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**THE NATIONAL QUESTION IN THE WRITING OF  
SOUTH AFRICAN HISTORY  
A CRITICAL SURVEY OF SOME MAJOR  
TENDENCIES**

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## Introduction

It is in the writing of history, more than in politics, that the controversies and conflicts about the presentation of the national question in South Africa are most comprehensively and systematically represented.

One only has to pose the questions: "how many nations does South Africa consist of? One? Two? Four? Many? Or none as yet?" to evoke a diversified response. Similarly, the question of what is the main theme of South African history evokes conflicting answers which, somehow correspond to the political positions each ideological tendency adopts on the national question.

The mutual relationships between political assumptions and historical writing is thus well illustrated in South Africa, because here, more than in many other countries, the question of the political implications of historiography are at the root of the current debate about the national question. Conflicting sides to the debate claim history as the basis for their policies. Yet, does not history, like all sciences, lay claim to objectivity in the reproduction of knowledge? Does South Africa have a single history, or many "histories"?

Despite a common view from professional South African historians that they do not take up political positions, and their advocacy of the notion that history is, or ought to be, outside political or ideological conflict, in reality they have taken up political stances. Strictly speaking, the view that history is above political conflict is itself a political question. The problem, however, does not belong to the historian so much as to the subject-matter of history itself. History embodies explanations and arguments that structure political conclusions, and it is the production of these conclusions which has political effect on concrete and current political problems. In the same manner in which politics relies on history for its justification, history relies on politics to justify its explanatory schemes. This explanatory structure deals in connections between events, their causes and their logical motivation. And this is a field of knowledge which typically requires that the historian reconstructing it should understand the conditions and circumstances under which people behaved in one way and not the other.

South African historians may well argue that in the exercise of their profession, they scrupulously follow the narrativist method of articulation, a method that "objectively" places them above the partisanship of political contestation. Such an argument has

been repeatedly advanced in South Africa from the days of George McCall Theal, who published an eleven volume *History of South Africa* during the first decades of this century, to Monica Wilson and Leonard Thompson, whose *Oxford History of South Africa* was written with the expressed purpose of overturning certain misleading assumptions commonly made about the South African past in the existing historiography.

Theal, who is generally regarded as the father of South African historiography, maintained that his method of presentation avoided giving interpretations to the historical information he provided. He insisted that his object, as a historian, was to relate all events of importance, to arrange them generally in chronological order, to give dates to every occurrence and to furnish minute details of all subjects of interest to South African readers (1). His task, he said, was "to state nothing but facts that can be proved"(2). These "historical facts" were unornamented and unpolished, for like the Afrikaner farmers (Voortrekkers) whose wanderings he had followed, he had plain food in abundance and no means of decorating his dinner table.

Wilson and Thompson, on the other hand, who openly crossed swords with the Theal tradition of historiography, and accused it of providing a colonialist version of the South African past, equally claimed to present South African history from the "objective" perspective of all its people, black and white, on an equal basis. The central theme of South African history, they argued, was the interaction between peoples of diverse origins, languages, technologies, ideologies, and social systems, meeting on South African soil (3). Yet this approach as well was severely criticised within the academic community for its shortcomings, most importantly for presenting South Africa's history from a liberal angle that altogether ignored or distorted the national question. Part of the critique of the *Oxford History of South Africa* was provided by Shula Marks, N. Westlake and Anthony Atmore, who have suggested a reinterpretation of the liberal tradition of South African historiography, highlighting its "positive features and limitations"(4).

That both Theal and his liberal critics claim "objectivity" in their historical presentation, and employ a similar narrativist method of articulation, does not prevent conflict from rising between them. If, therefore, the source of this conflict is not as a result of their contradictory political explanatory schemes, where else can the source of this conflict be traced and located?

Asserting that history in general and the narrativist school of historiography in particular, cannot avoid political commitment, would seem to suggest that historical discourse is essentially a subjective exercise, and therefore not a science. Is history not a science?

Debate and controversy over this question is as old as the writing of history itself. Agreement has never been reached over the definition of "history" and of "science", and whether or not we can talk of "historical science". Outstanding sociologists such as Max Weber and Emile Durkheim gave opposite replies to the question. Yet such lack of agreement over the theory of history has not rendered historians unconcerned with causal explanation of human events. Historians have, in the actuality of their practice, continuously regarded the business of history as that of narrating human events as well as giving both their meaning and their cause. This does not necessarily mean that where explanation is given, so is justification. Explanation is logically connected to the reasons people give for their actions. Although reasons may not be causally connected to human actions, the historian does provide, even in the "pure" narrative, a causal account of the relation between reasoning and historical activity.

It is precisely this reasoning, this attempt to understand the "whys" and "hows" of human events, that places history within the scientific terrain. Whether the historian performs such a task excellently or poorly, is not the principal question in determining whether science is involved or not. Rather, what may be the principal consideration is whether this or that historian is an excellent or poor scientist. "Sequences, particularly occurrences" said Gregor McLennan, "and changes are as much the subject of the natural as of the human sciences"(5). In his article "History as Science"(6), Haskell Fain also pointed out that in as much as many sciences are in essence historical, significant narratives may also be happily integrated with theoretical laws. Hayden White as well argued for the maintenance of a link between historical thinking and causal analysis, and he characterised "the cause" as "that which makes a difference to the situation"(7). Like G.H. von Wright (8), he maintained that historical explanation was necessarily value-orientated.

When Lawrence Stone cautioned that the factual qualities of history should be distinguished from the theoreticism of science (9), McLennan replied that Stone's version of a historian was "a common-sensical story-teller fearful of analysis"(10). Such a persona, he warned, is highly prescriptive; it is one whose credibility depends upon the obviousness of empirical norms. Yet historical propositions, as can be seen from the divergent historical approaches to the national question in South Africa, are not obvious.

Story-telling consequently requires the presentation of a story as of one kind rather than another, and this may demand theoretical argument on a number of different sociological and philosophical levels if one ideological tendency in the presentation of South African history has to be sustained against rival interpretations.

History, like all sciences, should (at least, implicitly) involve theoretical procedures in the production of knowledge. Unless that is so, history will lag behind the general development of other sciences, and historians will argue from incomplete knowledge and give insufficient meaning to real complexities. In other words, just as history has made epistemological advances by its mutual relationship with anthropology and archaeology, so can it benefit from a co-operative relationship with philosophy and other social sciences that define ethnic and national processes. The record of South African historiography on this score has been embarrassingly ignorant and, perhaps, even irresponsible.

An argument might be advanced that South African historians have varied understandings of the national question (which is true), and that their investigations of the ethnic and national processes (particularly during the pre-colonial era of South African history), as well as their use of such concepts as "tribe", "ethnic group", "nationality" or "nation", lack sociological rigour. If, however, in civil society, ignorance of the law is no excuse, then in historiography ignorance of sociology is no excuse either.

This is not to suggest that the historian's craft should turn from "the accurate portrayal of temporary sequences"(11) into timeless sociological generalisations. As Carl Hempel maintains, history should provide "explanation sketches"(12) rather than logically rounded explanations. Unlike McLennan (13), however, I do not think that by so doing we render history a poor thinker's science.

Political partisanship and the problem of the scientific obligations for the historian are sharply illustrated in the writings of the colonialist tendency among South African historians, the principal one in this regard being George M Theal.

## ***The Colonialist Tendency***

The colonialist tradition in South African historiography persistently makes the arrival of the whites in 1652 the starting point of its discourse. Accordingly, the pre-colonial era is either seen as a static period of history and the indigenous African communities are deprived of an intelligible scientific explanation of their evolution, or their existence in South Africa during this period is denied altogether.

Historians of this tendency have therefore provided "historical facts" which the ruling National party in South Africa uses to justify its present policies with regard to the ownership of the country's wealth, land distribution, and political dispensation. The central argument of the apartheid ideologists is that the present-day African inhabitants of South Africa, who constitute more than 80 per cent of the total population, are recent arrivals in southern Africa, having migrated from the north of Africa at more or less the same time as the whites who came from Europe during the seventeenth century.

There is also the suggestion that the locations where bantustans (or homelands) are presently established are the territories where the ancestors of the present Africans were settled by the time of the arrival of the whites in South Africa. The scattered nature of these "homelands", continues the argument, is as a result of the Mfecane/Difaqane wars that devastated the interior of southern Africa during the rise of the Zulu kingdom which brought about new migrations and the creation of new ethnic communities. This ethnic and territorial differentiation, it is further suggested, serves as an illustration that the various African ethnic communities were never a homogeneous ethnic group by the time they "landed" within the borders of present-day South Africa, but that they were consistently separate tribal groupings whose differences have continued to this day.

A brochure issued by the South African Embassy in London explaining the policies of the South African government summarised the history of South Africa thus:

"Several centuries ago the Black people migrated southwards in three main streams from the vicinity of the Great Lakes in Central Africa.... the first noteworthy contact on an appreciable scale between the south moving Black people and the Whites took place in the Eastern Cape Province, about 700 km from Cape Town and only about 120 years after the first Whites had arrived in Cape Town in 1652...."

"After the frontier wars of the 18th and 19th centuries and large depopulation of the interior as a result of the wars of genocide committed by the Zulu King Chake [sic] the Whites and Blacks by and large retained the respective White and Black homelands into which the country had come to be divided....

"After 1834 there was a historic moment by White farmers into the largely empty highland interior of South Africa to escape British colonial rule in the Cape colony ... Unlike the Black peoples, who speak nine major languages and who are also divided by culture as well as by language, the Whites speak only two languages (Afrikaans and English) and in culture and socio-political systems are a homogeneous, single nation ..."(14)

On the basis of such "historical" evidence, the ideologists of the apartheid system maintain that the various African ethnic communities are independent "nations" in the same historical sense as are the inhabitants of Lesotho, Swaziland or Botswana - all of whom are the immediate neighbours and ethnic relatives of South Africans. They further point out that the hard-core of the South African problem is the diversity of its population - that there are not just two peoples, one black and one white, but a mosaic of many different and distinct peoples each of whom insists on maintaining its identity, using its own language, managing its own affairs and avoiding any interference by the others. And that, consequently, the granting of independence to bantustans like Bophuthatswana and Venda is in accordance with the requirements of the United Nations Charter when it refers to the right of nations to self determination.

The main body of historical knowledge about South Africa has been provided by white writers. It has come from that section of the South African population who trace their origins to Europe. Whites came to South Africa only in 1652. They became a colonial settler community, whose interest, like other colonisers elsewhere, was to deny the indigenous people their birthright to independence and cultural progress. Their higher social status in colonial life gave them, and only them, the possibilities or articulating written knowledge in various fields. It is they who began to make a study of South African history and, through their publications, moulded the historical consciousness of generations of South Africans as well as others internationally. Their historical writings therefore reflected essentially what persons of European descent knew and believed about the South African past.

To raise the question of descent and racial affiliation with regards professional South African historians is not to stoke the demon of racialism. Was it not E.H. Carr who said that "before you study the history, study the historian, and before you study the historian, study his historical and social environment"?(15). Indeed, in exploring why certain historians wrote on South Africa as they did, it becomes important to understand who the historians themselves are, for in a society in political conflict as South Africa is, the past cannot simply be neutrally observed or the "historical facts" be regarded as mutually agreed. South African history is precisely an arena for fiercely contested theories, whose implications have practical political consequences in the formulation of policies and resolving problems posed by the national question.

South African history written by the Afrikaners has, for example, been typically contemptuous of the Africans, their past and their achievements. From SJ du Toit's *Die Geskiedenis van Ons Land en die Taal van Ons Volk* (Paarl, 1877) to F A van Jaarsveld's *From Van Riebeeck to Vorster, 1652-1974* (Pretoria, 1975), the record is the same. Even the most recent (1989) *History Lecture Guide* (16) prepared by the Department of History of the University of South Africa (UNISA) characterises the pre-colonial African communities (which it admits were in the country several thousands of years before the arrival of whites in 1652) as static, non-complex and waiting for the arrival of the whites to introduce social motion and development. Although Richard Elphick and Hermann Gilomee profess to make a break with this approach, nevertheless they still study the indigenous communities only in so far as they interacted with the Cape colony, "Three hundred years ago", they write.

"the Cape Colony was a poor, under populated territory of interest to no one but its inhabitants, its neighbours and a few inquisitive travellers. Yet in this colony there developed a complex society which in part prefigured that of modern South Africa. And South Africa is much that the early Cape Colony was not - rich, populous and of intense interest to the whole world"(17)

Several historical analyses concur with the view that Gilomee, who also regards himself as basically an Afrikaner historian, does not succeed in breaking from the colonialist tendency in South African historiography, despite his claims to that effect. His interpretation of South African history is made from the perspective of the white colonial community. Thus it is marked by an unquestioning acceptance of some of their myths and standards.

Those few amateur African historians who attempted to present a different version of South African history from the one provided by the white colonial establishment, had their works either ignored or rejected by the publishing business. What counts most in the publication industry is who owns those industries in the first place. In any colonial situation, the ownership of such enterprises is defined by the position the person occupies in relation to state power and other institutions of political control. In the event African historians posed a challenge by questioning and perhaps even overthrowing established historical myths, and thereby challenging the political policies on the basis of which they are constructed. The best solution for such a "problem" has always been regarded as one that denies the publication of their manuscripts because they are considered treasonable.

Such was the fate of Walter Runusana's *History of South Africa From The Native Standpoint*, for which he was awarded an honorary doctorate by the McKinley University in the United States. This manuscript has never been traced, even though its completion was celebrated by *The African Yearly Register* in 1930, a journal which was published by T D Mveli Skota in Johannesburg. Alan Soga's 500 page history of South Africa, which he wrote at the time he was editor of *Izwi Labantu*, was also never published. Other history works were written by Africans in their own languages, but these too were never published by the missionary-owned press because they either considered them inaccessible for the white readership, or simply did not agree with their version of South African history.

