

The riddle of Rosalind Ballingall: Poster girl for hippie counterculture in Cape Town in the late 1960s

Albert Grundlingh*
Stellenbosch University
amgrund@sun.ac.za

Abstract

This article examines the short-lived hippie phenomenon in Cape Town during the late 1960s through the lens of the disappearance of a young woman from the University of Cape Town in the Knysna forests in 1969. It seeks to explain the dynamics of a particular kind of emerging culture and the way it was infused by public mystifications and conceptions of hippies. In doing so it has two aims in mind, namely to account for an apparent historical puzzle and to cast light on a largely forgotten dimension of white social history.

Commenting on the fate of the 20-year-old University of Cape Town (UCT) student, Rosalind Ballingall who had vanished in the vicinity of the Knysna forests in the southern Cape on 12 August 1969, a police officer Major FJ du Toit felt justified in saying two weeks later: “I am sure Rosalind is still alive”.¹ He made this statement after an exhaustive search by his men, but one which still had to yield firm evidence on Rosalind’s possible whereabouts.

This article looks at the immediate circumstances of Rosalind’s disappearance and by implication why Du Toit could make such a confident statement. Its main analytical thrust, however, is the wider dynamics of an emerging counterculture mainly among certain UCT students and the way in which these developments informed the Ballingall case. Moreover, a particularly salient issue is the process, which for a brief period elevated Rosalind to an almost iconic figure, representing wider social concerns irrespective of her actual role and own misgivings at the time.

In contrast to the surfeit of books on American counterculture in the late 1960s, South Africa has been less well served.² This is not all that surprising. Apart from the fact that South Africa was largely on the margins of what happened elsewhere, its historiography has been so dominated by apartheid related issues that white social history and especially developments which

* Apart from those mentioned in footnotes I need to thank Gustav Hendrich and Annas Coetzee for research assistance and Charles van Onselen for his usual incisive remarks on a draft version of this piece.

1 Anon., “I am sure Rosalind is still alive”, *Cape Times*, 26 August 1969.

2 K Melville, *Communes in the counter culture: Origins, theories, styles of life* (William Morrow and Company, New York, 1987); T Miller, *Counterculture and American values* (University of Tennessee Press, Knoxville), 2011; P Braunstein and M Doyle (eds.), *Imagine nation: The American counterculture of the 1960s and 1970s* (London, 2002); DJ Sherman, R van Dijk, J Alinder, A Neesh (eds.), *The long 1968: Revisions and new perspectives* (Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 2013).

lurked below the surface have, with some notable exceptions, not been accorded nearly the same attention.³

Image 1: A press photo of Rosalind Ballingall



Source: *Scope*, 23 June 1972.

Disappearance

Rosalind was born on 30 December 1948 in Lusaka in what was at the time Northern Rhodesia, currently Zambia. Her father, Horace, was involved in the management of the mining industry and later moved to Johannesburg as a senior executive of Barlow Rand Mines. The family – consisting of her mother, Elspeth, and a sister, Miranda as well as a brother, resided in the wealthy suburb of Northcliff.⁴

Rosalind matriculated in 1966 in Johannesburg, but before that also had a spell of schooling in the United Kingdom. She only enrolled at UCT in 1969; what she did in the two intervening years after matric is not known. She registered for a Performers' Diploma in Speech and Drama. Her younger

³ See however H Lund, "Hippies, radicals and the sounds of silence; Cultural dialectics at two South African universities, 1966 -1976", Lund focused predominantly on the University of the Witwatersrand and what used to be the University of Natal. Specifically on this topic N Schafer has produced an outstanding DVD and elaborated on this in an informative long essay, "Memory, time and place in the Ballad of Rosalind Ballingall", A written explication of the film, Master in Film and Television Production, University of Cape Town, 2005. For an analysis of another youth phenomenon – the so-called "ducktails" in the 1950s – see K Mooney, "Identities in the ducktail youth subculture in Post-World- War –Two South Africa, *Journal of Youth Studies*, 8(1), pp. 41-57.

⁴ University of Cape Town Registration Records, Rosalind Ballingall (I am indebted to Howard Philips who kindly provided me with this information); Anon., "Is Rosalind still alive and well?"; *Scope*, 23 June 1972, unpaginated.

sister, Miranda had arrived at UCT before her in 1968, and studied English, French and Psychology. Rosalind gave her address in Cape Town as 4 Chester House, Chester Road, Rondebosch (her sister stayed elsewhere).⁵

She did not stay in Rondebosch for longer than a couple of months at most and then moved to what was at the time a less salubrious part of the city, Cobern Street in De Waterkant, Green Point. De Waterkant was a “grey” area in an increasingly apartheid zoned city with the demolition of District Six as a prime example. De Waterkant’s inhabitants were mixed: poor white Afrikaners, coloured people, Muslim shopkeepers, illegal immigrants and an assortment of down at heel people on the fringes of society. It was into this area that certain left wing UCT students drifted, some drop-outs, others not, with a growing number subscribing to an unconventional lifestyle in terms of dress, drug use and freer sexual relations. Coupled with this was a philosophical bent purporting to be deep reflections on the meaning of life.⁶

Cobern Street in fact, as one inhabitant later recalled “was gaining notoriety as a hippie ghetto and was assuming the mantle of Cape Town’s version of San Francisco’s Haight- Ashbury district as one of the more prominent not to say infamous haunts of the emerging hippie culture”.⁷ Mrs Elspeth Ballingall had indeed visited her daughter in Cobern Street and with the defensive concern of a middle class mother later commented:⁸

She [Rosalind] found a house – admittedly not in the best part of town – for herself and a few fellow students. They painted it out and were as pleased as punch with it. I suppose a few hippy types did turn up there, Rosalind being a honeypot and terribly kind, would not have turned them away.

Although the mother clearly downplayed the hippie dimension, she certainly knew her daughter’s temperament as others also commented on Rosalind’s “emotional generosity” and that she was “very gentle and very obsessive in her attachments”.⁹

5 University of Cape Town Registration Records, Rosalind Ballingall; R Greig, “In forests”, unpaginated (R Greig kindly provided with a copy of this manuscript).

6 J Oakley Smith, “Let there be no sadness of farewell” (Manuscript, Undated), p. 1 (J Oakley Smith kindly provided me with a copy of this manuscript).

7 J Oakley Smith, “Let there be no sadness of farewell” (Manuscript, Undated), p. 9.

8 R Marsh, *Unsolved mysteries of Southern Africa* (Struik, Cape Town, 1994), p. 54.

9 R Greig, “In forests” (available at <http://www.gorrybowestaytaylorlor.co.za/reviews/287/in-forests-robert-greig>., as accessed on 14 April 2016); Email: M Dickman (Fellow student)/N Schafer (Author), April 2004; N Schafer, “Memory, time and place in the Ballad of Rosalind Ballingall”, A written explication of the film..., p. 26.

