

**THE PORTRAYAL OF HISTORY BY AFRICAN WRITERS  
IN BANTU WORLD, 1932-1936**

by

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## Abstract

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This thesis, comprising five chapters, is about the portrayal of history by African writers, between 1932 and 1936, in Bantu World, a newspaper which circulated predominantly in African communities. As the thesis starts from the premise that history is not about the past but about the way the past is represented in the present, I decided that the first chapter of this thesis should focus on the political, socio-economic, and historiographic contexts in which Bantu World was published. This approach enabled me to demonstrate in the subsequent three chapters of this thesis that the portrayal of history in Bantu World was influenced by political and socio-economic developments in South Africa between 1920 and 1936. Since these developments were characterized by the intensification of the policy of racial segregation, I argued throughout this thesis that the portrayals of history in Bantu World during the period in question were influenced by the writers' preoccupations with the struggle of Africans against racial segregation.

I decided to present my argument through a thematic sequence of chapters, with each one based on an important theme in the references to history in Bantu World. Chapter one focusses on circumstances that prevailed before and during the 1930s and which could have influenced references to history in Bantu World. Chapter two analyses references made in Bantu World to ancient and pre-colonial history. Chapter three investigates the portrayal by writers in this newspaper of the establishment and consolidation of white rule in South Africa. Chapter four deals with their portrayals of the various responses of Africans to the establishment and consolidation of white rule in South Africa. Chapter five draws conclusions based on the contents of the preceding chapters. In these chapters I brought out in detail the varieties of historical portrayals, why these various portrayals were made, at what readership they were aimed, the background events and developments which influenced their making.

# CONTENTS

## Preface

v

---

## CHAPTER 1 Bantu World and its context

1

- 
- |    |  |    |
|----|--|----|
| 1. | Introduction   | 1  |
| 2. | The political and socio-economic background, 1920-1936         | 2  |
| 3. | The establishment and early history of <u>Bantu World</u>      | 7  |
| 4. | The production of written history in South Africa to the 1930s | 10 |

---

## CHAPTER 2 References to ancient and pre-colonial history

23

- 
- |    |   |    |
|----|---|----|
| 1. | Introduction  | 23 |
| 2. | Oppressive regimes and the ultimate triumph of the oppressed      | 23 |
| 3. | Class and ethnic conflict in the ancient world                    | 26 |
| 4. | The fall of African civilizations that neglected their own people | 28 |
| 5. | References to pre-colonial history                                | 30 |

---

## CHAPTER 3 The portrayal of the establishment and consolidation of white rule in South Africa

40

- 
- |    |  |    |
|----|--|----|
| 1. | Introduction   | 40 |
| 2. | Dispossession and inadequate allocation of land  | 40 |
| 3. | Racially discriminatory and repressive legislation   | 45 |
| 4. | The role of the missionaries   | 48 |
| 5. | Urbanization of Africans and their contribution to the commercial and industrial development of South Africa | 52 |
| 6. | Relations between whites and blacks  | 55 |

---

<b>CHAPTER 4</b>	<b>The portrayal of African responses to white rule</b>	<b>57</b>
------------------	---	-----------

---

- |    |   |    |
|----|---|----|
| 1. | Introduction  | 57 |
| 2. | The use of the vote by Africans   | 57 |
| 3. | The role of Africans during the First World War                                 | 59 |
| 4. | Unity and divisions among Africans in their resistance to racial discrimination | 62 |
| 5. | History of African revolts and civil disobedience                               | 67 |

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<b>CHAPTER 5</b>	<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>70</b>
------------------	-------------------	-----------

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<b>List of Sources</b>	<b>77</b>
------------------------	-----------

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## Preface

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The study of the production of written history in South Africa presents a challenge to students of history because of the depth of the political conflicts between blacks and whites that have characterized the South African scene since at least the early 19th century. These conflicts have resulted in history being far more ideologically important in this country than in societies where domination has been less starkly imposed and less starkly contested. In other words, the processes by which different histories are produced in the course of struggles between the dominant and the dominated have often been much more visible in this country than in those where less intense conflicts have occurred.

In South Africa, as in all other 'modern' societies, far more history continues to be produced informally outside the academy than formally inside it. Since the last decades of the 19th century, much of this non-academic history has been produced by African intellectuals writing outside the white dominated universities. Most of these writers have written, or claimed to have written, on behalf of the politically subordinate African communities or groups within these communities. Very little of these 'voices from below' has been heard in the histories produced by academics in South Africa. This thesis has been written with the aim of helping us to hear them more clearly. The emphasis will be on aspects of the histories produced by the generation of African writers that emerged in the 1930s as members of an urbanized, politicized and often well-educated African petty-bourgeoisie. (Although it has become a common practice in recent works to use 'blacks' as a collective term for Africans, Indians and 'Coloureds', in this study the term 'black' is used interchangeable with 'African' to indicate a specific population group.)

The thesis focusses on the portrayal of history by African writers between 1932 and 1936 in Bantu World, a newspaper published in Johannesburg. It circulated predominantly in African communities across the whole of South Africa. I decided to start my study of the projection of history in Bantu World in 1932 because this is the

## *Preface*

year in which this newspaper was first published. I end in 1936 because this year marks a watershed in African politics. The passing in this year of Hertzog's Native bills, the Native Representation and Native Trust and Land Bills, vehemently opposed by African intellectuals, closed off one era of protest on the part of the African elite. It inaugurated another, in which the politics of protest gradually began to be replaced by the politics of confrontation.

Bantu World was a newspaper intended for African middle class readers, giving extensive coverage to news about this group. By 1935 it had the largest circulation of any African newspaper in South Africa. An African newspaper was chosen as the main source for this study because of the nature of the role played by the black press in African communities in South Africa during the 1930s. Many African writers in the 1930s were journalists, and many others used the newspaper to express their literary aspirations as well as judgements about the political, social and economic circumstances in which Africans lived during this period. I assumed that these aspirations and judgements were influenced by a historical perspective which would reveal the kinds of histories produced by these writers.

The early and middle years of the 1930s seemed an appropriate period for my thesis because these years saw the climax of the intensification of racial segregation in South Africa in order to consolidate white domination over blacks. I reasoned that the need among African writers to challenge this existing order would have heightened the ideological importance of history to these writers and provoked them to present a particular interpretation of history to challenge the legitimacy of racial segregation and also to justify their opposition to this policy. I was further influenced to focus on this period by a comment made by Tim Couzens, a professor in the Institute of African Studies at the University of the Witwatersrand, that '[the] thirties and forties of this century have been the neglected decades as regards black South Africans'.<sup>1</sup>

In the preparation of this thesis I have received support and encouragement from a number of sources. I am greatly indebted to my supervisor, Professor John Wright, whose incisive and constructive criticism and guidance enabled me to both start and complete this study. The staff of the libraries at the Universities of Natal (Pietermaritzburg), South Africa, Witwatersrand and the Orange Free State, were

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1 T.J. Couzens, The New African: A Study of the Life and Work of H.I.E. Dhlomo (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1985), p. xi.

### *Preface*

unfailingly helpful during my period of research. I am grateful to Miss Manuela Lovisa and Mrs Rusta du Plooy who painstakingly assisted with proofreading and typing respectively. I was moreover privileged in having the support and encouragement of my friends and colleagues, especially Messrs Rufus Mmutlana and Mafu Rakometsi, without which my intention to study for this degree would not have been realized. I wish to thank Professor Roger Gravié for his professional guidance and for providing me with accommodation during my frequent visits to Pietermaritzburg. My greatest debt is to my family who, in so many ways, made it possible for me to complete a task that stretched over several years.

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## CHAPTER 1

## Bantu World and its context

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

The study of the portrayal of history in Bantu World in the period 1932 to 1936 requires a consideration of the context in which this newspaper was published. This means that circumstances that prevailed before and during the 1930s and which could have influenced references to history in Bantu World should be discussed, and this will be the focus of the three sections of this chapter. The first section will look at political and socio-economic developments in South Africa between 1920 and 1936. I decided to take 1920 as a starting point because I had realized during my study of the various issues of Bantu World that political and socio-economic developments in South Africa in the 1920s and 1930s had caused tensions that were reflected in the production in this newspaper of a number of different kinds of appeals to the past. Moreover, I reasoned that events that occurred before 1920 were too remote from the 1930s to have had any direct influence on the developments during this period to which writers in Bantu World were responding.

The second section focuses on the establishment and early history of Bantu World. This will give the reader background information about Bantu World which will further illuminate the circumstances in which history was represented in it.

The last section seeks to set the portrayal of history in Bantu World in the context of general historiographical trends in South Africa during the first third of the twentieth century. This will entail generalized assessment of the characteristics of the different schools of history-writing in South Africa during this period. My aim in this section is to give a picture of what different writers and historians saw as worth writing about in history. This discussion enables me to make comparisons between the history reflected in Bantu World and other kinds of history produced before and during the 1930s in South Africa. Each of the various approaches to history which



will be discussed in this section was represented by many writers, not all of whom can be mentioned. As a result, in my consideration of each school of history, I have referred to a selection of writers in order to illustrate the particular kind of history that they were depicting.

## **2. THE POLITICAL AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC BACKGROUND, 1920-1936**

The processes of secondary industrialization which had begun during and after the First World War greatly influenced political and socio-economic developments in South Africa between 1920 and 1936. The expansion of manufacturing industry occurred mostly on the Rand, where it led to the increasing urbanization both of Africans and whites. The black working class engaged in non-mining activities increased in number from 67 111 in 1918 to 92 597 in May 1920.<sup>1</sup> The increase in the number of urban workers, especially on the Rand, was one of the factors responsible for increased political tension in this region between 1917 and 1922. This tension was primarily caused by the demand of these workers for better wages, housing, living and working conditions. In 1918 a boycott of mine stores was organized by Shangane miners on the East Rand, and in June of the same year Johannesburg sanitary workers struck in demand for higher pay.<sup>2</sup> The militancy among African workers culminated in the 1920 black mine workers' strike. This strike was followed by that of their white counterparts in 1922 in protest against the decision of the Chamber of Mines to eliminate a 'colour bar' in any semi-skilled work.<sup>3</sup> The increasing importance of the urban working class during this period was further demonstrated by the founding of organizations that claimed to advocate the rights of workers. The Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union of Africa was formed in 1919 and the Communist Party of South Africa in 1921.

The increasing urbanization of Africans resulted in attempts on the part of successive governments to control it. The first of these attempts saw the passing of the Native (Urban Areas) Act in 1923. The implementation of this legislation marked the intensification of the policy of segregated residences as well as of pass laws to

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1 P. Bonner, 'The Transvaal Native Congress, 1917-1920: The radicalization of the black petty bourgeoisie on the Rand', in *Industrialization and Social change in South Africa*, eds., S. Marks and R. Rathbone (New York, Longman, 1982), p. 272.

2 Ibid., p. 274.

3 T.R.H. Davenport, *South Africa: A Modern History*, 4th edition (Houndmills, Macmillan, 1991), p. 254.

control the influx of African workers into urban centres.<sup>4</sup> This policy was later further entrenched with the implementation of the Native Areas Amendment Act of 1930, the Native Service Contract Act of 1932 and the pass law of 1934. As a result of this policy, Africans in urban areas were subjected to frequent police harassment.

The process of urbanization also led to the emergence of a mature African petty-bourgeoisie. The members of this class were descendants of the earliest mission-educated African settlers in the new industrial towns who had moved to the urban areas because of the demand for junior clerks, messengers, interpreters and constables.<sup>5</sup> The upper stratum of this class comprised the most successful landowning farmers and the most highly educated ministers, teachers, clerks and interpreters. As industry and the black working class expanded, so employment opportunities for the African petty-bourgeoisie opened up.<sup>6</sup> The African writers in Bantu World were members of this class.

In the urban centres, especially in the new black locations, members of the petty-bourgeoisie developed a new life style characterized by the establishment of social clubs and cultural associations such as drama groups, literary and book reading circles, music and choral societies, debating societies and sports clubs. In Johannesburg in particular, the focus of social and cultural activities for the African petty bourgeoisie was the Bantu Men's Social Centre (BMSC), which opened in 1924.<sup>7</sup> Later, similar clubs were opened in other major cities such as Durban and Bloemfontein.<sup>8</sup> Other cultural organizations formed included the Order of Africa, the South African Board of Music, which held its first meeting in Johannesburg in 1930, and the Bantu Dramatic Society, formed at the BMSC in 1932. These bodies played a significant role in helping members of this class develop a common cultural consciousness. In these organizations the members achieved social cohesion because they shared the same needs and interests. They were also able to evolve a unique cultural identity as part of their struggle against continuing state repression.<sup>9</sup>

Numbers of mission educated Africans had been prominent social and political leaders since the late nineteenth century. The African community leaders of the

4 P. Walshe, The Rise of African Nationalism in South Africa (Craighall, A.D. Donker, 1970), pp. 102-3.

5 A.G. Copley, Class and Consciousness: The Black Petty-Bourgeoisie in South Africa, 1924 to 1950 (New York, Greenwood Press, 1990), p. 66.

6 Bonner, 'The Transvaal Native Congress', p. 273.

7 Copley, Class and Consciousness, p. 81.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.

1920s and 1930s were the third or fourth generation of this class.<sup>10</sup> Ordinary people recognized them as their spokesmen because of their position of relative privilege and their educational qualifications, which enabled them to be articulate in protesting against the indignities and abuse that Africans were subjected to. Those who held key positions in political organizations were also regarded as leaders in the political sense. The educated Africans played both a leading social and political role in their communities because they often had more time and freedom than did wage-earning labourers.<sup>11</sup>

The coming to power of the Pact Government under Hertzog in 1924 was followed by the intensification of segregationist policies. One of Hertzog's aims was to abolish the franchise rights held by Africans in the Cape. In order to realise this aim he tabled four draft bills on 23 July 1926: The Representation of Natives Bill, the Union Native Council Bill, the Coloured Person's Rights Bill and the Natives Land Bill. Hertzog later withdrew these bills when the Native Representation Bill failed to get a two-thirds majority in a joint sitting of the Houses of Parliament.<sup>12</sup>

After winning the 1929 election, Hertzog referred the Cape franchise question to an all-party Joint Select Committee. This committee sat from 1930 to 1935. In November 1932 it adopted the Natives Representation Bill.<sup>13</sup> This bill entirely excluded Africans from voting for members of the House of Assembly. In April 1935 the Joint Select Committee reported for the last time, and presented the Representation and Land Bills to Parliament. These bills prompted increasingly hostile public debate. Z.R. Mahabane, A.B. Xuma and Selope Thema, prominent community leaders and members of the African National Congress (ANC) - an African political organization launched in 1912 - began planning a broadly representative national convention of African leaders.<sup>14</sup> Their plan materialized in December 1935, when over 400 delegates converged in Bloemfontein to inaugurate the All-African Convention (AAC).<sup>15</sup> The AAC condemned the abolition of the Cape franchise and demanded the granting of franchise rights to Africans throughout the Union.<sup>16</sup> Many of these events were reported in contemporary issues of *Bantu World*.

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10 Ibid., p. 64.

11 Ibid., pp. 65, 75.

12 M. Lacey, *Working for Boroko* (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1981), p. 66.

13 S. Duhow, *Racial Segregation and the Origins of Apartheid in South Africa, 1919-1936* (Houndmills, Macmillan, 1939), p. 146.

14 Lacey, *Working for Boroko*, p. 164.

15 Ibid.

16 Ibid.

Hertzog's segregationist policies were also intended to protect the interests of white workers and farmers. Poor, unskilled and urbanized white workers were to be protected in competition for employment against African workers. As a result, the Government introduced a policy of job reservation (colour bar), in terms of which the most lucrative forms of employment were reserved by law for whites, with the more poorly paid ones left for Africans.<sup>17</sup> This policy was emphasized in the boom years after the great depression of 1929 to 1933 because the economy was not expanding fast enough to absorb all the black and white urban immigrants.<sup>18</sup> The policy of job reservation for whites was so successful that between 1924 and 1933 about 8000 jobs were transferred from black to white hands.<sup>19</sup> Unemployment among Africans became a very important subject in *Bantu World*.

The pursuit of segregationist policies was also accompanied by intensified political repression of Africans. The 1927 Native Administration Act made the Governor-General the Supreme Chief of all natives in the Transvaal, Natal and the Orange Free State.<sup>20</sup> Under this Act, extensive powers were given to the Native Affairs Department (NAD) to act in the name of the 'Supreme Chief' without being answerable either to Parliament or the courts.<sup>21</sup> The increased powers of the NAD after 1924 had much to do with the realization of the government that in order to implement segregation, this department needed substantial strengthening.<sup>22</sup> In 1926 the portfolio of Native Affairs, fused with that of the Prime Minister since 1914, was separated. The number of personnel in the department increased and their functions were all redefined. The main purpose of the Native Administration Act was to refurbish African traditionalism, with the emphasis on ethnic and cultural separatism.<sup>23</sup> This policy of 'retribalization' was to be achieved by controlling Africans in the reserves through their traditional chiefs. The opposition of Africans to this policy was demonstrated in 1928 when a Chiefs' Convention in Bloemfontein criticized retribalization and especially the conferring of extra powers on the Governor-General.<sup>24</sup> African urban intellectuals, who had begun moving away from traditionalism, argued that whites had no right to enforce retribalization.

17 Davenport, *South Africa*, p. 505.

18 Ibid.

19 Ibid., p. 510.

20 Lacey, *Working for Boroko*, p. 97.

21 Ibid.

22 Dubow, *Racial Segregation in South Africa*, p. 87.

23 Lacey, *Working for Boroko*, p. 85.

24 Ibid., p. 99.

The oppressive policies of the Hertzog government were also seen in its attempts to control African 'agitation' in the late 1920s. The politicization of African workers through the ICU led in 1929 to a series of strikes.<sup>25</sup> With the worsening economic crisis, industrial unrest grew and the state took decisive action to crush African worker resistance. The Riotous Assemblies Amendment Act of 1930 was one of the laws specifically intended to control African agitation.<sup>26</sup> Using his powers under this Act, the Minister of Justice, Oswald Pirow, banned meetings and exiled ANC leaders. Another oppressive law passed by the government was the Native Service Contract Act of 1932, governing master and servant relations on the farms of the Transvaal and Natal.<sup>27</sup> Its main objects were 'to prevent the desertion of labourers from service, to discourage rural labour from migrating to the cities and to force squatters into relations of labour tenancy.'<sup>28</sup> The fact that the question of the administration of Africans was Hertzog's biggest concern was manifested in 1930 when Parliament approved the establishment of the Native Economic Commission (NEC). The aim of this investigation was to recommend measures to be adopted in order to deal with 'surplus natives' in urban areas and to prevent their increasing migration to such areas.<sup>29</sup>

As regards its constitutional status, South Africa changed its position between 1926 and 1931 from one of subordination to Britain to one of sovereign independence within the Commonwealth.<sup>30</sup> This had been one of Hertzog's main objectives for many years before he came into power. His views on this question were of major importance in the drafting of the Balfour Declaration at the Imperial Conference in London in November 1926. This document made Britain and its dominions 'autonomous communities' which were equal in status and in no way subordinate to one another.<sup>31</sup> However, as regards the relationship between South Africa and Britain, certain inequalities could only be removed by legislation.<sup>32</sup> This was done in 1931, when the British Parliament passed the Statute of Westminster. To the African intellectuals in South Africa, this independence from Britain was not a

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25 Ibid., p. 246.

26 Ibid., p. 248.

27 Dubow, *Racial Segregation in South Africa*, p. 120.

28 Ibid., p. 64.

29 Lacey, *Working for Boroko*, pp. 286, 313.

30 B.J. Liebenberg, 'Hertzog in Power, 1929-1939', in *Five Hundred Years: A History of South Africa*, ed., C.F.J. Muller (Pretoria, Academica, 1981), p. 419.