An example of such a major history writing endeavour by an African which the Lovedale Press refused to publish was by John Henderson Soga (1859-1941). Although this work was not altogether original, since it drew heavily from the published works by Theal, it nevertheless contained a substantial amount of oral evidence which only a historian who collects the testimonies of people in the community is able to have. None of the major South African historians, including within the liberal tradition, based their historical perspectives on the oral evidence of the African people themselves. Those exceptionally few white historians, like A T Bryant, who studied South African history as told to them by the Africans, have for a long time had their works ignored and uncited in the official history textbooks. Yet even Bryant, as we shall demonstrate in greater detail later, wrote for the settler white community and considered them only as his audience.

Christopher Saunders is therefore correct when he says that "had blacks had the same opportunities to write about the South African past as whites. The body of historical literature we possess would almost certainly have been very different"(18).

The official apartheid version of South African history, one that is taught to students in schools and marketed to the international community by the South African Embassies, projects whites as the bearers of "civilisation" who brought progress to the native races they "discovered" in the interior of the country. In the sixth volume of his *History of South Africa*, Theal wrote that although he realised the difficulty entailed in writing about the relations between Africans and the whites, nevertheless, he held the view that agreements with Africans were useless because the Africans, being barbarians, were untrustworthy; their rulers had been despots and their motives totally evil. He cited the example of King Dingane's killing of Piet Retief and argued that "from the beginning King Dingane only sought to lure the white men to destruction"(19).

That there could possibly be an explanation that justified King Dingane's decision to kill Piet Retief, was never perceived by Theal. Yet oral history among the Zulu clearly shows that before the decision was taken by the king and his councillors, Retief failed a crucial test which King Dingane had set for him in order to ascertain the honesty of his motives in asking for land for a settlement. The news about the colonial activities of the white settlers, it should not be forgotten, had spread to most, if not all, African kingdoms in southern Africa, arriving with numerous messengers from the Cape, where first contact with the whites was made by the Khoikhoi and the Xhosa. By forcefully confiscating Chief Sekhonyela's herd of cattle, simply because King Dingane had told him that if he (Retief) succeeded to bring back the cattle which Chief Sekhonyela of the Batlokwa had stolen - from him (Dingane), he would be favourably disposed to grant him (Retief) some land for settlement. Retief failed King Dingane's test when he and his commandos indeed came back with a herd of cattle which even King Dingane knew was not his but Chief Sekhoneyla's. King Dingane thus concluded that these white settlers had no respect for truth and justice, for they were capable of reaping even where they have not sown (*bavuna nalapho bengatshalanga khona*) a Zulu idiom which summed up King Dingane's judgement about Retief's capabilities to dispossess a chief of his treasured wealth.

For Theal, the African people's point of view of this dramatic event, was not worthy of any consideration. He was probably not even aware of their version of Retief's story. In his assessment of history, he deliberately selected evidence that fitted the case he

wished to make. And this was that Africans were backward savages who were not worth any equal treatment with the whites. This attitude from him comes as no surprise to those who remember that Theal did most of his historical research with the permission of, and under the sponsorship of the white colonial government. He had not only been once a magistrate of that government, a clerk of its Native Affairs Department and a close colleague of Cecil Rhodes, but had also on numerous occasions been pleading with the colonial government to be appointed the official Keeper of the Government Archives in the British colonial office in Cape Town. This is the same colonial office which had, on several occasions, deliberately commissioned the writing of South African history which defended the colonial perspective.

Then came Donald Moodie's book on South African history, whose explicit aim was to show that the relations between the whites and the Khoikhoi were generally of a peaceful nature except for a few nasty incidences, such as that of 1659, when the Khoikhoi started attacking the Dutch settlement (20). Robert Godlonton's *Narrative of the Eruption of the Kaffir Hordes into the Eastern Province of the Cape of Good Hope* is another example of a history book which was published by the government with the object of illustrating that the war of 1834-35 between the Xhosa and the Boers had its origins in the so-called barbarism of the Xhosa, and that the white colonialists had no blame.

Writing in *History of the Boers in South Africa*, Theal said that despite the constant aggression of the Boer commandos against Africans, he "would not be justified in terming the Boers a race of oppressors on account of the numerous instances of oppression of blacks by whites, any more than in terming the inhabitants of London a race of pilferers on account of the pickpockets in their city"(21). And as far as he was concerned, he accepted the Boer view of the difference in the "intellectual capacities of races which mark some as inferior to others". Responding to possible accusations that his historical judgements were racially biased, Theal pleaded his innocence by reminding his readers that he related occurrences without favour towards one group of people or prejudice against another. The reason he advanced for his impartiality was that, having been brought up in Canada, "no ties of blood, no prejudices acquired in youth, stand as barriers to my forming an impartial judgement of the occurrences in South Africa in bygone times"(22).

For all his pretension to impartiality, Theal's historical theme consistently articulated the colonialist perspective of South African history and thereby established ideological

groundwork for the justification of colonial aggression, national oppression and racial inequality that were the policies of various white governments. Justifying the European war against the Xhosa, he argued that "in the nature of things, a petty barbarous government could not be permitted to do whatever it pleases, even within the limits of its own territory, in opposition to the interests of a powerful civilised neighbour"(23). European civilisation, in other words, had a political right to conquer, oppress and establish relations of inequality among the population groups of South Africa. Commenting about the 1879 Battle of Ulundi, during which the British military forces sought to revenge their earlier defeat at the Battle of Isandlwana by destroying villages and burning crops, leaving Zululand and its people in utter desolation, Theal wrote that "the question was simply whether civilisation or barbarism was to prevail in the country". King Getshwayo, whom he considered "an exceedingly able man for a barbarian" had only "a barbarian idea of the sanctity of his word", and for this reason he could not be treated "in exactly the same way as a civilised ruler".

When the Zulus were ultimately defeated and their king later exiled, Theal expressed joy that Africans had finally been conquered, and commented that "the murderous rule of the Bantu despot has gone forever, as even where the tribes are still intact under their chiefs, their power for evil on an extensive scale has been broken. The great progress of late years is due more to the several European communities being free to direct their own affairs in their own way than to all other causes combined, and certainly the native races, whose advancement in civilisation and prosperity must always be an object of the very first importance with the Caucasian settlers in the land, have benefitted immensely by the change"(24).

Theal's historical judgements were considered outrageous even by some Afrikaner historians, like J.S. Marais, who found them to be flawed by numerous errors of fact as well as being illustrative of a historian possessed with prejudice (25).

It then becomes interesting to note similarities in the arguments advanced by Theal, the historian, and decades later by Hendrick Verwoerd, the politician, when the latter, after being elevated to the position of Minister of Native Affairs two years after the victory of the National Party in the whites-only elections, propounded his master plan for apartheid. As quoted above, Theal said that progress in South Africa had been achieved only when several European communities were "free to direct their own affairs in their own way". Verwoerd proclaimed his adherence to the ideal of total separation between South African racial groups. His aim, he told the House of Assembly on 1 June

1956, was to prepare the ground so that whites could continue to live freely and unafraid in their own areas, while blacks developed to the fullest extent of their potential in areas of their own.

During his address to the last session of the Native Representative Council, which his government had decided to abolish, he informed its members of what he considered to be the basic feature of the then new policy of apartheid:

"Must the future development of the Bantu and the White societies take place together, or separated as far as possible? If the answer is together, then it should be clearly realised that rivalry and clashes will take place everywhere. In such clashes the Whites will come off best, at least for a long time, and the Non-white will come off second best in every sphere. This will inevitably cause in him growing resistance and resentment. For neither the White nor the Bantu can such a situation offer an ideal future .... The only possible way out of the second alternative, viz. that both accept development apart from each other ... The present Government believes in the domination (*baasskap*) of Whites in their own areas, but it likewise believes in the domination of the Bantu in their areas"(26).

Verwoerd's government policy was merely giving lip-service to the idea of equality, as there was no intention by the government to establish black and white areas on the basis of an agreement between black and white leaders. Like Theal, the government believed that "agreements with Africans were useless because the Africans being barbarians were untrustworthy". Apartheid was a unilateral policy, conceived, worked out and applied by one section of the population. When this matter was raised and objected to by the leaders of the oppressed people the government refused to consider their views. Also, Verwoerd's idea of black domination in their areas and white domination in their areas did not mean the creation of two equal states based on two equal territories on South African soil, but that the whites were to occupy 87 per cent of the territory and the blacks the remaining 13 per cent which comprised the most backward and underdeveloped areas of the country.

"I want to state here unequivocally now", explained Verwoerd in his maiden speech in the Senate, "that South Africa is a white man's country and he must remain the master here. In the Reserves we are prepared to allow the Natives to be the masters ... but

within the European areas we, the white people of South Africa, are and shall remain the masters"(27).

As the situation was in reality, the Reserves had neither economic opportunities nor meaningful political fulfilment. According to the government's calculation, this desperate situation would provide favourable conditions for the recruitment of cheap African labour to work in the so-called white areas. Apartheid was principally concerned with the control of African labour. For three centuries before the ascent to power by the Nationalist government, the whites had striven to compel blacks to serve them and service their economy. At first it was the farmers who wanted cheap farm labour; later it was the diamond and gold-mining industries which wanted cheap miners; and when the manufacturing industry developed, the factories equally needed cheap labour. The objective of the apartheid system, therefore, was to ensure that, through a system of laws and social practice, Africans supplied these specific needs of the white economy.

Before the apartheid government, General Jan Smuts's United Party government, which had been in power since 1939, was equally a government that followed a policy of black domination by whites, and likewise sought to establish relations of racial inequality in all spheres of South African life. A statement released by Smuts immediately after his Party became the official opposition to the National Party government, said that their Party "stands for European leadership and authority and reaffirms the principle of Christian trusteeship towards the Native peoples ... (and) is not in favour of a policy of equality and assimilation ..."(28)

Neither was apartheid a policy of equality. This was best demonstrated in the sphere of education, where separate schools for different races did not mean that equal education was provided for all. Addressing the House of Assembly on 17 September 1953, Verwoerd stated that his intention was to reform the education system so that blacks will be taught from childhood to realize that equality with whites was not for them. "Racial relations cannot improve if the wrong type of education is given to the Natives. They cannot improve if the result of Native education is the creation of a frustrated people who ... have expectations in life which circumstances in South Africa do not allow to be fulfilled ..." There was no place for the African in the white community above the level of certain forms of labour, he said. "... it is of no avail for him to receive a training which has as its aim absorption in the European community"(29).

Like Verwoerd, Theal believed that Africans fell way behind the whites in intellect and cultural progress, he considered them as so thoughtless and "indifferent to the wants of the future generations" that even such a thing "as preservation of the forest never occurred to them". All that the Africans had intellectually, he said, was a "great power of imitating, but very little of inventing"(30).

For Theal, as for Verwoerd, nothing progressive and developmentally significant had ever been achieved by the Africans. Anything of developmental importance, which showed that black people were not barbarians, or that demonstrated the evidence of African civilisations that had existed in southern Africa before the whites arrived, was dismissed by Theal, who considered all cultural progress as coming from outside. Such was his opinion of the origins of the Zimbabwe ruins, about which he wrote that since the mines could not have been dug without portable artificial light, the blacks could not have been the builders because "even the most advanced Bantu knew nothing of such a device". He consistently held to the view first expressed in R N Hall's *Ancient Mines of Rhodesia* (1900) that the great Zimbabwe ruins were built by some mysterious, alien civilisation, probably Arab or Phoenician.

The true record of the African past, Theal insisted, was one of constant cruelty and misery. In Volume I of his *History of South Africa* he wrote that as soon as one got beneath the surface of black traditions anywhere in South Africa. it became certain that the normal condition of things was pillage and bloodshed (31). Theal, however, hardly knew much about early African communities since he never made any serious research into them. Although he wrote the *Ethnography and Condition of South Africa Before 1505*, which he said was to be regarded as the nearest approach that was possible to the history of South Africa before 1505, he came to the conclusion that only the San were the true original inhabitants of the country, and persistently maintained that Africans were recent immigrants coming from the north.

His ethnographical writings show this obsession about the migration of Africans from the north. It is actually doubtful whether he would have attempted to write on the subject of pre-colonial Africans had it not been for the intention of investigating evidence about the origins of the Africans of South Africa whom he thought could be traced back to Egypt. Saunders points out that this interest Theal in the subject of the pre-colonial African communities "arose from a concern to find evidence to prove that Bantu speakers arrived in South Africa relatively late, and therefore had no more right to land in the country than whites"(32). For all his concern with the history of blacks, Saunders

remarks, Theal could on occasion write as if they did not exist. Blacks were not equals in his eyes and their history and that of their relations with whites were not as significant as the history of white settlement (33).

Therefore, for both Theal and Verwoerd, Africans had no right to claim the whole South African territory as belonging to them. Consequently, neither could they (Africans) claim the right to self-determination in the whole country. This historical question, of to whom South Africa belongs, is the first and central issue in the presentation of the national question in this country. The connection between this issue of land ownership and the question of the right to self-determination, features as a common denominator for whatever aspect of the national question is investigated. It is the answer to this question that lies behind the viability or non-viability of the bantustan programme.

The approach to this question either challenges or justifies the various constitutional arrangements in South Africa that have consistently excluded the Africans from participating democratically in the administration of the country. The significance of this question is understood by the white rulers of South Africa in precisely these terms. That is why Eschel Rhodie, then Secretary for Information, told a French newspaper, *Le Monde*, on 12 August 1975, that "neither the blacks nor the whites have a prior claim to the whole of South Africa. Each owns the territories they occupied first".

In 1909, during the country-wide debate over the proposed Union Constitution Act, by which the then independent British provinces of Natal and the Cape together with the two Boer republics of the Transvaal) and the Orange Free State were to unite into a single country with a single constitution, various newspapers reported numerous white legislators, historians, publicists and political commentators. They all give their views, citing what they considered as the history of South Africa, about why blacks were not to be given the right to vote and participate in the government of the country. *The Cape Times* of 18 September, 1909, for example, reported whites who insisted that inclusion of blacks in the new franchise was a non-issue because South Africa belonged to the white people who thus had the right to govern it. To the view that it might have been occupied by the Africans before them, the white commentators are reported to have argued that "in reality this country was not the Bantu's originally any more than it was the white man's, because the Bantus were also immigrants ... most of their ancestors migrated to South Africa in comparatively recent times".

