my boots restlessly in the dust, speaking quietly with those who stood or sat near me. Our attention was focused on the far side of the square. There, three figures stood in heated exchange. The breeze rustled the leaves in the trees, birds balanced on fence-wire, and old shiny-smooth cedarwood benches slept their ageless sleep in the sun. But the atmosphere was tense. I was simultaneously exhilarated and disquieted. We all awaited the outcome of the intense deliberations taking place between the three before making the next move. Not knowing what the next move would be.

After months of struggling fruitlessly with a people's soul which was at once older than me while at the same time dormant in submissive quietude, a spark had been lit and the village was awake and cracking with energy. Since before my time the people had been resentful towards the village's only shop, the general dealer which was housed in a large building on the edge of the square. The 'owner' of the shop was not a member of the community, and had a contract with the church in terms of which he ran the shop for his own gain. The shop was the one enterprise which had not been placed under the rubric of 'community development'. People were angry, yet helpless, at the exorbitant prices he could charge because of his monopoly. The nearest town was over 80 kilometres away over mountain roads, and the church did not allow anyone else to run a shop. I had stirred a new form of resentment by questioning not the prices or the monopoly but the fact that profits were being channeled to one person, and out of the community. The profits could be used for the community itself – the need was self-evident. The church complained continuously of the amounts it pumped into the village; the people asserted that they gained nothing from the church.

Individual conversations led to group discussions which led to meetings. Petitions and delegations were sent to the church, but to no avail. I then suggested that people form a consumers' cooperative; buy in bulk once a week from the nearest town, generate competition, force the issue, boycott the shop. I assisted with the organization of this, but soon Sophie, who was a vibrant and energetic woman, unemployed and skilled, took over the complex and time-consuming organizational details. As membership grew a sense of ownership and power developed; people became involved and committed voluntary workers. Their skills and capacity for organization grew.

The shop owner fought our efforts every step of the way. He cut off people's credit if they bought anything through the cooperative (and the inability of the cooperative to offer credit was a major stumbling block to a community which relied on it). He tried to block the cooperative from hiring trucks to bring the goods through from outside the village. He enlisted the help of the municipal authorities in the nearest town to declare the cooperative unlawful on health grounds. When the people won this last battle by calling the bluff of the authorities through the freely given offices of a civil rights law firm in Cape Town, there was no stopping the boycott, or the exuberant growth of the cooperative.

The shop 'owner' turned to the church, which came out to arbitrate – or to exert their authority – for the tide was turning against their wishes. Now Sophie stood on the far side of the square, face to blazing face with the head of the church and the shop 'owner'. I was hoping that the church had no legal argument.

The threesome broke up and Sophie came striding back across the square, grinning broadly. We surrounded her as she came up to us, shouting our questions. She answered none of them; she simply berated us for standing around idly when there were boxes to unpack. Whereupon there was jubilation; people were proud of their elected representative and bursting with pride at themselves, at their victory.

Some way away, Johannes looked at the celebrations with a dark anguish in his eyes. A worker in the shoe factory, I knew him to be a concerned member of the community and wondered why he wasn't celebrating with the rest. I walked over to him. He moved uneasily in my presence.

'What's the problem, Johannes?'

'That!' He gestured vaguely at the crowd unpacking boxes.

'But we've won, Johannes. You've won!'

'You think so?' He looked up at me, shook his head, and explained, patiently, as to a child:

'For better or for worse, the shoe factory has always depended on free transport to and from Cape Town on the trucks of Mr B. (the shop owner). For supplies and for marketing. You know that we cannot cover the costs of that transport, and anyway there isn't any alternative. You think your cooperative is going to give a damn about our survival at the shoe-factory?' He turned and walked away, heading for his vegetable garden.

His characterization of the cooperative as 'your cooperative' stung me, but not so badly as the truth of his words. The village had won, and the village had lost. Yet the village had palpably come alive. It crackled with a sense of future.