31 Davenport, *South Africa*, p. 261.

32 Liebenberg, 'Hertzog in Power, 1929-1939', p. 420.

blessing because, as they saw it, the Hertzog government would now proceed to implement its racial policies without fear of intervention by the British government. The Statute of Westminster seemed to give South Africa in general, and the Afrikaner people in particular, real security against British intervention in South Africa's internal affairs.<sup>33</sup>

Another important development in the period in question was the decline of the ANC. From 1924 to the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939, the ANC was characterized by disunity and severe organizational weaknesses. This decline became worse in the 1930s under the presidency of Pixley Seme. After the passing of the 1930 Riotous Assemblies Act, which led to a clampdown on African political activists, it became very difficult for the ANC to operate efficiently. More details about the deterioration of this organization will be discussed in chapter 4, where it will be indicated how these conditions affected the portrayal of history in Bantu World.

### 3. THE ESTABLISHMENT AND EARLY HISTORY OF BANTU WORLD

Bantu World was launched in Johannesburg as a national weekly newspaper by a failed white farmer and advertising salesman, Bertram EG Paver, in April 1932.<sup>34</sup> He successfully incorporated existing black newspapers such as Imvo, Ilanga, Ikwezi le Afrika and Mochochonono into a single company in order to co-ordinate advertising in them.<sup>35</sup> This company came to be called the Bantu Press (Pty) Ltd. Paver was also helped in the founding of this company by white liberal intellectuals such as JD Rheinallt Jones, head of the South African Institute of Race Relations, and Howard Pim, who became the treasurer of the Institute.<sup>36</sup>

From the beginning, Paver laid down the policy that the members of the editorial and printing staffs of the Bantu Press were to be Africans.<sup>37</sup> For many years after its founding, the only whites in the headquarters of Bantu World were Paver himself, a works manager, and a handful of people in the executive offices.<sup>38</sup> It was in line with this policy, that Paver appointed RV Seloape Thema as editor of Bantu

33 Ibid.

34 T.J. Couzens, 'A short history of the World and other black newspapers, 1832-1960', extract from Ph.D. thesis (University of the Witwatersrand, 1983), p. 1.

35 Ibid., p. 24.

36 L. Switzer, 'Bantu World and the origins of a captive African commercial press in South Africa', Journal of Southern African Studies, vol. 14, no. 3 (April 1988), p. 353.

37 Bantu Press (Pty) Ltd., Black Gold: A New Market and Its Media (Johannesburg, 1945), p. 5.

38 Ibid.

World. Thema had gained journalistic experience as a writer for Abantu-Batho, the official organ of the ANC, and Umteteli wa Bantu, the Chamber of Mines African newspaper.<sup>39</sup> His political views were similar to those of Paver as well as of the liberal intellectuals who had helped him to establish his company. These views were about the promotion of racial harmony, advancement of African middle-class culture and protection, as well as extension, of the Cape African franchise. Since the early 1920s, Thema had been working with white liberals to promote these goals. He was one of the prominent members of the Joint Councils Movement. These were multiracial discussion groups started at the suggestion of the black American educationist and reformer, James Aggrey, who had visited South Africa several times in the early twenties.<sup>40</sup>

As Bantu World was a commercial newspaper aimed at the 'middle-class' urban African market, Paver endeavoured to make it a credible organ of news and opinion for this class. The members of this class were the 'principal communicators and consumers of news' in the African community. Paver encouraged black businessmen to invest in Bantu Press (Pty) Ltd. By the end of 1932 more than half of the thirty-eight shareholders in this company were Africans. Besides Thema, another prominent African, Isaiah Bud-M'belle, a key promoter of the Chamber of Mines African newspaper, Umteteli wa Bantu, was on the board of directors. About fourteen months after its founding, financial problems resulted in Bantu World being taken over by the Argus Printing and Publishing Company, which was the largest white-owned press conglomerate in South Africa.<sup>41</sup> This takeover does not seem to have caused any change in the editorial policy of Bantu World despite the fact that the African shareholders were bought out, while Thema and Bud-M'belle were removed from the board of directors.

The news content of Bantu World clearly reflected the policies and liberal ideology of its white proprietors, which were also shared by its editor. Paver had declared, when he founded Bantu Press, that the aim of the company and of Bantu World in particular, was 'the moulding of native opinion' and the maintenance of a 'progressive and moderate' policy on political and economic matters.<sup>42</sup> It was due to

39 T.J. Couzens, 'The black press and black literature in South Africa 1900-1950', English Studies in Africa, vol. 19, no. 2 (1976), p. 354.

40 N. Visser and T. Couzens, eds., H.I.E. Dhlomo: Collected Works (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1985), p. x.

41 Switzer, 'Bantu World and the origins of a captive African press', p. 352.

42 Couzens, 'History of the World and other black newspapers', p. 25.

this policy that Bantu World throughout the 1930s 'de-emphasized negative news that highlighted the discriminatory policies of the government of South Africa'.<sup>43</sup> In spite of this policy, the credibility of Bantu World was maintained in the eyes of its black readers. In part, this was because it was given a considerable degree of latitude in attacking the policies of the government during the 1930s.<sup>44</sup> Police harassment and brutality, pass laws, job reservation for whites and other discriminatory legislation were frequently criticized in editorials, letters and articles. Thema himself condemned slum conditions in the municipal townships, and also protested about the plight of the unemployed as well as the inferior education and poor housing provided for Africans.<sup>45</sup> Furthermore, Bantu World gave extensive coverage to the cultural concerns and leisure time of the African petty bourgeoisie. This included reports of dances, beauty contests and other competitions, fund-raising events, farewells and reunions, exhibitions, parties, speeches and meetings.<sup>46</sup> This is another indication of the aim of the owners of Bantu World to promote urban African petty bourgeois culture.

Bantu World expanded rapidly between 1932 and 1936. From ten pages in 1932 it grew to twenty by November 1935. It was apparently bigger than any other African newspaper in South Africa at the time.<sup>47</sup> It was read throughout South Africa, but circulated most widely in the Transvaal where industrialization was most advanced and African people of all language-groups were employed.<sup>48</sup> It was published in six languages - English, Afrikaans, Xhosa, Zulu, Sesotho and Tswana. In a typical twenty-page newspaper, seven pages were printed in the vernacular languages and the rest in English.

Most of the articles published in Bantu World were written by African writers. White writers who contributed articles included cabinet ministers and government officials, particularly those involved in the Native Affairs Department. A second group comprised liberal politicians, educationists and members of the clergy. The articles written by these writers dealt with topics such as 'native' education, pass laws, lack of unity among Africans, the Cape African franchise, race relations and the repressive legislation of the government. White writers tended to confine their

43 Switzer, 'Bantu World and the origins of a captive African press', p. 357.

44 Ibid., p. 358.

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid.

47 Ibid., p. 356.

48 Bantu Press (Pty) Ltd., Black Gold, pp. 4, 10.



comments to contemporary issues. Brief references to the past were, however, made in some articles.

#### 4. THE PRODUCTION OF WRITTEN HISTORY IN SOUTH AFRICA TO THE 1930s

The earliest works on South African history were written from 1830 onward by white English settler authors such as R. Godlonton, C. Brownlee, J. Noble and many others. The publications of these English authors marked the emergence of a distinct school of white settler history which reached its fullest expression with George McCall Theal in the 1880s and with George Cory in the early twentieth century. The various kinds of preoccupations with the past which these writers represented in their works were related to the politics of colonial society in the Cape, especially in the Eastern Cape-Transkei region in the nineteenth century. Under Theal and Cory, the writing of settler history reached its full development.

The early settler writers interpreted historical events in the Cape from the point of view of white colonists. They particularly focussed on the eastern frontier conflicts between the colonists and the Xhosa, as also on the coming and influence of British settlers.<sup>49</sup>

The historical works of Theal and Cory were, like those of their predecessors, still written from a white colonial point of view. These two writers also defended the colonists and laid the blame for what happened on the eastern frontier on the blacks.<sup>50</sup> Those who had sided with blacks, like the missionaries, were portrayed as enemies of white interests.<sup>51</sup> Unlike their predecessors, Theal and Cory not only wrote about the history of colonial events in the Cape, but also focussed on the history of the Boer republics. They gave more attention to the history of the founding and development of white societies in South Africa. Their history was intended to justify white domination of South Africa and the consolidation of political unity between the English and the Afrikaners.

The history constructed by white settler writers was very different from that portrayed by African writers in the later nineteenth century. These two groups of wri-

49 J.C. Moll and Van Aswegen, H.J., *Tussengroepverhoudinge soos Weerspieël in die Suid-Afrikaanse historiografie* (Pretoria, Raad vir Geesteswetenskaplike Navorsing, 1987), p. 3.

50 Ibid.

51 F.A. van Jaarsveld, *Omstrede Suid-Afrikaanse Verlede* (Johannesburg, Perskor, 1984), p. 37.

ters emphasized different historical events. The first works with historical content to be produced by black writers were by the new christianized and educated Africans who emerged in the later nineteenth century. These writers, such as M Fuze, JM Soga, PI Seme, S Plaatje and others, were the products of the various missions of the European churches.

The histories referred to by these early African writers had two important characteristics. The first was the portrayal of Britain as the protector of Africans. This history was often invoked in various petitions addressed mostly to the British monarchy and sometimes to certain high ranking imperial officials. It was intended to appeal for British protection of various African rights such as the franchise and land ownership, and also against what the writers perceived as the threat of Afrikaner racism. In their petition to Queen Victoria in 1887, the inhabitants of the location of Oxkraal in the district of Queenstown, recounted how the British government had freed them from Xhosa rule and had also given them the franchise for the past thirty-three years, which they described as a 'great privilege'.<sup>52</sup> They referred to this history because they were protesting against the Parliamentary Voters Registration Act of 1887 which excluded tribal and communal tenure as a qualification to vote, and introduced stricter registration controls.<sup>53</sup> Similarly, in another written appeal to Joseph Chamberlain, the British Secretary of State for colonies, in 1903, the executive of the South African Native Congress, founded by educated Africans in the Eastern Cape, protested against the 1902 Treaty of Vereeniging. In this treaty, signed at the conclusion of the Anglo-Boer War by the Boer leaders and the representatives of the British government, the latter made an undertaking not to enfranchise Africans before granting representative government to the Boers.<sup>54</sup> In order to reinforce its protest, the South African Native Congress referred to nineteenth-century imperial and colonial officials like Lord Glenelg, Sir Andries Stockenström, Sir George Grey and Sir Bartle Frere, whom it mentioned as examples of British offi-

52 'Petition to Queen Victoria, from "the native inhabitants of the location of Oxkraal", July 1887', in T. Karis and G.M. Carter, eds., *From Protest to Challenge: A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa 1882-1964*, vol. 1 (Stanford, Hoover Institution Press, 1972), p. 15.

53 Ibid., Lacey, *Working for Boroko*, p. 55.

54 Davenport, *South Africa*, p. 201.

cials who had displayed a high sense of fairness, justice and humanity in their attitude towards Africans.<sup>55</sup>

Another important feature of the writings of early African writers was their interest in pre-colonial history. The writing of people like Fuze and Molema dealt largely with aspects of pre-colonial culture and history, such as customs, laws, manners, religious beliefs and the achievements of chiefs. In his book entitled Abantu Abamnyama Lapa Bavela Ngakona, Fuze, a Zulu writer, who had converted to Christianity at an early age, painted a very positive picture of the Zulu pre-colonial past, and he evidently wanted the Zulu readers to be proud of this history.<sup>56</sup> Although both Fuze and Molema focussed on the pre-colonial past, there were several differences between the histories they produced. Unlike Fuze, Molema, who qualified as a medical doctor at the University of Glasgow in Scotland in 1919, did not focus only on the history of the Zulu but also that of other African communities such as Batswana, Basotho, the Xhosa, the Zulu and the Damaras. This was evident in his book, The Bantu Past and Present, which appeared in 1920. He did not express the same pride about the pre-colonial past as Fuze did and as probably most later African writers have done. Instead, Molema referred to the pre-colonial life of Africans to demonstrate that the contact between Africans and Europeans benefited Africans because it freed them from their backward life. He praised the missionaries for having contributed towards the 'progress of the Bantu'.<sup>57</sup>

The history of the suffering of Africans under the rule of whites was also important to African writers. Molema recounted how Africans had suffered under the native policies of white governments in South Africa from 1652 until the formation of the Union of South Africa in 1910. He did not refer to any policy from which Africans benefitted. Similarly, Solomon Plaatje, a prominent figure in African politics and an editor of African newspapers, such as Koranta ya Becoana and Tsala ya Batho, also recounted the history of the suffering of Africans. In his book Native Life in South Africa, which appeared in 1916, he made pointed observations about the hardships caused for Africans by the passing of the Natives Land Act of 1913.

55 South African Native Congress, 'Questions affecting the natives and coloured people residing in British South Africa', document of 1903, in T. Karis & G.M. Carter, eds., From Protest to Challenge, vol. 1, p. 21.

56 Abantu Abamnyama, Lapa Bavela Ngakona was translated into English by H.C. Lugg under the title, The Black People and Whence They Came, and published in 1979 (Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal).

57 S.M. Molema, The Bantu Past and Present (Edinburgh, W. Green and Son, 1920), p. 224.

This Act was intended to restrict African landownership and to eliminate share cropping, both of which were found undesirable by white farmers.<sup>58</sup> Like Molema, Plaatje wrote his book to appeal for British intervention on behalf of Africans. He blamed the suffering of Africans on the failure of the imperial government to protect them against the Boers.

The histories produced by these early African writers were intended to protest against the consolidation of European rule in South Africa, especially the unity in 1910 between the English and the Afrikaners. As mentioned earlier, this was the social order which the histories, as represented by white settler writers, sought to justify and to maintain. The histories portrayed by these early African writers were aimed at strengthening appeals for British protection against the oppression of white rule under the Afrikaners. Before 1910 these appeals were conveyed by focussing on the historical role of Britain on behalf of Africans. The failure of Britain in 1910 to safeguard African political rights seems to have made African writers such as Molema and Fuze more assertive in their request for British protection. Instead of appealing to the historical role of Britain as their protector, they drew from their own history, with specific emphasis on the pre-colonial period, to make Britons more informed about Africans and also to challenge the attitude of contempt displayed by white settler historians towards this history. In the history produced by Plaatje, this assertiveness assumes a militant tone. He accused the British government of displaying ingratitude to its loyal subjects, the Africans, by placing them under the rule of Afrikaners, despite the latter's history of disloyalty against the British government.<sup>59</sup> It will be seen later in this chapter how this assertiveness was further developed through the histories produced by African writers in the 1920s and 1930s.

The rejection of the Theal-Cory version of South African history by African writers between 1900 and 1920 was also seen in the 1920s and 1930s in the writings of white liberal academic historians such as WM Macmillan, CW de Kiewiet, EA Walker, AF Hattersley and others. These writers supported a liberal Cape tradition which rejected racial discrimination against Coloureds and Africans. A clear sign of this liberalism in the history they produced was their rejection of the pro-colonist, anti-black view of South African history propagated by Theal and Cory. They were academics who were attached to or products of the departments of history that had

58 Davenport, *South Africa*, p. 234; Karis and Carter, *From Protest to Challenge*, vol. I, p. 63.

59 W.R.L. Gebhard, 'Black perceptions of South African history (unpublished M.A. dissertation, University of Pretoria, 1988), p. 84.

been established at South African universities in the early years of the twentieth century. Their writings marked the beginning of the professionalization of South African history, which resulted in historians striving to 'impress their peers with objectivity and rigorous analysis.'<sup>60</sup>

It was because they strongly believed that the histories of Europeans and Africans in South Africa could not be separated that liberal historians gave the role of blacks in South African history a greater prominence than that shown by settler authors. De Kiewiet argued that 'the complete history of South Africa is thus not merely concerned with one or several communities of Europeans, distinct from the natives, even though they fought and sometimes governed them'.<sup>61</sup> Their rejection of segregated history was largely the result of their conviction that the major political, economic and social problems which faced South Africa in the 1920s originated in nineteenth-century relations between Europeans and Africans. The importance given to the history of race relations by these writers was the result of their concern about the intensification of segregationist policies by the Hertzog government after 1924, as also with the problems being brought about by the rapid urbanization of South Africa after the First World War. They were concerned about racism, poverty and competition for employment between blacks and whites. Macmillan's book, *The Cape Colour Question*, which was published in 1927, 'was the result of a conviction that a better understanding of the oldest phase of the Colour Question, is an indispensable preliminary to any hopeful approach to the complex problems that remain'.<sup>62</sup> Similarly, Walker, who was professor of History at the University of Cape Town from 1911 until 1935, asserted that the realization by Europeans that their economic and social problems 'were only other aspects of the Native problem', was the 'chief fact in South African history since Union'.<sup>63</sup> He added that the 'violent stage' of this realization was the 1922 Rand strike by white miners, which he described as the 'economic clash between European and non European'.<sup>64</sup>

These liberal academic writers shared the view that it was inevitable that conflict and misunderstanding should have characterized early contact between Europeans

60 C. Saunders, *Writing History: South Africa's Urban Past and Other Essays* (Pretoria, Human Sciences Research Council, 1992), p. 107.

61 C.W. de Kiewiet, *British Colonial Policy and the South African Republics 1848-1872* (London, Longmans, 1929), p. 3.

62 W.M. Macmillan, *The Cape Colour Question: A Historical Survey* (London, Faber & Gwyer, 1927), p. vii.

63 E.A. Walker, *A History of South Africa* (London, Longmans, 1928), p. vi.

64 Ibid.

and Africans because of their diversity in race, language and standard of civilization.<sup>65</sup> They emphasized this view because they believed that allowing Africans to attain the same level of civilization as whites would improve race relations and ensure a better quality of life for all South Africans. Macmillan stated that '... the prosperity of the white race is bound up with the progress of the black'.<sup>66</sup>

In referring to the history of relations between Europeans and Africans, liberal historians portrayed the latter as victims of European colonization and not as aggressors, as settler historians had done. Africans, according to them, had suffered at the hands of both English colonists and Boer trekkers, who did not 'take just account of the economic and human interests of the Africans, but instead conquered and reduced them to abject economic, legal and political dependence.' Hattersley, the first head of the department of history at the University of Natal in Pietermaritzburg, described cattle thefts by Africans on the eastern frontier as 'retaliation for dispossession of their rightful holdings.'<sup>67</sup> These historians were worried that the Hertzog government, through its policy of racial discrimination, was repeating the mistake committed by white colonists in the nineteenth century. Macmillan warned that 'nowhere is there such danger of political disaster as in a country, constitutionally democratic, which denies political rights to a section of its own people.'<sup>68</sup>

Liberal academic writers portrayed the historical role of Afrikaners in a negative light, and particularly blamed them for the origin of racism in South Africa. Macmillan described them as 'a dissenting minority of colonists who, regardless of South African unity, had created two independent republics.'<sup>69</sup> According to Walker, the Afrikaner trekkers left the Cape because their ideas and mode of life were threatened by changing circumstances.<sup>70</sup> He explained that his book, The Great Trek, published in 1934, was an attempt to find out what manner of folk the Trekkers really were, why they trekked and what they did in the interior of the country.<sup>71</sup>

65 A.F. Hattersley, South Africa 1652-1933 (London, Thornton Butterworth, 1933), p. 92.

66 W.M. Macmillan, Complex South Africa (Faber & Faber, 1930), p. 8.

67 Hattersley, South Africa, p. 98.

68 W.M. Macmillan, Bantu Boer and Briton: The making of the South African Native Problem (London, Faber & Gwyer, 1928), p. viii.