Rosalind at six feet (1.82) meters tall, with reddish ginger hair tinged with blonde streaks and prominent cheekbones and blue green eyes, also cut a striking figure. A friend described her as “an amazing woman who was extremely beautiful in a post-Raphaelite way...”.¹⁰ Her attractive appearance though was not sufficient cover for a sense of insecurity. Riddled with apparent inner tensions she at times sought to escape from reality through drug use. A contemporary of Rosalind who studied Drama with her later recalled that he “was struck by the outset how shy and ‘distant’ she always appeared (as if she was living constantly behind a ‘veil’)”. Initially he thought she was “simply self-conscious and it was only later that other students told me that she spent a lot of time ‘high’”.¹¹

During the first days of August 1969, the world weighed heavily on the shoulders of the young woman. She had become deeply depressed, one of her lecturers later remembered.¹² Rosalind had earlier participated in two productions, “M” an *avant garde* ballet performance consisting of three pieces and a drama called *Pantagleize* which underlined the fickleness of revolutionary movements. In “M” the producer, Tessa Marwick later recalled that Rosalind had thrown herself “unreservedly” into the production. Marwick also had high praise for Rosalind’s abilities: “she had integrity in her theatre presence and a somewhat dreamy way of moving and was always willing to try something new.”¹³ In *Pantagleize* she played a smaller part as a prompter.¹⁴ Earlier the year there was some unhappiness in the drama circles at UCT because students were often denied lead roles with preference being given to more experienced outside actors.¹⁵ Whether this was also the case with *Pantagleize* is not known. After her starring role in “M”, she might nevertheless have felt slighted to have only been allocated a bit part. Her friends stated that she had started to lose faith in her acting talent.¹⁶ Moreover, the theme of *Pantagleize* with its emphasis on the futility of dramatic change and dire speculations on the future might have further added to her already gloomy outlook and perhaps contributed to a generalised sense of anxiety further heightened by the lows brought on by drug dependency.

10 Email: M Dickman/N Schafer, April 2004, N Schafer, “Memory, time and place...”, A written explication of the film..., p. 26.

11 Email: P Slabolepszy (Fellow student)/A Grundlingh (Author), 30 November 2016.

12 Evidence of J Singer (Lecturer), interview, N Schafer (in DVD), “The Ballad of Rosalind Ballingall”, 2005.

13 Email: T Marwick (Producer)/A Grundlingh (Author), 19 September 2016.

14 Anon., “Cult that fears Armageddon”, *Cape Argus*, 23 April 1969.

15 Letter: C Curtis (Student), *Varsity*, 23 April 1969.

16 Anon., “Cult that fears Armageddon”, *Cape Argus*, 23 April 1969.

While she was in this state of mind, two acquaintances, Sasja Sergiev and his companion Tanya Geffin invited Rosalind to join them for a break at a cottage in a place called Fisantehoek in the Knysna forests. Such retreats into nature away from the influences of the city were a common feature of hippie counterculture in America.¹⁷ Sasja was well travelled and prominent in Cape Town alternative culture. He hailed from the Ukraine, had played the oboe in the classical orchestra of the Soviet Union and also had training as a homeopathic veterinarian. While on a concert tour to Western Europe, he sought political asylum in Holland and eventually obtained a stateless person's passport from the Swiss government. He then worked his way down to Cape Town. Aged about 30 years and known for his exotic clothes and curly mop of hair, reminiscent of the well-known folksinger Bob Dylan, Sasja ran a small shop and was well recognised as a saxophone player. He had established easy relationships with younger people and was empathetically inclined towards troubled souls. Not without a certain bohemian charm, he had gained a reputation as Prince of the Hippies.¹⁸

Upon their arrival at Fisantehoek on 11 August, they had lunch with neighbours and amongst other topics spent some time discussing passages in the book of Revelations in the Bible dealing with the end of the world prophecies.¹⁹ It might seem to have been a rather odd lunchtime discussion, but according to rumour some explored the imponderable topic further during a drug session at night. Be that as it may, on 12 August Rosalind left the cottage at nine in the morning, dressed simply in jeans, a jersey and sandals. She carried a Bible and told her friends that she is going for a walk. The last people she spoke to were two of the coloured staff. She asked the domestic for directions to a church and the gardener then saw her crossing the lawn, entering a grove of trees and disappearing into the forest.²⁰

Significantly in psychiatric terms, given Rosalind's depressive state and possible drug use at the time, it is not inconceivable though conjectural that she went into what is medically described as a fugue state – an altered level of consciousness linked to depression and stress which may cause the individual to

17 KM Mercer, "The farm: A hippie commune as a countercultural diaspora" (Unpublished postgraduate essay, University of Central Florida, 2012), p. 61; J Suri, "The rise and fall of an international counterculture, 1960-1975", DJ Sherman, R van Dijk, J Alinder and A Aneesh (eds.), *The long 1969: Revisions and new perspectives* (Indiana Press, Bloomington, 2013), p. 95.

18 J Oakley Smith, "Let there be no sadness of farewell" (Manuscript, Undated), p. 16.

19 Anon., "Is Rosalind still alive and well?", *Scope*, 23 June 1972.

20 R Marsh, *Unsolved mysteries...*, p. 53; J Oakley Smith, "Let there be no sadness of farewell" (Manuscript, Undated); Anon., "Is Rosalind still alive and well?", *Scope*, 23 June 1972.

wander from home for periods at end.²¹ Rosalind's friends were not particularly worried when she has not returned within a few hours as she had been known to go off on her own at times.²² The fact that it was not her first disappearance adds a further layer to the possibility of a fugue state, yet even that cannot in the absence of other supporting evidence be regarded as conclusive.

It was only when it became dark that her friends started to show some concern. Even then, they left it until the following morning before they alerted the authorities thinking that there was no point in calling the police out at night. In the meantime, it had begun to rain which made it difficult for the tracker dogs to pick a scent. Valuable time has been lost.²³ Matters were not simplified when the police tasked to question people came upon Sasja at the backdoor of the cottage playing a flute, trying to entice Rosalind back. To the investigating officers this must have appeared surreal. Sasja was taken to Oudtshoorn, the district headquarters, for interrogation and was only released after three weeks when the police were convinced that he could not provide any useful information. That this was no ordinary case became apparent when three other longhaired male friends of Rosalind arrived in Knysna in a purple beach buggy, dressed in ponchos and to the astonishment of the solid citizens of the town started beating on drums and playing on bagpipes. They might in their own way have tried to connect with Rosalind, but the locals could only describe them as "strange aliens".²⁴ More serious than this side-show was that there was a delay in informing Rosalind's parents about her disappearance as Sasja and Tanja were not too sure about her surname.²⁵ Once the distraught parents reached Knysna they immediately set about assisting the police as far as possible.