**Dialogue and Isolation.**

Prior to my arrival in Wupperthal the few small industries and the shop had been run by a white man, an immigrant from Europe whom the church had brought in 18 years before – ostensibly to run the economic affairs of the community on behalf of the church. In fact he had been given a monopoly over all financial activities, had run them for his own profit, and for these last 18 years had ruled the community in a dictatorial fashion. In addition to the store, the two factories and the tannery, he possessed most of the arable land, apart from the pieces which individuals were allotted for subsistence farming. Every way the community turned, there he was. And he used the community cruelly, denying wages, denying credit, denying work, denying basic rights, all at his own discretion and apparently in response to his mood of the moment.

Eventually the community got rid of him: they burned his house down. At that point the church recognized that the situation had got out of hand, and asked him to leave. He went to Cape Town with his wife and children, built himself a mansion in a plush suburb, and sent his children to university. The community was left as poor as it was when he arrived, but at least it was free. There were celebrations, and much thumping of fists into palms as stories were told about how ‘we’ had done it in the end, and how we were taking charge ourselves now, and about time too, because he treated us like slaves. But now we’ll be our own bosses, and did you see the way the house burned that night, and how the *bliksem* had to flee with his family in the police van from the neighbouring town in their pajamas.

I had arrived a few weeks before he finally left. This was to be a new era, said the church, and I was to help the community to develop itself. What the church seemed to mean by this was that I was the cheapest way of pushing the problem of the community onto a dusty shelf where it would safely lie ignored for the next few years and not bother them again. Or perhaps they were simply at a loss themselves as to how to care for economic issues. And the community was simply content that its oppressor had left.

But contentment doesn’t last – not when your land is barren, your clothes are threadbare, your resources are thin and you feel abandoned. But abandoned by whom? Abandoned, in fact, by the very man who had oppressed them for 18 years. The community wanted him back. They felt they could not do without him. Stories began to emerge of how much he’d done for them in spite of his cruelty, even by means of the cruelty itself. And they did not feel competent to carry on without him because no-one wanted to lead.

I didn't understand this at the time. I felt contentment gradually overtaken by despair, like sand slipping through the fingers and blown away on the wind. I was left wondering what was going on. Where was the people's pride, backbone, or whatever it is that keeps you standing when the wind howls and the dust rises and all that you want to do is screw your eyes shut and turn your back and huddle up under the donkey cart but instead you face into the wind and keep your eyes open and look for the path which will lead you through this skin-scraping grit-laden storm? I became angry, found others who were also angry, and organized a meeting in the communal hall; a meeting that was attended by many.

Nothing very structured happened that night. People were asked to reminisce in small groups and to examine their experience of the past 18 years. But they were asked especially to listen to others' stories rather than to concentrate on telling their own. For people had been talking and talking and talking in an extravagant barrage of words, and no-one had stopped to think, to listen, or to hear.

Nothing was written down, nothing was planned or resolved. People simply spoke, and were heard. And slowly it seemed as if a tentative understanding began to emerge. A very old man, spare and thin as the terrain in which he lived, rose to address the meeting. A grizzled man, grey and lined, whose eyes burned in his head as though they were consuming his old body in fire. A man whose voice rattled like a slide of rocks down the side of a dry hill. 'I have been alive a long time, and all that time the Bible has been my closest friend. But I never could understand, in all this time, the meaning of the story of the Israelites' exodus from Egypt. Why did they wander 40 years in the desert? Because no-one who had been born a slave in Egypt could enter the promised land. Why? Tonight, at last, I know why. Because when a people is pressed down, ground underfoot like a worm, when this happens for long enough, then the people begins to feel that it is a worm. And when the boots go away, and the worm can stand up once more, it is too late. The worm cannot stand up, because it no longer knows that it has feet. It believes it is nothing more than a worm.

'Our tragedy is not that that man was here, or that he did the things he did, or that he is no longer here. Our tragedy is that we believe we cannot do the things he did, that we need him. Our tragedy is that we believe what he wanted us to believe. We believe him, and not ourselves.'

He was not preaching to the community, he was an expression of communal learning which had taken place that night. So there was a collective murmur of agreement when he said, 'But it's not true. We can make a choice.' And the old man led all the people out of the hall into the stony gravel square before it, so that they could as he said, look at the stars once more, and realise that they were free.