69 Macmillan, Complex South Africa, p. 14.

70 E.A. Walker, The Great Trek (London, A and C Black, 1934), p. ix.

71 Ibid., p. 14.

Liberal academic writers also differed from settler writers in their portrayal of the role of missionaries in the history of South Africa. Macmillan in particular praised the missionaries such as Dr John Phillip of the London Missionary Society for 'ameliorating the lot of people of colour at the Cape in the early nineteenth century.'<sup>72</sup> His book, Bantu Boer and Briton, reviewed the influence of missionaries in the mid-nineteenth century. Other liberal academic historians did not, however, refer specifically to the historical role of the missionaries.

Another kind of history produced by white writers was Afrikaner nationalist history. It was regarded as nationalist because its writers placed particular emphasis on the Afrikaner as a distinct, particular group with a specific national character.<sup>73</sup> The writing of this kind of history began in the late nineteenth century with the works of writers such as SJ du Toit, M Hofstede, JD Weilbach and NJ du Plessis. As these writers were not trained professional historians, this first phase of Afrikaner history writing is often described as pre-scientific. In these early years, Afrikaner history writing already reflected a strong nationalistic tendency. It was only after the first World War that the writing of Afrikaner history was taken over by academic historians such as SFN Gie, JA Wiid, HB Thom and PJ van der Merwe. In this discussion, comments will be on the characteristics of the history that was produced by these writers between 1920 and 1936.

White society, especially Afrikaners, formed the focus of the history written by Afrikaner nationalist writers. The establishment and growth of the white community in South Africa, especially the role of Afrikaners during this time, were the central themes of their history. In the preface of his book, Geskiedenis van Suid-Afrika, published in 1928, Gie stated that 'ons kan dus sê dat onder die geskiedenis van Suid-Afrika moet verstaan word die geskiedenis van die Europese beskawing in Suid-Afrika.'<sup>74</sup>

A very distinct feature of Afrikaner nationalist history was the focus on the history of the role of Afrikaners in their relationship with blacks and the British, both of whom were portrayed negatively.<sup>75</sup> Blacks were always described as less civilized and less developed, and very little attention was given to their history. As Gie argued, 'Hulle afkoms is duister, van hulle lotgevalle voor die ontdekking van die

72 C. Saunders, The Making of the South African Past (Cape Town, David Philip, 1988), p. 66.

73 Moll and Van Aswegen, Tussengroepverhoudinge, p. 11.

74 S.F.N. Gie, Geskiedenis van Suid-Afrika (Stellenbosch, Pro-Ecclesia, 1928), voorwoord.

75 Moll and Van Aswegen, Tussengroepverhoudinge, pp. 12-14.

Kaap weet ons feitliks niks, en hulle geskiedenis selfs na die tyd is in baie opsigte onseker en onvolledig.<sup>76</sup> The British were seen as imperialists, colonists and oppressors whose aim was to deprive the Afrikaners of their freedom and possessions.<sup>77</sup> Great emphasis was placed on incidents, events and attitudes through which the British had supposedly wronged the Afrikaners.<sup>78</sup>

The 1920s also saw the rise of African working class history. The emergence of the writing of this history could be attributed to the rise in numbers of more or less permanently urbanized African industrial workers. The first accounts of the historical activities of African workers were written by people who were actively involved in trade unionism. David Jones was the leader of the International Socialist League which had existed since 1915 and subsequently merged into the Communist Party of South Africa in 1921.<sup>79</sup> Clements Kadalie and AW Champion were initially fellow leaders of the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union of Africa (ICU).<sup>80</sup> This was the first independent African trade union, formed by Kadalie in 1919.<sup>81</sup> In the late 1920s Champion left the ICU and established the ICU Yase Natal.<sup>82</sup> These writers were some of the first in South Africa to refer to the history of African workers.

The history of trade unionism among African workers was an important feature of working-class history. Labour leaders such as Jones and Kadalie wrote about this subject because they were advocating the unity of the South African working class, irrespective of colour, in order to maximize its bargaining power. In a document entitled 'Communism in South Africa', which was presented to the Executive of the Third International in 1921 on behalf of the International Socialist League of South Africa, Jones praised the efforts of African workers in fighting for better working conditions. He referred to the origins of militancy and collective industrial action by African workers as the period of their awakening.<sup>83</sup> He specifically referred to the 1915 strike of African workers on the dumping machinery of the Van Ryn Gold

76 Gie, *Geskiedenis van Suid-Afrika*, voorwoord.

77 Moll and Van Aswegen, *Tussengroepverhoudinge*, p. 17.

78 Ibid.

79 T. Karis and G.M. Carter, eds., *From Protest to Challenge: A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa 1882-1964*, vol. 4 (Stanford, Hoover Institution Press, 1977), p. 43.

80 Ibid., p. 18.

81 Ibid., p. 45.

82 Ibid., p. 18.

83 D. Jones, 'Communism in South Africa', in *South African Communists Speak: Documents from the History of the South African Communist Party, 1915-1980* (London, Inkululeko Publications, 1981), pp. 51-54.



mine, the 1918 strike movement among the 'native' municipal workers and also the 1920 native mine workers strike on the Rand.

Similarly in an article of 1927, entitled 'Open letter to Blackpool', published in the journal, The New Leader, Kadalie recounted the formation of the ICU and its successful growth despite problems such as persecution and oppression by the state and employers as well as the enmity of white trade unions.<sup>84</sup> Unlike Jones and Kadalie, Champion did not focus on the history of trade unionism among African workers but on their violent strikes between 1919 and 1920 in which many were imprisoned and some died.<sup>85</sup> The history of African labour was also referred to in other literature such as the Worker's Herald, a newspaper put out by the ICU in the 1920s, as well as in contemporary Communist Party publications such as the International, which was its weekly organ. In the late 1920s and 1930s the International was published under the names of the South African Worker and Umsebenzi respectively. In various articles published in these journals, the Communist Party, and sometimes its Youth League, stated that the history of the 'bloody repression' of both black and white workers by the South African government and the brutality of the Chamber of Mines, was confirmed by the suppression of the workers' strikes between 1913 and 1922.<sup>86</sup> In these journals, the role of the government and 'capitalists', especially with regard to the workers, was always portrayed in negative terms.

This working class history was not intended for African workers but for white sympathizers. It was written in English and in journals which very few African workers would ever have read. In the 1920s white liberal economists argued that white workers, particularly the craft unions, used their organization and their political influence to prevent black advancement and undermine economic progress.<sup>87</sup> This history was thus intended to strengthen the appeals made by labour leaders to all workers to co-operate with one another against their capitalist employers.

84 C. Kadalie, 'Open letter to Blackpool', The New Leader, 30 September 1927, reprinted in T. Karis & G. Carter, eds., From Protest to Challenge, vol. 1, pp. 328-330.

85 A.W.G. Champion, extract from 'Blood and tears', pamphlet of 1929, in T. Karis & G. Carter, eds., From Protest to Challenge, vol. 1, pp. 335-337.

86 South African Young Communist League, 'Never again', The International, 11 August 1923, reprinted in South African Communists Speak, pp. 73-74; 'Communist Party, SA Election Manifesto', The International, 16 May 1924, reprinted in South African Communists Speak, pp. 77-80.

87 J. Lewis, Industrialisation and Trade Union Organization in South Africa, 1924-55 (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 5.

In the 1920s and 1930s the African middle-class 'protest' history which had been produced before the 1920s, was beginning to turn into proto-nationalist history. African writers during this period were largely constructing a history of national unity and resistance against European domination. Plaatje, who was mentioned earlier as one of the prominent African writers in the period before 1920, continued writing after this period. Others who produced proto-nationalist historical writings included JH Soga, T Mofolo and the two brothers, HIE Dhlomo and RRR Dhlomo. The writing of proto-nationalist history in the 1920s and 1930s was also characterized by concentration on the history of African communities, especially in the pre-colonial period. Pre-colonial African history was important to the writers mentioned because African intellectuals were by now becoming pre-occupied with the question of cultural identity, and wanted to affirm their African identities.<sup>88</sup>

The focus on the pre-colonial history of African communities was clearly seen in the novel *Shaka*, which appeared in 1925. This novel written by Mofolo, who had worked for a long period at the Morija Printing Press and book depot in the then Basutoland (now Lesotho), was based on the life of Shaka, a pre-colonial Zulu king. It was a recreation of the life and atmosphere of Shakan times and it concentrated on the character and experiences of Shaka.<sup>89</sup> As Saunders stated, this novel 'sought to make Shaka a more human figure'.<sup>90</sup>

A positive portrayal of pre-colonial African life was also presented by Plaatje in his novel, *Mhudi*, published in 1930. Values of pre-colonial African societies, such as care for strangers and respect for justice, were greatly praised in this novel. As Couzens says, Plaatje was concerned in *Mhudi* to defend the 'traditional life' of the Barolong.<sup>91</sup> It was this concern to defend and even reveal more about pre-colonial African life that prompted Soga, who had trained for the ministry in Scotland before returning to South Africa in 1893, to write the *South Eastern Bantu*. Soga stated that the primary purpose of this book, published in 1930, 'was to place in the hands of the rising generation of the Bantu, something of the history of their people, in the hope that it might help them to a clearer perception of who and what they are, and

88 Cobley, *Class and Consciousness*, p. 74.

89 J.M. Tekateka, 'A critical literary survey of Thomas Mofolo's writings' (unpublished M.A. thesis, Unisa, 1967), p. 7.

90 Saunders, *The Making of the South African Past*, p. 110.

91 S.T. Plaatje, *Mhudi* (Johannesburg, Qwagga Press, 1975; first published by Lovedale Press, 1930), p. 11.

to encourage in them a desire for reading and for studying their language'.<sup>92</sup> His purpose seems to be an echo of the reasons given by Fuze for the writing of his book, Abantu Abamnyama, Lapa Bavela Ngakona. Fuze explained that in this book he recounted the early history of the Zulu in order that 'our children may get to know where they originally came from, because at present they do not know'.<sup>93</sup>

The literary works of the Dhlomo brothers, Rolfe and Herbert, comprised plays, novels and poetry based on African history. Rolfe had been an assistant editor of Ilanga, the Zulu national newspaper printed in Ohlange and later in Durban. He moved to the same position when Bantu World was launched in 1932. He wrote folk poems and short stories in the 1920s and 1930s which indicated his 'real regard for the dignity of the old way of life'.<sup>94</sup> Similarly, Herbert, who resigned from teaching and joined the staff of Bantu World in August 1935, based his first play The Girl who killed to save, published in 1936, on Nonqawuse and the 1857 cattle killing episode. His other plays on Shaka, Moshoeshe and Cetshwayo in the 1930s were 'pioneering works in South African drama'.<sup>95</sup>

African writers in the 1920s and 1930s portrayed history differently from their predecessors. Their focus on pre-colonial African history was not intended to strengthen their appeal for British support in their struggle against segregation as their predecessors had done. Instead they focussed on a history that would provide knowledge about their pre-colonial past in order to encourage pride in African culture and thus stimulate African solidarity. In contrast to their predecessors, they felt that African efforts rather than British protection would bring more pressure on the South African government to abandon segregationist policies. This subject will be dealt with in more detail in subsequent chapters.

Portrayals of history in Bantu World from 1932 also need to be seen against the background of the continued existence of another kind of history - oral history. Surviving oral traditions undoubtedly influenced the African writers whose portrayal of history forms the subject of this thesis. In the period before and during the 1930s, the majority of Africans were still illiterate and thus depended on oral traditions as their main source of information about the past. In 1931 literate Africans consti-

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92 J.H. Soga, The South Eastern Bantu (Johannesburg, Witwatersrand University Press, 1930), p. xvii.

93 Fuze, The Black People, p. v.

94 Couzens, The New African, p. 59.

95 *Ibid.*, back cover.

tuted only about 12,4 per cent of the adult African population.<sup>96</sup> Most of what was written in the period under discussion about the history of pre-literate African communities was based largely on oral traditions recorded by various writers, both white and black. Among these writers was James Stuart, a Natal government official who in the 1920s, published a number of traditions in Zulu-language Readers. These included Ubaxoxele and Uhlangakula, which both appeared in 1924, as well as Uvusezakiti which was published in 1926. Various books written by African writers before and during the 1920s and 1930s contain information drawn from oral tradition. The editor of Soga's book, The South Eastern Bantu, identified only by the initials RFAH, stated in his introduction that this book 'bears evidence in many parts of first hand enquiry into local tribal traditions.'<sup>97</sup> He indicated that Soga had made many journeys seeking verification of reports, from old native witnesses.<sup>98</sup> Similarly, in writing his book, Abantu Abamnyama. Lapa Bavela Ngakona, Fuze had relied on oral information. As the editor of the recent translation of this book, AT Cope, explains, the care and accuracy with which Fuze described the details of Zulu rural history, suggest that he was in constant touch with it.<sup>99</sup>

Mofolo's novel, Chaka, was largely based on eyewitness accounts of Chaka's rule which he had used to verify certain facts concerning Chaka's life.<sup>100</sup> He had visited Natal several times to conduct interviews.<sup>101</sup> His informants 'are finally identified in the very last paragraph of the book as the 'Zulu people'.<sup>102</sup> In the same way, Plaatje also obtained certain information in his book, Mhudi, from oral accounts. In the preface of this book, Plaatje explains that his perception of the Matebele, whose attack on the Barolong is described in this book, was based on various oral accounts. Firstly, he explained that from childhood, the Barolong were taught that the Matebele were an aggressive and destructive people who usually attacked other people without provocation.<sup>103</sup> Later in his life, he stated, he learned from older people that the Matebele's attack on the Barolong was provoked by the latter's killing of

96 Switzer, 'Bantu World' and the origins of a captive African press', p. 351.

97 Soga, The South Eastern Bantu, p. vi.

98 Ibid.

99 Fuze, The Black People, p. xi.

100 D.P. Kunene, Thomas Mofolo and the Emergence of Written Sesotho Prose (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1989), p. 142.

101 Kunene, Thomas Mofolo, p. 142.

102 Ibid.

103 S.T. Plaatje, Mhudi (The Lovedale Press, 1930), preface.

the Matebele's tax collectors.<sup>104</sup> It can be concluded that the knowledge of the past derived from oral tradition fed into the historical consciousness of African writers in the 1930s.

There are two observations that can be made from the discussions in this chapter. Firstly, the political and socio-economic context in which Bantu World was published was characterized by intensified racial discrimination and repressive government policies against Africans. The subsequent chapters will seek to show how much the histories produced by African writers in Bantu World, were the results of these circumstances of racial discrimination and repression. Secondly, this chapter has shown that there is a great deal of non-academic history still to be studied in South Africa. This is the history that is particularly constructed by Africans outside the white dominated universities. By the 1930s, when Bantu World emerged, much of this history was largely presented by the urbanized, politicized and often well educated Africans who were responsible for the outburst of writing in African communities during this period. The following chapters will consider the nature of the histories produced by African writers specifically in Bantu World.

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104 Ibid.

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## CHAPTER 2

## References to ancient and pre-colonial history

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter is divided into five sections which deal with representations by writers in Bantu World of ancient and pre-colonial history. References to ancient history are discussed under the following headings: oppressive regimes and the ultimate triumph of the oppressed; history of ethnic and class conflict; and the fall of civilizations, that neglected the welfare and education of ordinary people. The concept 'ancient history' usually denotes the period to the fall of the Western Roman Empire, but in the context of this chapter, this term is used in a broader sense. It is used to include accounts of, or references to, the empires of the ancient Near East, the history of the Jewish nation and the birth and life of Christ. This concept is also used to refer to the history of African empires and civilizations such as Timbuktu and Zimbabwe. This latter theme has been dealt with in the first of the following sections because writers tended to see the history of Timbuktu and Zimbabwe as belonging to a period remote in time and place, as remote as the history of the ancient Near East. As regards the other section, the term 'pre-colonial history' is used to refer to the period before contact between African societies and Europeans. Discussion of this subject is treated under two headings: the golden age of African history, and the building of the Zulu and Basotho nations.

### 2. OPPRESSIVE REGIMES AND THE ULTIMATE TRIUMPH OF THE OPPRESSED

The history of oppressive regimes and their ultimate defeat by their oppressed subjects was discussed in Bantu World with particular reference to the history of the Jews. This history was used by writers in Bantu World as a parallel to the history of Africans in South Africa, first under colonial rule and later on under the segregationist policies of the various governments since the formation of Union in 1910. As this history was based on the Bible, the African writers with their background of

mission education, found it relevant, and related it to their experiences under the segregationist policies of the Hertzog government in the 1930s.

The focus of African writers in Bantu World on the history of oppression can be regarded as a response to the various laws passed by the Hertzog government, especially between 1925 and 1932. The implementation of the policy of segregation was accompanied by oppressive legislation (see page 5). These laws included the Wage Act of 1925 and the Mines and Works Amendment Act of 1926, which promoted a policy of job reservation for whites. The Native Administration Act of 1927 gave the Governor-General authoritarian powers over all Africans by appointing him their nominal Supreme Chief (see page 5). An amendment to this law in 1929 brought all potential workers anywhere in South Africa under the discipline of pass laws and movement control.<sup>1</sup> The Native (Urban Areas) Act was amended in 1930 to tighten controls over the recruitment of farm workers by urban employers. This Act was followed in 1932 by the Native Service Contract Act which empowered white farmers to summarily evict their workers for 'non performance of labour obligations'.<sup>2</sup> It also increased penalties for breach of contract by African workers, and tightened restrictions on their movement outside the reserves.<sup>3</sup> The fact that these laws entrenched a policy of arbitrary control over Africans made politically conscious and educated Africans see them as oppressive.

In several articles, writers in Bantu World recounted the oppression of the Jews by ancient empires such as Egypt, Syria, Babylon and Rome. In their front-page Christmas messages in the issues of 24 December 1932 and 22 December 1934, the editor, Selope Thema, his assistant RR Dhlomo and the news editor, Guybon Sinxo, stated that the Roman Empire ruthlessly suppressed 'nationalistic revolts' by the Jews. They mentioned that about two hundred thousand Jews were killed by the Romans between the year 63 BC and the time of the birth of Christ.<sup>4</sup> In order to indicate further that the Jews were oppressed, the editors mentioned that although the Jews had no vote in the administration of Roman affairs, they paid heavy taxes for which they received nothing in return. The editors were drawing an analogy between the position of the Jews under the Romans, and that of most Africans in South Africa in the 1930s. The latter also had to pay tax although they had no voting rights.

1 Davenport, South Africa, p. 267.

2 Ibid.

3 Karis and Carter, eds., From Protest to Challenge, vol. 1., p. 141.

4 Bantu World, 24 December 1932; 22 December 1934.

The editors were therefore projecting their own experiences through their portrayal of the oppression of the Jews.

The struggle of the Jews for liberation was described in words that were seemingly intended to convey the impression that their oppression was the worst in history. Their nationalism, which according to the writers was the most 'vehement that the world [had] ever seen', was 'in conflict with the greatest imperialism that has ever existed'.<sup>5</sup> To the writers, it was these circumstances of extreme oppression and struggle that made the Jews think that Jesus had come to earth to destroy the Roman Empire and establish on its ruins a Jewish Kingdom with himself as king'.<sup>6</sup> But instead, the writers stated, Jesus preached the gospel of love and urged the Jews to submit to the authority of Rome. The writers' message with this interpretation of history was that Africans should not use violence to fight against their oppression, but opt instead for reconciliation and cooperation with whites. If this was the advice Christ gave to the Jews, whom the writers described as 'his own people', then all other nations, the writers seemed to suggest, were also to do likewise. The symbolic importance of the Jews as God's chosen nation, seems to be the reason why the writers chose to refer to their history and not to that of other nations in order to strengthen their message of peace and goodwill.