On top of it, the search was complicated by thick undergrowth in the forest which in places were almost impenetrable. Police dogs found it difficult to traverse the terrain. "You need a tortoise to follow a track", an exasperated police officer commented, "and then it had to be a small tortoise".²⁶

If Rosalind had found herself in the forest, she would have had similar problems. A fictional account, though not improbable, gave a graphic

21 Email: R Kaplan (Forensic psychiatrist with an interest in History)/A Grundlingh (Author), 13 October 2016.

22 Anon., "Is Rosalind still alive and well?", *Scope*, 23 June 1972.

23 Anon., "Is Rosalind still alive and well?" *Scope*, 23 June 1972; "Into the forest with a Bible", *Oudtshoorn Courant*, 20 August 1969.

24 Anon., "Riddle of Rosalind still unsolved", *Cape Argus*, 27 September 1969; J Oakley Smith, "Let there be no sadness of farewell" (Manuscript, Undated), p. 18; Anon., "Misaadreeks: Meisie verwyn spoorloos", *Servamus*, 30 November 1994.

25 Anon., *Cape Argus*, 27 September 1969; "Riddle of Rosalind still unsolved" *Servamus*, 30 November 1994.

26 Anon., "Ballet-danseres soek in Knysna-woud" (Translated), *Die Burger*, 16 August 1969.

description of what she might have experienced:²⁷

Her walk is inconclusive. She is not going anywhere and is uncertain what she has come from. Because the forest is enclosed and overgrown, having few tracks, vegetation dictates direction. Paths record the drift of water or small delicate animals – duikers perhaps – rather than human purpose... . She walks through the minor clearings... . She goes through or around the dense shrub; with the punctilious dipping of the tall, she passes beneath the branches. Light is dim, sky implicit.

The police, assisted by some local people, combed the difficult terrain for days on end but to no avail. Eventually Horace Ballingall had to come to the grim conclusion that the forest had been meticulously searched to a depth far beyond that which his lightly clad daughter could have reached.²⁸

Although the search focused on the forest, there was another possibility that Rosalind did not actually enter deep into the forest, but found her way to the National Road which was about 6 km from Fisantehoek. If that had happened, the possibility existed that she might still have been alive somewhere. Various leads were followed up and her parents also implored Rosalind in the press to contact them.²⁹ All of this was in vain. On 26 August, the search was officially called off and the case was deemed closed until there was sufficient further information to re-open it.

Whether Rosalind fell, injured herself and perished in the forest, or whether she was murdered or committed suicide one would not know; nor whether in perhaps taking to the main road, she had met with some mishap. The fact that the body was not found only fuelled speculation. One sceptical line of thought on her whereabouts, discounted by the police, was that it was just “a prank” and that her reappearance was being “hushed” up.³⁰ Nevertheless, with so many variables it is understandable why Major du Toit as we have noted earlier, could not rule out the possibility that she might still have been alive somewhere.

The saga had one final twist. In 1986, a skeleton with badly faded and mouldy women’s clothing was found about 5 kilometres from Fisantehoek in the forest. Speculation was once again rife that this might have been the remains of Rosalind, but the tests revealed that the deceased was older than

27 R Greig, “In forests”, Manuscript, unpaginated.

28 Anon., “Come back plea to Rosalind”, *Cape Times*, 21 August 1969; “I am sure Rosalind is still alive – policeman”, *Cape Times*, 26 August 2016.

29 Anon., “Come back plea to Rosalind”, *Cape Times*, 21 August 1969.

30 Anon., “Clairvoyant sees Rosalind in a remote mountain hut”, *Oudtshoorn Courant*, 17 September 1969.

what Rosalind would have been and that she was also shorter and suffered from arthritis.³¹ Later in the same year that the discovery was made, the Cape High Court officially declared Rosalind “presumed dead”. This was in response to the execution of the Ballingall estate as Horace had died in 1980 and Elspeth in 1984 and a policy made out in the name of Rosalind had to be paid out.³²

Whilst Rosalind’s ultimate fate remains shrouded in mystery, her disappearance and the ensuing press interest at the time did open up a lens on the context from which she had emerged in Cape Town and which helped to shape her lifestyle and outlook at a particular juncture in her young life. At the same time, it provides a glimpse into a dimension of social history which historians hitherto have not explored.

Hippie culture

The late 1960s were marked by the gradual emergence of a counterculture at the UCT. Although there is no evidence that Rosalind was an overtly politically conscious person, she did arrive at the UCT campus in the aftermath of a spike in political activity.

On the formal political front, inspired in part by an awareness of student revolts in Europe and America, but prompted more specifically by the non-appointment of Archie Mafeje, a black anthropologist to the UCT staff in 1968. A core of some 200 students staged a sit-in to protest against what they regarded as an inadequate response of the university authorities to defy the government’s apartheid decree of not allowing black people to be appointed to university teaching staff. Leading the protest was Raphael Kaplinski, described by a contemporary as a “red diaper baby”, born to immigrant eastern European parents committed to the hard left with his older brothers being involved in the banned South African Communist Party.³³ UCT authorities, under pressure from the National Party government refused to concede to the demands of the students. Yet for some of the participants the protest was a significant occasion as they not only received support from student bodies abroad but also experienced a sense of intellectual liberation.

31 Anon., “Death of a hiker” (available at <https://hooflyn.wordpress.com>, “Mense verdwyn”, as accessed on 18 April 2016), *Weekend Argus*, 14 December 1991.

32 Anon., “Vermiste student na 17 jaar dood verklaar”, *Die Burger*, 31 July 1986.

33 Email: K Hughes (Student activist at the time)/A Grundlingh (Author), 6 April 2016. On Mafeje, see also L Ntsebeza, “The Mafeje and the UCT saga; unfinished business?”, *Social Dynamics*, 40(2) June 2014, pp. 274-288.

One former student later recalled: “Alternative lectures were organised on the stairs. We got a newspaper up and running. In one fell swoop we had thrown off our mental shackles. At least were not some isolated racist outpost of empire but part of an international student movement. And the times they were really a changing!”³⁴

In 1968 it was difficult to predict exactly what form change would take, if at all, but the Mafeje affair did represent a marker in student politics and also fed more surreptitiously into an embryonic counterculture. It was also a period which saw the emergence of eccentric individuals attracting a semi-cult following. One such person was Ben Dekker, also known as Big Ben Dekker, a tall muscular and self-styled hippie. He was born in 1941 from newly arrived Dutch immigrants and grew up in East London. He was employed as a forest worker after finishing school and then enrolled at Rhodes University for a BA degree in Psychology and Philosophy. Upon leaving Rhodes he often lived rough, frequently hitchhiking through what was the Transkei and going wherever he fancied. In the late 1960s, Dekker had left the Eastern Cape and found himself in Cape Town where he enrolled part time at UCT whilst working as an actor and lightning technician. A contemporary recalled that he was “‘a presence’ – silent, mysterious, aloof – one always wondered what was going on inside that head of his”.³⁵

Dekker somewhat surprisingly also dabbled in formal politics and in 1970 went so far as to oppose Sir De Villiers Graaff, leader of the United Party and the official parliamentary opposition, in the general election in the Rondebosch East constituency. With a catchy slogan, “Stem lekker, Stem Dekker” (Vote well, vote Dekker), and *avant garde* political opinions which included the hippie rallying cry to the effect of “love, justice and freedom” he certainly gained considerable attention. In addition his call for “one person one vote” was at the time beyond the realm of regular party political discourse.³⁶ Some years later Graaff recalled that Dekker was “almost without any organisation and fought an extraordinary campaign”. For publicity

34 M Plant, UCT, 1968 (available at <https://martinplaut.wordpress.com/2011/9/01/the-1968-revolution-reaches-cape-town/> Accessed, as accessed on 4 April 2016); J Daniel and P Vale, “1968 and South Africa: Where were we looking?”, P Gassert and M Klimke (eds.), *1968: Memories and legacies of a global revolt* (Washington, German Historical Institute, 2009), pp. 135-146.