Theal as the leading published historian on South Africa at the time, associated his name with these views. Six months earlier, he had been quoted by the *South African News* of 5 March 1909, as saying that "the Bantu now in and south of Natal are very recent immigrants, their ancestors having come down from the north, less than four centuries ago ... It was into this vast stretch of vacant land that white men moved from the south and black men from the north almost if not quite simultaneously. Near its centre they met, and then a struggle began as to which should go further. Bear in mind that it was not an attempt of white men to take possession of land owned by black men, it was an effort on both sides to get as much unoccupied land as possible".

Following in this tradition, George Edward Cory (1862-1935) sought to outdo Theal in establishing the original occupation of South Africa by whites, whose troubles, he said, were only started by the "mischievous" Africans. On the original cover of the third volume of Cory's history series on South Africa, under the title: *The Rise of South Africa*, a photograph of a Xhosa man smoking a pipe is published, with a caption beneath saying: Meditating Mischief. Like Theal, Cory considered the whites and not the blacks as the principal actors in the South African historical drama. When he made contributions of articles in the British press, which was then publishing the missionary version of the story of the relations between blacks and whites, Cory challenged their view and argued that no white person ill-treated any black in the country.

As recently as 1969, the Theal-Cory tradition of historiography was still having its influence among Afrikaner historians. C F J Muller's *Five Hundred Years - A History of South Africa* still regarded the real epic of South African history as the story of the survival of the Voortrekkers against barbaric conditions among the "Bantu" tribes whom they met on the northern provinces. Muller's story of South Africa is one of the Voortrekkers moving into unoccupied territories where they had every right to settle. These Voortrekkers are considered the instruments of Providence or God on a civilising mission among blacks.

According to another leading Afrikaner historian, F A van Jaarsveld, when the whites met blacks, the latter were primitive and uncivilised. It was the whites who, after "the Mfecane/Difaqane period of devastation and exterminatory war, brought peace and order to the Bantu nations ... the tribes eventually accepted authority of the whites and helped to tame the land as peaceful, law-abiding labourers" (34).

Nobody understood the political implications of these historical arguments in South Africa more than the National Party. In taking over political power in 1948, it had to advance a policy that claimed to solve the national question in a historically just way. If blacks had no prior claim to the whole of the South African territory, then they had no right to self-determination in the whole country. Instead, argued the National Party, they could only govern themselves within the boundaries of their traditional "homelands" or bantustans.

The leadership of the National Party made no secret of the fact that the primary task of the policy of apartheid was to safeguard and preserve the privileges of the white race, on the one hand, while arresting the process of detribalisation among the Africans, on the other. With regards to the first objective, said J G Strydom, who followed D F Malan as the Nationalist Prime Minister, their policy "is that the Europeans must stand their ground and must remain *baas* (boss) in South Africa. If we reject the *herrenvolk* (chosen race) idea and the principle and the idea that the White man cannot remain *baas*, if the franchise is to be extended to the non-Europeans, and if the non-Europeans are given representation and the vote and the non-Europeans are developed on the same basis as the Europeans, how can the European remain *baas* ... Our view is that in every sphere the Europeans must retain the right to rule the country and to keep it a White man's country"(35).

Concerning the question of the African people's political rights, he said that the purpose of the apartheid policy was to give the Africans an opportunity of developing "in their own areas and in accordance with their own nature and abilities under the guardianship of the whites; and in so far as they develop in accordance with the systems which are best adapted to their nature and traditions, to govern themselves there and serve their community at all the various levels of their national life"(36).

When Verwoerd became prime minister, and witnessed the independence movement among African states, starting with Ghana in 1957 and followed by a large number of others he coined the concept that the various African ethnic groups were also "nations" in the same sense as were the Congolese, Kenyans or Ghanaians. "We want each of our population groups to control and govern itself as is the case with other nations", he said in London in March 1961. "Then all can cooperate as in a Commonwealth - in an economic association with the Republic and with each other... South Africa will proceed in all honesty and fairness to secure peace, prosperity and justice for all by means of political independence coupled with economic interdependence".

The process of setting up these "independent" ethnic "nations" began with the Bantu Authorities Act, which Verwoerd put through parliament in 1951. This law revived and reinforced tribalism, conferring extensive powers upon the chiefs and headmen, and providing for the establishment of tribal, regional and territorial authorities, dominated by the chiefs as officials of the South African government. The Minister of Native Affairs (later called Bantu Affairs and Development) became the supreme chief of all the Africans, and was invested by the Act with the power to control every facet of the African's life. Through the Department of Native Affairs he controlled the lives of Africans on farms, in the towns and cities as well as in the rural areas (called the Reserves). Some of this power was vested on him through the many laws that governed Africans, which over the years had expanded steadily and made the principal business of the white legislature in South Africa the administration of the black people in general, and Africans in particular.

Without the approval of the Ministry of Native Affairs and its multitude of white officials, no African could seek or accept employment or move from one area to another. African areas were ruled by the Minister's proclamation, which made his department virtually a state within a state. Native Commissioners, chiefs and headmen were appointed by the department, and had their duties and powers prescribed for them. The Minister was also empowered by the Native, Administration Act to dismiss any chief whom he considered to be acting against the interest of the white state and the policies of his department. He even had the power to remove whole ethnic communities from one area to another without prior notice. His proclamations could apply to Africans anywhere in South Africa, including to all Africans living in the urban areas, who could be compelled to go back to their "homelands" when the officials of the department thought so.

In actual political practice, the Bantu Authorities Act injected new life into a dying system of tribal administration, and it resuscitated backward traditional practices which the African people had objectively outgrown during the process of the industrial development of South Africa. Yet the government, undeterred by the massive African opposition to this system of government, went ahead to establish training colleges for the chiefs and headmen, where they were taught to govern according to the requirements of the Department of Native Affairs as salaried servants of the white government.

It became quite clear from the start, therefore, that the system of bantustans and administration of Africans by chiefs in the so-called homelands, had nothing to do with the building of nationhood in the universally understood definition of the term. Chiefs, by

nature, stand for institutions that predate democracy. They derive their authority from traditional rules of inheritance, not election. Under the Bantu Authorities system, they derived their political power from the white Minister of Native Affairs. And without this process of democracy, no ethnic community in South Africa could be said to be developing towards nationhood, even if the examples of Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland are used by the apartheid ideologists to justify the bantustan practice by reference to common historical origins of the Africans with the peoples of these independent countries.

The establishment of bantustans and the promotion of the notion that the Tswana Venda or Zulu people are nations, is therefore meant at the level of solving the national question in South Africa, to deny South African nationhood to the black people. That is why B.J. Vorster said to a white audience during the election campaign in Durban on 13 March 1970: "South African nationhood is for the Whites only. That is how I see it, that is how you see it, and that is how [we] will see it for the future".

Theal and other colonialist historians in South Africa, might well be considered as having pioneered the formal writing of the country's history and given the profession some academic respectability. Theal did, indeed, provide that elementary skeleton with no flesh, the dry narration with no analysis, but the bones he provided were those of white people, the victims of shipwrecks and the Voortrekkers whom he admired. He forgot to consider that the indigenous African people who form the majority population in this country, were making the history of southern Africa long before the first European landed on South African soil. This fact does not only have to be fully articulated by the historian but its full implications in the presentation of the national question has to be equally appreciated.

### ***The Liberal Tendency***

An examination of four historians who represent the liberal tradition in South African historiography will suffice to make the point about their common approach to the national question, namely, William Miller Macmillan, Cornelis Willem de Kiewiet, Monica Wilson and Leonard Thompson.

The above-named historians were not, of course, the founders of the liberal tendency in South African historiography. It was the missionaries, like John Phillip of the London Missionary Society (who published two volumes of South African history in 1828) and

David Livingstone (37), who should be credited with the foundation of this liberal perspective. In contrast to the colonialist tendency, these missionaries chose as their theme the defence of the Africans from white aggression and oppressive brutality. Very much a minority among whites, these missionaries challenged slavery in the Cape, questioned the right of the settler government to seize African land and cattle, and condemned racial oppression. Although I would not be so generous as to grant them leadership in championing the African people's rights, nevertheless, it is proper and fair to acknowledge their pioneering role in providing a critical historical viewpoint to the one that was provided by the colonialist-minded writers. And despite the fact that a convincing case can be made about the collaboration of certain missionary institutions with the colonialist establishment, it cannot be denied that liberals such as Van der Kemp, Pringle, Livingstone, Phillip, Schreiner and others, swam against the stream of racialism in their white community and courageously challenged racial oppression in South Africa.

In his memoirs (38), Macmillan openly admitted that in his historical writings, he had been influenced by David Livingstone, whose book, he said, was the first South African history work he had ever read from cover to cover. Macmillan lived and wrote history at a time when South African whites still regarded themselves as Europeans, and were described as such by the official literature. During his history teaching career at Rhodes University College and later at Witwatersrand University, Macmillan advised his white students to be more acquainted with European history than with South African history.

When he did ultimately develop a particular interest in South African historical studies, he became obsessed with the problem of poor whites more than with the history and social conditions of the blacks. When blacks featured in his historical thinking, it was only in relation to the propositions he was making about solving the problems of poor whites. The theme of his first published work, which was a pamphlet entitled *The Land, The Native and Unemployment*, was an argument for the granting of more land to the Africans so that they would stop competition with whites in searching for jobs in the cities.

Although Macmillan, like Theal, believed in the virtue of "objective history", and like Theal again, believed himself to be more disposed towards objectivity by reason of him being an expatriate to South Africa (he came from Scotland) he (unlike Theal) made no pretence at not being interested in South African politics simply because conventional wisdom expected historians to stand above political conflict. He thus commented

generously on various political issues, and consequently he established a clear connection between historical perspectives and political ideas. Unlike Theal, Macmillan believed that history was not merely a matter of chronicling past events but also the study and disclosure of relevant social issues so that people would understand better the nature of society in which they lived. He advanced a method of historical research which made contemporary social interests the only justification for studying the past. He said that the past was important only if it helped to explain the present.

During the political debates preceding the formation of the 1910 Union Constitution, Macmillan, like all liberals, advocated the extension of franchise rights to blacks and called for the removal of "illegal inequalities" affecting them. The franchise he advocated, however, was not a universal one, but a qualified franchise. In 1927, when he published *The Cape Colour Question - A Historical Survey*, Macmillan wrote :

"White South Africa must carry its child races along with it on the way to progress. There can be no vision of a civilisation that will rest on a base of serfdom and live. The policy for the future is to be judged according to as it stands by those principles of freedom which have been tried in some measure and have not been found wanting"(39).

Writing in another of his books, two years later, Macmillan warned that unless the Hertzog government took decisions in the direction he (Macmillan) indicated, then those Africans in the Cape province who exercised the right to vote, and who "are still eager and willing to be led - content with a humble place in the one South African society - were to be driven into increasingly bitter racial, opposition. There is no solution which denies to this little group of progressive and dispossessed Bantu full rights of citizenship in the Union which is their only home. Given such rights, they may easily be led and won"(40).

Again, writing in the Preface of *Bantu, Boer and Briton*, Macmillan said:

"The natives ready to qualify (for the vote) increase all too slowly. Wisdom demands that white South Africa bind this handful to itself and secure their cooperation in devising a policy for leading up to civilisation the great backward masses who must, for many years, remain incapable of independent political thought and action"(41).

Typical of liberalism in South Africa, Macmillan thought of the whites as a culturally superior race whose mission was to raise the Africans (whom he regarded as the "child race") to civilisation. To a certain extent this was a similar attitude to that of the missionaries, whose sympathies for the blacks was essentially based on a belief that blacks, as human beings, also deserved to partake in the glory of western civilisation. Blacks were not regarded as subjects with whom South African society could be analysed and developed, but rather as objects to be analysed and developed by whites. Blacks were an object of concern, people to be converted prayed for and given a sense of true humanity and civilisation. Where this much-celebrated civilisation came from, was an unproblematized question: it was assumed that it could only have been European civilisation.

When Macmillan argued that the government should grant the Africans more land, it never occurred to him that this matter could be historically put the other way round, namely, that the Africans claimed the whole of the South African territory as originally belonging to them. Is this not what used to happen, after all, when various colonialist delegations used to approach African kings and chiefs to requested land for settlement? What had caused the onus to change?

Whereas the apartheid ideologists saw South Africa as composed of many nations, the liberals argued that there was a single South African nation and regarded the whites as constituting the core of that nation. Blacks were to be brought in by instalments on the basis of them meeting certain white standards. For liberalism, the central theme of South African history was the integration of its various peoples into a single South African nation. This integration process, however, was not merely seen in sentimental humanitarian terms, in the manner in which the missionaries agitated for the abolition of slavery before 1828, but rather as a result of an analysis that pointed to the growth of a single South African economy, which then made racial cooperation rather than conflict, the main theme of historical discourse. Whereas the liberal missionaries would argue against the colonialist tendency by expressing their belief in the equality of men before God, the liberal social analysts would cite proclamations by great bourgeois prophets of democracy that no nation can survive half slave and half free.

Olive Schreiner, who thought along similar lines, and engaged in much writing and debate about the destiny of people of South Africa at the turn of this century, put the matter this way:

"Wherever a Dutchman, an Englishman, a Jew, and a native are superimposed, there is that common South African condition through which no dividing line can be drawn ... South African unity is not the dream of a visionary; it is not even the forecast of genius which makes clear and at hand that which only after ages can accomplish ... South African unity is a condition the practical necessity for which is daily and hourly forced upon us by the common needs of life: it is the one path open to us. For this unity all great men born in South Africa during the next century will be compelled directly or indirectly to labour: it is this unity which must precede the production of anything great and beautiful by our people as a whole; neither art, nor science, nor literature, nor states craft will flourish among us as long as we remain in our unorganised form: it is the attainment of this unity which constitutes the problem of South Africa: How from our political states and our discordant races, can a great, a healthy, a united, an organised nation be formed?"(41).