That gathering in the square became even more poignant for me a few days later when the shockwaves from a small item of news reverberated through the community. The European immigrant, in the basement of his new mansion in Cape Town, had committed suicide by shooting himself in the head. He had left a note for his wife expressing his loneliness and his feeling of abandonment.

By whom had he been abandoned, I wondered. He was worth over a million rand, earned through a community which had nothing. And then I realized that he had been as dependent on these people as they had been on him. He had needed his 'slaves' as much as his slaves needed him. Perhaps more so, because they at least had each other; he was alone. He was trapped in a nightmare, believing himself the master, yet held prisoner by this belief. Unable to be master any longer, he chose death over freedom.

The people had chosen differently. I could only conclude then, and still believe now, that the people's ability to enter into dialogue with each other, and through this dialogue to learn something about themselves, was the key to ridding themselves of an unhelpful paradigm. The master, on the other hand, had been isolated, unable to explore in dialogue with others, and had therefore failed to unravel the knot which he himself had tied. And the knot had swollen over the years so that in the end he had pulled at it with weak and wasted fingers in a futile attempt to loosen the strands. It needed more than him alone.

## **Leadership**

We sat on the hillside overlooking Wupperthal. Directly below us the river meandered lazily around the corner of the slope. From the river bank on the opposite side immaculate vegetable gardens spread themselves out until they reached the lines of white-washed cottages built precipitously on the far hill. The brownblack thatched roofs blended with the mountain; behind them, the rough stone walls of the animal pens were hardly to be distinguished from the natural rocky outcrops. Piet sat next to me in workers' overalls, his baseball cap worn, as always, the wrong way round on his head, the peak shading his back. It gave him an air of nonchalance, of irreverence, which contrasted with his position and the respect in which he was held. I loved him for it. He picked up another pebble and lobbed it casually out into space. We watched it curve away from us, saw its tumbling, turning fall and the small splash as it hit the water.

'The thing is this,' he said. 'Whatever decision I make, I'm the one who will be blamed. Because look, make no mistake, they may have given me the responsibility to make the decision, but everyone will resent me if I make it. Just because they ask me to do something which they can't do for themselves doesn't mean they'll accept my doing it.' He turned to me with a wry smile. 'You've been here long enough. You know what a strange people we are.'

'You're not,' I said. 'But that's beside the point anyway. Is there really no compromise which we could work out until the situation changes?'

Piet was the elected manager of the glove factory. This factory, which employed 70 villagers, had for years been run by the church's white contractor. All profits had accrued to him. Now the factory had been transformed into a workers' cooperative. While various worker committees controlled most of its affairs, Piet had been elected overall manager. He came from a small outstation situated some way from Wupperthal, through a gap in the hills. He had worked in the factory for years, had an acute intelligence and was well-liked. But leadership had not been his choice, and he was struggling to grow into the role. I had watched his natural humility grapple with his newfound stature, and knew that the challenge he faced now was a severe one.

'The thing is this,' he said. 'There is no compromise. The factory has faced this many times before. It's just that this is the first time we're faced with making the decision ourselves.'

The factory was dependent on two factors beyond its control. The first was supply. The leather used in the gloves was reject leather, and the tanneries

supplied it only when available; they did not make it to order. The second was demand. These were industrial safety gloves, and the economic recession meant less demand and fewer sales. Already a mountain of gloves was lying unsold on the workshop floor. There was little leather with which to continue manufacturing, and little reason to do so anyway.

'I mean, *we're* not faced with the decision. *I* am.' The decision was not whether to close down or not. As Piet said, this had happened many times, and things always returned to normal, for a while at least. No, the problem was that for the foreseeable future the factory would only be able to justify three days' work per week. The decision which had to be made hinged around the fact that this was a cooperative in the service of the community. Should the factory reduce its workforce, lay off the younger members, and continue working a five-day week with a compliment of workers who had family responsibilities? Or should all members be retained, but on a three-day work schedule with proportionately less pay for everyone? The dilemma had split the entire community, for many families were dependent on factory wages. The debate had grown so hot and so unresolved, that the cooperative had requested Piet to make the final decision on his own. He would not be financially affected either way as it was recognized that his job necessitated his working a five-day week in order to pull the factory back on track.