35 Email: P Slabolepszy/A Grundlingh, 30 November 2016.

36 On Ben Dekker, see G McCann (compiler), *Ben Dekker: Larger than life* (Groep 7 Drukkers, 2013), pp. 98-100; B Dekker, *Am I alive?* (Self published, 1970); B Dekker, *Sewentig*, 4 (Photocopied magazine in Stellenbosch University Archives), 28 April 1970; “Die verkiesing se raarste kandidaat”, *Die Huisgenoot*, 6 February 1970; F Mouton, *Iron in the soul. The leaders of the parliamentary opposition in South Africa, 1910-1993* (Protea, Pretoria, 2017), p. 102.

purposes, he challenged Graaff to a swimming race to Robben Island. He also obtained a fruit vendor's flat barrow as a platform to speak from or just to recline in various parts of Rondebosch. Dekker's antics had according to Graaff nothing more than nuisance value.³⁷ Whilst Dekker might have been a maverick candidate mocking an all white election, he did attract some hippie student voters who otherwise would not have come close to a polling booth. Their support was at least sufficient for him to retain his deposit.

Dekker was clearly more at home amongst the hippies of Cape Town than the staid voters of Rondebosch. His philosophical musings spoke with intent to those souls searching for a fresh departure: he claimed that in order for civilization to be renewed in a creative way, culture and all its moral codes had to be interrogated with revolutionary zeal.³⁸ It was probably precisely his standing in the local hippie community that might have prompted Elspeth Ballingall to contact Dekker in case he had some information on Rosalind. They had a telephone conversation and Dekker went so far as to claim that she was still alive but that it was not for him to reveal her whereabouts.³⁹ This was similar to the argument used by other acquaintances of her; that it would be "an affront to her right to decide for herself if they should attempt to find her".⁴⁰ Such hippie-speak might have wished to convey a sense of respect, but on all other counts it was entirely misconceived. Alternatively, perhaps they just thought they knew, but were in reality oblivious.

Counterculture at UCT and off campus had various dimensions and levels of involvement. Apart from emerging serious student politicians there were, one contemporary recalled, "quite a number of youngsters, who had no serious political commitment or philosophy, but who came along for the ride" at political gatherings. Then there were those who "dropped out of regular careers or training for careers in order to pursue the arts or more frequently, oriental religion or meditation. Some wandered abroad and joined hippie or New Age or feminist communes in the UK or USA. And some were just eccentrics or misfits – a few developed serious drug dependency, and a few committed suicide or landed up long-term in psychiatric institutions".⁴¹ Another contemporary pointedly remarked on this lifestyle that the only way

37 D-V Graaff, *Div looks back: The memoirs of Sir De Villiers Graaff* (Human and Rousseau, Cape Town, 1993), p. 220.

38 B Dekker, *Sewentig*, 4..., 8 April 1970.

39 Anon., "Is Roosalind alive and well?", *Scope*, 23 June 1972.

40 Anon., "Is she on the Rand - or buried in a forest grave?", *Sunday Times*, 3 May 1970.

41 Email: K Hughes/A Grundlingh, 6 April 2016.

some could survive financially was through “family trust funds or wealthy daddies”.⁴²

In terms of word views, there was a range of positions. One was an embryonic rejection of apartheid, without actually elaborating on it, and a general rejection of “kragdadigheid” (forcefulness) in the maintenance of the system. More pertinent and pervasive was the notion of the “politics of consciousness”, heightened by drugs and rock and roll music and coupled with a greater awareness of the nature of human interaction on the basis of class, race and gender. A corollary of this was born-again Buddhism, which tied up with a denunciation of formal western psychiatry. Likewise, art was refigured and art criticism became more incisive. All of this, as one participant explained, “was slowly exploding in isolated heads and groups, some overlapping”. By the early 1970s these positions were more generally articulated, but in 1969 they were only emerging and were “lonely stuff in many respects” and much of it was “free-floating”. “You have to understand”, it was explained further, “a little where we were, so to speak, and where that was, was a revolution that had very little to do with politics. We were rather hoping that the world would get its shit together”.⁴³ In summing all of this up none other than Ben Dekker had to admit that the hippies failed to achieve much apart from introducing a new lifestyle and colourful clothing.⁴⁴

The movement, such as it was, suffered from its distance from the main sources abroad and almost had to invent their own version of what constituted counterculture. “Hippiedom” as one former member of the clan later recalled, “was not indigenous to Africa and we were making it up as we went along...”. With the benefit of hindsight, he questioned the dynamics of their movement:⁴⁵

No matter how much we believed that we were part of a worldwide revolution that would sweep away all that was restrictive and benighted, our hippiedom was ultimately an impersonation. No matter how much we nodded in assent at the profundity of the writings of Doctor Timothy Leary, Alan Watts, Alduous Huxley or Marshall MacLuhan [hippie gurus], we were never destined to be the tributary of the great mythical crashing of the river of youth liberation. Since tomorrow did’nt often come into many people’s calculations, if it occurred to us at all we did not dwell on the possibility that we may have been pursuing a mirage.

42 K Gottschalk/A Grundlingh, 6 April 2016 (Keith Gottschalk was an activist in the late 1960s).

43 Email: G Hugo (Fellow student)/N Schafer (Author), August 2005; N Schafer, “Memory, time and place...”, A written explication of the film..., p. 3.

44 Anon., “Ben Dekker- die verkiesing se raarste kandidaat”, *Die Huisgenoot*, 6 February 1970.

45 J Oakley Smith, “Let there be no sadness of farewell” (Manuscript, Undated), p. 4.

With searing honesty, he also commented on the ambiguities in the movement:⁴⁶

Hippies in our limited exposure to the few we knew, were almost exclusively white. We purported to despise wealth and materialism though we wanted to live comfortably, to have enough money and plenty of clothes. In fact many of us were from middle class backgrounds and clandestinely admired the rich white American hippies of whom we had read in Time magazine. We secretly yearned to be part of the Jet Set or, or even better, the Beautiful People, but altruism was only part of it. To be cool, rich, clever, famous and beautiful simultaneously would have been the ultimate state of being, for so much we knew then.