Because it was the whites who were seen as constituting the principal elements of this "South African nation", and since it was they who were on the commanding heights of the South African economy, that is, a single economy that was seen to be providing the basis for single nationhood in the country, the liberals ultimately rallied in support of the 1910 Union Constitution. Their claim to be defending the political rights of the African people revealed their limitations. For them, the South Africa of 1910 was already an independent nation-state. This meant that the national question in South Africa had ceased to exist. After all, for them, the dispute over whether the Afrikaners or the English constituted the South African nation had been the major issue of the nation-formation process in South Africa. Now that they had united in a single constitution - Dutch, German, French, English and Jew - and their leaders had formally proclaimed the birth of that nationhood, the national question was regarded as resolved and as having become a non-issue in South African politics.

That the Africans had not only been excluded from the "sovereignty" of this new "nation-state" but had also been made subject to it, bothered them only to the extent that that section of the Africans who were already "civilised" were not included in the franchise.

When it came to the choice of either rejecting the racist constitution because it did not give full recognition to the principle of majority rule in the country, or joining hands with General Smuts when he declared that the whole meaning of Union was the creation of a white nation (42), the liberals chose to join ranks with General Smuts. Africans felt

betrayed by them, and concluded that when the liberals talked of unity with the blacks, they mean only that kind of unity which denied the black people their right to self-determination.

This betrayal of the African people's cause by the liberals, however, is not, as is so often thought, only a result of opportunism on their part. Their political action was, in fact, quite consistent with their basic historical perspective of the South African problem. Their approach was therefore the logical culmination of the ideological standpoint of liberalism in approaching the national question in South Africa. Theirs is an approach whose starting point is that South Africa is a multiracial society. This multiracialism is the beginning and the end of all historical as well as political discourse. Therefore, to the liberals, as in the case of the colonialist historians, the real South Africa begins to take shape when whites meet with the blacks in the seventeenth century. What happened in South Africa before that, and how the pre-colonial period contributed in the shaping of the country's status and future, was not considered important, and could therefore have no relevance in the formulation of policies.

De Kiewiet, who had been one of Macmillan's brilliant history students at Witwatersrand University, and who became an outstanding history professor in South Africa, is acknowledged by Shula Marks and Anthony Atmore as having made a revolutionary break with the past in South African historiography (43). His *History of South Africa, Social and Economic* (44) in particular established him as a social historian who attempted to provide an interpretative essay on South African history. Contrasted with his predecessors, he can rightly be distinguished as a pioneer historian in realising the significance of economics in history as well as, more importantly, recognising the role of labour (both black and white) in the shaping of South African society.

He not only commented favourably about the development of the African proletariat, but went further in defending the Africans against government policies which led to their social and economic deprivation. When others pointed to the Reserves as the areas for African economic growth, De Kiewiet ridiculed such arguments by pointing at the hopelessness of the conditions in the Reserves. He defended the actions of Africans where past historians placed the blame on them.

Unlike the colonialist historians who provided historical evidence to sustain the establishment of bantustans and the creation of ethnic "nations" in the Reserves, De Kiewiet did not believe in the myth of the empty land which was then supposedly

occupied by the whites while the blacks slowly migrated from the north to fill the areas of the present-day bantustans. He was critically aware of the imperial policy of colonialism. When he wrote *The Imperial Factor in South Africa* (45), he clearly analysed British colonialism in South Africa in the context of a wider imperial policy covering various other countries including New Zealand where the indigenous inhabitants were overwhelmed in numbers by the colonial settlers. Thus in his writings, he sought to absolve the Africans of the blame that had been heaped on them by previous historians. To him, whites remained the intruders who practiced aggressive colonisation over the blacks.

De Kiewiet, however, did not maintain this theme consistently. That is why he did not introduce a new paradigm in South African historiography. He too subscribed to the liberal tradition, and carried with him all the essential features of this tradition. Like Macmillan, he considered the leading theme of South African history to be the "growth of a new society in which white and black are bound together in the closest dependence upon each other"(46). He maintained that the development of close economic ties in South Africa, which objectively bound together the various races into a single nation, was a theme of South African history which had previously been ignored by those who either talked only of black history or white history.

The dependence of white on black labour, he wrote in *The History of South Africa, Social and Economic*, was "the greatest social and economic fact" in 19th century South African history. He pointed out that the development of a single economy in the country had produced "a single society in which the main line of division was not race and culture but of possession and authority". He also felt that neither the British government nor anybody else deserved to be blamed for South Africa's problems. In other words, at a certain level of his historical analysis he maintained an artificial impartiality and a false objectivity over the national conflict between the oppressors and the oppressed. By adopting such a position, De Kiewiet ignored the national demands of the oppressed people, and imagined them to be enjoying a feeling of national equality with the whites.

Although De Kiewiet commented critically about the activities of the Afrikaners against the Africans, he was quick to defend the British policy which he saw as protectionist towards the Africans. Even where there was indisputable evidence of British colonial aggression against Africans, he thought that British motives were always inspired by worthy ends. This obsession with imperial policy was the central focus of De Kiewiet's historical studies. Like Macmillan, he gave minimal attention to the study of precolonial

African societies. Africans were discussed mainly in the context of British imperial policy. They were not given the same importance with whites in the making of South African history. Saunders correctly observes that, whereas much space in De Kiewiet's books was given to detailed accounts of white communities, the Africans were merely generalised and not even a start was made at analysing them from within their own social fabric (47). No wonder in *The Imperial Factor in South Africa* De Kiewiet wrote that Africans were "savages with no government", and that they were always prone to "violence"(48).

In a very real sense, therefore, De Kiewiet was also centred on the white society, which he investigated in greater depth than the blacks. And like most other liberal historians, he never conducted oral interviews with Africans to ascertain their own independent perspectives of the South African past and future. De Kiewiet did, however, deny this accusation, for he wrote in a letter published by the *Washington Post* on 25 April 1981 that he belonged to the last surviving generation of historians who attempted in the 1920s to bring the national question (or the native problem, as it was then called) into "a credible historical, economic and social focus ... We developed the history that put the African population in its proper place as the central element in South African society. We laid the groundwork of economic and social perception that displayed the role and the condition of the African in society".

Had De Kiewiet actually done that, he would have established a new paradigm within liberal historiography, an accomplishment which, however, he did not make. What De Kiewiet professed to have accomplished in the 1920s was only attempted for the first time within the liberal tradition by Monica Wilson and Leonard Thompson in *The Oxford History of South Africa*(49). That this work furthered the frontiers of historical knowledge about South Africa is beyond dispute.

The distinguishing feature of this historical work, in contrast to its other liberal predecessors, is that it put the history of the Africans and other blacks before the colonial era into focus. South Africa is not studied merely as a British dominion, as De Kiewiet had done, but rather as a country whose populations had their own historical dynamics. *The Oxford History of South Africa* closed the debate about who were the original inhabitants of South Africa.

In the first chapter contributed by R R Inskip, a devastating scientific argument is presented which lays to rest once and for all some of the myths spread by the

colonialists concerning the South African past. A skilled archaeologist, Inskip provides evidence from his discipline which shows the chronological sequence cultural succession in southern Africa, beginning with what he calls the Early Stone Age past several other economic epochs up to the Iron Age. The excavation of diamonds in the archaeologically rich banks of the Vaal river, and the discovery of the skeletal remains of *Australopithecus africanus* in 1924, as well as radiocarbon dating of the fauna dug up from many rivers and their tributaries, are all knitted together into a single rope of historical meaning to demonstrate the life of the earlier inhabitants of southern Africa thousands of years before the first whites arrived.

Evidence of excavations made at Taung, Sterkfontein, Makapansgat, Swartkransat, Silverleaves, Eiland (all in the Transvaal) and Enkwazini near St Lucia Bay on the Natal coast all areas which fall outside of the borders of the present bantustans, led Inskip to the conclusion that a developed culture had existed among the African people long before the arrival of the whites. There already were, as early as the first millennium AD, settled villages, agriculture, iron using and pottery. Writing in his illustrated volume, *The Peopling of Southern Africa*, he said:

"By the fifth century populations were established in large villages of pole and thatch houses with plastered walls and floors. Their technology included the smelting and smelting of iron and copper, the manufacture of elaborate pottery, the carving of shallow bowls or dishes from soapstone, and the carving of bone and ivory. Salt was extracted from alkaline mineral springs by evaporation in soapstone dishes. The localised nature of such industry combined with the importance of the product almost certainly resulted in its being traded. Some form of trading with the East Coast is suggested by the occasional Indian Ocean seashells that turn up in so many sites"(49).

Whereas many historical writers who acknowledge such early habitation of Southern Africa recognise only the San and perhaps the Khoihhoi as the only early inhabitants of the country, studies of the South African fauna, both ancient and modern, conclusively regards these cultural achievements "to be essentially African, with changes through time resulting from normal processes of mutation and natural selection, aided perhaps by climatic changes resulting in migration and specification"(50). Regarding the possibility that the people responsible for the development of Iron Age civilisation in South Africa were the San or the Khoikhoi, Inskip argues that "early historical sources leave us in little doubt that these peoples were still ignorant of the processes of

metallurgy at the time of the arrival of the first Europeans, except perhaps for the Nama, who may have acquired, already, some knowledge of metallurgy from Bantu- "speaking neighbours"(51).

The development of archeological studies in South Africa as well as Monica Wilson's own anthropological knowledge, helped to make the Oxford History the first comprehensive work of South African history to scientifically demolish the historical argument of the bantustan programme as well as to shift the opinion of the academic community from regarding the Africans, Coloured and Indians as historically constituting a "problem" for the whites.

Wilson and Thompson were critically aware of some of the major shortcomings of the histories of the pre-1960s period (that is, mainly those within the academic establishment). Their point of departure from them, they said, was that they were not providing a history of South Africa from the point of view of only one community. Like De Kiewiet, they aimed at presenting South African history from the "objective" perspective of all its people, black and white, on an equal basis. Contrary to some suggestions that have been made (52), the Oxford History does not fall within the Africanist tendency in South African historiography. By the admission of its editors, their work derives from their belief that the central theme of South African history is interaction between peoples of diverse origins, languages, technologies, and social systems, meeting on South African soil.

There is no need here to repeat the general critique of liberal South African historiography, since this has been done in sufficient measure with Macmillan and De Kiewiet. Suffice it to say that in their Preface, Wilson and Thompson honestly admit that individual historians are conditioned by the assumptions and prejudices of their own community, whether it is a community of religion, class, language, race or some combination of two or more of these factors. That is why their historical account, despite some indisputable breakthrough achievements, cannot be free from the limitations set on the authors by their, environment. "We, too, are the products of our time and place" they write. "We live, or have lived, in a caste society, and we are all white. This last unbalance occurs because in South Africa today few Africans, or Asians or Coloured people have the opportunity for unfettered research and writing: and those who have the training and opportunity are for the most part occupied with other commitments"(53).

And partly for this reason, Wilson and Thompson like their liberal predecessors, have not included a shred of oral history in their account of the South African past. Their sources are all academic papers written by others, but not a single interview with an African, Coloured or Indian. The ability to listen to people, and to note down their authentic knowledge and experience, does not strip the historian of academic presuppositions. Great classical historians, from Herotodus to Machiavelli, listened to people, and did not disregard oral history. Yet because of the deep distrust of oral sources that academic history has had previously, the voice of the people goes missing even in such works of erudition as the *Oxford History*.

From the point of view of the national question, the major problem of the *Oxford History* is its failure to reconstruct a comprehensive formulation of the precolonial ethnic and national processes. What Volume I reflects, is merely a hotch-potch of unconnected archeological and anthropological data that gives us little or no information at all about the dynamism of the processes that led to ethnic differentiation among Africans, as well as factors that justify African self-identification. When the apartheid ideologist argues that there is no such thing as an African nationality in South Africa, what does a historical scientist say? And is not the answer to this question to be found precisely in a work of history? Instead, what we get in the *Oxford History* is a discussion of the Africans as Tswana, Venda and Zulu, and nothing about the development of the family, the clan, the tribe up to a nationality.

Dismissing the historical territorial claims of bantustan ideologists is one thing, but giving a scientifically substantiated historical characterisation of the ethnic communities who presently inhabit them or who are meant to regard them as their "homeland", and placing such ethnic communities within the context of contemporary national processes in South Africa, is quite another. Such an exercise is not assisted by a work of history that regards the whites as a homogenous ethnic community, while the interconnection between ethnic differentiation and national unity among the Africans is not placed on a historic basis. This requires a detailed and systematic definition of the ethnic and national processes among the African people both during the pre-colonial and post-colonial period. The notion of the integration of African ethnic groups into a single nationality should not be oversimplified and presented as theoretically and historically unproblematic. This problem is made particularly complex by the fact that the Tswana, Venda or Zulu ethnic communities were not created by the bantustan system but they

were there as developed language and cultural communities long before colonialism was imposed in South Africa.

It is the task of the historian, therefore, to answer the following questions: Is there not a case of regarding colonialism in South Africa as having interrupted these ethnic groups in the process of nation-formation? And if so, is there not a sense in which some of the bantustan leaders justifiably regard the peoples they have been given to lead as having been deprived of the "right" to full nationhood and therefore the right to self-determination and the formation of their own national states, as happened with the present inhabitants of Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland?

African ethnic groups have, in historical terms, a reality at a certain level. To deny this would be to behave like an ostrich. Yet they should be recognised for what they really are, which means that they have to be characterised in an analysis that captures the dynamics of the South African social formations during the various periods. There has been much talk in literature about such concepts as the "Zulu nation", but did King Shaka's kingdom preside over a "nation"? Wilson and Thompson use this notion with regard to the Zulu as though it was sociologically problematic.