The history of the triumph of the oppressed in ancient times was also recounted by Walter MB Nhlapo of Johannesburg and Josiah Mapumolo, a free-lance journalist and ex-headmaster of Impolweni school in Natal. In two articles published in successive issues of *Bantu World* in August 1935, Nhlapo referred to the 'suppression and injustice' experienced by the subjects of Rome and the latter's ultimate triumph.<sup>7</sup> He did not, however, mention any specific incidents. In the same way, Mapumolo wrote about the collapse of oppressive ancient governments such as Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome.<sup>8</sup> He argued that these governments collapsed because of defying God by pursuing oppressive policies.

References to the history based on the Bible, were a sign of the influence of mission education on the African intellectuals in the 1930s. This view is clearly demonstrated by Mapumolo's perception of oppression as being incompatible with Christian principles. The ancient governments mentioned by Mapumolo were familiar

5 *Bantu World*, 22 December 1934.

6 *Ibid.*

7 *Bantu World*, 10 August 1935; 17 August 1935.

8 *Bantu World*, 10 October 1936.



biblical names. According to Walshe, the most common form of protest against racial segregation by middle class Africans at this time 'remained a moral assertion of human dignity with its roots in the Christian ethic'.<sup>9</sup>

### 3. CLASS AND ETHNIC CONFLICT IN THE ANCIENT WORLD

The Christmas period was important to Bantu World editors because they often wrote a Christmas message to their readers. The issues of Bantu World on 24 December 1932, 22 December 1934 and 26 December 1936 each carried such a message. The writers of the messages of 1932 and 1934 were clearly indicated as Thema, RR Dhlomo and Guybon Sinxo. Although it was not stated, there is no doubt that the message of 1936 was written by these editors because they were all still with Bantu World.

All three of the Christmas messages referred to two kinds of conflict that existed at the time of the birth of Christ. The first was cultural conflict between Jew and Gentile, as well as between the Greeks and the Barbarians who were all quarreling about 'dissimilarities of their cultures and civilizations'. Secondly the writers referred to class conflict between the rich and the poor, in which the former 'trampled and exploited the latter.' In the eyes of these writers, both ethnic and class conflict in the 1930s was the result of the policy of racial discrimination which was against Christian principles. They saw a relationship between ethnic and class conflict in the 1930s because the government's racial legislation discriminated against Africans both as a race and as a class. Besides discriminatory policies against all Africans, the government had also passed laws specifically intended to discriminate against African workers in the labour field.

The writers further explained that as Christ had come to earth to save humanity from the 'bondage of sin' and from the 'thralldom of greed, selfishness and materialism', he advocated love and the removal of barriers between all these conflicting groups. Unfortunately, the writers added, Christ was rejected and his teachings ignored. This failure to follow Jesus' teachings was, according to the writers, the reason why conflicts that had existed at the time of Christ still existed in the 1930s. They stated that selfishness, unbrotherliness, inter-racial and international preju-

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9 Walshe, Rise of African Nationalism, p. 159.

dices and racial and national antagonisms, still existed, as did exploitation of the poor by the rich.

The history of class and ethnic conflict was a theme which the editors regarded as important in their Christmas messages. It was therefore a subject which they believed was appropriate during the celebration of Christmas in order to raise the readers' consciousness of Christian principles and the correct way of celebrating Christmas. It can thus be argued that the importance given to this theme was not motivated by any specific events during each of these years, but by the policy of the editors to use the celebration of Christmas to send a moral message to their readers on Christian principles.

The editors' reference to the history of conflict at the time of the birth of Christ in order to strengthen moral comment shows that Christianity was an important influence in Bantu World during the 1930s. As Walshe argues, 'important leading Africans saw Christianity as having clear social implications for all men and it remained the moral norm to which educated Africans tended automatically to appeal.'<sup>10</sup> In the message of 1932, the editors stated that 'we of the Bantu World, who stand for interracial goodwill and harmony, feel it our duty at this Yuletide to prick the conscience of our readers so that they can bring Christ into their dealings with one another.' The editors pointed out that Christmas should not only be seen as the time for 'merry making and indulgence', but a time when 'we should examine our lives, our relationship as individuals, races and nations, so that we can purge them of all that brings conflict, poverty, misery and hatred.'

It can be argued that in the South African context the writers were referring to prejudices, exploitation and racial antagonisms that often existed between blacks and whites as a result of the government's policy of racial discrimination. These writers were using the history of ethnic and class conflict in ancient times to protest against the policy of racial discrimination and separation. Such references to the history of conflict in ancient or biblical times were not made in the histories that were being produced by contemporary white writers. African writers in Bantu World seem to have invoked ancient history because of their tendency to interpret historical events along religious lines, and also because biblical references would be widely understood by their readers. They rejected the policy of racial separation mainly because it was against Christian principles. By contrast, liberal academic historians

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 197.

were opposed to this policy because it would not lead to economic and political stability and would damage interracial relations in South Africa.

#### 4. THE FALL OF AFRICAN CIVILIZATIONS THAT NEGLECTED THEIR OWN PEOPLE

Besides the theme of class and ethnic conflict in the ancient world, Bantu World writers also wrote about the history of the destruction of African 'civilizations' by the 'forces of barbarism'. The civilizations referred to were those of Zimbabwe, Timbuktu, Egypt and Memphis. These references were made in two editorials in the issues of 19 May 1934 and 5 January 1935. The use of several common expressions and words in both editorials gives the impression that these editorials were written by the same person. It can also be inferred from the use of the word 'we' that they were jointly written by all the editors or by one on behalf of the others.

The focus on this history was a reflection of the aspirations of the African intellectuals to attain a 'civilized' life which in their eyes was being enjoyed by most whites. The writers of the two editorials under discussion were concerned that the poor standard of living and widespread ignorance and illiteracy prevented Africans from attaining a western civilized life. In the editorial of 19 May 1934 the writer was worried that many Europeans '[hated] the idea of a black man raising his standard of living and rising to a higher standard of civilized life'. He appealed to white businessmen 'throughout the country that the raising of the Bantu standard of life is essential for the development of commerce and industry and that the payment of a living wage to Bantu workers does not impoverish but enriches the European community'.<sup>11</sup>

The writing of the editorial of 5 January 1935 was largely the result of the writer's concern about findings released by the Provincial Finance Committee on the financial problems facing native education. The writer reported that according to this commission, the Native Development Fund from which native education was financed, was bankrupt and that consequently native education was in a 'chaotic state'. The financing of African education by the government was still based on the Native Taxation and Development Act of 1925. In terms of this Act, the government contributed a fixed sum of three hundred and forty pounds per annum and one fifth

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11 Bantu World, 19 May 1934; 5 January 1935.

of the 'native' general tax to African education.<sup>12</sup> As a result of this system, the government spent far less money on the education of Africans than on that of other racial groups. In this editorial, the writer argued that the 'chaotic state of Native education is due largely to the fact that it ... is not financed from the same source as European, coloured and Indian Education.' He stated that it was 'absolutely necessary therefore, that the Union government should take over the control of, and abandon the present system of financing Native Education'.

In the two editorials under discussion, the editors briefly stated that African 'civilizations' 'grew' and 'flourished' but were eventually destroyed by the destructive and 'irresistible' influence of African barbarism.<sup>13</sup> In applying the word 'civilization' to ancient African societies, the editors did not mean 'westernization'. They were referring to the intellectual, architectural, artistic, political and economic accomplishments of these ancient African societies, long before the European penetration of Africa. All the names referred to by the editors were those of urban civilizations, based on manufacturing and trade, which had existed long before the industrial period. The writers perceived the civilizations as symbols of African creativity because in their eyes, Africans had created cultures that had flourished and survived over the centuries. To the writers, the civilizations were achievements that confirmed their argument that, if given the chance by whites, Africans in South Africa could contribute greatly to the development of the country. In both editorials, the writers argued that '[the] security of Western civilization in Africa, we maintain, depends upon bringing the Africans within its fold'. It can be concluded that by African barbarism, the writers referred to those societies that had not attained to the complexity described above. The fact that both 'civilized' and 'barbaric' societies existed at the same time in Africa was the reason, according to the editors, why the 'civilized' ones were destroyed. They argued that no civilization had developed and flourished permanently in the midst of the overwhelming forces of 'barbarism'.<sup>14</sup> They argued that the cause of the disintegration of ancient African civilizations was their failure to help other backward societies living in close proximity to also develop their cultures.

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12 Walshe, *Rise of African Nationalism*, p. 151.

13 *Bantu World*, 19 May 1934; 5 January 1935.

14 *Bantu World*, 5 January 1935.

For the writers in Bantu World, the message in this history was that unless white civilization in South Africa destroyed the forces of African barbarism 'by bringing Africans within its pale, it must inevitably share the fate of its predecessors'. This warning was particularly intended to influence white public opinion to support the increase of wages of African workers as well as the improvement of African education. In the editorial of 19 May 1934, the writer stated that, 'we of the Bantu World believing that the security of civilization in Africa depends upon the realization of the fact that the economic interests of white and black are interwoven, have undertaken to educate public opinion on the need for interracial goodwill'. Similarly, in the other editorial, the writer argued that, 'it is needless to emphasize the fact that in their own interests and that of their civilization, the whites will be well advised to consider seriously the question of African education'. These views were similar to those expressed by liberal academic writers who also reasoned that enabling Africans to attain the same level of civilization as whites, would benefit all racial groups in South Africa (see page 15). This similarity of views suggests that writers in Bantu World were influenced by the views of these white academic writers. This is not surprising, because the white liberals like Rheinallt Jones and Howard Pin, and certain African intellectuals, were working together in the Joint Councils and the South African Institute of Race Relations. They held similar views on the issues of urbanization and education of Africans. In spite of their common views, the histories they invoked to support these views were different. The references to ancient history were not seen in the writings of white liberal academic historians. By contrast, African writers evidently made references to this history because of their concern about oppression. They made no reference at all to democracy or harmony between races or people of different classes in ancient times. They only wrote about events during this period which would encourage African resistance to what they perceived as repressive segregationist policies of the South African government.

## 5. REFERENCES TO PRE-COLONIAL HISTORY

This section concentrates on the references of African writers in Bantu World to the pre-colonial period as the time in the history of Africans when existence was happy, prosperous and innocent. The political systems, culture, moral standards and life in general of pre-colonial African societies were described in romantic terms which suggested that African writers in Bantu World regarded the pre-colonial period as

the golden age of African history. The portrayal of this kind of image of pre-colonial Africa was largely the result of the pre-occupation of African intellectuals in the 1920s and 1930s with cultural identity, and more specifically, as mentioned in chapter 1, of a movement to promote their own consciousness about African heritage and identity.

The democratic nature of African society in pre-colonial African times was an important historical theme in Bantu World. The importance given to this theme was in large measure a result of the opposition of African intellectuals to the passage of the Native Administration Act in 1927 (see page 5). This Act made the Governor-General Supreme Chief over all Africans, with authority to appoint native commissioners, chiefs and headmen, define boundaries of chiefdoms, alter their composition and move chiefdoms and individuals at will 'from any place to any other place within the Union upon such conditions as he may determine'.<sup>15</sup> The Governor-General was also given extensive powers over matters relating to landownership, possession of weapons, wearing of clothes and carrying of passes.<sup>16</sup>

The main goal of this legislation, as mentioned in chapter 1, was retribalization of Africans in order to have uniform control over them through their 'tribal' chiefs.<sup>17</sup> The NAD, which under the new Act could act in the name of the Governor General, refurbished the tribal system as a way to run African affairs.<sup>18</sup> The aim of the government was to elevate chiefs as a group and then co-opt them as agents of the state to administer and control Africans in their areas.<sup>19</sup> The Act was condemned by members of the educated African elite as well as by the tribal leaders. In 1928, a convention of chiefs held in Bloemfontein under the auspices of the African National Congress passed a statement that, 'If it is the policy of the Government that the Bantu people should be governed by means of their law and custom, we feel it our duty, as guardians of our people, to point out that this should be in accordance with Native Law and not with the wishes of the white race.'<sup>20</sup>

The same sentiments were expressed in three editorials of Bantu World, as well as in an article written by the editor, Seloape Thema. These writings challenged the argument by the government that the Native Administration Act was derived from

15 Davenport, South Africa, pp. 266-267.

16 Ibid.

17 Lacey, Working for Boroko, pp. 84-107.

18 Ibid., pp. 97-98.

19 Ibid., p. 107.

20 Ibid., p. 100.

Bantu law and custom. In the editorial of 23 April 1932, the editor stated that African rulers 'never possessed "autocratic" powers like those given to the Governor General under the Native Administration Act'. They asserted that pre-colonial African societies were ruled by democratic, accountable rulers. An African chief, they explained, was not a despot, because he ruled with the aid and advice of a council, which gave people a chance to control matters concerning their welfare, and also to check any arbitrary tendencies on the part of the ruler.<sup>21</sup> This interpretation of history was intended to oppose an autocratic government measure which the writers in *Bantu World* believed was based on a misunderstanding of pre-colonial African society. The writers were presenting a version of the past that better corresponded with their own aspirations for political rights for Africans.

The editors were also opposed to the policy of retribalization because it would lead to a reversal of the assimilationist trend of gradually accepting educated Africans into western industrialized society. Under the Native Administration Act the granting of pass exemptions to educated Africans was made an 'arbitrary' matter lying in the good grace of NAD officials. These exemptions allowed formally educated Africans and those with the vote to go about their lives without carrying passes.<sup>22</sup> The state had also found after passing the Act that the 'politicized educated African was the real threat to its system of exploiting cultural differences and ethnicity to rationalize and legitimize racial and class domination'.<sup>23</sup> In the Chiefs' Convention in Bloemfontein in 1928, the Native Administration Act had been criticized because the 'civilized and the uncivilized natives, the professional man and the ordinary living in his primitive state, are subject to the autocratic rule of Governor General'.<sup>24</sup>

The relevance to *Bantu World's* editors of the history of democratic practices in pre-colonial African societies was also the result of Hertzog's policy to weaken the Cape African vote. The methods used by Hertzog to realise this goal were to increase white votes and to make it difficult for Africans to qualify for the vote.<sup>25</sup> His first step was to give universal suffrage to whites by passing the Women's Enfranchisement Act 18 of 1930 which extended franchise rights to all European

21 *Bantu World*, 23 April 1933; 20 January 1934; 25 April 1936.

22 Ibid.

23 Lacey, *Working for Boroko*, p. 117.

24 Ibid., p. 100.

25 Ibid., p. 74.

women of 21 years. This was followed in 1931 by the Franchise Laws Amendment Act 41 which extended adult male suffrage to indigent white men in the Cape.<sup>26</sup> As a result of those Acts, the Cape African vote was reduced from a proportion of seven and a half per cent of the white vote in 1929 to little more than three per cent in 1933.<sup>27</sup>

This increased voting strength of whites was condemned by Reverend ZR Mahabane in an article entitled 'Political Segregation deprives the African of the benefit of Democracy', which appeared in Bantu World of 26 May 1934. Mahabane had been the President of the Cape Congress since 1919, and was also the Vice-President of the Cape Native Voters Convention.<sup>28</sup> He specifically attributed the increased voting strength of whites to the two Acts discussed above. In order to strengthen his protest against the policy of abolishing the African vote, he emphasized the point that in pre-colonial African societies all people were represented in the process of government. He argued that African kings or chiefs were assisted by councillors drawn from the subordinate chiefs, indunas or headmen of villages 'as representatives of the various family units or clans comprising the tribe.'<sup>29</sup> Mahabane added that a National Council or Pitso consisted of the Supreme Chief, subordinate chiefs, headmen and all adult male members of the tribe.<sup>30</sup>

Writers in Bantu World also focussed on pre-colonial African cultural forms such as 'spirit worship', burial ceremony and lobolo. These cultural practices were referred to because they were still a subject of debate among African intellectuals. The debate over lobolo in particular - its merits and demerits - was an ongoing one which occupied many columns in the newspapers.<sup>31</sup> The interest of Bantu World writers in these cultural forms can be attributed to a movement among African intellectuals in the 1930s to develop a new 'progressive' African culture. The formal cultural associations founded by African intellectuals in the 1920s and 1930s had a declared aim of combining the 'best features' of African and European civilizations in order to develop this new culture. The 'Order of Africa', launched in the 1930s by Mveli Skota, at the time General Secretary of the ANC, pledged itself not only to combine these good features, but also to combat 'bad features' such as witchcraft, '...

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid.

28 Karis and Carter, eds., From Protest to Challenge, vol. 4, p. 65.

29 Bantu World, 26 May 1934.

30 Ibid.

31 Couzens, The New African, p. 60.



so that a reborn African culture would become the guiding star of the African race.<sup>32</sup> The development of a new African culture was also one of the aims of the African Eisteddfod held annually from 1931 at the BMSC under the auspices of the South African Board of Music. Shortly before the second Eisteddfod was held in December 1932, AB Xuma, who had chaired the original organizing committee, explained that the African Eisteddfod was intended '[to] preserve and develop the individuality of African Native Music and concurrently to encourage the finer refinements of European music'.<sup>33</sup>

The desire to praise the orderliness and discipline of pre-colonial African life prompted Rolfes Dhlomo, the assistant editor of Bantu World, to focus on the history of the burial ceremony of pre-colonial Africans. The burial ceremony was an important subject in this newspaper because a decent and well organized funeral was a matter of great concern in the 1930s among the educated elite, the main readers of this newspaper. In the townships during this period 'the most popular institution for investing savings were burial societies which held out the psychologically and socially important prospect of a decent burial to their members.'<sup>34</sup> By 1937 the South African Burial Society, operating in the western areas of Johannesburg, was reported to have a paid-up membership of 14 000.<sup>35</sup>

In his article in Bantu World of 5 November 1932, Rolfes Dhlomo narrated a story of an old man from Nongoma who had told him that burial ceremonies in pre-colonial times were very 'elaborate' and 'fantastic'.<sup>36</sup> This old man had told Dhlomo that when a person died, great preparations for the funeral were made. From this story, Dhlomo wrote details about the great support given to the bereaved family, the burial itself and events after it. Although he did not say so in his article, it can be concluded that he was rallying support for burial societies. In the 1930s the African petty bourgeoisie showed increasing interest in cooperative societies such as burial societies. This aspect will be discussed in detail later in this section.

The attention given by Bantu World writers to the history of lobolo was also the result of the continuing debate over this subject. Many christianized Africans were for stamping out this custom, arguing that women were being sold for cattle.<sup>37</sup> On

32 Cobley, Class and Consciousness, p. 85.

33 Ibid.

34 Ibid., p. 169.

35 Ibid.

36 Bantu World, 5 November 1932.

37 Couzens, The New African, p. 60.

the other hand, the defenders of lobolo, among whom were some 'progressive' Christians, argued that the exchange of cattle was not a sale or anything demeaning but rather security for the woman, and in addition was one of the fundamental pillars of traditional economy and society.<sup>38</sup>

In Bantu World, two writers who referred to the history of lobolo in order to justify its preservation were IB Gqwabaza and 'Joe'. Their respective letters in the issue of 30 March 1935 were a response to an article in the issue of 2 March 1935 in which the writer, a Mr CP Molefe, advocated the abolition of this custom. In reply, Gqwabaza, who lived in Kokstad, wrote that the lobolo custom 'had no disadvantages with our ancestors.' He declared that 'we are not ready to drop this unheathen custom, but we want to polish it instead'. 'Joe' argued that 'to say that lobolo is an evil ... is a direct insult to our forefathers who carefully and painfully observed this custom'. Like Gqwabaza, Joe also argued that lobolo should be 'purified', not abolished.