It was within this diffuse, fragmented, topsy-turvy and confused world of novel and cross-cutting influences that Rosalind Ballingall found herself and sought to make sense of that which enveloped her. What she did was to gravitate towards a semi-religious fringe group which called themselves the Cosmic Butterfly.

Already in May 1969, well before Rosalind's disappearance, there were indications on UCT campus of a sense of disenchantment with organised religion. Under the rubric of "Christianity and radical thought", received wisdoms were being questioned. The idea of a towering omnipotent other worldly Supreme Being – labelled dismissively as a "fuddy duddy God" - was rejected. The need for a radical rethink was emphasised, focusing not on the afterlife, but on the here and now.⁴⁷

The Cosmic Butterfly – the singular was used to indicate a sense of consciousness animated by nothing more than the apparent effortless flitting of a single butterfly from one object to another⁴⁸ - certainly pushed the boundaries and was widely believed to have been established during a lengthy hallucinogenic rave in a dilapidated, squalid nook of Rondebosch, called "The Burrows."⁴⁹ The numbers of those who attended the meetings varied from about 40 to 100 interested people, with a core group of not many more than 12. One of the gurus of the group was Rob Harding, a student and another was Mike Dickman, a guitarist and art student who reputedly lived off a generous allowance of his widowed mother. They were both close to Rosalind who had gained a reputation as a high priestess of the group.⁵⁰

46 J Oakley Smith, "Let there be no sadness of farewell" (Manuscript, Undated), p. 4.

47 Anon., "Christianity and radical thought", *Varsity*, 14 May 1969.

48 N Schafer, "Memory, time and place...", A written explication of the film..., p. 10.

49 J Oakley Smith, "Let there be no sadness of farewell" (Manuscript, Undated), p. 15.

50 Anon., "Is Rosalind alive and well?"; *Scope*, 23 June 1972; J Oakley Smith, "Let there be no sadness of farewell" (Manuscript, Undated), p. 14.

What made a particular impression on them was the gruesome murder of the American actress Sharon Tate in America by the drug crazed, hippie leader, Charles Manson in 1969. Along with this went the belief that the end of the world was near, based on their reading of Revelations of St John in the Bible.⁵¹ It was, as noted earlier, precisely this kind of discussion that took place at Fisantehoek the day before Rosalind's disappearance. For Rosalind who had a staunch Roman Catholic upbringing such new and dramatic points of departure, particularly if it was enhanced by drugs, must have been unsettling even if she was projected as a figure of influence in this grouping.

Although given to esoteric and exotic teaching with some firm believers, Dickman did not regard their gatherings and activities as being the self-conscious rituals of a cult. Euphemistically he explained that it "was just a large group of likeminded people dropping into a house in Rondebosch for a talk and a smoke". Having rejected mainline religion and what they considered "sterile book philosophy", they plumbed for a mixture of belief systems: Zen Buddhism, Zoroaster, Mahayana and elements of Christianity. "What we got", Dickman claimed, "was a newly assembled religion called disorganised religion".⁵² Dickman in 2004 sought to portray him and Rosalind as "basically just dreamers... . Dreamers who hoped that a better world was dawning now that minds were starting to awaken, and who were prepared, to a greater or lesser extent to help that dawn into existence."⁵³ It was reported that they would meditate for hours on end, holding hands in an elevated state of consciousness, hoping to get in touch with revelations of their god.⁵⁴ In addition, they had some local concerns and in a utopian manner hoped that with wider change South Africa would turn into a paradise. It was a matter of time. "We were waiting for the pendulum to swing", Dickman explained, "and trying in our strange little ways to encourage it. Our strange little ways included much hope, a little prayer, and a very minor dabble in 'white magic'".⁵⁵

"White magic" implied witchcraft and there were indeed reports at the time that some of the Cosmic Butterfly adherents practised a form of witchcraft.

51 Anon., "Is Rosalind alive and well?"; *Scope*, 23 June 1972, On Tate, see for example J Guin, *The life and times of Charles Manson* (Simon and Schuster, New York, 2014).

52 Anon., "Coastal storm after their end of world forecast", *The Cape Argus*, 30 August 1969.

53 Email: M Dickman/N Schafer, April 2004; N Schafer, "Memory, time and place...", A written explanation of the film..., p. 15.

54 Anon., "Is Rosalind alive and well", *Scope*, 23 June 1972.

55 Email: M Dickman/N Schafer, April 2004; N Schafer, "Memory, time and place...", A written explanation of the film..., p. 15.

What precisely this entailed though remained hidden. The issue of witchcraft nevertheless had a bearing on what might have happened to Rosalind. One of the leads the police pursued was that Rosalind might have offered herself as a “sacrifice” to facilitate the change that was desired.⁵⁶ Although there was no firm evidence to substantiate this notion, it was according to Dickman who knew Rosalind well not too farfetched. He recalled that if “she had in her stoned state decided to become the ‘sacrifice’ so that the —??? changes might happen, she could very well have done just that. She was not her sanest at that time, believe me”.⁵⁷ As has been noted Rosalind was depressed when she left Cape Town, but Dickman’s opinion on her possible state of mind is more specific and informative.

Yet the possible implications of this need to be qualified. Whilst Rosalind might have imbibed the convoluted Cosmic Butterfly philosophy of impending change, the very thought of this must have been disconcerting. Instead of doing something that might have been considered brave and heroic of sacrificing herself for a greater cause, she might merely have been scared and confused. Another “priestess” in the Cosmic Butterfly circle revealed that Rosalind “had been worried at the idea of the world coming to an end while she was so young”.⁵⁸ This does not point to an idealistic hippie crusader intent on doing her bit to change the world, but to an insecure, if not slightly neurotic, young woman. She could, apparently, some of her friends had observed, be “tiresome” in her obsessions and as a child was also known to withdraw into her own make belief world.⁵⁹ Her involvement in Cosmic Butterfly, which might have started off as a process of trying to make sense of the world, took an unexpected turn to compound her initial problems.

Nevertheless, late in August 1969, Cosmic Butterfly’s belief in an imminent world change received what they considered an unmistakable sign that their views were vindicated. On 26 August, it was reported that the group was awaiting “a cosmic influence which could upset the balance of nature”.⁶⁰ The following day this self-fulfilling prophecy seemed to have come to pass. A series of gigantic waves lashed the beaches of the Western Cape, preceded by a night of unprecedented thunderstorms and lightning. On the west coast the tiny

56 Anon., “Is Rosalind alive and well?”, *Scope*, 23 June 1972.

57 Email: M Dickman/N Schafer, April 2004; N Schafer, “Memory, time and place...”, A written explication of the film..., p. 26.