### ***Against Empiricism and Idealism***

The *Oxford History*, therefore reflects the outstanding gaps in current research on African ethnic processes. These arise for Wilson and Thompson partly because of their method of historical research and the logic of their investigation. They, like most other academic historians before them, seem to be trapped within the limits of an empiricist idiom of discourse. For them, historical knowledge is exclusively that which is given to us by empirically verifiable data. Where such empirical data is not-available or where history cannot be presented as a narration of the sequence of determinable events. The empiricist feels that he or she has entered the realm of speculative reconstruction. And precisely because much of the empirical data about the pre-colonial ethnic processes is absent from the library shelves, where the main source of the academic historian's authority derives, no systematic attempt has been made to reconstruct the early life of the indigenous African communities and thus consistently challenge the apartheid theory of ethnicity and nationality.

Wilson's empiricist anthropology sees South African society as a collection of unconnected ethnic appearances, and decisively ignores the role of theory in actively

organising and critically reorganising the data provided by such appearances. Typical of empiricism, she stands for "purely" concrete studies and fails to identify the function of theory to represent in thought the essential relations generating the historical processes. From this standpoint the early history of the indigenous African communities is isolated from the rest of the world where similar ethno-transformational processes of human development took place. Empiricism thus expresses the fragmentary and atomistic facts and their constant conjunctions, thereby creating a world segregated into various partial spheres and unrelated to any meaningful social reality. Yet scientificity is immediately lost when some of the fundamental elements needed to constitute a total and integral conception of society are dislocated. This results in mere "historicism", the reduction of historical science to an expression of conjunctural mediations. Such a conception of history is metaphysical and formalist.

A dynamic historical approach, one that reflects the comprehensive and yet historically changing objective society, articulates the social development of ethnic communities from the "totalising vantage point of world history"(54), since ethnic communities exist within a universal intercourse. Reflecting on this concept of social totality, Georg Lukacs was partly correct in concluding that

"it is not the predominance of economic motives in the interpretation of society which is the decisive difference between Marxism and bourgeois science, but rather the point of view of totality. The category of totality, the all round, determining domination of the whole over the parts is the essence of the method which Marx took over from Hegel and, in an original manner, transformed into the basis of an entirely new science"(55).

The level of historical research that would help us penetrate the overall social complex, the social totality, is theoretical analysis of both the modes of production and socio-economic formations of various epochs of social development. It is this level of analysis which provides the source of hypotheses for further historical research as well as being capable of giving rise to laws which express the general direction of development of society as a whole.

E P Thompson, would probably deny the usefulness of this method in the study of history. In his book, *The Poverty of Theory* (56), a highly polemical work against Althusser (57), he dismisses this paradigm of knowledge reproduction and argues that categories in abstraction (like modes of production) contradict the very nature of

historical research; he regards them as "static analytical concepts ... A logic inappropriate to history"(58). Thompson assures us that historical knowledge lies within the discipline of history itself and nowhere else. He maintains that the permissible method of acquiring historical knowledge consists of "finding out" what really happened, a procedure that establishes experience as the only legitimate means of acquiring historical knowledge. This experience, he explains, is a category which, however imperfect it may be, is indispensable to the historian, since it comprises the mental and emotional response, whether of an individual or social group, to many inter-related events or to many repetitions of the same kind of event (59).

Although some of Thompson's points against Althusser are valid and constitute substantial arguments (since Althusser himself is not free of the error of dislocating theoretical analysis from the socio-historical realm), Thompson proposes an epistemological doctrine that would not assist South African historians in reconstructing what would to an empiricist be illegitimate historical knowledge. Was it not Engels who wrote in *Dialectics of Nature* that empiricism, assuming that it "operates only with undeniable facts ... operates predominantly with traditional notions, with the largely obsolete products of thought of its predecessors"(60)? As pointed out in the introduction of this paper, what we are concerned with here is history as a science - that is, historical science.

The scientific dimension in history is one that goes beyond the reflection of individual ethnic communities as concrete by and in themselves, independent of society as integral wholes. Science implies the process of constructing a system of scientific definitions. This definition of concepts like "family", "clan", "tribe", "nationality" or "nation", which an empiricist historian disregards, or simply borrows ready-made from everyday usage, have to be interrogated and critically analysed. The theoretical process leading to the attainment of new historical knowledge is, therefore, the formulation of new scientific definitions that correspond to changing reality. It is on this theoretical terrain where the "nationhood" of the Zulu can be contrasted to the nationhood of the Swazi of Swaziland.

Yet while admitting the existence of social laws that determine the social evolution and revolutions of pre-colonial societies, no one should propose a theory that imposes a uniform pattern or conceptual scheme in the study of concrete individual ethnic communities. There are considerable differences in the actual processes of this development, determined and influenced by a host of various factors such as wars, famines, possession or non-possession of cattle, royal marriages, etc. The level of

scientific abstraction is merely concerned with those basic features of the ethnic communities which were, and probably continue to be, the central character of their mode of life. The abstract level of analysis does not deny the importance and usefulness of the conjunctural level with its focus on the analysis of the concrete.

Looking at historical processes more closely, we shall actually discover that the general laws of historical development necessarily manifest themselves through particular configurations of a relatively accidental kind, so that there is always a tension between the two. The question of studying the social relations in South African society thus serves only one aspect of our theory of historical knowledge; it is an indispensable analytical tool only in so far as it helps us to reconstruct the essence of our concrete object of enquiry. The proposed historical epistemology is therefore not anti-empirical, but anti-empiricist.

Arguing along similar lines in *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels firmly rejected the dislocation of rationalism from the historical process. Their premises, they announced, were not "arbitrary dogmas", but could be verified "in a purely empirical way"(61). At the same time they insisted that history is "nothing but the activity of men in pursuit of their ends"(62). By absolutising the role of theory in acquiring historical knowledge, Althusser thereby dehistoricises society and attributes to rationalism an exaggerated autonomy.

According to Althusser, the distinction between the abstract and the concrete in the process of the reproduction of historical knowledge, only exists within the realm of thought itself, and may not represent the distinction between thought and reality. To him abstractions never meet with concrete reality. His process of knowledge production ends where it begins, entirely within thought. Althusser is so suspicious of the empirical that he repeatedly reaches the conclusion that the process of the reproduction of knowledge takes place entirely in thought, which becomes the raw material and the product respectively in the production of knowledge. This method objectively places Althusser, perhaps much against his intentions, within the camp of idealists. As Roy Bhaskar correctly points out, Althusser "tends to buy theory at the expense of experience, as he buys structure at the price of praxis ..."(63). What Althusser fails to realise on the other pole from RP Thompson, is the fact that the conditions for the reproduction of knowledge are social and historical and not, as ideal supposes, absolutely independent of social practice and actual history.

Wilson and Thompson in their Preface to Volume 1 of the *Oxford History*, blame some of the limitations of most historical writings on South Africa on the disciplinary limitations that exist in all modern societies. According to them, the problem "arises from the partition of knowledge between the disciplines in modern universities"(64), whereby history became divorced from most of the social sciences. They also talk of the difficulty inherent in cooperation between members of different disciplines in that they ask different questions and are not agreed as to what facts are relevant. "The historian is likely to concentrate on what happened, and the succession of events." they say, "while the anthropologist is more interested in what is and why it is, and he seeks to answer 'why' partly through comparison with other societies. In making comparisons, he may disregard time and his account become static"(65).

What a lame excuse! *The Oxford History* is already an example of a historical presentation of "static" ethnic communities. The Tswana (grouped under Sotho in the book), Venda or Zulu are all without ethno-evolutionary changes. They are presented as fixed anthropological categories with no interconnections, continuity or transition to a new state in their developmental process. In this regard, how useful has been our Oxford historians consciousness about "time" and the question of what happened"?

Some of the shortcomings referred to in the *Oxford History* are not corrected by the collection of essays edited by Shula Marks and Anthony Atmore, despite its pronounced preoccupation with the study of the Pre-capitalist Modes of Production in South Africa (66). The situation described by Phillip Bonner, Jeff Guy and William Beinart in terms of the case studies of Swaziland, Zululand and Pondoland respectively, cannot be described as fully "pre-colonial". Rather, it is a reconstruction of the nature of the mode of production of Nguni speaking agricultural communities during the nineteenth century. By that time these communities had already partly been shaped by the forces impinging in different ways on all southern African societies in the nineteenth century. Marks and Atmore themselves admit that "there are considerable difficulties in using this material for the pre-colonial period"(67).

## ***The Nationalist Tendency***

In the Preface of a booklet he wrote in 1920, D D T Jabavu called for South African history to be written by the Africans, because "however sympathetic and good a European may be, he cannot undertake such a task with the minute knowledge and enthusiasm that can belong only to the native African, who must himself be the victim of the untoward circumstances and difficulties under discussion"(68). However, for some of the reasons previously mentioned, very few attempts have been made by Africans to write of South African history.

Among those who made this attempt some fell victim to the influence of either colonialist or liberal historians, and consequently rendered questionable the universality of the dictum that the history that is written by Africans themselves, as Jabavu said, will necessarily be a correct reflection of the South African past.

An example of an African historian who reproduced almost all the colonialist historical myths about South Africa was Silas Modiri (S.M.) Molema (1891-1965) who published in 1920 *The Bantu, Past and Present - An Ethnographical and Historical Study of the Native Races of South Africa*.

Relying heavily on Eurocentric sources, including Theal, Molema reiterated the view about the arrival of Africans in South Africa from the north, and also questioned the correctness of the belief that it was the Africans who built the Zimbabwe ruins. So uncritical was he in the assessment of the colonialist history of South Africa that he wrote that the main features, of African life before the arrival of whites were barbarism and incompetence indolence and lethargy. To him, the Africans were a "dreamy race of men". He described Shaka as a despotic tyrant and Mzilikazi as a drinker of blood. He also wrote that the Khoikhoi were responsible for much of the war that was waged by the colonialists against them because they (the Khoikhoi) "stole Dutch property on a grand scale". He regarded the colonial policy as so civilising to the Africans that, without the rescue by white guidance, Africans would still be living in the dark past.

Later, when Molema wrote the biography of Chief Moroka, he described the Rolong ethnic group among the Tswana as "rude in their manners. totally illiterate, ignorant of the arts of peace, polygamous, sunken in suspicion, without the light of any true religion, so degraded in morals as to be almost unmoral, intellectually undeveloped, content with

life of indolence and oblivion, and without ambition beyond the satisfaction of their immediate physical needs, regardless of the past and careless of the future"(69).

Another African historian who exceptionally succeeded to publish an history look in his own language, Zulu, was Mangema Fuze in 1922, under the title: *Abantu Abamnyama, Lapho Bevela Khona*. In this book Fuze presented a general history of the black people, with specific focus on where they came from. The book has since been republished in 1979 by the University of Natal in the English translated version under the title: *The Black People And Whence They Came* (70). Like Molema, although not in the same crude colonialist manner, Fuze repeated some of the well-publicised myths by white colonialist historians. According to him as well. Africans were immigrants who came from the north of Africa, and he equally emphasized the notion that there was no ethnic affinity between the Africans and the Khoikhoi and the San peoples. Fuze referred to them, almost derogatively, as the "Hottentots" and the "Bushmen".

Both Molema and Fuze made no original contribution to the writing of South African history. Worse of all, African though they were, they made no break with the tradition of articulating the white colonialist point of view. They presented a contrasting literary image to the works of historians like Thomas Mofolo and Sol Plaatje. Although Mofolo's study of King Shaka may easily be classified as a novel, it was a result of researches conducted on the spot in Zululand in the 1920s, which presented a version of King Shaka and the Zulu kingdom which differed substantially from the "blood-thirsty" image that had been constructed by previous historians.

Plaatje's novel *Mhudi* and his *Native Life in South Africa*, were both a perspective of South African life from a nationalist perspective. Plaatje was an official of the African National Congress immediately after its founding in 1912, and participated in delegations that went to the British monarch and government to argue for the rights of the Africans in South Africa. Although both Mofolo and Plaatje never regarded their efforts as an attempt to write a history of South Africa, nevertheless Plaatje's *Native Life in South Africa* serves as a good illustration of the nature of African nationalism during its early years. In a real but limited sense, this is a work of history.

Plaatje, like most of the leaders of the African National Congress at the time, belonged to that emergent crop of Africans who had come from the mission schools school teachers, religious ministers, clerks, interpreters, small traders, lawyers, medical doctors, newspaper editors and university graduates - who represented and articulated the

nascent political ideas and embryonic national consciousness of the African people. They were responding initially to the establishment of the Union Constitution Act of 1910, which excluded Africans (except those in the Cape colony) from exercising franchise rights, and later to threats by the established Union government to pass a Land Act that would deprive the Africans of their right to land in the greater part of South Africa (this was to materialise in 1913). This group of African intellectuals together with some traditional rulers (the chiefs) and peasant farmers, resolved to bury whatever ethnic differences and conflicts existed among them in order to found a new African national identity that would, in correspondence to the unity of the whites, unite all the African ethnic groups in a determined struggle against national oppression.

The principal leaders of the process of this African unity were Pixley Seme and Sol Plaatje. It was they more than anyone else who rallied the various African leaders to an urgent meeting to consolidate feelings of brotherhood among the various ethnic groups. "The African people", Seme had said in Columbia University during an address on the occasion of his receiving the Curtis Medal on 5 April 1906:

"although not a strictly homogeneous race, possess a common fundamental sentiment which is everywhere manifest, crystallising itself into one common controlling idea. Conflicts and strife are rapidly disappearing before perception of the true inter-tribal relations, which relation should subsist among a people with a common identity".

This theme was reiterated by Seme in Bloemfontein on 8 January 1912 when the African National Congress (then called the South African Native National Congress) was formed:

"Chiefs of royal blood and gentlemen of our race, we have gathered here to consider and discuss a theme which my colleagues and I have decided to place before you. We have discovered that in the land of their birth, Africans are treated as hewers of wood and drawers of water. The white people of this country have formed what is known as the Union of South Africa - a union which we have no voice in the making of the laws and no part in their administration. We have called you therefore to this Conference so that we can together devise ways and means of forming our national union for the purpose of creating national unity and defending our rights and privileges".