'Either way, some people in the community are going to lose. I live here, I have to live with that. I also have to think of what's best for the factory. The people no longer see that they all lose if the cooperative disintegrates. They only see their own need.' He took his cap off and ran a hand through his hair. He put his hand on my shoulder and looked at me resignedly. 'Leave me now, brother. You can't help me further with this one.'

I stood up, picked up his cap, put it back on his head the wrong way round, and picked my way down the slope to the plank bridge across the river.

## **Organisation**

It had been quite some journey getting here through the wild winter storm, for the roads which clung precariously to the mountain sides were a muddy slush, and my arms ached from continuous wrenching of the steering wheel as tyres slithered dangerously close to the abyss. The rivers were in flood, and on leaving Wuppertal the lights of the van had twice dipped below the water level as I fought the vehicle against the raging current and the loose stony river bottom, leaving me for moments in utter panic at the pitch black night. Yet I had made it through the storming blackness, and miraculously all the others had made it too. We were 20 men sitting shoulder to shoulder in a tiny room in a tiny outlying village, two candles flickering on a wooden table and a paraffin lamp hanging from a nail in the wall. Outside the rain drummed against the window panes and the wind howled between the mountain peaks. The powerful, squat old man spoke again, more emphatically this time, the grey stubble on his chin lit by candle light.

‘Mr Kaplan here keeps telling us about the advantages of working together. Yet he is not a rooibos farmer; he has never farmed in his life. And the one thing we need, the use of the processing barn in Wuppertal, he cannot get for us. I say we continue working with our own families. I have never been beholden to anyone, and I’m not about to throw in my lot with some of you.’

There were some murmurs of assent, but most of the men kept silent. Slowly a long beanpole of a man disentangled himself from the shadows, stepped across the bodies and approached the table in the centre. His clothes hung on him as from a hanger and his face, lit by the candle from beneath, was a hawk-like etching of light and shadow. He spoke slowly, looking around him at each upturned face with an air of quiet purpose.

‘Everything that brother Bokkie says is true. Yet it is a truth which keeps us in bondage and does not allow us the privilege of risk. For Bokkie, nothing should change. Yet we are stuck, and we know we are, otherwise we would not be here tonight.’ He coughed into his hand, a dry, hacking cough, before continuing: ‘Look. Look at us. Each of us in our villages, we farm on our own, transport on our own, struggle with the Rooibos Control Board on our own, yet day by day we get poorer together. We cannot challenge the white farmers for a decent share of the market because each of us on our own has nothing. If we organised together, if we overcame the barriers that separated us, we could pool resources, gain power, challenge the discrimination practiced against us by the Control Board because we are coloured and because we are poor.’

The grizzled old man called Bokkie made as if to speak again, but the speaker raised his hand and quieted him. 'Wait. I have not finished. I am not used to speaking. Have the decency to hear me out.' Again came the dry, hacking cough. 'The key to our organising is the use of the processing barn. The church, without giving reasons, denies us permission to use it. Yet it would change everything for us. Brother Bokkie is right when he says that Mr Kaplan has not been able to persuade the church. But he misunderstands the point of Mr Kaplan's being here among us, of all the long conversations we have had with him, the questions he has forced upon us.' A smile flickered across his face for a moment and then disappeared, like a trick of the candle light. 'If we form an association of rooibos farmers, the association will be able to put more pressure on the church than any one of us alone. Together we can simply occupy the barn if need be, which we could not do alone. And with the barn in our possession we would be in a position to start to make something of our farming.'

He stood still for some moments, looked around him slowly, then retreated back to the shadows. A hand rose, and a young, open-eyed man spoke.

'I don't understand. How would we share profits and losses? How can I be sure that others are working as hard as I am? If we bought a tractor, who would get the use of it?'

I got to my feet tentatively. 'May I speak?' A number of heads nodded. 'There are many questions which we do not have the answers to now. There are various different routes available, and different choices which could be made. We would have to put our heads together and work these things through. But we cannot do this unless we can decide in principle whether it makes sense to organise together or not. Are we willing to try it, or would we rather continue on our own?'