58 Anon., “An ‘astral’ search”, *Cape Argus*, 23 August 1969.

59 R Greig, “In forests” Manuscript, unpaginated. This is a fictional but well informed account.

60 Anon., “Fears of a cosmic influence.”, *Cape Argus*, 26 August 1969.

fishing village of Dwarskersbos was inundated by water – a portent of what was deemed to come. Although the good fishermen of Dwarskersbos might have been surprised to find themselves in the epicentre of a cosmic revolution, the mystics of Cosmic Butterfly could hardly have asked for better “proof”.

Dickman regarded the heavy storms as an indication that the world was sliding from one age into another new era, “It is possible”, he argued, “that we are now entering an age which will be an amalgamation of our technocratic society with a new spiritual society. Brave new world, the rebuilding of Babylon and all that. The end of the world as we knew it. A completely different bag.” A new way of life was to dawn and new forms of consciousness to emerge. Personally Dickman believed that “we are about to hear the sound of one hand clapping and light our way to bed with a snuffed-out candle”.⁶¹

Some followers were less concerned about the mythical significance of these developments than they were about the practical consequences of a new order about to descend on the Cape Peninsula. Dickman stepped in and thought it best to decamp in order to avoid possible chaos. Thus, a procession was spotted, apparently on its way to Durban, with a “self-styled ‘high priest’, a lanky UCT drop-out who headed the exodus in a purple beach buggy”. This was also the last reported sighting of the Cosmic Butterfly grouping. After the end of August, they seemed to have dissolved, but while they survived to carry on with their lives in whichever way they might have preferred, it was not the case as far as we know for the hapless Rosalind who had vanished on 12 August.

While Cosmic Butterfly exited from history, it did leave in its wake some intriguing questions about the wider significance of the emergence of hippies in the late 1960s. It was never a movement that was destined to have a major impact on an intellectual and philosophical plane. Apart from limited numbers, their musings were just too outlandish and exotic to gain traction outside their immediate circle. In addition, their grasp on local political developments was extremely tenuous. It is therefore not surprising that some sober contemporaries regarded the hippie movement as “all show and little substance”.⁶²

Buttressing their beliefs with an elaborate mythology obviated the need to engage directly with the intractable problems of South Africa. In a way it was a personal kind of rebellion which for some took a semi-religious form.

61 Anon., “Coastal storm after ‘their end of world’ forecast”, *Cape Argus*, 30 August 1969.

62 N Schafer, “Memory, time and place...”, A written explication of the film..., p. 15.

This was mirrored elsewhere in the western world where mainline churches lost sizeable sections of their younger adherents during the 1960s. “At the heart of counterculture”, it has been argued”, “was a single-minded, often fanatical onslaught on boundaries and structures, a crusade to release Ariel, the infinite, and express the chaos of the everyday world”.⁶³ Under such stress, the conveyor belt which transmitted religious affiliations from one generation to the other buckled under considerable strain.

Whilst this resonated with the local hippie movement, the South African variant also had its own characteristics, located in the structural dimensions of white English speaking in South Africa. Apart from those of 1820 settler stock, there were those English speaking youths who came to university in the late 1960s who had shallow roots in South Africa, with some of them only being first generation South Africans as their parents emigrated to South Africa post-1945 after the devastation in wartime Britain. Between 1946 and 1948 there was a massive 84,7 % increase in the number of British immigrants to South Africa.⁶⁴ In contrast, white Afrikaans counterparts were more rooted and many could trace their ancestry back several generations. Young Afrikaners were also emotionally more attached to what they considered to be their own indigenous history, whilst the cultural imaginary of English speakers was largely that of Britain or the western world more generally and their South African environment tended to serve as a mere backdrop as opposed to a source of inspiration and commitment.⁶⁵ Given these sensibilities, it is not surprising that English speakers were more attuned to trends from abroad and some given to drift towards a hippie movement.

Moreover, at the time they were caught in the grip of two forces. On the one hand, there was an increasingly dominant Afrikaner culture which they found difficult if not impossible to identify with and on the other a weakish liberal orientation from some parents who by and large preferred to stay clear of politics and rather focused on building their careers. For the hippies, the “rat race” as it was called, seemed to be empty and devoid of purpose. Yet ironically, as we have noted, some of them including Rosalind came from wealthy families and needed family financial support to survive. This corresponds with the situation in America where many hippies were also from

63 CG Brown, “What was the religious crisis of the 1960s?”, *Journal of Religious History*, 34(4), December 2010, p. 476.

64 FG Brownell, “British immigration to South Africa, 1946-1970”, *Archives Yearbook of South African History*, 1985(1), p. 31.

65 J Oakley Smith, “Let there be no sadness of farewell” (Manuscript, Undated), p. 4; Also compare H Lund, “Hippies, radicals and the sounds of silence...”, pp. 38-39, 131.

affluent families and the hippie revolution, in as far as the term “revolution” was even accurate, has been described as “a capitalist, bourgeois revolution; a revolution of the privileged...”⁶⁶

Nevertheless, if not materially, there was amongst a certain section of the white English speaking youth of South Africa at the time, tiny as the grouping might have been, those who in terms of worldviews and emotional inclination experienced a sense of detachment from family aspirations and their social and cultural environment. It was precisely this kind of distancing and disaffiliation, which constituted the lifeblood of the hippie movement.⁶⁷

In America one of the ways the hippie movement sought to express itself was through resistance to the Vietnam War and more broadly what was called the military-industrial complex. In the late 1960s, South African militarization was still in an embryonic form, but the signs were there. PW Botha, Minister of Defence, elaborated on the aim of national military conscription introduced in 1967 and that it should be equated with love of the fatherland and a “burning desire for freedom in one’s heart to serve God and country”.⁶⁸ This notion was of course light years removed from the hippies’ idea of freedom. De Waterkant had a fair number of draft dodgers who found the area consisting as it did of a motley collection of marginalised groupings, conducive to hide from the military police. Their attitude was explained cryptically: “Hippies don’t want to go to the bush and shoot dark people; they would rather go to the beach and wonder at the dolphins, the whales, the rainbow, the sunset and the ships that visited from places we would never see”.⁶⁹

The kinds of currents that ran through the movement were not strong enough to sustain it for any length of time and it hardly featured in the overall ideological landscape of South Africa. A fair number of former adherents had also cut their ties with the country and decided to emigrate. Yet at the time, the mere fact that such a movement existed was grist to the mill of those who sought a key to the riddle of Rosalind.

66 R Kimbal, *The long march: How the cultural revolution of the 1960s changed America*, 3rd ed. (USA, Read-How You Want.com, 2010), p. 248.