Plaatje's book records not just the events surrounding the birth of the African National National Congress but also its significance as an organisational manifestation of the birth of a single oppressed nation in South Africa. It is 1910 and 1912 that symbolise the birth of an oppressor and oppressed nations in South Africa. Plaatje located the common nationhood of the Africans in the question of the land, which had been theirs in pre-colonial times, and from which they were driven off and dispossessed in consequence of the 1913 Natives' Land Act. For him, the significance of the Land Act was that it laid the legislative and territorial foundations of the colonial system of national oppression. The South African territory, he argued, was part of Africa. "History does not tell us of any other continent where the Bantu lived besides Africa", and yet it had by law "ceased to be the home of any of her native children whose skins are died with a pigment that does not conform with the regulation hue". He reasoned that this systematic ill-treatment of the Africans by the colonialists, being hounded out of ancestral homes, was not only in order to quicken their pace to death but was also a guiding principle of Europe's scramble for Africa.

Published in 1916, two years overdue, Plaatje's book provided an account of the origins of this legislation and made a devastating description of some of its immediate effects. Exploring this theme in the context of a broader examination of the historical and political conditions that had led to its promulgation, Plaatje eloquently demonstrated an historical approach to the national question in South Africa from the oppressed people's point of view, namely, the distinction that was placed between the oppressed and oppressor nations. In other words, in contrast to the colonialist tendency (which argued that there existed many nations in the country) or the liberals (who already saw South Africa as constituting a single nation), Plaatje's accounts were a tale of two nations. What Botha and Smuts represented to the white nation, Seme and Plaatje represented to the African nation.

According to Plaatje, the object of this Land Act was "to prevent the natives from ever rising above the position of servants to the whites", and its passing and operation had "rudely forced the fact that the Union Parliament is capable of producing any measure that is subversive of native interests", and that "it would not only interfere with the economic independence of the natives, but would reduce them forever to a state of serfdom, and degrade them as nothing has done since slavery was abolished at the Cape"(71). Clearly, the complete arrest of African progress was the principal object aimed at by the creation of the union of whites.

What the early African nationalism of Plaatje's time did not do, however, was to assert the right of the oppressed to national self determination. Neither did it categorically challenge the sovereignty of the Union constitution by reason of its exclusion of the majority of the South African population. Instead, the legitimacy of the white state on South African soil was something that was taken for granted, unquestioned and never even challenged. Rather, delegations and deputations were sent to the white rulers of the country with a message pleading for the inclusion of Africans in the white parliament, to enjoy jointly with them the fruits of Union, so to speak.

One such delegation was appointed following the 1913 Annual Conference of the ANC, which went to Cape Town to present African objections to the Act. As General Secretary of Congress, Plaatje was among the national executive members of the organisation that went to plead with the government. Even General Botha, first Prime Minister of South Africa after Union, acknowledged that "Mr Plaatje is a special pleader, and consciously or unconsciously he has, in my opinion, been somewhat biased in his strictures against the government in regard to the Natives Land Act: he has exaggerated incidents which tell in his favour, and suppressed facts that should be within his knowledge which show the honest attempts made by the Government to avoid the infliction of hardships in carrying out a principle which, you must remember, was sanctioned by the legislature"(72).

Mokgethi Motlhabi questions the "nationalist" character of the ideology that drove Plaatje and the early ANC along a path of pleadings and representations. He argues that the tactics and the language used at this stage indicates that the ANC was not actually a "nationalist movement" but rather a "Congress of defeated people" which still had fresh memories of European military conquest. This, he says, made its response to white domination and disinheritance seem as nothing more than beggar-tactics, making the early history of the movement that of "obsequious representations and cap-in-hand deputations"(73). Motlhabi does consider, of course, that the early ANC was "national" in the sense of being country-wide, representing all Africans.

This characterisation of early African nationalism (for it has to be called nationalism if it represented the political ideology of the perceived oppressed nation, whether or not it was militant) is criticised by Francis Meli, who disputes the charge that at that time the ANC's nationalism was reformist in character:

"It would be wrong to deduce from this that the ANC at this time was simply reformist and end there ... deputations and appeals were part of traditional African political custom ... In 1915 the enemy was different from our enemy today and this gave rise to a hope that Britain might concede to the pleas of the Africans"(74).

However, whilst African patriots in South Africa would tend to disagree with the negative characterisation of the early ANC given by Motlhabi, not everyone would agree with Meli either when he suggests that "deputations and appeals were part of traditional African political custom", considering the record of two centuries of uninterrupted military resistance (and not deputations) against the colonisers up to the 1906 Bambatha Rebellion, six years before the formation of the ANC. Meli's point, however, is one of partisanship. Throughout his book, *South Africa Belongs To Us*, his partisanship to the ANC is unquestionable. Partisanship, however, becomes a problem when it is no longer tempered with objective realism. In these days of *glasnost* and *perestroika*, blank pages in history should not be allowed. Everything should be told. If needs be, it has to be told dispassionately and ruthlessly. Wishful thinking cannot replace the hard facts of life otherwise an exercise at history writing is reduced to sheer political propaganda for one's organisation.

No shame should be associated with the admission of the fact that the tactics employed by the early leadership of the ANC were thoroughly reformist, or even that their version of nationalism was somewhat cautious, timid and non-confrontationalist to white nationalism. Chapter 15 of Plaatje's book, devoted to a discussion of the "Appeal for Imperial Protection", reveals that the ANC delegation to Britain placed great confidence in the patient representation of grievances through reasoned statement and debate, appeal and petition. Moreover, it was keen to impress the British crown and government as well as public opinion that the Africans of South Africa were "loyal British subjects" which had only been left to the mercy of "Dutch inhumanity" by the 1910 Union Act. As Slovo correctly observes, the early ANC stood for "the encouragement of a spirit of loyalty to the British crown and all lawful authority"(75), and pledged "to bring about better understanding between the white and black inhabitants".

The example of an exercise at creating such a "better understanding" between whites and blacks is a resolution passed at the Third ANC Annual Conference to send condolences to the government on the death of J W Sauer, Minister of Justice and Native Affairs, who died just as the ANC was about to hold its conference. Also, when

the then militant white working class clashed with government troops during their general strike of 1913-14, the ANC conference passed a resolution dissociating its members from armed clashes between the white workers and the government, and stated that it preferred to seek redress for the African people's grievances through constitutional means.

Meli himself is not completely unaware of this conciliatory attitude on the part of the early ANC since elsewhere in the book he writes:

"In the years 1914-16, the ANC had largely refrained from any criticism of the South African government as a demonstration of their loyalty to the king and Empire in the war against Germany"(76).

During the three decades following the passing of the Natives' Land Act, it is difficult to deny the liberal influence on the ANC's national policy. This is illustrated by the character of the political demands that were enshrined in the "Bill of Rights" adopted by the ANC in 1923. This document stated, *inter alia*, that "the Bantu inhabitants of the Union have, as human beings, the indisputable right of abode in this land of their fathers ..."; "all Africans have, as the sons of this soil, the God-given right to unrestricted ownership of land in this, the land of their birth ..."; "the Bantu, as well as their coloured bretheren, have, as British subjects, the inalienable right to the enjoyment of those British principles of the liberty of the subject, justice and equality of all classes in the eyes of the law that have made Great Britain one of the greatest world powers ... "the Bantu have, as subjects of His Majesty King George, the legal and moral right to claim the application or extension to them of Cecil Rhodes' famous formula of 'equal rights for all civilised men south of the Zambezi', as well as the democratic principles of equality of treatment and equality of citizenship in the land, irrespective of race, class, creed or origin ..."; "the peoples of African descent have, as an integral and inseparable element in the population of the great Dominion of South Africa, and as undisputed contributors to the growth and development of the country, the constitutional right of an equal share in the management and direction of the affairs of this land of their permanent abode, and to direct representation by members of their own race in all the legislative bodies of the land, otherwise, there can be no taxation without representation".

For all their efforts and eloquence, the ANC delegations to the South African or British governments came back disappointed. For the British, as the colonial power in the country, were committed in both principle and deed to the maintenance of colonialism.

British imperial policy for the country was mainly directed towards reconciling Boer and Briton, and the price of this was the subordination of African political aspirations. In contrast to the liberalism of the Cape, which tolerated the voting participation of blacks with so-called civilised standards, after the Act of Union, the South African ruling class was united in implementing a "native policy" that sought to restrict African land ownership and political involvement to segregated areas. Plaatje, and the ANC of the time, sought to reverse this trend by appealing for the extension of the Cape liberal tradition to the rest of the Union. It can therefore be safely concluded that the essential feature of their nationalism was liberal - that is, it was liberal nationalism.

At the beginning of the 1940s the ANC was still speaking explicitly of the right of African franchise within the white parliament, recognising its legitimacy and not demanding its dismantling or even calling for majority rule. These policies seemed neither to have been influenced by a full understanding of the policy of colonialism, nor by the political notion that liberation of the blacks in South Africa objectively means the establishment of a predominantly black government because of the population ratio. The revised ANC constitution of 1943 equally made no departure from the earlier liberal nationalism, since it was couched in a political language that merely claimed "full citizenship" for Africans as for whites. In other words, blacks and whites were placed on the same historical and political footing, each as legitimate owners of the land and therefore the logical partners in government and political administration. The irony of it all is that, whereas South African whites regarded themselves at that time as Europeans in almost the same sense in which the Portuguese of Mozambique and Angola thought of themselves as Europeans, the Africans in South Africa had already accorded them South Africanhood, and never did question their right to be in the country, notwithstanding their oppressive colonial practices.

Thus Plaatje ends his book by citing a poem by Ida Luckie:

"Alas my country! Thou wilt have no need  
Of enemy to bring thee to thy doom ...  
For not alone by war a nation falls.  
Though she be fair, serene as radiant morn  
Though girt by seas, secure in armament.  
Let her but spurn the vision of the Cross;  
Tread with contemptuous feet on its command  
Of Mercy, Love and Human Brotherhood,

And she, some fateful day, shall have no need  
Of enemy to bring her to the dust."

To a certain extent, the liberal concept that South Africa already constituted a single nation filtered through the cracks in Plaatje's loosely-bound African nationalism. Accordingly, South Africa's national question could also be seen as that of a racially divided but single nation. Although there is no consistent articulation of this single-nation theory in the book, nevertheless the implication of its appearance now and then in the text is indicative of the liberal soil from which Plaatje's nationalism grew.

It is regrettable that Plaatje, who possessed a genius talent for writing and recording history, died early before he embarked on a more comprehensive project, that of writing the history of South Africa from a nationalist perspective. We have, therefore, right up to the mid-1940s, no history of South Africa from the African nationalist point of view.

The first breakthrough in the presentation of South African history from this perspective, came not from the pen of an African, but a white communist, Eddie Roux (1903-1966) who published *Time Longer Than Rope* in 1948. Roux's book began as a series of articles for the Communist Party journal, *Umsebenzi*, and as a further response to the request by his political students in the Party night school in Cape Town that he should write a history of South Africa from the oppressed people's point of view. As Roux himself said in the Foreword of the first edition of the book: "no general account of the political history of the black man in South Africa, the battles he has waged, the organisations he has built and the personalities that have taken part in the struggle"(77) had ever been written.

Africanists in South Africa may well argue that Roux's book was no major departure from the past trends since his history of South Africa was still being presented by a white. The issue about the racial descent of South African historians, however, becomes relevant only in so far as it relates to their ability or inability to present history from the point of view of the national question of the oppressed people. It is the substance and content of their historical presentation that leads to the question of who they are, rather than the other way round. If it were not so, would it not be a curious irony that African historians like Molema and Fuze gave a colonialist version of South African history, whereas Roux, undeniably a white, for the first time in a South African history work, presented an anticolonialist perspective? On the blurb of the paperback edition of the 1964 edition published by the Wisconsin University Press, it is stated that Africans are

presented for the first time in South African history as self-conscious and active protagonists rather than as "a dark acquiescent host before which the really important story of South Africa unfolds".

The significance of Roux's *Time Longer Than Rope* is that, unlike the later liberal concern about the subject of Africans in South African history in the 1960s, which was as a result of the African independence process (a process which was accompanied by a reorientation in the writing of African history by academics in the newly independent African states). Roux's book was produced in direct response to the nationalism that characterised the ideology of the liberation movement (of which Roux was a part) in South Africa.

Although the tendency in the literature is to attribute the first articulation of the nationalism of the oppressed in South Africa to the birth of the ANC Youth League in 1944, the truth of the matter is that it was first articulated by the Communist Party of South Africa in the 1920s long before the ANC Youth League came into being. The Communist Party was the first political organisation in the history of South Africa to call for majority rule at a time when some leaders of the ANC acknowledged "the superiority of the white race" and British imperialism. There was nothing strange, therefore, in Roux writing a version of South African history from a nationalist perspective long before Anton Lembede, Walter Sisulu, A P Mda, Oliver Tambo or Nelson Mandela thought of representing such a political ideology. Although Roux's book is not without some errors of information and faults in both presentation of content and methodology, it remained, for a long time, the only comprehensive nationalist response to all hitherto written history of South Africa. Like the general nationalist approach introduced by Plaatje, and contrary to both colonialist and liberal historiography, it affirmed the existence of two nations in South Africa, the oppressed and the oppressor.

If the nationalism of the African National Congress until the 1940s had been dominated by missionary Christianity and its concept of a "civilising process", the South Africa of the 1940s responded to a new set of political and economic circumstances. South Africa's decision to enter the Second World War on the side of the Allied Forces, forced the country's economy to undergo drastic changes, which produced equally drastic demographic repercussions on the distribution of the population.

Because of the huge demand for cheap labour in the industries brought about by war conditions, tens of thousands of Africans flocked to the cities in search of employment,

particularly in Johannesburg. Overcrowding and congestion forced thousands of people in areas like Pimville and Alexandra to squat on vacant space in the townships. Poverty and distress increased, and wages were far below the breadline. Meanwhile the police increased their harassment of pass law offenders, raiding slums and townships in the early hours of the morning during which they arrested hundreds of people each day. With frustration building up among the people, a series of mass strikes took place in the Reef and in Natal, and there were many clashes between Africans and the police.