Another aspect of pre-colonial African history which writers in Bantu World wrote about, was the custom of sharing things and caring for one another. This was the theme of three editorials as well as a separate article by Selope Thema. The editors focussed on the history of communal assistance because they were concerned about the disappearance of this practice in the urban areas. They condemned the 'selfishness' and 'self-centredness' of the contemporary generation of Africans, and their failure to perpetuate good features of pre-colonial African life such as honesty and hospitality.<sup>39</sup> They asserted that in pre-colonial African societies the poor and the needy were never allowed to die of starvation because 'the law of kinship bound tribes together and compelled people to look after one another and share whatever they possessed.'<sup>40</sup> The responsibility of looking after the children and teaching them tribal laws and traditions belonged to all adults in the community.<sup>41</sup> The subject of communal assistance was also important because in the 1930s, African intellectuals strongly believed that a 'progressive' member of the community, one who qualified as a 'new African', was one who took a keen interest in the welfare of his own people.<sup>42</sup>

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38 Ibid.

39 Bantu World, 6 August 1932.

40 Bantu World, 6 August 1932; 13 September 1934; 3 August 1935.

41 Bantu World, 6 August 1932; 3 August 1935.

42 Couzens, The New African, p. 7.

The importance given to this history was the result of the widespread conditions of poverty amongst Africans of all classes in the 1930s. As Cobley says, 'in strictly economic terms, almost the entire black population of South Africa was poor and the only differentiation was between levels of poverty.' This poverty could be attributed to various factors. Drought and the economic depression in the early 1930s resulted in the migration of thousands of Africans to the Rand, where they struggled to get employment because of the shortage of jobs and the policy of discriminating against African workers. Unemployment had become very bad by the middle of 1933, and the authorities admitted that at least 5000 'natives' were unemployed on the Rand.<sup>43</sup> The low wages received by African workers were also responsible for their low standard of living. As the Native Economic Commission reported, the wages of most Africans had fallen sharply since 1931, owing to the economic depression.<sup>44</sup> The evidence presented to this commission also revealed that average wage rates for Africans had remained virtually unchanged since before the First World War.

The conditions of poverty amongst Africans were exacerbated by the failure of the government to provide adequate welfare services. During the economic depression, the government introduced new welfare schemes for poor whites, but not for Africans and other 'non-whites'.<sup>45</sup> Furthermore, despite the rapid recovery of industry after 1933, Africans did not have their tax burden lightened and, although increasingly urbanized, permanent city-dwellers were not offered welfare services comparable to those for urban whites.<sup>46</sup>

In response to worsening economic conditions in the 1930s, Africans of all classes sought to develop their own forms of economic cooperation. These included a number of quasi-cultural, ethnic and fraternal associations complete with executive officers and constitutions.<sup>47</sup> Besides the burial societies discussed earlier, other kinds of mutual support organizations were the 'stockvel' the 'mahodisana' and the 'umgolelo'. All these societies were forms of social gathering primarily concerned with mutual aid and in accumulating money.<sup>48</sup> They offered tangible and immediate

43 E. Roux, Time Longer than Rope (London, Madison, 1964; first published London, 1948), p. 270.

44 Cobley, Class and Consciousness, p. 36.

45 Karis and Carter, eds., From Protest to Challenge, vol. 1, p. 148.

46 Walshe, African Nationalism, p. 153.

47 Cobley, Class and Consciousness, p. 169.

48 Ibid.

benefits to their members in terms of community solidarity and support.<sup>49</sup> In view of the importance of co-operative societies to the educated African elite, it can be concluded that the editors in Bantu World invoked the history of communal assistance to encourage the readers to join these societies in order to fight against poverty, and presumably to warn against the further erosion of 'traditional' sharing practices.

As indicated earlier, Bantu World writers also referred to the history of pre-colonial African kings such as Shaka and Moshoeshoe. This history was considered in articles in the issues of 23 April 1932, 23 July 1932 and 3 March 1934. There were several reasons that influenced writers of these articles to focus on this history. One of these reasons was the decline of African political organizations and quarrels between their leaders. In his front-page article entitled 'Wanted - A leader like Moshesh', in the Bantu World of 23 July 1932, Seme expressed concern that the ANC and the ICU were 'practically non-existent, and the people [were] like a flock of sheep without a shepherd'. He stated that 'when things are in this state of chaos, it is absolutely essential to ask the great men of the past to point the way of salvation'. Thema was concerned because by 1930 the ICU had virtually collapsed because of internal squabbles. Similarly, during the first five years of the 1930s, the ANC was characterized by internal divisions and rivalry at both national and provincial levels. These divisions will be discussed in detail in chapter 4.

The focus on this history could also be attributed to the opposition of African intellectuals to the government's policy of retribalizing Africans through the use of chiefs. As explained earlier, this policy had begun with the implementation of the 1927 Native Administration Act (see page 5). The chiefs in the 1930s were under pressure from the ANC and African intellectuals to refuse to be co-opted by the government. Under the Native Administration Act, chiefs were tempted into the role of coercing men into jobs to earn money for their taxes, because a chief's salary from the government was calculated on how many taxpayers he had in his district.<sup>50</sup> This system ensured that chiefs collected all the taxes on behalf of the government. Through it, the government hoped to ensure the success of the migrant labour system and effective control of Africans. The writers in Bantu World invoked the history that praised the role of pre-colonial chiefs in order to mobilize chiefs into not supporting a policy which, they argued, would not be in the interests of Africans.

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49 Ibid., p. 170.

50 Lacey, Working for Boroko, p. 108.

Both Shaka and Moshoeshoe were portrayed as 'great leaders' because they had successfully built the Zulu and the Basotho nations. In an editorial of 23 April 1932 entitled, 'Chaka builds a strong nation of warriors ...', the writer praised Shaka's success in building a 'powerful Zulu Nation' despite his cruelty and tyrannical rule. The writer placed more emphasis on Shaka's success in firmly establishing the Zulu nation than on the suffering caused by his cruelty. He argued that the atrocities and wars that had been ordered by Shaka were aimed at realizing his ambition of building a nation. Shaka's goal, this writer stated, was 'not only to conquer but also to bring all the tribes within the comity of an empire which he was establishing'. This portrayal of Shaka shows how his outstanding leadership qualities were balanced against references to his cruelty. This was a different view of Shaka from that of white writers who largely concentrated on Shaka's cruelty. This different portrayal of Shaka demonstrates what Cobley says was the 'rehabilitation of Shaka's reputation as a mighty Zulu General.'<sup>51</sup> According to Cobley, the reconstruction of Shaka's reputation was an aspect of the efforts of the African petty bourgeoisie in Natal in the 1930s to revive Zulu national consciousness. These efforts culminated in the raising by public subscription of a monument to Shaka at Stanger in 1932. Although these events occurred in Natal, they also affected Zulu speakers outside Natal, like Dhlomo, who had lived in Natal before moving to the Rand.

The history of Moshoeshoe, king of the Basotho, was treated in front-page articles in *Bantu World's* issues of 23 July 1932 and 3 March 1934. As mentioned earlier, the writer of the article of 23 July 1932 was Selope Thema. In the second article, the writer, an unnamed correspondent, was commenting on preparations by the Basotho workers on the Rand for the celebration of the birthday of Moshoeshoe later that month. These writers stated that Moshoeshoe's diplomacy and statesmanship had enabled him to 'build' and 'preserve' the Basotho nation. They explained that the Basotho were seldom attacked by other tribes because Moshoeshoe had dealt with the leaders of these tribes with tact. Selope Thema concluded that the leadership qualities of Moshoeshoe, such as vision, diplomacy and tact, were needed by African leaders in the 1930s in the 'building of the Bantu nation'. He asserted that he referred to the 'fine qualities of leadership' exemplified by Moshoeshoe in order to offer 'an incentive and inducement for present-day Bantu leaders to follow the example of the greatest statesman of tribal days.

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<sup>51</sup> Cobley, *Class and Consciousness*, p. 83.

The pre-colonial history produced by African writers in Bantu World referred to features which they believed had been part of pre-colonial African life, and which in their eyes, had disappeared under white rule. The democratic African political system had been replaced by white rule, which writers viewed as oppressive and in which Africans were not represented. The orderly and disciplined life of pre-colonial African societies had been destroyed by urbanization and westernization of Africans. The African kings, chiefs and political leaders lacked the leadership qualities of their pre-colonial predecessors. Features of the pre-colonial period, such as incidents of oppression or conflict, which the writers regarded as undesirable, were hardly mentioned. The aim was evidently to emphasize the point that democracy was an inherent and traditional characteristic of African communities. The writers were clearly advancing the argument that Africans would not abuse their democratic rights and privileges if racial segregation was abandoned. The writers therefore only referred to the features of pre-colonial life which would represent their desires about their present life. It can be concluded that the portrayal of pre-colonial history in Bantu World had less to do with the realities of the pre-colonial period than with the image and reality of the 1930s as projected by the writers.

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## **CHAPTER 3**

# **The portrayal of the establishment and consolidation of white rule in South Africa**

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### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Writers in Bantu World produced numerous accounts of how European rule in South Africa was established and consolidated. They wrote on this subject because their aim was to challenge segregationist and often oppressive policies against Africans, which were intended to help consolidate white rule over them. The themes to which they devoted most attention were dispossession and inadequate allocation of land to Africans, racially discriminatory and repressive legislation, harassment, indignities and injustices suffered by Africans, the role of the missionaries during the establishment of white rule, urbanization of Africans and their economic integration with Europeans, and interracial relations between whites and blacks. This chapter has been divided into five sections, each of which focuses on one of the themes listed above. The period covered includes both the period of colonial rule before 1910 and that of rule by the Union government after 1910.

### **2. DISPOSSESSION AND INADEQUATE ALLOCATION OF LAND**

The subject of the dispossession of Africans, and inadequate allocation of land to them, was raised in articles that appeared in Bantu World on 13 August 1932, 18 February 1933, 13 January 1934, 27 January 1934 and 18 May 1935. In these contributions the writers focused particularly on the history of the implementation of the Land Act of 1913 in order to demonstrate that this Act was not intended to benefit Africans. Three of the articles that referred to the implementation of the Land Act of 1913 were editorials which were presumably written either by Selope Thema or his assistant, RR Dhlomo. The other was a front page article, the writer of which was not named.

The writers in Bantu World referred to the history of the Land Act of 1913 to demonstrate that this legislation was primarily intended to prevent Africans from owning more land. The writers were concerned about the shortage of land for occupation by Africans, both in the 'native reserves' and the urban areas. The 'native reserves' were areas scheduled for African ownership under the Natives Land Act of 1913 as amended by Acts 28 of 1925, 34 of 1927, 36 of 1931 and 27 of 1935.<sup>1</sup> The failure of the government to create additional reserves as it had promised to do when the Land Act was passed in 1913, was highlighted by the writers. Under this Act, they stated, new reserves were to be developed in addition to the existing ones in order to enable 'Bantu people' to develop their own life.<sup>2</sup> This promise, the writers explained, remained unfulfilled because European farmers and landowners refused to part with land that had been identified for African occupation by the Beaumont Commission. This commission was appointed in August 1913 to investigate further grants of land to Blacks, and its report was released in March 1917.<sup>3</sup> The writers in Bantu World explained that European landowners complained that 'too much land was given to Natives and that as a result Natives would not come out to work for Europeans.' In the eyes of the writers, the refusal of European farmers to release land for African occupation indicated that 'what Europeans wanted was not a land policy that would enable Africans to 'develop along their own lines', but one which would expose them to exploitation by the 'employers of labour, particularly the farming community.'<sup>4</sup>

As the writers in Bantu World were concerned about overcrowding in the reserves in the 1930s, they criticized the failure of the government to establish additional reserves. They were also worried about the low agricultural production of the reserves due to the use of poor farming methods. In a front-page article published in Bantu World on 13 August 1932, the writer, who was seemingly one of the members of the editorial staff, accused the government of having failed to give the Africans proper assistance in agricultural development. In this article, the writer referred to the report of the Native Economic Commission, which recommended that the provisioning of more land to Africans should be coupled with education in agricul-

1 Lacey, Working for Boroko, pp. 383-384.

2 Bantu World, 18 February 1933; 18 May 1935.

3 B.J. Liebenberg, 'The Union of South Africa up to the Statute of Westminster', in Five Hundred Years: A History of South Africa, ed., C.F.J. Muller (Pretoria, Academica, 1969), p. 383.

4 Bantu World, 18 May 1935.



tural methods. This report was the source of the most influential comment in the 1930s on the grave state of the reserves.<sup>5</sup> It drew attention to the problems in the reserves such as soil erosion, overstocking and the impending ecological collapse.<sup>6</sup>

The focus on the history of the failure of the government to increase land in the reserves, as well as to give Africans agricultural education, was an expression of the aspirations of African landowners in rural areas to be successful farmers with enough land and knowledge for farming. African landowners, especially in the eastern Cape, were worried that the revival of the power of the chiefs under the Native Administration Act of 1927 threatened their freehold rights. They feared losing the right to own land as individuals'.<sup>7</sup> To them, individual titles symbolized freedom from tribal rule and the start of independent peasant farming communities.<sup>8</sup> The granting of individual tenure had enabled many to qualify for the vote.

Besides commenting on the failure of the Land Act to grant additional land to the reserves, the writers in *Bantu World* also recounted how the implementation of this Act 'brought about disintegration of Bantu life in the rural areas'. In the editorials of 18 February 1933 and 27 January 1934, the writers explained that the implementation of this Act made conditions of labour on the farms 'difficult, if not impossible for Africans to remain on the farms as labourers'. Although the writers did not give details of these difficult conditions on the farms, they were probably referring to the abolition of squatting and movement of Africans from farm to farm, which Plaatje had described in detail in his book, *Native Life in South Africa* (see page 12). Owing to the unsuitable conditions of labour on the farms, the writers explained, Africans emigrated to the urban areas where the Act did not operate, whilst others 'flocked to the already over-crowded reserves'. Consequently, the writers added, many of these families became 'landless and homeless'. It is important to point out that the writers described the suffering caused by the land Act in similar terms to those used by Plaatje in his book, *Native Life in South Africa*. It is possible that this book was one of the sources of their knowledge of the history of the Natives Land Act of 1913.

The writers referred to the history of migration of Africans to urban areas to demonstrate to the government that Africans could not be blamed for settling in the

5 Dubow, *Racial Segregation*, p. 68.

6 Ibid.

7 Lacey, *Working for Boroko*, p. 113.

8 Ibid.

towns because they had been forced by circumstances beyond their control, which were the result of government legislation. In the editorial of 27 January 1934, the writer argued that the 'movement of Africans to the towns [was] controlled by the conditions created by western civilization and not by their desire to live among Europeans'. He was concerned about the call for control of the influx of Africans into urban areas which Dr Milne, the Medical Officer of Health for the city of Johannesburg, had made in his annual report.

It was important to the writers in Bantu World to explain how the shortage of land in the rural areas had driven Africans to towns. These writers were concerned about the shortage of land for the housing of African families in the urban areas, as well as restrictions preventing Africans from buying land there. The editorial of 18 February 1933 stated that the Natives Land Act of 1913 had failed to solve 'our racial difficulties' as the government had expected, but instead, 'created urban problems of far reaching effect'. In the urban areas in the 1930s, the number of Africans owning property constituted a small fraction of the total urban African population and only a slightly larger proportion of those defined as permanently urbanized.<sup>9</sup> In the municipally controlled locations in the Transvaal and the Free State there were no freehold rights for Africans.<sup>10</sup> Africans in the Transvaal could, however, acquire property rights in the peri-urban or 'native' townships such as Sophiatown, Martindale and Newclare situated in the western areas of Johannesburg as well as Evaton, north-east of Vereeniging. By 1935, Africans in the western townships held titles to only 538 properties with an average value of 123 pounds each out of 2036 stands in Sophiatown and Martindale.<sup>11</sup> This shows that the number of African landowners in these areas was very small.

The poor living conditions in townships where Africans had freehold rights meant that the African landowning class also faced many frustrations because of the shortage of land. As these townships were not under municipal control but privately owned, they had no administrative body with the responsibility to provide services or amenities.<sup>12</sup> Population pressure further contributed to the poor living conditions in the freehold townships. As property owners sought to maximise the value of their

9 Cobley, Class and Consciousness, p. 34.

10 *Ibid.*, p. 31.

11 *Ibid.*

12 *Ibid.*

holdings, they let out as many rooms as they could cram onto their property.<sup>13</sup> It was in response to the development of such slum conditions that the front-page story in Bantu World of 13 August 1932 was written. The writer of this article stated that in order to improve the living conditions of more than 50 percent of the 'Bantu' population which was outside the reserves and on European owned farms, sufficient land had to be provided.

Bantu World writers devoted much attention to the history of dispossession of land because, from 1932, the question of the granting of additional land to Africans became of central political significance. When the Joint Select Committee on the Hertzog Native Bills reconvened in February 1932, the chairman laid before it the new Native Trust and Land Bill.<sup>14</sup> This bill, together with the Representation Bill, was eventually presented to Parliament in April 1935. The passing of the Native Service Contract Act in the same year also added to the importance of the land question to African writers. In accordance with the provisions of this Act, Pirow, the Minister of Justice, confirmed that since the government had no intention of resettling evicted tenants in the reserves, there was no longer any need to release the land promised in 1913 under the Natives Land Act.<sup>15</sup>

The history of the implementation of the Natives Land Act of 1913, as portrayed by Bantu World writers, represented to a very large extent, the reality of the experiences of Africans under this Act. It was more than a portrayal of the past as desired by the writers. This was a recent history the events of which could have been witnessed by the writers. The availability of books written by both black and white writers on this subject meant that the writers were well informed about this history. The history represented was also a reflection of the real experiences of writers in the 1930s. The additional land for Africans promised under the Land Act of 1913 had still not been granted. The shortage of land in the reserves and the inability of most Africans to buy land in the urban areas were still some of the main causes of social and economic difficulties experienced by Africans in these areas. With the passage of the Native Service Contract Act in 1932, the conditions of Africans on the farms, which, according to the writers, had been made difficult by the Natives Land Act of 1913, became worse. The shortage of land affected Africans of all classes. The his-

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13 Ibid., p. 32.

14 Ibid., p. 289.

15 Ibid., p. 282.

tory portrayed by Bantu World writers on this subject was thus not only a reflection of the experiences of the African petty bourgeoisie, but of all Africans.

### 3. RACIALLY DISCRIMINATORY AND REPRESSIVE LEGISLATION

According to the accounts by African writers in Bantu World, the consolidation of European rule in South Africa was achieved largely through the implementation of racially discriminatory and often repressive legislation. Their focus was largely on the history of the pass laws. Two articles in the issues of 4 June and 11 June 1932, referred exclusively to this history. The first one was a front-page article written by an unnamed correspondent of Bantu World under the heading 'Pass Laws creating criminals'. The second was an editorial entitled 'The Pass Laws'. The focus of both articles on the subject of the pass laws was provoked by the comments made on this subject by the Native Economic Commission in its 1932 report. The writers were shocked by the statistics of crime for the year 1930 which had been given in the report. According to this report, the writers stated, 42 000 Natives in the Union were convicted for contravention of the [Pass Laws], and 39 000 of these belonged to the Transvaal, while 16 000 of this latter number were convicted on the Rand.<sup>16</sup> To the writers, these figures confirmed the observation made by the commission that the pass laws had lost their 'deterrent effect' and that 'an undesirable effect of their enforcement is the creation of a large volume of technically criminal offences which involve little or no moral opprobrium'. They supported the commission's assertion that a large number of Africans at an early age were unnecessarily arrested for pass laws offences, and that the state incurred heavy expenses in enforcing these laws.