A hum of voices broke out, temporarily silencing the pervasive drumming of the rain. I felt the one called Bokkie staring hard at me across the room. When eventually he rose and stilled the room as he began to speak, I was struck, as always before, by the raw strength of the man.

'Let's do it,' he said. 'Long Jan is right. Mr Kaplan is not a farmer, but we know little about organising. I'm prepared to see what will happen if we put the two together. But', he added, glaring around the room, 'we will need to work this thing out in very fine detail before I join hands with anyone.'

Many hours later, when eventually we filed out of that smoke-filled room, the ice-cold night air hit us like an express train, knocking the breath out of us. The rain had ceased, the wind sunk to little more than a whisper, and we stood around talking quietly, breathing deeply of that brilliant black night in the mountains.

## **Intervention**

I had lost my cool and sworn at men I revered and at men who trusted me; men who were so much older and wiser than I. We sat now in an embarrassed silence, none of us quite knowing where to look. The weight of recrimination hung heavy in the air, though I realized that this came from me and was directed inwards. Their forgiveness went without saying; they were forgiving people. But I had overstepped a mark, and did not know whether I could forgive myself.

No sound broke the silence. The long room stretched away on either side of us, its edges lost in a twilight dimness. It was always twilight inside the shoe factory, cool and dark, a haven from the harsh glare of the Wupperthal sun. Worn workbenches, generations old, lined the walls. Venerable tools lay where they had been left when the other men had gone to lunch. The smell of leather hung over everything, and half-finished shoes stood in rows, silent testimony to the perfection of craftsmanship.

Calling it the shoe factory was something of a misnomer. It was a workshop really, a place where craftsmen had worked slowly and painstakingly for over a century. Each of the four men sitting around me had been a shoemaker for at least 30 years. I valued their craft and their humble craftsmanship enormously. The shoe factory was my place of refuge; always welcoming, a place of brotherhood where time stretched endlessly and there was always space for a rambling conversation amidst the gentle tap of hammer on nail and the quiet clickety-clack of the sewing machines. Yet the shoe factory was also the place of my greatest doubt.

Development and organisational capacity had made modest headway in various spheres of Wupperthal life: the glove factory, consumers' cooperative, rooibos farmers' association, people's savings bank, residents' association. These developments were consolidating links between people, increasing their capacities and gradually generating the potential for a community of choice rather than one dependent on the whims of the church. But the shoe factory defied this pattern. The craftsmen refused to organise. Each individual shoe was the thing, not the factory itself. The shoemakers struggled with division of labour, with administration, with the constraints and complexities of demand and supply. They were simply not interested. They did not concern themselves with improving production, with competition, with the wider economic world with which they inevitably interacted. As a result, they had long ago ceased to make ends meet. The factory was totally dependent on the church subsidy. It

had no resources with which to sustain or improve equipment. And the church was signaling that it could no longer afford to continue the subsidy. The shoe factory was under real threat of closure.

Every effort I made to facilitate a different consciousness met with failure. Somehow this very maintenance of traditional craftsmanship which eschewed the complexities and often meaningless activities contained in increasing specialization and division of labour made the factory my haven. But I struggled to engender development.

The final straw which broke my cool had occurred over the previous few days. Faced with a massive order from a new client who promised to become a major buyer, the four men with whom I sat – and who together formed the backbone of the factory – had taken off to attend to their small rooibos plantations high in the mountains. It was not a case of alternative economic gain, for although the men battled to make a living their rooibos farming was not an economic venture. It was simply that, traditionally, they tended their fields at this time of year, regardless of other considerations.

My anger had known no bounds. Now I sat staring ahead of me aimlessly. Was I forcing something which had no place here? I had their interests at heart, yet I was pushing them beyond their own wishes. In the process I was destroying friendship and trust. Was it worth it? Was it, in any case, right, or developmental?

I stood up slowly, smiled at them wanly, and stumbled outside. The sudden move from shadow to light, the harsh glare of the midday sun, blinded me. I screwed up my eyes. Was I blinded by more than the sun? Was I blinded by my own need for developmental success, which overshadowed the reality of the four men inside? I no longer knew in which direction the path lay, nor where it led.

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