67 H Lund, “Hippies, radicals and the sounds of silence...”, pp. 131, 164.

68 Anon., “Baie verstaan nie wat diensplig is nie” (Translated), *Die Burger*, 19 August 1969.

69 J Oakley Smith, “Let there be no sadness of farewell” (Manuscript, Undated), pp. 5, 10.

Mystification

A journalist who explored the Bellingall saga in 1970 found that amongst Rosalind's friends and acquaintances in popular gathering places in Cape Town, she has been elevated to the status of a folk heroine. They spoke about her in revered tones and invested her memory with mythical dimensions.⁷⁰ This was fuelled by media reportage on the nature of her disappearance and her unconventional lifestyle. She was projected as a poster girl for developments which at the time were only ill understood if at all. Accordingly, she was depicted in one-dimensional fashion:⁷¹

... a tall willowy extrovert who embraced the 'new society' of the '60s – the spirit of love and peace and miniskirts and Eastern mysticism; a girl who had shrugged off the security and comfort of offered by her wealthy parents without a backward glance, choosing an alternative lifestyle and mixed with an off-beat crowd known as the 'cosmic butterflies'; someone who had cultivated the friendship of student drop-outs and those interested in the occult and was reported to have joined the butterflies in bizarre rituals which were conducted in the Knysna forests.

The constructed narrative of Ballingall had a number of ingredients which helped to elevate her to semi-celebratory mythical status: the circumstances under which she had vanished and her state of mind at the time, her personification as an "elusive flower child"⁷² of the utopian 1960s, the grief of her parents and ultimately the apparent wasteful loss of a young life. Whilst these elements were useful in crafting a public profile for Rosalind, they did little to pierce the mist which had enveloped her tragic fate. In addition, it left little room for a more prosaic but less obfuscatory reading that Rosalind was perhaps only a confused young woman, searching for meaning and dependent to some extent on others who were equally unsure of the world around them – a quest that futilely involved the use of drugs. There were also other key factors which more specifically helped to shape the way in which wider society assigned meaning to the case.

Central to this was the notion of "hippie". At the time the term "hippie" carried considerable negative freight and was often associated with moral degeneration. In this vein, Rosalind's disappearance came to be depicted "as some kind of moral fable; this is the consequence of not having short hair, right-wing views

70 Anon., "Is she still on the Rand - or buried in a forst grave?", *Sunday Times*, 3 May 1970.

71 R Marsh, *Unsolved mysteries...*, p. 54.

72 The term is from N Schafer, "Memory, time and place...", A written explication of the film..., p. 15.

and attending church”.⁷³ The hippie analogy went further. One young surfboard manufacturer complained indignantly of people who thought “once they have called someone a hippie, they have made out a watertight criminal case against him”.⁷⁴ There also appears to have been a heightened public awareness of drug use in the immediate aftermath of Rosalind’s case. The medical superintendent of the Cape mental hospital, Valkenburg, Dr CGA Simonsz, warned against what he considered an increasing tendency of members of the hippie cult who were “determined to follow a type of philosophy which has already resulted in the total disintegration of personality and the lowering of social stratum which is, in our contemporary society regarded as the level of the sewers”.⁷⁵ Likewise, there were concerns about expensive drugs in elite schools and the ready availability of drugs on the street “to fill, even if it be temporary, that unnamed emptiness in the kid’s life”.⁷⁶

Besides the use of drugs, the hippie lifestyle and particularly their way of dress were often regarded as bizarre. They were seen to wear “knitted doilies on their dreadlocks” and their clothes resembled “your granny’s tablecloth”. Their diet was described as “vegetarian fare with occasional weed thrown in for flavour”. If they had one redeeming feature, if it was indeed considered that, was that intellectually they should not be underestimated “as the far-away look in their eyes belied a fierce intellect that questioned the status quo”.⁷⁷ The parents of hippies did not escape censure. Thus a decidedly odd rumour had it that Rosalind’s parents were cousins, as in-breeding was the only way to explain their “weird” children.⁷⁸

Whilst elements of moral panic can be discerned in such outbursts, it was not maintained for any length of time and soon evaporated.⁷⁹ Hippies were nevertheless perceived to have banished themselves to the margins of society and being outside the mainstream of accountable behaviour their actions could not be rationally comprehended. As their world was seen impossible to penetrate, it was given to mystification and hyperbole. Rosalind’s association with the hippie cult therefore predisposed her disappearance to be mythologised.

73 Anon., “Tact and intelligence make student film stand out”, *Sunday Independent*, 9 July 2006.

74 Anon., “Hippies heading for the wilds.”, *Sunday Times*, 3 May 1970,.

75 Anon., “Court told of hippie cult danger”, *Cape Argus*, 11 September 1969.

76 Anon., “Drug age takes its toll of SA youth”, *Cape Times*, 28 August 1969.

77 Anon., “The old hippy trail has’nt quite gone to pot”, *Weekend Post*, 25 June 2005.

78 Anon., “Tact and intelligence make student film stand out.”, *Sunday Independent*, 9 July 2006.

79 On the question of moral panic in the South African context, see D Dunbar, “The devil’s children: Volk, devils and moral panics in white South Africa, 1976-1993” (MA, Stellenbosch University, 2013), p. 17.

If she had just disappeared as an ordinary individual with no “peculiar” attachments, the potential for exaggerated claims would have been less.

The hippie dimension was not the only factor that helped to fuel the process of mystification. There were also other imponderables, which imparted a sense of suspense to the tale of her disappearance, related in part to supposed sightings of her in different places. Initially a report reached the police that she was seen buying a stamp at the nearby George post office. Although the description of the person the post office clerk passed onto the police matched that of Rosalind, there was also a strong possibility that it could have been of another woman in George.⁸⁰ Following hard on the heels of this cold lead, were first rumours that she was hiding in a disused mine near Knysna and this was then followed up by a report that she was apparently making her way to Cape Town, but had chosen to interrupt her trip by hiding in a cave near Worcester.⁸¹

As there was no substance to this either, the next focal point became Cape Town. Here a man who claimed to have shared accommodation with Rosalind and her brother was emphatic that he saw her in St George’s Street. They exchanged pleasantries he said and she “looked well and acted quite naturally”.⁸² Another man was certain that he had spotted her in Loop Street. According to him, she was “dressed in hippie type clothing” and in contrast to the others who claimed that she was in a healthy condition, this person regarded her as looking “very pale - as though she had been ill or had not been outside for a long time”.

The supposed sightings persisted: a young woman was sure that she had seen Rosalind at a bus stop in Strand Street, another in a car with the drummer of a local pop group.⁸³ Even 30 years after the event, in 1999, a story surfaced that a woman who claimed to have been Rosalind was seen in a Cape Town night club and said: “Here I am today, still dancing with the hippies!”⁸⁴

Rumours of this kind were not restricted to the Cape Town area. At one point, there was talk that she had gone on expedition into the remote interior of South Africa possibly with a party of American anthropologists to the

80 Anon., “Clue in mystery of missing girl”, *Cape Argus*, 23 August 1969; *Cape Argus*, 20 August 1969, “Vermiste drama student”, *Die Burger*, 19 August 1969.