In order to lend credibility to the comments made by the commission, as well as to reinforce their own argument that pass laws should be abolished, the writers portrayed a history that would prove to the readers that the conditions under which the pass laws were introduced had changed. They stated that pass laws were originally introduced in the early days of the Cape Colony to prevent thefts and raids by Africans. In the editorial of 11 June 1932, the writer explained that the Cape Colonial government had believed that the pass laws were necessary in those days because 'there was no peace between white and black'. This writer argued that pass laws were no longer necessary as Africans 'are no longer the wild men' they were a

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<sup>16</sup> Bantu World, 4 June 1932; 11 June 1932.

century ago 'because they have made appreciable progress in civilization and, furthermore, they are no longer hostile to Europeans as when the pass laws were introduced'. The writers' reference to the conditions which, according to them, had precipitated the introduction of the pass laws, does not mean that they believed that the introduction of these laws had been justified. They were only highlighting conditions which they knew white people believed had justified the implementation of these laws.

The writer of the front-page article of 4 June 1932 further mentioned that with the development of the mining and farming industries, the pass laws were used as a means of controlling native labour. He explained that since then there had been a strong belief in the Transvaal and the Free State, the former Afrikaner republics, that without the pass laws, native labour could not be controlled and regulated. This situation, the writer of the editorial of 11 June 1932 asserted, had changed because the Africans were no longer the 'lazy people they were when they were developing along their own lines'. He added that Africans had learned the dignity of labour, so much so that Europeans regarded them as a threat.

It is not surprising that the history of the pass laws became a subject of interest to writers in Bantu World. They were responding to legislative changes made from the late 1920s onward which imposed more restrictions on the movement of all African work seekers. Under section 28(1) of the Native Administration Amendment Act of 1929, the Governor-General could by proclamation declare pass areas where Africans had to carry passes, and also make rules to control the movement of Africans into and from these proclaimed areas.<sup>17</sup> In 1930, African women were also made subject to pass control through the Native Urban Areas Amendment Act, which authorized local authorities to prohibit any African women from entering municipal areas without a certificate from the urban local authority. This Act also tightened controls for the registration of service contracts and passes, and for the first time the onus fell on the employer to check that the work seeker was legally in town.<sup>18</sup> In 1932 the Native Service Contract Act was passed in order to prevent the desertion of black farm labourers to the urban centres (see page 6).

It was because of these increased restrictions on the lives of Africans that the implementation of the pass laws became an important subject in Bantu World. In

<sup>17</sup> Lacey, Working for Boroko, p. 203.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 268.

the eyes of Bantu World writers, the introduction of the pass laws was not intended to benefit Africans but to put more restrictions on them. These laws were portrayed as part and parcel of repressive legislation aimed against Africans in order to consolidate European domination over them. The history of the pass laws was being used to appeal for their abolition.

It was not only the history of the pass laws that was considered by Bantu World writers, but also that of other discriminatory laws. One writer using the pseudonym Africanus, referred to the history of discriminatory legislation '[from] the early days of the first meeting between whites and blacks', in an article entitled, 'Trend of Native Legislation', in Bantu World of 18 June 1932. This was a very substantial article, the writing of which was provoked by the passing of the Native Service Contract Act in 1932. This Act, which was described by Africanus as 'a fit climax to native legislation', prompted him to conclude that 'native legislation in South Africa appears to have one end - the repression of the Bantu and keeping them in perpetual bondage'.<sup>19</sup> He further added that 'there could be no worse legislation than this which has been passed on the Bantu for the last quarter of a century'.<sup>20</sup> Africanus' extreme resentment of this Act was part of a fierce opposition it had aroused among African intellectuals. A clause permitting magistrates to sentence those who broke labour contracts was rejected by Africans as the 'most obnoxious feature, a return to the days of slavery and a national insult'.<sup>21</sup>

In this article, Africanus traced the history of 'native' legislation in the four future provinces of South Africa before the establishment of Union in 1910. He stated that the Cape policy had made it easy for Africans with certain qualifications to obtain the franchise. In Natal, Africans who were 'christianized, educated and civilized' were exempted from Native law and custom and placed on the 'road to progress'. By contrast, Africanus indicated, the Transvaal and the Orange Free State had prohibited equality between blacks and whites and had made no provision for the 'progress' of the 'Bantu'.<sup>22</sup> It should be noted that Africanus, perhaps deliberately or out of ignorance, stated that Africans in Natal had had the franchise when this was not in fact the case. He possibly said this because he wanted to distinguish the former Boer

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<sup>19</sup> Bantu World, 18 June 1932.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Walshe, The Rise of African Nationalism, p. 141.

<sup>22</sup> Bantu World, 18 June 1932.

Republics on one hand and the British colonies on the other in order to blame the former for the origins of segregation.

The rest of Africamus' article focussed on the history of discriminatory legislation since 1910. He explained what in his view were the objectives and aims of such laws as the Native Land Act, the Urban Areas Act, the Masters and Servants Act and the pass laws. His decision to mention these laws shows that he was particularly concerned about restrictions on Africans as regards buying of land and settlement in urban areas, as well as employment opportunities. His message was that of hope to the Africans that this policy of repression would eventually fail.

Bantu World writers described the legislation passed for Africans in the history of European rule as repressive. This was in fact a true portrayal of European rule in South Africa. In order to consolidate European domination over Africans, white governments before and after 1910, had passed oppressive laws. The portrayal of the history of European rule as oppressive, was further a protest by the writers against the intensification of segregationist laws in the 1930s.

#### **4. THE ROLE OF THE MISSIONARIES**

The role of the missionaries and the church during the establishment and consolidation of European rule in South Africa was described positively by Bantu World writers such as Reverend Calata, Selope Thema and unnamed special correspondents of this newspaper. The various missionaries were praised for their role in matters such as education for Africans, assistance to King Moshoeshoe of the Basotho, and anti-slavery campaigns in Africa. The above-mentioned writers adopted this positive attitude towards the historical role of missionaries for several reasons.

The first reason was the writers' concern about the growth of negative attitudes amongst Africans towards the European mission churches. The writers were appealing to Africans to be loyal to mission churches because secession from these churches often led to more fragmentation of the church. In the 1930s, fragmentation of independent African churches which had emerged as a result of secession from mission churches continued at a bewildering pace. A good example of this fragmentation was that which had occurred within the African Methodist Church. The crisis within this church resulted in the formation of two competing churches, the Bantu Methodist Church, which was established early in 1933 and the Bantu Methodist

Church of South Africa, established in October of the same year.<sup>23</sup> A year after the founding of the Bantu Methodist Church, some of its members under the leadership of Gardiner Mvuyana seceded and formed the African Congregational Church.

The history of the role of the missionaries was also relevant to Bantu World writers because of the controversy in the 1930s about the idea of a national church. In the early 1930s the idea of a national church was invoked repeatedly by Pixley Seme after his election as President-General of the ANC in 1930, apparently as part of his efforts to reunify Congress.<sup>24</sup> At the ANC conference in December 1931, an appeal was launched for independent black churches to unite under the aegis of Congress.<sup>25</sup> This initiative failed because it was rejected by black church and secular leaders alike 'who saw it both as a gross over-extension of Congress responsibilities and a further evidence of Seme's quixotic approach to leadership'.<sup>26</sup>

The history of the contribution of the missionaries towards black education was recounted in articles published in Bantu World on 11 June 1932, 4 February 1933 and 19 May 1934. Two of these accounts were written by unnamed special correspondents. The third was the contribution of Bennet B Mdledle of Lovedale. These writers praised the missionaries for their pioneering work in, and total responsibility for, black education. They stated that besides being responsible for the provision of school buildings, equipment and administrative expenses, missionaries also supervised schools and guided African teachers.<sup>27</sup> These writers gave few details about the missionaries and their historical role. They did not specify which missionaries they were referring to or when and where they operated. It seems that their main objective was to strengthen their argument that the government was still not accepting its responsibility towards black education. The history of the contribution of the missionaries to black education was important to the above-mentioned writers because in the 1930s 'Bantu' education was still almost entirely under missionary control.<sup>28</sup> This was the situation that had existed since the period when schools were first established for Africans in the middle of the 19th century. By 1936 Natal was still the only province where the state had started its own schools along-

23 B.G. Sundkler, Bantu Prophets in South Africa (London, Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 47.

24 Cobley, Class and Consciousness, p. 107.

25 Ibid.

26 Ibid.

27 Bantu World, 11 June 1932; 4 February 1934.

28 K.G. Grubb, compiler, The Christian Handbook of South Africa (Lovedale Press, 1938), p. 89.



side the missionary institutions.<sup>29</sup> In the Cape there was only one 'native' school which was a state-aided school under a school board. In the Free State, the establishment of black schools was a joint undertaking between various missionary societies.<sup>30</sup>

Bantu World writers could also have been stimulated into referring to this history by the increasing attention of the ANC in the 1930s to the issues of taxation and the role of the state in education. The ANC's demand was for 'per capita financing out of general revenue, the acceptance of full responsibility by the state as opposed to the voluntary efforts of the missions and the transfer of administrative control from the provinces to the Union's Department of Education'.<sup>31</sup> The views expressed by writers in Bantu World supported this demand. In the issue of 11 June 1932, the writer, a special correspondent, urged the government to abandon the policy of segregation in education. This plea was also expressed by another correspondent in the issue of 4 February 1933 when he stated that the 'Bantu people as taxpayers and as citizens were entitled to state education'. Both the writers' exhortations and the ANC's demand were part of the dissatisfaction of African intellectuals with poor conditions in black education, as discussed in chapter 2 (see page 28).

Unlike Mdledle and the anonymous special correspondents, other writers such as Reverend Calata and members of the editorial staff gave more details about the historical role played by missionaries. In a front-page article in Bantu World of 11 February 1933, the writer who was one of the editors of this newspaper, wrote about the role played by the Paris Missionary Society in helping King Moshoeshoe to 'preserve' the Basotho nation during its wars with its 'white foes'. This writer clearly stated that his reference to this history was provoked by the commemoration of the Day of Moshoeshoe on 12 February 1933. As reported in this article, this celebration, organized by Basotho working on the Rand, was to take place in the Western Township. Moshoeshoe's success in his wars with whites, the writer explained, was the result of his 'wisdom in accepting the council' from missionaries. The latter, he added, played the role of 'politicians, councillors and protectors of the nation'. The reference to the Paris Missionary Society in an article written in 1933 was also relevant to the writer and readers because this year marked the centenary of the arrival in Lesotho of missionaries of this society.

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29 Ibid.

30 Walshe, The Rise of African Nationalism, p. 141.

31 Ibid., p. 152.

The writers did not write only about the role of missionaries who had helped the Basotho, but even the Xhosa as well. In his article, Reverend Calata referred to the role of the missionaries such as Henderson, Philip, Brownlee and Bishop Gray in challenging the oppression of the Xhosa by the Cape colonial government. He argued that these missionaries had influenced colonial officials such as Lord Glenelg and Sir George Grey to 'do justice for the Africans'.<sup>32</sup> The fact that Calata was a resident of Cradock in the Eastern Cape seems to be the reason why he mentioned only those missionaries who had operated in this region and not in other parts of the country.

This historical role played among Africans by another well-known missionary, David Livingstone, was described by Selope Thema in his front-page article of 11 August 1934. He was prompted to recall this history by the unveiling of the Livingstone Memorial at the Victoria Falls, an event which he said 'reminded black Africa of one of the noblest and greatest white men that ever put his foot upon the African soil'. He praised Livingstone for fighting against slavery in Africa and bringing it to the attention of the 'civilized world'. Livingstone, he explained, had become the enemy of all those who were engaged in the slave trade, irrespective of their race, colour or creed. These included the Portuguese, the Africans who acted as agents of the slave traders, and the Boers who used children and women from Bechuanaland 'tribes' for compulsory labour in agriculture and domestic service.<sup>33</sup> Thema's appeal that '[black] Africa cannot afford to forget the heroic deeds of such a noble soul' further reinforces the view that he referred to this history in order to silence the critics of the missionary church.

Reverend Calata and the members of the editorial staff also wrote about opposition and difficulties which missionaries had faced. They indicated that the missionaries were opposed and suspected both by Africans, who resisted interference with their traditional beliefs, and European settlers, who were against the efforts of missionaries to educate and to 'civilize' Africans.<sup>34</sup> They added that the problems of missionaries were heightened by the fact that they worked among people whose customs, traditions and language they were not familiar with.<sup>35</sup> The information given by the writers about the difficulties experienced by the missionaries was intended to

32 *Bantu World*, 12 May 1934.

33 *Bantu World*, 11 August 1934.

34 *Bantu World*, 11 February 1933; 12 May 1934.

35 *Bantu World*, 12 May 1934; 11 August 1934.

demonstrate to the readers that the decision of missionaries to work among Africans was a sacrifice which Africans should appreciate.

In the eyes of *Bantu World* writers mentioned in this section, it appears that criticism of missionaries who had helped Africans and suffered on their behalf, or secession from the churches they had established, was an indication of lack of gratitude by Africans. In his article of 12 May 1934, entitled 'Missionaries Encounter fierce opposition in converting Africans', Calata argued that missionaries were also 'human' and that it was easy to find mistakes in their work. He was also worried that so little was 'recorded in the history book of this country about the missionaries'.<sup>36</sup> In expressing this concern he emphasized that it was the duty of black Christians to find and tell their people the truth that the European missionary had no 'selfish motives'. This was exactly what the writers were doing by referring to the history about missionaries which was discussed in this section.

#### **5. URBANIZATION OF AFRICANS AND THEIR CONTRIBUTION TO THE COMMERCIAL AND INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT OF SOUTH AFRICA**

The history of urbanization of Africans and their economic integration with Europeans was the theme of two articles, one by Selope Thema in the issue of 7 May 1932, and another, in the form of an editorial, in the issue of 9 September 1933. Thema argued that through the process of urbanization, Africans were removed from their 'tribal life'. He focussed on this subject because he was concerned about growing unemployment among urbanized Africans, which, he contended, was the result of the government's policy of controlling the settlement of Africans in the urban areas. The editorial was written as a response to the statement made by Councillor Saul Rutowitz of Pretoria at a conference of the Association of Managers and Superintendents of locations. Rutowitz, the writer stated, was concerned about the 'detribalization' and urbanization of Africans, and urged that they should be forced to leave the urban areas.<sup>37</sup> In both these articles the writers argued that Africans had become an integral part of the economic life of South Africa and could 'not be repatriated or be forced into that life out of which the white man had called [them]'.

Thema's intention in his article was to emphasize those events of the past that had led to economic integration between blacks and whites in South Africa. He

<sup>36</sup> *Bantu World*, 12 May 1934.

<sup>37</sup> *Bantu World*, 9 September 1932.

stated that whites had 'forced' Africans out of their 'tribal life' because Africa could not be developed along European lines without the labour of the black man. The clearing of African forests to make way for cities, towns, roads, railways, mines and agriculture had, according to Thema, required the labour of the black man. Thema contended that Africans 'were unwilling to come to European towns' because 'they wanted to develop along their own lines, had few wants, which were easily satisfied, and had at their disposal large tracts of land for cultivation'. Consequently, he added, 'the white man thought it wise to force the Natives out of their natural surroundings' in order that they should help in the task of establishing western civilization in this country.<sup>38</sup>

Thema's concern about unemployment amongst Africans was in part a response to the intensification of influx controls in the 1930s. The government tightened influx controls during this period because the Urban Areas Act of 1923, which was aimed at 'controlling the pace of African urbanization and the growth of unemployment in the towns', had proved ineffective.<sup>39</sup> Consequently, this Act was amended in 1930 in order to widen its scope and to increase the effectiveness of influx controls. The first amendment provided for the prohibition of all African men and women 'from entering proclaimed urban areas to seek work and from residing without the permission of municipal authorities'.<sup>40</sup> As discussed earlier, the passage of the Native Service Contract Act further intensified influx controls in the urban areas (see page 3). Unemployment among Africans was also the result of the government's 'civilized labour policy' which resulted in Africans being discriminated against in matters of employment. This policy was condemned by educated and politically conscious Africans as 'epitomizing the government's refusal to accept the complete dependence of a growing number of Africans on the urban areas'.<sup>41</sup>

The same history was also recalled in the editorials of 13 October 1934 and 1 June 1935. The first editorial was as its writer stated, a protest against the resolutions passed at the conference recently held under the auspices of the Dutch Reformed Church at Kimberley. This conference, the writer reported, had proposed that in order to solve the 'poor white question' in South Africa, 'there should be a gradual repatriation of Africans from urban areas to the reserves' in order to elimi-

38 *Bantu World*, 7 May 1932.

39 D. Hindson, *Pass Controls and the Urban African Proletariat* (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1987), p. 42.

40 *Ibid.*

41 Walshe, *The Rise of African Nationalism*, p. 143.

nate 'Native Competition' for the urban labour market. The other editorial was about the celebration of twenty-five years of the establishment of the Union of South Africa in 1910. The writer stated that when white South Africans were celebrating and holding thanksgiving services for the political and economic progress made during these twenty-five years, they should remember that the contribution of Africans, especially to the economic achievements had been vital. In both these above-mentioned editorials, the writers emphasized that the commercial and industrial development of South Africa was largely the result of the labour of Africans. African labour, they argued, had been responsible for the clearing of the 'jungle' and the building of roads, towns and cities and had also 'brought forth gold, diamonds and coal from the bowels of the earth'. African labour had helped Europeans in transplanting western civilization and making conditions comfortable for them.

This is all the writers said on the history of urbanization of Africans and the latter's contribution to the commercial and industrial development of South Africa. They did not give any details about the history of urbanization despite their great interest in this subject. The message in this appeal to the past was that the establishment and consolidation of European rule had succeeded because of the exploitation of the labour of Africans. It was therefore unrealistic, the writers seemed to suggest, to expect that the process of integration could be reversed through the policy of segregation. The intention of the writers was to point out that despite having helped whites to develop this country, Africans were barred from enjoying the benefits of the prosperity and developments which were the results of their labour. In the editorial of 26 August 1936, the writer stated with dismay that '... today when South Africa smiles with life and beauty', it is proposed to get the Native out of the white areas so as to enable whites to 'do their own work at wages which will enable every man to live in comfort'. These were the same views that were being expressed by white liberals like Macmillan and, by this time, by Brookes, who argued that the economic and political stability of South Africa depended on cooperation between blacks and whites. This similarity of views was not coincidental, as Thema and other 'moderate' African community leaders were working together with white liberals in promoting better inter-racial relations in South Africa.

## 6. RELATIONS BETWEEN WHITES AND BLACKS

The relations between whites and blacks during the period of the establishment and consolidation of European rule in South Africa was another subject discussed by African writers in Bantu World. This subject was mostly discussed in the editorials, which indicates that it was also of great importance to the editorial staff of this newspaper. Thema, the editor, also contributed a separate article on the subject.

The writers' interest in the subject of relations between whites and blacks was a response to public statements made on this issue as well as events during the 1930s that were intended to improve race relations. The editorial of 4 June 1932 referred to the statement made by Dr JE Holloway, Director of Census and Statistics in his address to the Pretoria Rotary Club. Dr. Holloway, it was reported, had stated that the racial problem was not 'primarily due to differences between the peoples', but to the failure of people who are different to understand each other. The editorial of 1 October 1932 praised the participation of Afrikaner students at the Fort Hare Conference as an indication that the 'rising generation of the Dutch race was outgrowing the traditional attitude of their forebears towards black people.'

In all the above-mentioned editorials, the writers referred to the history of wars and friction between blacks and whites. In the editorials of 1 October 1932 and 17 February 1934, the writers stated that clashes in the past between Voortrekkers and Africans had been caused not by mutual hatred but by their lack of knowledge about one other's interests and needs. Similarly, in the editorial of 4 June 1932, the writer explained that the lack of knowledge about one other of Europeans and Africans was evident in their hostile attitude towards one other. The Europeans, he said, thought that they could secure the labour of Africans by fragmenting their tribal organization, whilst Africans wanted to 'drive the white man into the sea'. The writers argued that the purpose of referring to interracial conflicts of the past was to make the readers aware of the futility of interracial quarrels.<sup>42</sup> In the editorial of 4 June 1932, the writer appealed to Europeans on one hand to 'learn to regard the Bantu as an integral part of the national life of South Africa and to Africans on the other, to appreciate the good that Europeans had done for the country.