The ANC of those days was a loosely bound political organisation in a nearly moribund state (the Youth League in its Manifesto referred to it as "an organisation of the privileged few... professionals, small traders, a sprinkling of intellectuals and conservatives of all grades"). In 1941 Govan Mbeki wrote a letter to Xuma complaining that "the Transkei is, to be frank, politically in midnight slumber". In 1942 Rev Calata reported to the National Executive Committee that in passing through Pietermaritzburg he addressed a meeting which was presided over by J T Gumede, former president of the ANC (1927-30), and, "I am afraid that Natal requires a special attention. Congress is dying in that province ... ". Around 1943 Molema estimated that ANC membership was 253! This figure, of course, might be an exaggeration. When Dr Xuma was elected president in December 1940, only 41 delegates had turned up at the annual conference; 21 of them voted for Xuma and the remaining 20 for Rev Z R Mahabane. In such conditions the ANC was bound to be out of touch with the needs of the masses of the people who were already responding, independently of their organisation, to the combustible situation.

Xuma brought about a number of important organisational changes within the ANC, building its treasury on the basis of a strict membership as well as instituting strict administration and improving the standard of accounting. With him in the presidency, gone were the days of annual conferences with no organisational activity between them. In 1943. Xuma initiated the drafting of a new constitution (already referred to) which made provision for a year-round organisation. Membership of the ANC increased. Whereas in 1939 the ANC officially claimed only 4 000 members. By 1945 the Orange Free State alone had 4, 176 registered and dues-paying members.

At this time, also playing a leading role in this build-up of the ANC, were leading members of the Communist Party, who sat side by side with ANC leaders members in planning ways of improving the organisation's general appeal to the African masses. Some of them, like Moses Kotane, Gana Makabeni, Govan Mbeki and Edwin

Mofutsanyana, made known their Party's championship of the principle of majority rule as the only logical answer to the solution of the colonial and national question in the country. This had an appeal to a number of ANC members, including Xuma, who in turn served as a source of inspiration to the young generation of Youth Leaguers.

However, in spite of many achievements by Xuma in improving the ANC, and in spite of the support he initially enjoyed from the Youth League, he failed to build the ANC into a mass organisation. This made it unable to advance the national cause in a manner commensurate with the demands of the time. Moreover, Xuma himself was temperamentally averse to mass activity and street demonstrations, preferring to resolve political questions in committee meetings.

Under these conditions, a young generation of Africans came to the fore and demanded the transformation of the African National Congress. By introducing a critical dimension, they provided the movement not only with new political insights but also set unprecedented strategic perspectives. Like their predecessors, they considered the ANC to be the principal vehicle of all liberation efforts; but unlike them, they were impatient with the ritual employment of tactics such as deputations and the passing of endless resolutions. They insisted that it was time for a change, that the ANC should rely on mass political action as the prime arena for the promotion of its strategic and tactical initiatives. Without the establishment of such new channels for political expression, relying on the masses of the people as the true makers of history, the ANC would mark time, without making a single practical step towards the achievements of majority rule. Along with many changes they brought to the organisation, was a changed perspective on nationalism.

### ***The Africanist Tendency***

Lembede, who was the leader of this new nationalism, wrote in an article published by *Inyaniso* in February 1945 that "only African nationalism or Africanism can save the African people". He defined Africanism as the spirit of self-determination, which meant that "the national liberation of Africans would be achieved by Africans themselves". He found his inspiration in the African past, even in the "spirit of dead ancestors". The politics of the Youth League therefore marked the birth of a new dimension in the development of nationalism - Africanism.

The Africanist tendency should be differentiated from the nationalist tendency, since it is guided by its own set of ideological parameters which, under South African circumstances, are a strictly narrow version of nationalism. That it shares certain political beliefs with nationalism, is not in question, because Africanism in South African history shares a common history with nationalism. It is, however, exclusive in contrast to the main stream nationalism which is inclusive. Africanism inherits its ideas partly from the international Pan African movement, as well as partly from a South African set of political ideas which came into being in the mid-1940s, and which later developed into conflict with the interpretation of nationalism as given by the African National Congress in the 1950s, following the adoption of the Freedom Charter.

Not until very recently have there been works of South African history written from an Africanist point of view. The founders of the Youth League and of Africanism, incidentally, neither wrote a history of South Africa nor remain permanently within the Africanist ideological viewpoint. After the 1946 passive resistance campaign against white oppression by the Indian community under the leadership of Yusuf Dadoo and G M Naicker, the Youth League leadership were faced with the question of having to identify with militant Indian tactics which they demanded should be adopted by the ANC. Later, it was Nelson Mandela himself who gave evidence in court during the Treason Trial of 1956-60 that the Youth League found much inspiration in cooperation with the Indian Congress which helped generate the ideas which were incorporated in the Programme of Action adopted by the ANC in 1949.

In that regard, two books by South African historians have reached the attention of the general public, namely, *Apartheid: The Story Of A Dispossessed People*, by Motsoko Pheko (78), and *The Rise of Azania, The Fall of South Africa* by David Dube (79).

On the book's blurb, Pheko's work is described by Professor C L R James as one of the most remarkable history books that he has ever read for many years. Unlike most history books, which are written from a Western historical point of view, says Professor James, this one "for the first time" is a history of South Africa by one from Africa.

Pheko traces the history of the black people in South Africa to as early as 460 A D, which is the date attributed by him to the occupation of South Africa (called Azania in his book) by a people that were essentially responding to an "evolutionary cycle". What this evolutionary cycle is, he gives no explanation, but he does suggest that they originated from Egypt, where they acquired some of their cultural traits from the Hebrews who were

then in bondage among the Egyptians. In an impressive demonstration of his knowledge of the Bible, Pheko cites Genesis 3:7 to refer to the similarity between the Jewish culture such as circumcision, atonement for crime or sin by blood, raising of a family for a dead brother and the traditional dress of the Sotho women and the branch of a tree that was used by Eve to cover her nakedness after she and her husband Adam had eaten of the forbidden fruit. The similarity is said to go up to the level of linguistics, for whereas the Hebrew word for Eve's item is "thana", in Sesotho it is called "thethana"(80).

Pheko's authorities on this subject are D E Ellenberger and J C Macgregor both of whom are said to have written a book entitled *The History of the Basuto - Ancient and Modern*, cited in the text without full references. Pheto's book, in fact, suffers from this lack of full bibliographical details about the authorities he is quoting to prove his points. This then not only leaves the reader unconvinced, but also annoyed at the shabby treatment of such an important subject.

Perhaps the lack of rigour in Pheko's presentation reflects not so much his academic incompetence (because he is a graduate of both the University of South Africa and University of Zambia), but his preoccupation with presenting a version of South African history from the Pan Africanist Congress's (PAC) point of view. In chapter 3, while discussing the "Khoisan Influence of Bantu Culture", he makes his point by reminding the readers that "Templeton M Ntantala for many years a prominent rugby player in the Cape Western Region and later a deputy chairman of the Revolutionary Command of the Pan Africanist Congress (POQO) comes from the Amangqunukwebe tribe"(81). How Ntantala fits within an anthropological discourse is not altogether clear. With several such examples, Pheko probably succeeds in making a propaganda point for his organisation, but then he dismally fails to present a credible historical account.

Pheko argues that the modern generation of Africans has become suspicious of white historians, suspecting that the history of South Africa is written to suit the Europeans and to justify the national dispossession of the Africans and the policy of apartheid. "White settlers", he writes, "always try to remove honour conferred upon Africans by antiquity"(82). That is true, but that honour cannot be restored by exaggerated historical claims. In an attempt to demonstrate that Portuguese sailors met with Africans (in this case the Zulu) on the coast of Natal and that the area presently called Durban was an established fishing area for the Zulu, who "knew it as eThekwini", Pheko makes the error of supposing that the Zulu were fishermen, which they never were. In traditional

Zulu culture in fact, the eating of fish is unknown. Yet Pheko writes: "(Durban) was called by this name (eThekweni) because of a number of fish places which were operated by the African fishermen"(83). And he talks of the development of fishing trade between the Zulu and the survivors of the shipwrecks from Europe, a development which was quite improbable.

Pheko is, perhaps, among the first generation of South African historians to challenge the view that the ethnic distinction between the Africans and the Khoikhoi as well as the San people has no common affinity. All past historians take this ethnic differentiation as a historically given fact and confer on it parallel origins, with no serious attempts at investigating the cultural similarities between these peoples as well as examining whether or not they shared a common cultural background.

The problem with Pheko's analysis is the historical angle from which, and manner in which, this question is raised. Pheko takes for granted that the Khoikhoi, the San and the Africans only met in the Cape Province and the areas of the vicinity of present Lesotho in precolonial times, but does not raise the possibility that these peoples might have belonged to a common ethnicity in the ninth century during the Mapungubwe civilisation in southern Africa. Neither does he examine the question of how a few inhabitants like the San and the Khoikhoi could manage to significantly influence and even change the language structure and syntax of the language of a numerically stronger group, like the Xhosa, instead of the other way round.

By raising this matter only superficially Pheko therefore makes no fundamental challenge to the historical knowledge on this issue as raised by previous historians. First he says that the "light" complexion among the Xhosa and the Sotho, which also corresponds to the extent to which their languages have an abundance of implosive consonants (the click sounds), is proof that the Khoikhoi, Sotho and Xhosa peoples lived together many years prior to the European arrival in South Africa. "The Khoisan languages greatly influenced the languages of Xhosa and southern Sotho speakers ... Clicks found in the African languages such as Xhosa, Zulu and southern Sotho clearly confirm that the Africans of the Cape Province, Natal and Orange Free State lived side by side with their Khoisan neighbours many years ago"(84).

For Pheko, the Khoikhoi not only influenced the Xhosa language, but their religious life as well. Proof? He cites the instance of a Xhosa word for God, "Thixo" as well as "Qamata", and concludes that "as can be clearly seen this word comes from the

Khoikhoi language". Why? Because of the click sounds in these words? None of the Khoisan languages call God either "Thixo" or "Qamata". Such quick and simplistic conclusions, without the backing of scientifically established methods of epistemology, do not take our knowledge of South African history further than the colonialists and liberals have done. Pheko remarks that "the only reasonable explanation why the Khoi influenced the Xhosas in religious matters is that there was just great harmony between the Xhosa Africans and the Khoi Africans". Fine remark, but what about the influences that the Afrikaans language has had on some black cultures, up to a point that with the Cape Coloured, their native language has now become Afrikaans and with some African families in the Cape, their surnames even changed from Xhosa to Afrikaans, such as "Mthimkhulu" changing to "Grootboom"? Does this also demonstrate the "great harmony" between the Xhosa and the Boers?

These shortcomings, it will be said, belong to Pheko and not to the Africanist tendency. Partly true. It is important, however, to realise that the very ability of Pheko to commit some of these errors of judgement is because he, like all Africanists, sees the Africans as a pure, homogenous and undifferentiated category. The defence of the Africanist view is to them, therefore, objectively the defence of the positive as well as the negative aspects within this category. Pheko is no exception to Africanists in his regard of the early African society as a community without some class and other social conflicts at a certain stage of their development.

Even after the industrialisation of South Africa, with the emergence of the working class. Pheko, typical of an Africanist engages in no class, analysis, but only sees Africans as constituting a politically homogenous group. In other words, South Africa, only has a set of ethnic problems between blacks and whites, but no economic ones. The economic development of South Africa is therefore not seen as having any effect in the appraisal and presentation of the national question. The fact that ideological problems had to arise within ANC leading to the break-away of the PAC, a conflict that arose as a result of their differing understanding of the national question and the interpretation of the nationalism of the liberation movement, is attributed by Pheko simplistically to the influence of "foreigners" or white "liberals" on the liberation movement, who are then accused of creating "disunity among the "pure" Africans" (POQO means 'pure').

Since Pheko loses a golden opportunity in his book of giving a detailed historical analysis of the ideological roots of the Africanist tendency in South Africa, and instead engages for more than half the book in polemics against the African National Congress

and the South African Communist Party, which he calls reformist and liberal, it will be important to partially fill this gap for him, in order to understand why the Africanist tendency in South African historiography, equally fails to provide a comprehensive presentation of the national question.

What were the essential ideas characterising African nationalism? As already pointed out, Africanism stressed that the national liberation of Africans would be achieved by Africans themselves. For this reason, the Youth League was suspicious of any cooperation with other racial groups; be it white or Indian. Antony Lembede, for example, declined an invitation sent to the Youth League to affiliate to a multi-racial organisation because "cooperation at the present juncture or stage is premature; it can only result in chaos, ineffective action and mutual jealousies, rivalry and suspicion"(85).

In an article contributed to *Inkundla Ya Bantu* of May 1946, in which Lembede elaborated on the policy of Africanism, he argued that

"no foreigner can ever be a true and genuine leader of the African people because no foreigner can ever truly and genuinely interpret the African spirit which is unique and peculiar to Africans only. Some foreigners, Asiatic or European, who pose as African leaders must be categorically denounced and rejected. An African must lead Africans ... Non-European unity is a fantastic dream which has no foundation in reality".

The Manifesto of the Youth League, issued in March 1944, said that the contact of the white race with the blacks had resulted in the emergence of conflicting living conditions and outlooks on life which seriously hampered South Africa's progress to single nationhood. The Whites, possessing superior military strength, had arrogated to themselves the ownership of the land and invested themselves with the authority and the right to regard South Africa as a white person's country. They regarded as their destiny the task of "civilising" the Africans, thus making themselves trustees of the African people.

Yet the effects of this "trusteeship" alone had made the African people realise what "trusteeship" actually meant, namely, the consolidation of the whites as rulers of the country who enjoy all the wealth of South Africa. This meant that the Africans, who owned the land before the advent of the whites, had been deprived of all security which could guarantee them an independent pursuit of their destiny to ensure their leading a

free life. Although Africans had been defeated in the field of battle, this did not mean that they had to be oppressed. The Africans therefore demanded the right to be free citizens in the South African democracy. Civilisation was a common heritage of all mankind, and Africans claimed a full and legitimate right to make their contribution to its advancement so that they could live freely as white South Africans did.