81 Anon., “Search for girl in old mine”; “Missing girl: Search turns to mountain hide-out”, *Cape Argus* 23 August 1969.

82 R Marsh, *Unsolved mysteries...*, p. 54.

83 Anon., “Is she on the Rand or buried in a forest grave?”, *Sunday Times*, 3 May 1970.

84 Quoted in N Schafer, p. 15.

Kalahari.⁸⁵ To add to this, a young hitchhiker on the Garden Route coastal road who called himself Jack ‘Jesus-man’ Johnson and claimed to have been a friend of Rosalind, maintained that that she had fled the country and gone to Mozambique. According to ‘Jesus-man’ she had taken this step as she was afraid that she might be targeted by in an Immorality Act investigation because she had a coloured lover. In order to save her family from what might have proved to be a possible embarrassment she decided to “vanish forever” and was living in a remote part of Mozambique with her lover and a baby boy.⁸⁶ An Afrikaans journalist also got wind of the story and actually went to Mozambique only to find out that all his leads were dead-ends. The closest he came to an even remote possibility was a down at heel striptease dancer from Vereeniging in a nightclub in what was Lourenco Marques, currently Maputo.⁸⁷ Rosalind’s case furthermore attracted more than its fair share of clairvoyants and psychics, as well as plain extortionists who demanded money before parting with their so-called information.⁸⁸ The desperate and distraught Ballingall parents did follow up some of these suggestions only to be disappointed every time. The couple also launched their own investigation, separate from the police and at times assisted by a Colonel J Fforde, a former Northern Rhodesian police officer and friend of Rosalind’s father. During the course of their investigation Elspeth Bellingall said, “they had heard a thousand different theories” but no firm facts. One of the more outlandish stories was that Rosalind was unwittingly a “dupe of communists and had been whisked away in a Russian submarine”.⁸⁹ Given the resolute anti-communist government propaganda at the time, it is perhaps only to be expected that the communist angle had to emerge in the discourse surrounding Rosalind.

The welter of rumours and alleged sightings, wildly disparate and some more bizarre than others, contributed to a haze of incomprehension regarding Rosalind’s fate. Yet at the same time these rumours, stories and allegations, apart from those of the extortionists, can be seen as attempts to try and come to terms with what has happened. If rational thought could no longer provide the answer, then it had to be sought in the supernatural and the extraordinary. Such suppositions also tend to feed off and reinforce each other, creating a

85 Anon., “Is missing Rosalind on an expedition?”, *Cape Times*, 23 September 1969.

86 Anon., “Is Rosalind alive and well?”, *Scope*, 23 June 1969.

87 Anon., “Die man van ‘skoeps””, *Rapport*, 30 December 2001.

88 R Marsh, *Unsolved mysteries...*, pp. 55-56; Anon., “An ‘astral’ search”, *Cape Argus*, 23 August 1969; Anon., “Prisoner claims Rosalind was murdered”, *Sunday Times*, 23 May 1970; Anon., “Is Rosalind alive and well?”, *Scope*, 23 June 1972; Anon., “Misdadreeks: Mense verdwyn spoorloos”, *Servamus*, 30 November 1994.

89 Anon., “Is Rosalind alive and well?”, *Scope*, 23 June 1972.

climate favourable for all kinds of explanations to flourish and masquerade as the “truth”. As the anthropologist, Clifford Geertz has noted: “Men plug the dikes of their most needed beliefs with whatever mud they can find”.⁹⁰

An additional element in the process of mystification was the way in which the Knysna forests were portrayed. The area was invested with dark, ominous and mysterious qualities. Because of the dense vegetation some parts of the forests were uncharted; in 2005 an “environmental officer had claimed that “mankind knows more about the surface of the moon than he does about these forests”.⁹¹ Locals at times also compared the area to the Bermuda Triangle, notorious for the mysterious disappearance of ships and aeroplanes. Besides the possibility of Rosalind, there were other cases of people who went missing; some were found, others not. A helicopter which went down in the forests in 1999 was only accidentally discovered in 2006. The forests reluctantly released its secrets, it was said, and “if you get lost, you are lost forever.”⁹² A local farmer who was involved with the search for Rosalind described the forests as “a very dangerous place for someone not used to it”. Apart from the possibility of getting lost, he said, there “are elephant, leopards and baboons” as well as “old traps left there by the bushmen. And that is not to mention all the ravines”.⁹³ The forests had gained a reputation, as a journalist remarked, to “be steeped in myth and legend”. It was a place, he claimed, that if you listened carefully, “you might hear voices in the wind that sigh through the trees, telling tales of sadness and heartache, loss and joy”.⁹⁴

Personifying the forest in this way made it a co-player in history - more than just a passive background but an active participant in proceedings. This added another layer to Rosalind’s case as her name was now associated with a mysterious and dangerous place that had no mercy for transgressors who did not obey its rules. Framed in this way the forest functioned as a metaphor for a punitive society with the implication that those who strayed off the beaten path will be punished.

It was the interpretations of a hippie lifestyle, the persistent rumours of sightings and the imaginings of the meaning of the forests that fed into the mystification of Rosalind’s disappearance. Besides these it also has to be taken

90 C Geertz, *Local knowledge: Further essays in interpretative Anthropology* (New York, 1983), p. 80.

91 N Schafer, “Memory, time and place...”, A written explication of the film..., p. 22.

92 Anon., “If you get lost, it’s forever”, *Star*, 16 May 2006; “Death of a hiker”, *Weekend Argus*, 14 December 1991.

93 Anon., “Hunt for girl back in forest”, *Cape Argus*, 21 August 1969.

94 Anon., “Forests” (available at <http://www.khaleejtimes.com/wknd/it-is-my-life/into-the-whispering-wood>, as accessed on 29 March 2016).

into account that she was a woman; young, attractive and given to testing the boundaries of the generally accepted roles assigned to woman. All of this added another layer of sensationalism and mystique.

Conclusion

We are no closer to explaining precisely why and how Rosalind disappeared on 12 August 1969, though we have made some tentative suggestions on her state of mind at the time. What has emerged more clearly is the nature of hippie culture in Cape Town in the late 1960s and how its beliefs and social dynamics played out. In addition, in re-conceptualising the rumours about Rosalind's disappearance as a process of mystification has helped to at least partly understand the swirl of conjecture generated at the time.

Rosalind was more than just a missing person case and she came to assume a much larger persona in her presumed death than in real life. In retrospect her remembrance for a brief moment, mirrored, however distorted it might have appeared to outsiders, a glimpse of a social world which few could countenance in the generally staid white society. Whilst it might have been a form of cultivated marginality, inauthentic in many respects and inchoate in the articulation of new ideals, it did grapple, even if drug induced at times, with notions of how to escape an environment which they perceived to have been excessively restricted. One participant captured it exceptionally well: "The instinctive human craving for liberty is one of the most powerful and it was one that underscored those years in Cobern Street and which with hindsight it glints as something worthy underlining a time when much of life was racked by insecurity and occasional dread that has dominated a young adult's life".⁹⁵ And one may add, every quest for freedom usually has its unfortunate casualties.

⁹⁵ J Oakley Smith, "Let there be no sadness of farewell" (Manuscript, Undated), p. 10.