This conciliatory attitude towards blacks and whites was encouraged in the editorials of Bantu World because this newspaper had close ties with the Joint Councils and the South African Institute of Race Relations. These organizations had de-

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42 Bantu World, 11 March 1932; 17 December 1932.

clared that they were committed to the fostering of interracial understanding and gradual political reform. As mentioned in chapter 1, Thema, the editor, was an active member of the Johannesburg Joint Council. Furthermore, Howard Pim and Rheinallt Jones, who had become key members of the SAIRR, were also shareholders in the South African Press, the company that owned Bantu World (see page 7).

The history of relations between blacks and whites as portrayed by Bantu World writers was not only one of conflict and friction. The writers also referred to the history of friendly relations between the two groups. The editorial of 1 October 1932 and Thema's article on 17 December of the same year referred to wars between 'Bantu and Boers' in which Africans sided with whites. In support of his argument, the writers cited co-operation between the Voortrekkers and the Bataung under Chief Makhoana against the Matebele under Mzilikazi. Thema also mentioned the event among the Zulus when Mpande rebelled against Dingane and joined the Voortrekkers who had promised to make him King of the Zulus if Dingane was defeated. Thema referred to this history of co-operation between blacks and whites because, he said, he believed that the co-operation that had existed between the Dutch people and the Africans could still be continued by the present generation.

The portrayal of the establishment of white rule in South Africa as discussed in this chapter reveals that, although some writers referred to instances of harmony and co-operation between Africans and whites, the overall attention was on the suffering of Africans brought about by white rule. Like their Afrikaner nationalist contemporaries, African writers also portrayed their history as a 'tale' of suffering. Whilst Afrikaner writers blamed their suffering on the English, African writers attributed it to the hostility of whites in general. The histories of dispossession, suffering and repression discussed in this chapter demonstrate that according to African writers in Bantu World, the establishment of white rule in this country had benefitted Africans on a very small scale. The only way in which these writers believed Africans has gained significantly from the arrival of whites in this country, was through the role played by white missionaries amongst, and on behalf of, Africans.

Bantu World writers in the 1930s were portraying the history of white rule in South Africa in a negative light because the 1930s saw the intensification of racial segregation against Africans. The writers' negative representation of white rule in the past was a reflection of their protest against the existing order. To them repressive white rule was still continuing.

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## CHAPTER 4

## The portrayal of African responses to white rule

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

Writers in Bantu World wrote about the responses of Africans in South Africa to the establishment and consolidation of white rule. These responses ranged from protestation of extreme loyalty on one hand to resistance and disobedience on the other. The examples of African loyalty referred to included their use of the vote and their willingness to fight in the First World War on the side of the South African government and Britain. The resistance of Africans to white rule was portrayed in two ways. The writers recounted how attempts by black political leaders to organize resistance often led them towards unity and also made them quarrel. Secondly, the writers referred to incidents of revolt and forms of civil disobedience. This chapter considers how the portrayal of historical responses by Bantu World writers was provoked by particular events in the 1930s.

### 2. THE USE OF THE VOTE BY AFRICANS

The Bantu World editorials of 3 December 1932 and 7 March 1936 focussed on the history of the use of the vote by Africans. The importance of this theme to Bantu World editors was to a large extent a reaction to events and debates linked to the Natives Representation Bill. Between 1930 and 1933, this bill was debated and revised by the all-party Joint Select Committee.<sup>1</sup> In April 1935, together with the Native Trust and Land Bill, it was presented to Parliament. It excluded Africans completely from voting for members of the House of Assembly, and also inaugurated a uniform and Union-wide system of political representation for Africans through four white members of the Senate elected by four purely African electoral colleges.<sup>2</sup>

The editorial of 3 December 1932 referred to the conference of the Cape Bantu voters which, as mentioned by the writer, was due to be held on the sixteenth of that

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1 Lacey, Working for Boroko, p. 53.

2 Ibid., p. 72.



month at Kimberley. The aim of this conference, the writer stated, was 'to consider General Hertzog's bill to alter the present franchise system in the Cape'. The writer doubted whether the resolutions of protest which this conference would pass and subsequently forward to the authorities would be of any help. He felt this way because of what he described as a strong determination of the government to deprive the 'Bantu of the Cape of their franchise rights'.

In the other editorial in the issue of 7 March 1936, the writer was responding to the speech delivered in Parliament by the Prime Minister, General Hertzog, in moving the second reading of the Representative of Natives Bill. He particularly referred to Hertzog's comments that the bill was a 'safety first measure' for whites in South Africa and that it was intended to 'prevent the swamping of Europeans by Africans to ward off the danger of miscegenation and make the position of the white man in South Africa secure'. He further argued that this speech justified the opposition of the All African Convention towards the two bills and that it clearly showed that 'a large section of the European population regarded the Africans as their 'natural enemies'.

The writers' intention in the above-mentioned editorials was to disprove the government's allegations that African franchise was a threat to the welfare of whites. In the process they referred to the history of African franchise in South Africa. In the editorial of 3 December 1932, the writer argued that the introduction of African franchise under Sir George Grey's 'liberal policy' in the 1850s had immediately brought to an end the frontier wars in the Eastern Cape. Since then, he stated, blacks and whites in the Cape had 'lived in peace and worked in harmony'. It is surprising that this writer made such a statement, since the rule of Sir George Grey was followed by two more frontier wars.

In both editorials, the writers emphasized the point that the 'educated' and 'civilized' black man of the Cape had never used the vote racially during the eighty years that he had been enfranchised. This was demonstrated, they explained, by the fact that the African voters 'always voted for the best man, and all Europeans who went to Parliament because of their votes have always been men of whom any country could be proud'. In the eyes of these writers, Africans used their vote not only for their own benefit, but for the good of all South Africans. This was described in the editorial of 7 March 1936, as an example which white people could emulate. It was also regarded as an indication that Africans as a race were free 'from that rabid

racialism' which had been 'corroding the vitals of the national life of South Africa since the colonial times'. Implicit in these views was the point that enfranchised Africans in the Cape had understood the basic purpose of voting rights. The writers were challenging the argument put forward by the government that as 'Natives become more civilized and educated', they would use the power of the ballot to their own advantage. The history portrayed was only about the African middle class and did not make any reference at all to the attitude of the African working class towards the right to vote. It was an indication that African intellectuals believed that the vote could only be given to the westernized and educated Africans.

### 3. THE ROLE OF AFRICANS DURING THE FIRST WORLD WAR

The subject of the participation of black South Africans in the First World War was the theme of a number of articles in Bantu World written in 1933 and 1934. The immediate impetus for the writing of these articles was a move to commemorate the Mendi disaster. During the First World War, the troopship Mendi, with members of the South African Native Labour Contingent on board, had sunk after colliding with the transport ship Darro in the English channel near the Isle of Wight.<sup>3</sup> This collision, which occurred in the early hours of 21 February 1917, claimed the lives of 615 African soldiers.<sup>4</sup> The memory of this event became an important element in African political thinking. Its symbolic significance was kept alive through the Mendi Memorial Club initiated by SM Ncwana, who had been a sergeant in the third battalion of the South African Native Labour Contingent in France during the war, as also the annual commemoration of Mendi Day in the big urban centres.<sup>5</sup> The decision to observe Mendi Day on 21 February every year was taken at a meeting of the Inter-denominational African Ministers' Association held in 1928. The resolution was, that every year on that date all members should assemble 'in solemn and reverent remembrance of the men of their race who went to serve their king and country, hoping and believing that in the distribution of the spoils of the war their compatriots may share in the blessings of peace and the opportunities guaranteed by the

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3 A. Grundlingh, Fighting Their Own War: South African Blacks and the First World War (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1987), p. 93.

4 Ibid., p. 139.

5 Ibid.

successful arms of the allies'.<sup>6</sup> In 1931 the association invited the whole of 'Bantudom' to observe Mendi Day as a national day for commemoration.<sup>7</sup> To African writers in Bantu World and to many other politically conscious Africans, the Mendi disaster symbolized one of the many sacrifices made by Africans on behalf of white interests, and the celebration of this day was intended to serve the specific political aims in the 1930s of the African intellectuals.

The fact that the subject of the participation of Africans in the First World War was always discussed in front-page articles in Bantu World confirms its importance to the editors of the newspaper. The writers in Bantu World referred to the patriotism of Africans during the war to demonstrate that there were no grounds for white fears in giving Africans equal rights, because the latter were loyal citizens. In a front-page article on 24 February 1934, written by one of the editorial staff, the writer cited the statement made by Dr AB Xuma, the President of the ANC, at the memorial service held during the same week in honour of the victims of the Mendi disaster. In this statement, Dr Xuma had stated that the participation of Africans in the war 'was as it should be because we have a common country with common interests and we therefore should have common benefits'.<sup>8</sup>

The patriotism of black soldiers during the war was likened to that of their white counterparts. In two front-page articles, one written by a correspondent of Bantu World and the other by an unnamed member of the editorial staff, it was stated that black soldiers, like their white counterparts, had enlisted for military service because they were also committed to the defence of 'freedom', 'civilization' and 'humanity'.<sup>9</sup> The fact that both black and white soldiers were portrayed as having entered the war for the same reasons indicates the way African writers wanted to identify values of the white society with those of Africans. The intention of the writers was to gain for their class a measure of acceptance by the white society.

The fact that African writers wanted to highlight African patriotism and loyalty is further demonstrated by the way they portrayed the attitude of most Africans towards the war. In the article of 18 February 1933, a correspondent reminded readers that when the war broke out, 'Bantu leaders' offered to 'raise men among their own

6 N. Clothier, Black Valour: The South African Native Labour Contingent, 1916-1918 and the Sinking of the Mendi (Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal Press, 1987), pp. 174-175.

7 Ibid., p. 175.

8 Bantu World, 24 February 1934.

9 Bantu World, 18 February 1933.

people for active service.' He also described the decision of 20 000 African soldiers to enlist for the war as an offer 'in loyal service to the King and country without any condition of stipulation.' The writer went on to mention how ANC leaders had stopped all agitation against the government and had urged their followers to remain loyal to the government despite the suffering of families that were being evicted from European farms as the result of the operation of the Natives Land Act. These leaders were being portrayed as having been prepared to defer the programme of the ANC or in other words, the struggle of the African people against their oppression, for the good of the whole country.

The correspondent proceeded to describe the obedience of Africans to orders given by the government during the period of war. Initially, when the war broke out, Africans had been told by the government that their services in the war were not required because that was a white man's war.<sup>10</sup> Africans, the writer explained, had obeyed this instruction as 'law abiding people and continued to work on the mines, on the farms, in the factories, in the stores and in the kitchens as though the world was at peace.' He further showed the loyalty of Africans to the government by stating that despite the initial rebuff by the government, Africans still obeyed the call of the Prime Minister, General Botha, in 1916 for their participation in the war.

The history of African participation in the war, was intended to honour those soldiers who had died in the Mendi disaster, but more importantly it was aimed at bolstering the claim of Africans for full recognition by the government and whites in general, as citizens of South Africa. Unlike Molema, who in his book, *Bantu Past and Present*, also cited the participation of Africans as a sign of their loyalty to the British government, writers in *Bantu World* portrayed it as evidence of loyalty to the South African government in particular. This is yet another indication of how African writers in the 1930s were moving away from the tendency of their predecessors to direct their political demands to the British government and British public opinion (see page 13). Instead they were openly confronting the South African government and their white compatriots to meet the political claims of Africans. This movement to direct demands to the South African government instead of the British government could be attributed to several factors. Firstly, African intellectuals no longer believed that Britain could act as the protector of Africans. Britain had failed repeatedly in the past to respond favourably to the demands of Africans.

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<sup>10</sup> *Bantu World*, 18 February 1933.

The 1914 delegation of the South African Native National Congress to appeal to the King and the British public against the Land Act of 1913 had received an unsympathetic hearing.<sup>11</sup> Similarly another delegation of 1919 sent to request 'intervention of the King throughout Southern Africa to overturn the policy of the Union government', also elicited no favourable response.<sup>12</sup> Secondly, Britain could no longer interfere in the internal affairs of South Africa because the Balfour Declaration of 1926 and the Statute of Westminster of 1931 had made South Africa a sovereign country which was no longer subordinate to Britain.

#### 4. UNITY AND DIVISIONS AMONG AFRICANS IN THEIR RESISTANCE TO RACIAL DISCRIMINATION

The subject of unity was very important in both black and white politics in South Africa in the 1930s. In white politics, the two main political parties, the National Party and the South African Party, fused in 1934 to form the United Party. By contrast, unity and co-operation between African political leaders was difficult to attain. It was largely the failure of African leaders to establish unity while the main white political leaders were able to achieve it that made the history of unity as well as disunity amongst Africans so important to African writers in Bantu World.

Two articles on this theme written by Pixley Seme, the President of the ANC, were published in the issues of 24 December 1932 and 23 June 1934. Two other articles were front-page stories in the issues of 13 January 1934 and 20 January 1934, and were written by the same but unnamed 'special correspondent'. Gilbert Coka was the writer of an article published in the issue of 17 June 1933. Coka was a member of the ICU. He later became a member of the Communist Party of South Africa, from whom he was expelled in mid-1935.<sup>13</sup> The other articles on the same subject were written by GR Kuzwayo in the issue of 11 June 1932, and SMM Mamabolo and 'Absie' of Carolina in the issue of 19 May 1934. Two other writers on this subject were JB Mavuso of Ladysmith and HM Maimane, whose letters were carried in the issues of 30 June 1934 and 7 March 1936.

11 Walshe, *Rise of African Nationalism*, p. 49-51.

12 T. Karis and G.M. Carter, eds., *From Protest to Challenge*, vol. 1, p. 68.

13 T. Karis and G.M. Carter, (eds.), *From Protest to Challenge*, vol. 4, p. 19.

The history of unity and disunity amongst Africans was important to these writers because of the decline and collapse of African political organizations during the 1930s. By 1930, the ICU had already collapsed due to internal squabbles. Between 1931 and 1936 the ANC was unable to organize any campaigns or protests because of the deterioration in its branch and provincial organization.<sup>14</sup> In his article in Bantu World of 11 June 1932, GR Zibuse Kuzwayo encouraged African leaders to plan for the reawakening of Bantu national organizations because, as he said, at that moment they were 'doing nothing'. He expressed the hope that 'when our leaders go into the field again', they would do away with 'racial animosities' and petty personal squabbles which according to him, were the causes of the downfall and stagnation of African organizations.

The writers were particularly concerned about personal squabbles and organizational weaknesses within the ANC. In a comprehensive article published in the issue of 24 December 1932, Dr PI Seme, who had become president of the ANC in 1930, made a special appeal to African chiefs, as well as to churches and organizations in the African communities, to send delegates to a special conference of the ANC. Seme disclosed that this conference was scheduled to meet in Bloemfontein from 31 December 1932 to 2 January 1933. The reference to the ANC was also made in two successive front-page articles in Bantu World of 13 January 1933 and 20 January 1934. In these articles, the writer, an unnamed correspondent of Bantu World, wrote what he described as a brief history of the ANC. He explained that his intention was to 'help the man in the street to understand the true position of this national organization'.<sup>15</sup> He was concerned that 'much noise has been made about the destruction and resurrection of the ANC so much so that the ordinary man in the street is absolutely confused'.

The writers in Bantu World argued that lack of unity among African leaders was the main cause of the decline of African organizations. In response to this lack of unity, they sought to emphasize the need for unity and cooperation among black political leaders. In the process, they had recourse to the history of black politics in South Africa. They stressed the role of black organizations and leaders in promoting unity amongst Africans in South Africa. In order to show that the need for unity amongst Africans already existed before 1910 and could thus not be seen merely as

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14 Walshe, Rise of African Nationalism, p. 249.

15 Bantu World, 13 January 1934.

a response to the formation of Union, the correspondent of Bantu World referred to various organizations which in his eyes, were already working for unity in the various colonies before Union. These organizations included three bodies in the Transvaal under SM Makhatho, W Letseleba and JM Makhotle respectively, one in the Free State led by M Mapikela and JB Twayi, the Natal Native Congress under the leadership of Reverend John L Dube and Chief Mini and, lastly, Dr Rubusana's Inqungqutela in the Cape.<sup>16</sup> The writer argued that without the need for unity that had been created by these organizations, it was doubtful if the ANC would have ever been formed.

The establishment of the ANC in 1912 was portrayed as the result of the need and enthusiasm for unity displayed by Africans. In his article in Bantu World of 24 December 1932, Seme stated that when the Union of South Africa was formed in 1910, it had become very clear to all Africans in all parts of South Africa that they 'must likewise form their own Union of Africans or Congress in order to be able to deal with the greater problems of a united South Africa ...' Similarly, the unnamed correspondent explained that the response to Seme's call for unity and appeal to all leaders and chiefs to meet at Bloemfontein on 8 January 1912, 'was marvellous and revealed at once that there was a growing desire for unity among Bantu leaders and chiefs'.<sup>17</sup>

Seme emphasized unity among African leaders in the past because, as he said, he wanted to 'warn the Chiefs and all our people against leaders who were trying to break away from the ANC by establishing their own Natal Congress or Cape Congress'. Seme was evidently very concerned about events in the Cape and Natal Congresses. In the Western Cape, Ndobe, the provincial secretary and Tonjeni, one of the members of this Congress, led a struggle against Professor Thaele, the provincial president. This struggle was essentially an attempt by Ndobe and his supporters to replace Thaele. By September 1930, Thaele had regained control of the branch, suspended Ndobe, and expelled ten members.<sup>18</sup> These events culminated in the formation of the Independent ANC by Ndobe in November 1930.

The importance to Seme of the history of unity within the ANC was also related to the fact that throughout his presidency he was committed to bringing unity in the Natal Congress. Divisions within this Congress could be traced back to 1926 when it

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16 Ibid.

17 Ibid.

18 Walshe, Rise of African Nationalism, p. 181.

had split into the Natal Native Congress under Dube and the Natal African Congress under Gumede.<sup>19</sup> The fact that in the election for the ANC presidency in 1930 Seme had defeated Gumede and that they were both from Natal, further complicated divisions in African politics in this province. Dube had voted for Seme, and Champion, the 'radical' member of ICU Yase Natal, for Gumede.<sup>20</sup> By 1934 there was still friction between Dube, Champion and Gumede, and Seme had failed to reconcile these leaders as he had hoped to do.

It was in response to these quarrels among leaders of the ANC that, in his article of 13 January 1934, the 'special correspondent' stated that ordinary people do not know 'who is destroying the organization because what [they] hear is the angry protest of its destroyers and the equally indignant protest of those who claim to be its saviors'. In order to help those he regarded as ordinary people to understand what he described as the 'chaotic state' of the ANC, the correspondent recounted events since the founding of this organization. He explained that the founding leaders of the ANC had not had enough time to 'lay proper foundations' for the organization because within a year of its establishment they had to concentrate on fighting against the Natives Land Act of 1913. The campaign against this Act, the writer stated, culminated in a deputation being sent to appeal to the British government for its abolition.

The 'special correspondent' also explained how the constitutional controversy within the ANC immediately after the outbreak of the First World War had led to a conflict amongst leaders similar to those that were still taking place in the 1930s. This conflict, he added, was between Dube, the president, and Saul Msane, an important figure within the ANC. As a result of this conflict, the writer explained, the ANC was split into Dube's followers, advised by RW Msimang, and Msane's supporters, with Seme as their advisor. This history was relevant in the 1930s because of the renewed conflict between Dube and Seme during this period. Seme, who was now the President-General of the ANC, clashed with Dube who was in the National Executive of the ANC as chairman of the education committee. Dube eventually resigned from the National Executive in March 1931 because of his dissatisfaction with Seme's refusal to 'meet with them and take collective decision'.<sup>21</sup>

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19 Ibid., p. 229.