When in the 1950s the Congress movement (as founded in 1912) developed to include alliances with other racial groups, for example the white Congress of Democrats and the South African Indian Congress, and all these racial groups participated actively in the mass struggles against the apartheid system, discontent began to build up within the ANC spearheaded by a group who considered themselves the legitimate heirs of the Africanist tradition. The last drop in their cup of endurance came about when a country-wide campaign of demands for an alternative South Africa (the Congress of the People) endorsed a view that South Africa belonged to all who lived in it, black and white. Three years later, the Africanists formally opposed this notion and suggested that the Freedom Charter, the document adopted at the Congress of the People and which made that assertion, was equating the oppressor and the oppressed, and thus undermining African nationalism as well as the significance of the national question in South Africa.

This marked the birth of the Pan Africanist Congress in South Africa, from whose perspective Pheko has written his history of the country. In his polemics against the ANC and the SACP, Pheko charges that the Freedom Charter had abandoned genuine African nationalism in favour of some multi-racialism. He also violently opposes the alliance of the ANC (which at that stage was still an exclusively African organisation) with the other Congresses, alleging that whites and Indians had taken over the direction of the struggle and that these "foreigners" were interested only in preventing the indigenous African majority gaining their rightful control of South Africa or what he calls Azania. These allegations are mingled with a militant anticommunism. and the allegation that communists or white members of the Communist Party had infiltrated the liberation movement in order to hijack it from the aims of nationalism to the aims of socialism or communism.

Chapter 13 in Pheko's book is thus devoted to the Communist Party which is discussed under such sub-titles as "The Sabotaging Role of the Communist Party of South Africa", "The African National Congress Betrayed", "What are the facts of the split?", "Domination of ANC by minority groups", "In South Africa, Race is Class and Class is

Race", "The Complaint About the Freedom Charter", "African Nationalism reactionary?", etc.

The tension between Africanism and Marxism as theoretical methods of analysing nationalism and resolving the national question cannot be underestimated. Pheko's book partly reflects that conflict. This tension is best illustrated by the title of George Padmore's book which was published in 1955 - *Pan Africanism or Communism?*(86). In it he said that "the idea of Pan Africanism first arose as a manifestation of fraternal solidarity among Africans and peoples of African descent. Today, Pan Africanism is becoming a part and parcel of emergent African nationalism, serving as a beacon light in the struggle for self-determination, the prerequisite to regional federations of self-governing African communities which may one day evolve into a Pan African Federation of United States"(87).

Africanism was, therefore, right from the start, a set of ideas geared towards asserting the common cultural destiny of the African people irrespective of their class. This approach gave the Africanist tendency its definite non-class dimension, reflected so clearly in Pheko's book. It should be remembered that Marcus Garvey, one of the leading ideologists of this tendency within the international arena, even suggested in his book *Philosophy and Opinions*, that the development of the African bourgeoisie was the end desire of the Pan African movement. He wrote:

"Why should not Africa give to the world its black Rockefeller, Rothschild and Henry Ford? Now is the opportunity. Now is the chance for every Negro to make every effort towards a commercial, industrial standard that will make us comparable with the successful businessmen of other races"(88).

True Pan Africanism underwent various stages of development, from the racist, and utopian "Back to Africa" movement of Garvey to the refined and strictly anti-colonial and anti-imperialist version of William DuBois. Yet in all its different stages of development, it was confronted by the problem of class analysis and it could never overcome it. But can the colonial status of the blacks in South Africa be comprehensively and meaningfully articulated by ignoring the complex problem of the relationship between national oppression and class exploitation? Can the pre-colonial African society itself be fully understood in all its social and ethnic dimensions without incorporating a class analysis?

Although Chapter 15 of Pheko's book is devoted to bantustans, which he calls "a plot against Africans", because its lack of class analysis it fails to explain the problem of the emergence within the bantustans of a class of black bourgeoisie, whose objective economic interests lead them to the support of the apartheid system in general and its bantustan policy in particular. This section of the black bourgeoisie should be differentiated from the broad petty-capitalist strata that has emerged generally in South Africa, those whose political aspirations and demands for national equality with the whites have been frustrated by the apartheid government. This strata, which is found mainly in the urban areas, has both political and economic limitations created for it by the apartheid system. Its class mobility cannot proceed beyond a certain point and, therefore, its immediate fate is with the national liberation movement. The other section, however, has been deliberately cultivated by the ruling class within the bantustans in order to play a collaborationist role.

While the bantustan strategy in no way meets the demands of its inhabitants, the South African government has made available to the leaders of the bantustans various resources which were not available to Africans in the past, and thus created a significant group of entrepreneurs whose economic stake is bound up with the bantustan system. During the decade of the 1960s alone, following the legislation of the Bantu Self-government Act of 1959, the Bantu Investment Corporation (BIC), itself established in 1959, advanced loans worth more than 10 million Rands to more than one thousand African businessmen in the various bantustans. Business ranged from farming to bottle-store owning. In a paper presented to a conference on development at the University of Witwatersrand at the end of 1974, T.M. Molathlwa, then Minister of Agriculture of the Bophuthatswana bantustan, stated:

"It is notable that in recent times a new breed of farming entrepreneur has emerged among the Tswana people. It is not uncommon to find farmers running herds of several hundred cattle. Stud breeders have also been forthcoming, and also in the field of crop husbandry, men, owning tractor units and producing up to 6 000 bags of grain per annum are operating on portions of land leased from other farmers or on vacant (Bophuthatswana) government land".

By 1979 the number of permanent posts on fixed establishment created for the local bureaucracies in seven "non-independent" bantustans (excluding KwaNdebele) stood at 27 625. Clearly the bureaucratic structure created by the newly established ethnic "states" did not only expand employment opportunities for the emerging petty

bourgeoisie but also created a social machinery to administer the successful operation of the bantustan system on behalf of Pretoria. It has been these material conditions that have also been responsible for providing the necessary social base for the development of ethnic nationalism or ethnicism.

In an article written by George Matanzima of the Transkei in 1975 on the *Development of Nationalism in the Homelands* (89), he says that vigorous and widespread economic activities that had been initiated in the Transkei had also engendered the acceptance of Transkeian, national politics, national policies, national goals and eventually must lead to the legitimacy of a unitary national government. The big question is whether the Transkei government is going to take advantage of this situation in the interests of the peoples concerned". With what he regards as a relatively homogenous population, speaking the Xhosa language, "it was natural that the Transkei should be the first African area within South Africa selected for the government's experiment" in providing nationhood. One of the key factors raised in Matanzima's article and one which provides the basis for class analysis of the social base of nationhood (whether ethnic or Africanist), is the development of the South African economy. And this terrain is precisely the point where Africanist ideology loses its coherence and consistency.

Instead of engaging all the social and ethnic elements of the national question in South Africa, the Africanist tendency takes flight into an African continental perspective, leaving South Africa's national problems unsolved, and finds satisfaction in engaging in the debate about mere name-calling, whether South Africa should be called Azania or South Africa. This is the subject of David Dube's book.

Dube's book is dedicated to Zephania L Mothopeng "the veteran Azanian revolutionary who was imprisoned for the Sharpsville Uprising in 1960, for the POQO Uprising in 1963 and sentenced to 30 years imprisonment in 1979 for the Soweto Uprising". In the Preface, Dube calls his book "the true voice of the dispossessed, oppressed and exploited indigenous African people of Azania".

*The Rise of Azania, The Fall of South Africa* is intended to provide historical literature that asserts "the blackman's right in calling the country of his forefathers Azania and not South Africa". It is argued that Azania means a blackman's country. South Africa on the contrary "is the name that was given by white settlers to the southern tip of Africa to consolidate their political, economic and military oppression and suppression of the indigenous black population - the owners of the country - Azania"(90). Dube insists that

only white people and a tiny section of mentally colonised blacks have been trying to resist the name Azania in favour of the colonial name South Africa. After all, he asks, which other country in this whole world is named simply by its geographic situation?

Unfortunately, like Pheko's book, Dube's work also suffers from the obvious intention to perpetrate propaganda for his organisation, the PAC. This becomes a great disservice to historians, who are still eagerly waiting for a serious historical work by a South African. To illustrate Dube's preoccupation with propaganda and the scoring of points against the ANC, the first Chapter of his book is entitled: "ANC and Sechaba Spark Off Azania Debate", and uses this as a launchpad to give a "Brief History of Azania". This history, however, is not given in the text, but only references are cited to such works as Lester Brook's *Great Civilisations of Ancient Africa*, without a shred of evidence provided to demonstrate that South Africa ought to be called Azania. What Dube rather does, is to quote Tsietsi Mashinini telling the *Rand Daily Mail* on 5 October 1976 that his slogan is "Viva Azania!" Furthermore, Dube engages in a debate with the Sechaba article which made a critique of the calling of South Africa Azania.

According to the Sechaba article (91), it was first the Greeks, then Persian colonists of the east coast who applied the name Azania to parts of Eastern Africa, which are much further north of southern Africa. "During the First century AD," continues the controversial article:

"the African coast as far south as the mouth of the Rufiji River in Tanzania (cite of the old city of Kilwa) was widely known as Azania. The Greek meaning of the word Azania is 'dried-up country', probably from the long stretches of arid coastline and semi-desert hinterland in what is now Somalia and north-east Kenya. The Greek writers of Alexandria popularised the name Azania for the same region that was called Zanj (or Zenj) by the Persians.

As shown on the 1798 map of ancient Africa - it was the coastal lands of today's a Somali, Kenya and Tanzania which were known as 'Barbaria Azania', and the sea off this coast was called 'Sinus Barbaricus'. The southern limit of Barbaria Azania was 'Cape Presum' known today as Cabo Delgado, in northern Mozambique (Latitude 10 south). All land to the south of that was called 'Terrae Incognites' and South Africa was part of this land, then unknown to outsiders.

"After AD 900 some Persians migrated to East Africa and established settlements at such places as Kilwa, Lamu and Zanzibar. They named this part of the coast Zanj (Zinj/Zeni), the Persian root word from which Azania is derived. It means 'black' - and was used by the Persians to distinguish themselves from those they colonised. When they talk of 'Zanj' they meant slaves from Africa. The word, in all its forms, has connoted racial contempt for over a thousand years, and is an unsuitable name for any part of Africa."

In other words, according to this article, much as the Africanist tendency has used the name Azania as a central point of departure in its approach to the national question in South Africa, with all the political connotations that this implies in the body of their argument, there are grave historical errors in reaching this decision about the name to be given to South Africa. It may seem that a discussion of this issue is beside the point, and that we are allowing ourselves to get carried away from focussing on the subject under study. However, a discussion of this question of Azania is important because for the Africanist tendency it is not so much the nationalism of the oppressed in South Africa that matters, more the identification with Africa as a continent, even if the areas are as far away from South Africa as Somalia.

In his speech at the inaugural conference of the PAC held in Orlando Community Hall, Johannesburg, on 6 April 1959, Robert Sobukwe said that he wished to state that "the Africanists do not at all subscribe to the fashionable doctrine of exceptionalism. Our contention is that South Africa is an integral part of the invisible whole that is Africa. She cannot solve her problems in isolation from and with utter disregard of the rest of the continent ... We aim, politically, at government of the Africans by the Africans, for the Africans, with everybody who owes his only loyalty to Africa and who is prepared to accept the democratic rule of an African majority being regarded as an African ..."

The African scholar who was the first person to suggest that South Africa should be called Azania, and who was himself a member of the PAC is Professor Bolofo, Robert Sobukwe's highschool teacher at Healdtown, Cape Province. When various scholars began to debate and question the historical and geographical wisdom of calling South Africa Azania. Prof Bolofo, overwhelmed by the evidence and supporting argument that definitely linked the name to eastern Africa, changed his opinion and subsequently published a paper setting out to prove that Azania is a geographically and historically wrong name for South Africa. Supporting an article written by Phillip Tobias (92),

Professor of Palaeo-Anthropology at the University of Witwatersrand, he confirmed that it was a name given by the Persians to the eastern African coast.

Pheko and Dube, therefore, left the ball in the court of the Africans in South Africa who had still to write a definitive history of the country from a perspective that would not only present the national question correctly, but which would also deal properly with the relationship between this question and the economic realities of the country during its various phases of development. In that regard, the Africanist tendency in South African historiography is not an adequate ideological system to meaningfully conduct such an analysis.

A radical tradition in South African historiography that has made a truly comprehensive analysis of the national question has been the Marxist-Leninist tendency. In spite of the fact that not many historical studies have been produced by those who are inspired by the theory of Marx, Engels and Lenin, the few works that have appeared, such as Jack and Ray Simons *Class And Colour in South Africa* (93) as well as Francis Meli's *South Africa Belongs To Us*, have proved that it is within this ideological terrain that most of the answers to the questions posed by South African historiography as well as by the problems of presenting the national question; find some initial (although not the final) answers.

An understanding of the theoretical rationale for the development and nature of the nationalism of the oppressed, as well as the convergence of the immediate national goals of the ANC and the South African Communist Party in respect of the theory of nation-formation, can come about only if there is a detailed historical presentation of the national question and if the relationships between class and national struggle are examined within a critique of the theory of bantustans and its concept of ethnic nationhood. The problems under study need to be considered in the context of the concrete historical situation of the general tasks of the South African revolution in bringing into being a single South African nation. That is the subject of my present research.

## Notes

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## **DEVELOPMENT POLICY AND PRACTICE**

The Development Policy and Practice Research Group was set up in the Open University towards the end of 1984 to promote research on development issues. Its members have a wide range of disciplinary backgrounds (engineering, sociology, economics, education and geography). At present, research is focussed in three areas: food markets - particularly in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia; the development of finance and banking; and links between small and large scale production.

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