20 Ibid., p. 230.

21 Ibid., pp. 230-231.



In his article, Seme also referred to the active role which had been played by chiefs in the establishment of the ANC. He stated that the organization had been created by the 'noble patriotism and self-sacrifice' of the paramount chiefs who met in Bloemfontein on 8 January 1912, representing every 'tribe' in South Africa. In his eyes, the participation of chiefs had been very important to the ANC because the chiefs 'created and dedicated [the ANC] to become a blessing and a champion for the rights of all our people'. The reference to the role of paramount chiefs was intended to reinforce an appeal to chiefs in the 1930s to play a role similar to that of their predecessors in the planned special conference of the ANC. 'I hereby appeal to you as successors of these noble chiefs, leaders and councillors, not to throw the African nation away'. In view of the internal squabbles within the ANC, Seme seemingly wanted the participation of chiefs to legitimize the special conference as well as his own position in relation to that of his enemies. He appealed that, as their predecessors had done in 1912, chiefs should also attend the special conference at Bloemfontein and 'declare this Congress ... to be the high Parliament of the nation' and as such to be the representative of all Africans in South Africa.

It was necessary for Seme to appeal to chiefs to attend the special conference because by the 1930s, they had largely withdrawn from the activities of the ANC. One of the reasons for this withdrawal was that since the end of the First World War, the ANC had been turning more and more to a growing urban constituency. It had become more preoccupied with issues like the pass laws and the economic colour bar, issues which chiefs were not inclined to support with any enthusiasm.<sup>22</sup>

The African writers in *Bantu World* focussed largely on the history of the ANC to demonstrate the history of unity and disunity in African politics. Other organizations, like the ones mentioned by the 'special correspondent' in *Bantu World* of 13 January 1934, were not given the same attention. This was probably because their membership and activities had been confined to particular areas, whereas the ANC had been formed as a national body. Surprisingly, no reference was made to the history of the ICU despite the fact that this was the first African labour union which was intended to unite African workers. As this was a workers' organization, writers seemingly did not see it as having represented the interests of the African middle class or of Africans as a whole. They placed emphasis on the ANC because in their eyes it led the struggle against racial discrimination and therefore represented all

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 211.

Africans. The writers were evidently tempted to suppose that the history of the ANC could replace or represent the history of Africans.

## 5. HISTORY OF AFRICAN REVOLTS AND CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE

The history of African revolts and civil disobedience in South Africa was not an important subject for Bantu World writers between 1932 and 1936. This subject was discussed only in two editorials, in the issues of 23 March and 1 June 1935 respectively. This limited discussion of this issue in Bantu World should not be interpreted as a reflection of the absence of its discussion by African political leaders generally. It was an issue which often caused division within the African political organizations during the 1930s. In the Bloemfontein Conference of the ANC in 1930, 'moderate' leaders such as Seme, Mapikela, Mahabane, Thema and Plaatje clashed with 'radicals' like Gumede, Champion and Ndobe over the question of political methods.<sup>23</sup> The 'moderates' argued that freedom for Africans could be achieved by 'consultation and the growth of a more enlightened public opinion, rather than by African political assertion and mass action' as demanded by the 'radicals'.<sup>24</sup> Similarly, the Non European Conference of 1930, which composed of delegates from African, Coloured and Indian political organizations, decided after a heated debate to use passive resistance involving boycotts, strikes and demonstrations against the Riotous Assemblies Act. However, its President, Dr. Abdurabman, conceded that such a policy was not practical. 'There is not', he said, 'a single man in South Africa who could make a success of passive resistance'.<sup>25</sup>

It can be argued that contributions that made references to the history of African revolts were seldom published in Bantu World because they would not be in line with the policy followed by this newspaper. As mentioned in chapter 1, Bantu World was supposed to maintain a 'progressive and moderate' policy on political and economic matters (see page 8). This newspaper therefore, supported the views of those 'moderate' African leaders as far as methods of challenging segregationist policies were concerned. In the editorial of 1 June 1935, the writer contended that African revolts in the past had not deterred the government from introducing oppressive and

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23 Ibid., pp. 178-179.

24 Ibid.

25 Report on proceedings and resolutions of the Non European Conference, The Cape Times, 4 and 6 January 1930, extracts reprinted in T. Karis & G. Carter, eds., From Protest to Challenge, vol. 1, pp. 267-273.

discriminatory measures such as the 'civilized labour' policy and the Riotous Assemblies Act of 1930.

The editorials mentioned above referred to several events during the 1930s. The editorial of 23 March 1935 was written as a response to the appointment of Mr BW Vilakazi as lecturer in Zulu at the University of the Witwatersrand. The writer described this appointment as an example which could be followed by the government in appointing Africans in posts in the Department of Justice and Native Affairs.

The writer argued that the appointment of Vilakazi was the result of the spirit of 'interracial goodwill' which prevailed among whites in Johannesburg. He argued that the disturbances among Africans in Johannesburg between 1917 and 1920 had brought about this spirit of 'interracial goodwill' by making white residents of this city realize that 'all was not well with the black man and that the Rand was a sleeping volcano, which only awaited a firebrand to set it aflame'. This history was invoked in this editorial not to justify the revolts that occurred, but to send a message to the government that its policy of racial segregation against Africans would lead to violence. The disturbances among Africans were described by the writer as 'a natural response to unjust treatment'. The writer described how these disturbances had 'priggged the conscience of Johannesburg white citizens' and prompted many of them to become involved in the welfare of the Africans. To him this was a sign that whites in South Africa could 'rise above race and colour prejudice', a fact which was confirmed by the appointment of Mr Vilakazi.

The other editorial in the issue of 1 July 1935 was about the celebration by white South Africans of twenty-five years of the Union of South Africa. In this editorial, the writer argued that Africans could not share in the celebration because the twenty-five years had not brought them the 'blessings' which [could] compel [them] to review the trend of events since 1910 in a spirit of thankfulness'. During these twenty-five years, he said, African people were subjected to 'disabilities and injustices' under various laws such as the South African Act, the Natives Land Act of 1913 and the Natives Urban Areas Act of 1923.

The writer explained that the operation of these laws resulted in 'dissatisfaction' and 'unrest' among Africans. He portrayed these events in such a way that conveyed the impression that all Africans were dissatisfied and that all parts of the country were affected. The campaign against what he described as 'oppressive conditions' was 'launched from one end of South Africa to another by leaders from political as

well as industrial organizations'. It cannot be concluded that the reference to the history of violence was meant to encourage or condemn a growing climate of militancy. In 1935, when these two editorials were published, there had been no major incidents of violence involving Africans.

Writers in Bantu World wrote about historical responses to white rule of Africans of all classes. They did not only refer to the responses of their own class, the middle class. They selected only those responses that would legitimize their demands and highlight their concerns about both racial segregation and quarrels in African politics in the 1930s. The history of the use of the vote by Africans was an expression of the writers' concern about governments attempts to abolish the African franchise. The reference to the participation of Africans in the First World War was a reflection of the desire of the writers that Africans were not to be discriminated against, but to be regarded as patriotic citizens who could be relied on. The history of the violent resistance of Africans to white rule was given little attention. The writers only referred to urban disturbances and unrests among Africans after 1910. The eastern Cape frontier wars of the nineteenth century, as well as many other wars between blacks and whites in the interior of the country, were not mentioned. The writers wanted to present a version of African responses to white rule which would strengthen their view that whites and blacks could work together. Consequently, they were more interested in the history of African loyalty to white rule than that of resistance to it.

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## CHAPTER 5

## Conclusion

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The number of references to the past found in the issues of Bantu World between 1932 and 1936 was fewer than expected. In most cases writers did not give a detailed account of the past, but only brief references to historical events. As these writers were journalists and not historians, their references to the past were made in passing, as part of their commentary on events in the present. The history contained in their contributions was not being recounted as something separate. Their aim was not to portray history nor were they conscious of the fact that they were doing so. It is thus appropriate, in this thesis, to refer to the writers' references to the past, merely as portrayals of the history of the time.

An analysis of these portrayals by African writers in the issues of Bantu World studied confirms one of the premises on which this thesis is based, namely, that history is not about the past but about the way in which the past is represented in the present. This means that the kind of history portrayed by a writer is largely shaped by the writer's perception of contemporary circumstances. In the case of writers in Bantu World, the histories they presented were largely influenced by their preoccupation with the policy of racial segregation, which was being intensified in the 1920s and 1930s. Their presentations were thus an expression of their political aspirations as well as judgements about the political and socio-economic conditions of Africans in South Africa. This also confirms the assertion that is often made by historians in South Africa that, in this country, history is ideologically relevant because of the intensity of political conflict.

As a result of the concern of writers in Bantu World about what they regarded as the oppressive segregationist policy of the South African government, the histories they invoked mostly referred to incidents of oppression and suffering in the past. They were so concerned about racial oppression that they even traced its history to periods as remote as ancient times. Their antipathy to racial segregation caused them to concentrate only on incidents of oppression and conflict in ancient times.

The writers made no references at all to democracy or harmony between races or people of different classes. In their eyes, oppression and conflict were the main aspects of life worthy of note. They were using the ancient history of oppression and conflict as being parallel with the oppression and conflict which, they argued, still prevailed in the 1930s because of the policy of racial segregation.

Ancient history, especially biblical history, was important and relevant to Bantu World writers because of their Christian background as products of mission education. To them, oppression, racial and class conflict in ancient times had been contrary to Christian principles, as was racial segregation in South Africa. They invoked a history based on the Bible to challenge the legitimacy of racial segregation as well as to provide moral justification for their opposition to it. They seemingly thought that, by appealing to biblical history which highlighted Christian ethics, they would convince the white government, which they believed was founded on Christian principles, to abandon the policy of racial segregation. As Cobley says, black intellectuals who were committed to Christian ideals wanted to 'resolve the contradictions between the ideals of colour blind Christian morality and the racist assumptions of white western Christian practice in South Africa'.<sup>1</sup> They looked upon their faith as 'a social cohesive which ... offered an ultimate goal of inter-racial harmony based on the brotherhood of man'.<sup>2</sup>

The writers were concerned about racial segregation because it prevented them from attaining western civilization. They argued that it was necessary for Africans to be provided with education and a high standard of living because western civilization would not survive in South Africa if Africans remained 'uncivilized' and 'barbaric'. In order to support this view, they argued that ancient African civilizations such as Zinbabwe, Egypt, Timbuktu and Memphis had been destroyed by the forces of African harharism. This interpretation of the collapse of ancient African civilizations was derived from the views of liberal white academic writers. The latter contended that enabling Africans to attain the same level of civilization as whites would ensure the prosperity of the whole country, whilst their exclusion from western civilization would be disastrous for the country.

The preoccupation of writers in Bantu World with the history of oppression was also evident in their portrayal of the history of the establishment and consolidation

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1 Cobley, Class and Consciousness, p. 26.

2 Walshe, Rise of African Nationalism, p. 158.

of white rule in South Africa. More historical events cited by these writers referred to this period of colonial conquest than to the ancient and pre-colonial periods. The writers focussed their attention on histories of the consolidation of white rule as well as on African responses to it. According to these writers, the establishment of white rule had brought mainly oppression and suffering to Africans. To these writers, the suffering of Africans under white rule had been caused firstly, by the dispossession of land which they had experienced. They particularly recounted the dispossession of land that was brought about by the implementation of the Land Act of 1913. Consequently, they hardly referred to any other legislation before 1913 which had resulted in Africans losing their land, nor was reference made to the land lost by Africans through defeats by Europeans. The writers were interested in the history of the Land Act of 1913 because it represented their real experiences in the 1930s. The additional land for Africans promised under this legislation had still not been granted. The sparsity of land for Africans in both the rural and urban areas was still one of the main causes of discontent in the African communities in the 1930s.

Secondly, the writers argued that the suffering of Africans under white rule was caused by subjection to racially discriminatory and repressive legislation, especially the pass laws. The history of the pass laws became a subject of interest to the writers in Bantu World because of the intensification of these laws in the 1930s, which had resulted in increased restrictions on the lives of all Africans. Although, as educated Africans, the writers qualified for certificates which exempted them from these laws, they were still, like the rest of the black population, subjected to the same inconvenience and harassment of the police because these certificates had to be carried and produced on demand. The history of the pass laws was being invoked as an appeal for the abolition of these laws.

The writers in Bantu World recounted the history of the suffering of Africans under white rule to justify their argument that white rule in the 1930s was still oppressive to Africans. As they were more concerned about challenging the intensification of segregationist laws in the 1930s, they did not refer to any laws in the past from which Africans had benefitted, although such laws might have existed. Their portrayals of oppression during the establishment of white rule drew on the direct experiences of the writers and of Africans in general, as well as on the ideas of liberal academic writers. The history of dispossession of land and repressive legislation represented the real experiences of Africans under white rule. This history

was not just manipulated to support the writers' opposition to the government's land policies and legislation, but reflected the reality of the lives of Africans.

The only way in which the writers believed Africans had gained from the arrival of whites in this country was through the contribution made by the white missionaries. The missionaries were praised for their help in black education, their assistance to King Moshoeshoe to build the Basotho nation, and for fighting against slavery in Africa. The writers did not refer to any problems caused by the advent of the missionaries amongst Africans. This was because their main concern was to counter growing criticism among educated Africans of white missionaries. Most of these Africans were prominent members of the independent black churches which had emerged as a result of secession from mission churches. The portrayal of the historical role of missionaries in positive terms was intended to strengthen the writers' argument that criticism against those missionaries who had helped Africans and suffered on their behalf was an indication of a lack of gratitude on the part of the Africans.

In the eyes of the writers, the establishment and consolidation of white rule succeeded because of the exploitation of Africans' labour. They recounted how, during this process, Africans and whites had become economically integrated. Their aim in referring to this history was to point out that, despite having helped whites to develop this country through their labour, Africans were discriminated against and not treated as full citizens.

The way the views of white liberal academic writers influenced the perception of African writers in Bantu World as to the history of Africans under white rule was further evident in the writers' depiction of relations between blacks and whites. In order to promote good interracial relations, as advocated by white liberal politicians and academic historians at the time, the writers in Bantu World concentrated mostly on the history of friendly relations between blacks and whites. They referred specifically to incidents of co-operation between the Voortrekkers and the blacks because they believed that co-operation could still be maintained in the 1930s. Furthermore, they argued that wars and friction between these two groups had been caused not by mutual hatred but by lack of knowledge about one others' interests. This interpretation was a reflection of the writers' attempts to encourage interracial understanding, which was also a goal to which white liberals were committed. African writers were influenced by the ideas of white liberal academic writers because the



latter, in spite of belonging to a politically dominant group, were often sympathetic to the struggle of Africans against racial segregation. In spite of this, the histories referred to by African writers were also influenced by their own perceptions of their circumstances in terms of their own experiences.

The concern about relations between blacks and whites influenced the way Bantu World writers wrote about the historical responses of Africans to white rule. They were more interested in the history of African loyalty to white rule than that of resistance to it. They recounted how Africans had used their franchise rights in a way acceptable to norms of western civilization. They argued that Africans had used their vote not only for their own benefit, but for the good of all South Africans. Similarly, Africans had participated in the First World War as loyal and patriotic citizens, despite being denied political rights. To African writers, this symbolized one of the many sacrifices made by Africans on behalf of white interests. The history of the violent resistance of Africans to white rule was given less attention. The writers only referred to urban disturbances and unrest among Africans after 1910. The numerous instances during the nineteenth century when Africans militarily resisted European domination were not mentioned. The writers were interested in a history that would demonstrate that blacks could be trusted by whites as reliable compatriots.

The concern of writers with racial segregation also prompted them to recount the history of African politics in South Africa, with particular emphasis on the history of the ANC. The history of unity and disputes between the leaders of this organization was important to these writers because in their eyes the ANC embodied the struggle of the African people against domination by whites. Its establishment in 1912 was portrayed as the result of the desire for unity by all blacks in South Africa in order to lead their struggle against white domination, which, in the writers' eyes, had been consolidated by the formation of the Union of South Africa in 1910. The history of the ANC was invoked not only to inform the readers about its past, but to explain its historical role in the struggle of Africans against segregation and, in so doing, to demonstrate the extent to which it was failing to perform this role in the 1930s. The writers were worried about internal squabbles and disorganization within the ANC during this period. Its history was therefore invoked to give lessons to its leaders and members in the 1930s on how to act in situations which had occurred before within the organization.

The pre-colonial period was portrayed by the writers in positive terms. No references were made to events of suffering, oppression or conflict during this period. Instead, democratic political systems, cultural practices, and the custom of looking after one another were described in romantic terms. The kings and political leaders of this period were highly acclaimed. This conveys the impression that the writers wanted to emphasize that the life of Africans before the advent of white rule was free of mystery and suffering. As they wanted to portray their past in a way that would support their struggle against oppression, the writers tended to overlook and perhaps even reject any record of oppression during pre-colonial times. The interpretation of events during this period is a good illustration of how rival histories are used by dominant and dominated groups respectively to uphold and subvert the social order. In the 1920s and 1930s, white government officials justified their segregationist and repressive policies against Africans by arguing that the latter were not used to democracy because pre-colonial African communities had been undemocratic. Both white and black South Africans were therefore using history for different political purposes because of their different conceptions of the policy of racial segregation.

Although writers in Bantu World were primarily preoccupied with the sufferings of Africans under white rule, they did not express their protest by portraying the past only in negative terms. The pictures they produced also referred to positive aspects of the past. The histories of oppression, conflict, collapse of ancient civilizations and empires, dispossession of land and repressive legislation are all negative elements of the pictures they produced. On the other hand, loyalty of Africans to white rule, the role of the missionaries, and the democracy and order found in pre-colonial African societies are amongst the positive aspects depicted. All the histories they portrayed, irrespective of their negative or positive elements, formed part of oppositional history. Their main function was to raise the consciousness of both blacks and whites as to the need for the abolition of racial segregation.

Most references to the past in Bantu World were made in contributions by members of the editorial staff as distinct from readers of the newspaper. Their contributions, in the form of front-page articles and editorials, were in most cases more comprehensive than the short letters and articles written by readers. This further explains why most of the portrayals of the past depicted in this newspaper were influenced by the views of white liberal writers and politicians. The proprietors of this

newspaper were also white liberals. Unlike ordinary readers not attached to Bantu World, members of the editorial staff would reflect in their contributions in this newspaper the editorial policy which provided for the advancement of 'moderate' views on political and economic issues. Consequently, although the writers were so much concerned about the sufferings of Africans, they did not only write about white oppression but also referred to histories that portrayed African responses to white rule in positive terms.

The different aspects of the history discussed in this thesis have illustrated that the practical application of history, even in societies where it is of such political importance as in South Africa, is not only to manipulate it in support of an ideology, but also to inform others about historical events. In various ways, the portrayals of the past published in Bantu World revealed to its readers the perceptions, values, felt needs and goals of the African writers themselves and to a certain extent of the African people on whose behalf the writers often claimed to be writing. The history portrayed in Bantu World between 1932 and 1936, was in large measure invoked by members of an embattled African middle class engaged in an ideological struggle against increasing racial discrimination and repression. Being educated, they considered themselves civilized by every reasonable criterion and then deeply resented exclusion on racial grounds from what they regarded as the civilized life of whites. Although they often wrote about the plight of all Africans, they were particularly concerned about the position of their own class. They were using history to strengthen and legitimize their protest against racial discrimination and repression.

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